

FRIDAY  
September 29, 2006

# Resolution of ancestral domain urged

BY SAMIRA TOMAWIS

AL-HAJ MURAD, Chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in a statement issued September 18, described the peace process as passing through a "turbulent era".

Though both parties—the GRP and the MILF—have signed more than 60 agreements since talks began in 2001 so far, even agreeing to share economic resources, the main stumbling block has always been the mapping out and division of land to include in the ancestral domain claim.

During the peace talks in Kuala Lumpur on Sept. 6-7, the parties were not able to agree on the territorial delineation that will form part of the so-called Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). Government negotiators are offering more than 613 barangays while the MILF claims more than 1,000 barangays that should be "automatically added to ARMM as the core territory to form part of BJE."

Civil society all over Mindanao has urged the parties to resume the talks.

The Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society-Ranaw of Lanao del Sur issued a statement supporting the resolution of the issue on ancestral domain. "No enduring peace agreement or meaningful negotiated political settlement can come about if the GRP persists in ignoring or downplaying the centrality of the Bangsamoro homeland to the success of the peace negotiations," said the statement signed by 30 organizations released September 28, 2006 at the Philippine

## Ramadan night: A night better than a thousand.



Muslims in downtown Quaipto, Manila do not mind the drizzle as they go to mosque for the evening tarawi prayer. Makeshift foodstands around Globo de Oro are open on evenings until dawn when fasting starts for the day.

PHOTO BY N. S. SHARIEF

Muslim Teacher's College, Marawi City. The statement rejected GRP's pre-condition of invoking "constitutional processes" on the issue of ancestral domain, noting it would place the MILF in a similar position with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) when the 1976 and 1996 peace accords were sub-

ject to the framework of the Philippine Constitution.

In Zamboanga City, Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, head of the Silsilah Dialogue Movement, an NGO actively involved in promoting peaceful dialogue in Southern Philippines between Christians and Muslim, said "No one would be

happy if war erupts, thus we are committed to building an atmosphere of peaceful dialogue, to build up a better feeling for peace. We should ask ourselves: Is war really the solution?"

Senator Santanina T. Rasul, founder of the Muslim Women Peace Advocates- Sulu Council, meantime supports the call

of Mindanao civil society for the GRP and the MILF to go back to the negotiating table. Senator Rasul met with State Department officials in Washington DC on Wednesday. Rasul calls on both government and MILF to learn from the example of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, stat-

ing "Involve the communities since ultimately, we ordinary citizens have the most to lose. Mindanao is our homeland."

CSOs in Central Mindanao gathered in Marco Polo Hotel, Davao City for the 3rd CSO Forum on Community Development Approaches in Mindanao, urged the MILF and the government to uphold the peace talks. The participants said in a unity statement that "peace-building" is a long process. "Peace building efforts should go hand-in-hand with the economic activities with people having enough access to food, livelihood and income to minimize tendency to resort to crime," they stressed.

Despite the MILF's perceived war-posturing, Al Haj Murad states, "negotiation is still the best option to resolve the conflict in Mindanao. We have already spent so much time, efforts, and resources for this. In the words of the late Chairman Salamat Hashim, negotiation is the "most civilized and practical way of resolving the conflict in Mindanao."

The MILF Chairman also encourages the "acceleration" of development projects to be implemented in conflict-affected areas even while negotiations are still ongoing. Speaking with Madame Sadako Ogata, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan Ambassador Ryichiro Yamazaki and other JICA officials at Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Murad noted the necessity of the involvement of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) in the rehabilitation and development projects under the GRP-MILF peace agreement of 2001.

## Ramadan in the Philippines: Taking Stock

BY NASSER SHARIEF

MODERN LIFE: the more time-saving gadgets we have, the less time we seem to have. That's why they no longer make movies as long as *Gone With the Wind*. (That's why I keep abbreviating ur text messages on ur mobile.) Today, Metro-Manila like every city in the world with its share of 7-Elevens, never sleeps. One long, slow burn of the candle as an on-line game addict observes, and that's it. Where is man's soul in all these?

Ramadan is a built-in month for all Muslims to slow down their daily affairs and reflect on what the Creator has bestowed on them. The rich, obsessed with extending his empire is required to empathize with the poor and the deprived by making him experience live—not vicariously—the predicament of have-nots that he may relearn a lesson or two, loosen his coffer, shake out a few coins for the orphans. Spread 'em, man: that's the message.

Ramadan this year falls on September 23, 2006. Muslims gird themselves by rearranging their routine round it. Superficially, the injunction is to desist from eating or drinking from dusk to dawn. But what Ramadan really means

is a major overhaul of one's life. No gossips, no bad habits, put off those cigarettes please, stop viewing those X-rated scandals, help your congressman construct a bill, don't plant an evidence on a hapless civilian, don't kick but pat the cat that ate your fish for *iftar*, and hey, don't pad those payrolls. Tall order? It only feels so because junk has accumulated in man's soul. One will emerge out of Ramadan—it is hoped—a better member of the human race.

Even children get into the workshop of Ramadan. Pre-pubescent kids are encouraged to just fast half the day to inculcate in them the values of fasting.

The festivities of Ramadan have evolved over the centuries and had been tempered by the practicality of modern life, its tempo, and the shifting moods of Islamic thoughts. As late as the late 60s, Maranaos in Lanao burn candles by their balconies, singing hymns, especially in anticipation of *Laylat el Qadir*, the night when Archangel Gabriel and the angels descend down on earth. Folks used to exchange foods, sweets, and fruits with the neighborhoods as sign of making up, healing old wounds, sewing back friendships and reacquainting afresh.

Sherina Ismael Kazan, a native of Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, is busy kneading flour on a kitchen table in her home in Quezon City, squinting her eye at a recipe passed on to her by a chef who specializes in dishes of the south. She is determined to revive the kind of Ramadan she knew from memory hoping that her children who have all gone in the School of the Holy Spirit, a Catholic school in Quezon City, would get a whiff of it. Sherina nostalgically recalls that in her town, "Children used to sing religious songs to keep people awake at night. To rouse people for *suhur*, the meal before dawn, we clank pots, pans, and skillets. Everyone is hospitable, and you could just pop by any door to have your meal."

In Ramadan, houses are cleaned of cobwebs and furniture taken out into the sun to get rid of bedbugs. Incense sticks are burned. Culinary art reaches its full expression as a way of thanksgiving. Graveyards are cleaned and prayers and supplications are offered. And at the end of Ramadan, a hypnotizing trance of *diker rawatib* is staged. Rawatib is chanting the name of Allah accompanied by a swaying of the upper body while one is seated in a lotus position, starting

slow and then gradually working one's self to a frenzy.

But these practices seemed like in the distant past now. Old traditions are hard to witness nowadays.

Every country which has a sizeable Muslim population—from Argentina to Azerbaijan—has its own unique way of welcoming the month of Ramadan. In the Philippines, the equatorial sighting of the moon to determine when to start Ramadan had been a tradition. Volunteer groups, especially Boy Scouts, are organized to ascend hills to man observations posts to assure themselves of the literal meaning of seeing with one's own eyes the new moon, (as the Hijra is essentially based on lunar calculation). Others maintain that we should rely on science. After all, we now have charts on the exact time the sun rises and sets each day, as well as the phases of the moon. Still, the controversy over sighting the new moon rages in cafes, souks of the Muslim world.

Once the new moon is sighted, excitement rises. In Mindanao, the whap-whap of drums echoes in the distant. Cannons dating back to the Spanish times rend the air. And children would not be outdone with their Chinese



Students of Notre Dame in Cotabata wait for the sun to set to break their fast in the first day of Ramadan.

PHOTO BY N. S. SHARIEF

firecrackers.

In the dominantly Christian areas like Manila, the arrival of Ramadan is hardly noticed. A nameless Muslim sidewalk vendor took time off from his peddling nail clippers to reply on the greetings on his mobile. His vintage Nokia 3210 could only handle a dozen incoming message at a time, and had to wipe them to allow more incoming messages from dear ones. Not far off, a Muslim executive attends to the hundreds of messages on his Sony-Ericsson.

The sun is setting by the Manila

Bay. Mauve strips the horizon. Five medical students, two nurses, all clad in white entered the arch of a McDonald's. If not for the distinctive shawls and the yarmulkes, they could just have been any diners. They will be having an *iftar* of hamburgers, milkshakes and fries.

No *pinyalokan*, *dodol* or *tamokansi* or any of the traditional dishes. The setting may be new but the message remains the same. Fasting is ordained unto everyone as it was ordained unto Abraham as it was ordained unto his progenies.

## GRP-MILF must show cooperation - IMT

BY GANDHI C. KINIYO

GENERAL SANTOS CITY: The International Monitoring Team head of mission is confident that if constant cooperation between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) will prevail, peace accord will be reached soon.

"Everlasting peace, that will benefit the people of Mindanao, is possible if the two parties will cooperate constantly," Brig. Gen. Dato' Ismael bin Ahmad Khan, 3rd IMT head of mission, said during his courtesy call to General Santos City Mayor Pedro B. Acharon, Jr. at the conference room of the city hall this morning.

Gen. Khan visited Sarangani Governor Miguel Dominguez before meeting Mayor Acharon. Khan's courtesy call to the Local Government Units is part of his weeklong tour of different IMT-Team Sites in the cities of Davao, General Santos, Iligan and Zamboanga, which started yesterday.

Khan was accompanied by the teams of MILF Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) Chairman Von Al Haq and GRP-CCCH Chair Brig.Gen. Edgardo Gurra.

Von Al Haq has assured the mayor that the MILF will maintain an "open line communication" with the LGUs. "We hope that this peaceful situation we have now will continuously exist," he said.

Brig. Gen. Gurra said that the CCCH is in constant communication with the IMT. "There is that 'impasse' in the peace talk. However, we are working it out now," he related.

The chairmen of the two parties are hopeful that GRP-MILF peace accord will be reached before the year ends. Mayor Acharon said, "with open line communication, everything will be given due process." "Once the peace talk totally collapse, it will surely disturb the development of Mindanao."

He stressed, "I am confident that the presence of the CCCH plays a big role in keeping peace on the ground.

Brig. Gen. Khan has expressed hope that the presence of the IMT and Malaysia's mediation to the GRP-MILF peace talk will bring fruitful result.

The MILF recently has urged the church to influence the government to break the deadlock in the peace talk during the 13th Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on September 6-7 over the issue of territory.

Raja Muda Alimudin Hassan of Sugoda Buayan Royal House who was present during the meeting said that if the peace talk collapse, war is possible.

"War brings destruction, hatred, and hunger. We do not want to experience what happen during the martial law years and the 'all-out-war' period during President Estrada's regime," he pointed out.

Hassan stressed, "I urge all the Muslims in this country to include in their prayer during this Holy Month of Ramadan that the decades-old conflict in Mindanao totally ends very soon."



Governor Migs Dominguez (center) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front-Committee on Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities (MILF-CCCH) chairman Von Al Haq (right, in long sleeves shirt) gesture during the latter's courtesy call this morning with GRP-CCCH chair BGen. Edgardo Gurra (3rd from left). They were joined by the new International Monitoring Team (IMT) headed by Malaysian Major General Dato MD Ismail Bin Ahmad Khan (3rd from right).

PHOTO BY SARANGANI INFORMATION OFFICE/CAS

### Note:

Due to unforeseen circumstances brought about by the typhoon Milenyo and the onset of Ramadan, Moro Times will be reverting back to its usual 6-page issue in October.