

The Moro Times

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"New formula" sought out of GRP-MILF impasse

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

SHARED powers, shared sovereignty - The MILF is seeking an "associative free state" relationship with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), which would be in between independence and within national democratic processes. The GRP-MILF peace talks have not been formally convened since a stalemate on the territory issue in September last year.

In a forum with civil society groups in Iligan City, lawyer Musib Buat of the MILF peace panel cited the Puerto Rico and US model saying, "It will be a political relationship between two jurisdictions wherein neither one is the subject of the legal constraints of the other, in order to peacefully conclude the fundamental differences over

equally legitimate political aspirations of the Bangsamoro people in relation to the whole country."

Calling the state a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) which would not supplant the ARMM, Buat said there would be a transition period that would convene a "Constitutional body" to consult the

communities, including non-Muslims, to afford the Bangsamoro people time and opportunity to decide whether to remain as part of the Philippine national community or to establish their own separate country and become a free, sovereign, independent member of the community of nations."

The GRP has recognized the Bangsamoro right to self-determination (RSD), although it maintains the need for any agreement to be subject to constitutional process.

"It is a natural right of all peoples," said GRP peace panel member Prof. Rudy Rodil. "If we can do it with other groups, why not the Bangsa Moro?"

However, Rodil stressed this option would not violate any provision of the constitution and would require Congress to pass a law authorizing the creation of an independent charter for the Bangsa Moro written by the Moro nation.

Buat said, "The Philippines recognizes International law, we might as well use it as basis for our talks on RSD." He referred to the UN Charter and International Convention on Civil and Political Rights which recognize the right of self-determination of peoples, of which Philippines is a signatory to. UNESCO enumerates the holders of self-determination to have a "common historical tra-

dition, racial or ethnic identity, cultural homogeneity, linguistic unity, religious or ideological affinity, territorial connection and common economic life."

The MILF maintains that the Moro people are a "First Nation with an established identity".

Buat said the 613 barangays and ARMM are "given and part of the core areas of the peace talk. Outside of this, we need to negotiate still. Kung may masasagasaan, we wanted to solve this through the transition period." On ancestral domain by the indigenous peoples, he said the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) would also be recognized.

In response, local civil society

groups called for more transparency in the peace process. "Whatever agreements by parties, we must be informed for us to know how to advocate these in the grassroots and with media," said Musa Sanguila of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS).

The GRP-MILF peace talks have been ongoing for nine years now. In the 1989 and 2001 plebiscites conducted for autonomy in Muslim Mindanao, the Christian provinces refused to join the ARMM, reducing the offered 13-province autonomy (to the undivided Moro National Liberation Front in 1976) to four in 1989 and to five in 2001.

Our Australian experience: Muslims can lead anywhere

BAI CABAYBAY ABUBAKAR

MUSLIM religious leaders in the Philippines face a major challenge today. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and other war-torn areas in the Bangsamoro homeland represents the poorest of the poor of Philippine society. Muslim areas are the least developed, their people the least educated, and their schools and *madaris* the lowest in standards.

Moro leaders should realize by now that the most practical way to mend the image of Muslims in the country is to turn their people towards peace and development so that they can live in harmony with the community. The Philippine government on its part must stop the lawlessness and rehabilitate Muslim areas destroyed by the war, so that Muslims can live in peace. The task is enormous and requires a dose of good leadership.

It is vital to have leaders who know how to manage time; can focus on concrete results; build on strength rather than weakness; concentrate on programs where hard work produces outstanding result and above all, it is important to have leaders who have complete trust in Allah. Our leaders, therefore, must aim high to succeed.

The recent Muslim Religious Leadership Exchange in Australia (February 18-25, 2007)

Muslim women's rights



Participants to the *Muslim Women and CEDAW: Challenges in Rights, Representation and Opportunities* held on March 19 at the Miriam College in Quezon City. The daylong forum ended with a decision for participating women's groups to collaborate for CEDAW implementation in Muslim Mindanao. (Inset) Her Excellency, Hussn Bano Ghazanfar, Minister for Women of Afghanistan speaks at the conclusion of the forum.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASSER SHARIEF/PCID

hosted by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was a great opportunity for success stories of Muslim leadership. The Muslim delegation was composed of Esmal Ebrahim, Executive Director of the Society for the Family Development and Education in the Philippines and convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID); Aleem Elias Macarandas, member of the Constituent Council of the Muslim World League. Aleem Abdulwahid Inju, the Mufti of Tawi-Tawi; Aleem Abdulla Utto, Mufti of Sulu; Aleem Sharif Abirin, the Mufti of Basilan, Ustadz Bajunaid Ibrahim Darul Ifta-Maguindanao; Ustaza Albaya G. Badrodin DepEd, Madaris Coordinator of the Cotabato

City Division and this author. We visited mosques, Islamic centers, universities, community centers and government agencies.

Australia exercises multiculturalism. Muslims are free to perform their religious obligations for as long as they will not disturb other groups in performing such obligations and vice versa. All religious-based organization promotes inter-faith dialogues and multiculturalism. The mosques are generally clean and beautiful. They are used not only for praying but also as a center where people assemble themselves and discuss matters of interest to them as Muslims and as Australian citizens.

After the London bombings, the Australian Government

strengthened its cultural diversity policies and programs to build on social cohesion, harmony and security. This is to achieve greater understanding and respect through education, employment and more involvement by the Muslim community in the mainstream Australian community.

Another initiative is the Living in Harmony program, which is community-based. It promotes mutual respect and participation, and culturalism.

Muslims here are allowed to participate in elections and can have their selves elected to public office. Education is world-class. Faith or religious based schools greatly contribute in enriching the Australian society. All universities have strong research, human rights and

multiculturalism programs.

Islamic schooling is fast on the rise in Australia. Islamic schools accommodate non-Muslim students, teachers and staff provided they observe specific rules to be followed. Muslim students and teachers are free to perform their religious obligations in the school (i.e. wearing hijab). Some state-owned schools in Sydney integrate the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies.

Australia is a big supplier of halal meat. Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne are active in business. There is an Arab Islamic Bank, big restaurants and shops; a clear manifestation that Muslims in Australia particularly in Sydney and Melbourne are progressing.

Muslims here are in various

professions - media, sports, security, and politics. Here the policewoman is allowed to wear "hijab" and are given appropriate and dignified assignments.

The government of any nation is obliged to support and provide security to its citizens, where the rights of everyone are respected regardless of background. This mandate is implemented in Australia. We observed an atmosphere of respect, contentment and commitment on the part of the Australian people to their government and constitution. Moreover, the strong support for multiculturalism attracts people from around the world (especially Muslims) to migrate to Australia—the Migration Country.

Moro Women and CEDAW

BY REY TRILLANA

THE United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) urges the State to "pay attention to the needs of rural women, indigenous women and Muslim women". Thus, Muslim and non-Muslim women gathered in solidarity at a forum held last March 19 at Miriam College. Appropriately titled "Muslim Women and CEDAW: Challenges in Rights, Representation and Opportunities", the forum was co-organized by the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID).

Ky Johnson (The Asia Foundation) spoke of the support given by TAF to the empowerment of Muslim communities, citing the translation of Muslim personal laws and

anti-discrimination laws into 5 local dialects. Senator Santanina Rasul cited the legislation for women such as RA 7192, which provided the framework for improving gender equality. However she stressed that many obstacles still remain; more so with Muslim women. The role of women in conflict areas and peace building initiatives need to be supported, according to Rasul.

Prof. Jurma Tikmasan (UNFPA) asserted that the conflict that has ravaged the region for decades has taken its toll in the socio-economic conditions and education system of the Muslims.

Ms. Fatima Allian reported on a qualitative study of beliefs, perceptions and practices that influence reproductive health behavior in Tawi-Tawi. Among them: the perception that use of contraceptives is contrary to Islamic teaching, and; interpreta-

tion of some Quranic verses used by men to justify certain practices that may be harmful to women

The forum, organized to commemorate International Women's month, concluded in a commitment to collaboration. Sahara Malawani of the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women (RCBW) decried the conditions of Muslim women. She made an impassioned appeal for help from women organizations. This elicited commitments of support from Miriam College president Dr. Patricia Licuanan as well as WAGI executive director Prof. Aurora de Dios. De Dios and Licuanan lauded the forum as the first one to have focused on the rights of Muslim women in the context of CEDAW and vowed to continue to work for the solidarity of all women towards alleviating the conditions of their Muslim sisters.

PBLF-PCID Forum on Who Speaks for Mindanao?



Senatorial candidates Loren Legarda and Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel III join hands with Amina Rasul, José Zubiri, Sherrilyn S. Samaco, and Tom Clancy to support a Mindanao agenda.

Muslim women power

The Jihadist Amina Rasul

dominated political system characterized by patronage.

While the number of women in political institutions are important indicators of political participation, we need to go *beyond the numbers*. In fact, increasing the role of women in governance requires us to go beyond the traditional and formal political institutions.

The first point to be made here is this: while we welcome women who have assumed political posts, the ultimate measure of political participation should not be limited to the quantity rather the quality of women representation. Although the Philippines appears to be ahead of its neighboring countries (even the United States) by having 2 women presidents in 20 years, major hurdles are still in place for women to gain a firmer foothold in politics. It is still basically an elite-male dominated political landscape. While there is a perceptible increase in the number of women elected into government posts, assumption to institutional leadership does not necessarily translate into the expected degree of political clout for women. The question of resources also affects wom-

THE 1987 Constitution states that the Philippines is a republican and democratic state. A representative government, different sectors of society, those who have a stake in the making of policy and especially those who are marginalized must have a voice in governance. Among the marginalized, Muslim women suffer from what is similar to double jeopardy: not only are we women in a male-dominated world, we are also Muslims living with strong discrimination against Muslims.

Gender equality is a key element of the Philippine Constitution. Article II Section 14 of the 1987 Constitution states: "the State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men." Considering the unequal gender relations in the country, laws have been passed to level the playing field, including:

- **Local Government Code of 1991.** Provides for the election of sectoral representation, including women, in local legislative councils.
- **Women in Nation Building and Development Law.** Repub-

Resources also affects women's access to decision-making positions since women and men do not enjoy the same access to resources that yields power.

lic Act 7192 promotes the integration of women as full and equal partners of men in development and nation building. The law provides that a substantial portion of government resources be utilized to support programs and activities for women. The law also encourages the full participation and involvement of women in the development process and to remove gender bias in all government regulations and procedures. It mandates all agencies to allocate a minimum of 5%, increasing to 30%, of all official development funds in mainstreaming gender concerns.

• **Gender and Development Budget (GAD).** Through executive directives, the 5% allocation under RA 7192 is further expanded to cover the total budget appropriations, not only development funds, of all government agencies and local government units in the country.

Clearly, the Philippines has a well-developed legal framework for gender equality. This is even reinforced by the ratification of international instruments on women (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women or CEDAW) and clear commitments to the outputs of the UN Women Conferences. But these laws face serious obstacles in a male-

en's access to decision-making positions since women and men do not enjoy the same access to resources that yields power. The lack of economic power, similarly, deprives women of their rights and opportunities.

Second, the global explosion of civil society movements; a phenomenon that signifies a rejection of traditional politics and a shift to a more popular type of influencing public policy through people's organizations. It is in this context that I wish to discuss the political engagement of Muslim women in the Philippines

Muslim women continue to face obstacles in terms of fully realizing their rights as equal participants in society. However, resistance to gender equality has been the most challenging in Muslim communities, despite the adoption of laws aimed at reaffirming the equality of all citizens before the law in rights and duties. Such reforms have the potential to trigger wide-ranging gains for women's rights.

In Mindanao, ordinary Muslim women have started to become a force in social, political, or economic undertakings. After the 1996 Peace Agreement, MNLF women were vocal about their exclusion from the process. We know what happened to that peace accord. Today, women demand for the chance to be involved in the conceptualization and implementation of peace and development programs, as the men are.

More and more Muslim women are entering the realm of civil society. Many have become active in conflict resolution programs, in mass action to stop armed conflict, in establishing zones of peace, and they are some of the most active partners in interfaith dialogues. In Sulu, the Muslim Women Peace Advocates and the Bangsamoro Women Solidarity Forum are working on their own peace and development work. Disenchanted with the non-implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement, some women leaders in the communities of the MILF even believe they need to persist in the armed struggle in order to attain their goals.

As we celebrate Women's Month, I hope we can come up with concrete and concerted action plans to implement our commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, especially Muslim women. To uphold the rights of Muslim women is to defend women's rights. And defending women's rights is defending human rights.



Status of women in Islam

(Khutba are sermons delivered by the Imam during the Friday congregational prayers.

This Khutba was drafted by the Darul Ifta of Central Mindanao)

Khutba

Muhammad the man of mercy and noble character, considered women as important of the society, even as men were. He taught that women are entitled to rights and obligations as much as men are. He taught that nobody has the right to scorn and look down upon women because they happen to be females.

In marriage, a woman is considered of equal partner to her husband. The Holy Quran describes the woman as a companion of her husband with reciprocal love and a source of peace to him. It says: "And among His wonders is that He created mates for you, out of your own kind, that you may dwell in harmony with them, and instill love and tenderness between you. Verily in this are signs for those who reflect." (30:21)

In the West, Western countries take women as a medium of enjoyment or as a sexual object. That is why, when the slogan of woman's freedom is raised, exploitation of her role in the West took place even by females themselves! Breaking up of marriages, disintegration in family life, and profound family instability result from such exploitation.

On the other hand, by example provided by ladies such as Khadija, Fatima, Zainab, Aisha

and many more, Islam highlighted the greatness of women. Their role illustrated the meaning of woman's life and turned it into an example and specimen for future generations of races. Theirs were the best examples for ethical and moral life that point to nobility, graciousness, and civility.

The Holy Quran clears woman of the responsibility for the fall of Adam completely. The Quran gives woman respectability, honor and dignity. It was Islam that gave the woman the same rights as those of man for the first time in history. The Quran says in Surah 2 (al-Baqarah), Ayah 228: "And the women have similar rights over men in a just manner." (2:228)

Modern man recognizes there can be no freedom in the real sense without economic rights. Fourteen hundred years ago, Islam gave woman the right to inherit the property and wealth of her father and husband and to acquire, own, and dispose of wealth, as she willed.

The Holy Quran says: "...for men shall have what they earn, and (so) women shall have of what they earn" (4:32)

In marriage a woman is considered by Islam as equal partner free from injustice and all forms of compulsion. Describing the woman as a companion of her husband, an individual to love, and a source of peace and solace to him.

The Holy Quran says: "And among His wonders is that He

created mates for you, out of your own kind, that you may dwell in harmony with them, and instilled love and tenderness between you.

Verily in this are signs for those who reflect." (30:21)

To impress upon his followers the high position of womanhood, the Prophet declared: "Paradise lies under the feet of the mothers."

Islam makes no distinction between men and women as far as their moral or spiritual capabilities, or their consequential rewards or punishment for the Hereafter.

The Quran says in this regard: "And [as for] the believers, men and women, are wali (Guardians) unto one another: they enjoin the good and forbid the wrong, and are constant in prayer, and they render the poor-due, and pay heed unto God and His Messenger. Upon them Allah will bestow His Grace; verily, God is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (9:71)

Also in quoting Surah 16 (al-Nah'l), Ayah 97, it says in this regard: As for anyone, be it male or female who does righteous deeds and is a believer — him shall We certainly cause to live a goodly life, and certainly shall We grant unto such, rewards according to the best of what they ever did. (16:97)

We therefore ask Allah the Almighty to Guide us and make us truly Muslim believes and successful in this life and in the Hereafter.

[MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION]

The UP Institute of Islamic Studies in cooperation with the UP Diliman Student Council and Research Association for Islamic Social Sciences, Inc. organized a forum, "Women in Veil behind Bars: Guilty or Not Guilty?" on March 29, 2007 at the Bulwagang Salam, Asian Center, Romulo Hall, UP Diliman. The program served as a venue to present the conditions of Muslim women, particularly of Quezon City inmates. In 2005, the Commission on Human Rights and the Women Lawyers Circle (WILOCI) documented the cases of Muslim women and children detained in MetroManila jails. The study showed a high incidence of human rights violations.

The speakers at the UP forum were Atty. Mehol Sadain, former COMELEC Commissioner, Dr. Carolyn Sobritchea, Director, UP Center for Women Studies and Police Chief Superintendent Sukarno Ikbala, Deputy Director, PNP Directorate for Police Community Relations. A 2003 UN Report says some women have become drug users or pushers as one of the effects of poverty and unemployment. The Camp Karingal Female Detention Center in Quezon City housed more than 100 Muslim women inmates detained for various crimes. More than 90% of them are facing criminal charges under R.A. 9165, known as "The Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002".

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THE Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Social Fund has acquired a loan of P1 billion from Japan for the implementation of its infrastructure projects. The funds would be used for the construction of additional 33 infrastructure projects in the autonomous region. Among the infrastructure projects to be constructed are school buildings, health centers, roads, and other needed projects like those that were implemented previously.

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The ARMM committed to support UNICEF's child-friendly policy through 4-Gifts which provides proper protection and safeguard to children below 18 years old and the Child Friendly Movement (CFM) which DepEd has been promoting. The 4-Gifts are the Local Code for Children (LCP), Local Investment for Children (LIC), Local Plan for Children (LPC) and the State of the Children's Report (SCR). 10 pilot barangays and municipalities in the provinces of Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan will implement these policies which include local government units appropriating 10% of their IRA in support of the Country Program for Children of UNICEF. The 10 pilot barangays are as follows: Kinebeka and Awang in Datu Odin Sinsuat; Timanan and Kuya in South Upi; Tunggol and Bulit in Datu Montawal; Nuro and Kibleg in North Upi; Darampu and Paldong in Sultan

sa Barongis; Central Langkong and Langkong in Matanog; Nuyo and Dinganen in Buldon; Bulalo and Crossing Simuay in Sultan Kudarat; Macabiso and Tapayan in Sultan Mastura and Poblacion 1 and 2 in Parang.

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127 Arabic teachers were trained as madaris (Islamic school) facilitators at the Kasfala Hall, Provincial Capitol, Saranggani on March 28-April 1 to support peace and development efforts of the local government unit (LGU). In partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd), the program aims to capacitate the teachers with effective strategies to mentor their enrollees in the areas of lesson planning, grading system and teaching.

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In preparation for the 2007 elections, the Citizen's Coalition for ARMM Elections (CCARE) supported by the International Federation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conducted trainings in ARMM provinces on Voter's Education and Democracy with stakeholders and concerned agencies, PNP, COMELEC, DepED and Armed Forces of the Philippines. The activities aimed to increase awareness among the electorate on the rules and prohibitions during elections period and qualifications of candidates, among others.

The Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting will be meeting with Muslim NGOs in Davao City on April 2 and 3 to discuss partnership in safe-

guarding the electoral process in ARMM. The initiative is supported by The Asia Foundation. PPCRV is calling for volunteers from Muslim Mindanao to help make the elections "Clean, Honest, Accurate, Meaningful and Peaceful".

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The British Council and Mindanao State University's (MSU) Institute of Peace and Development in Mindanao hosted the visit of British peace expert Dr. Nick Lewer to Mindanao last March 19-22. He handled a Peace Convergence and Analysis Training in Cagayan de Oro for MSU's seven campus peace academic representatives and NGOs. Lewer is Senior Lecturer and Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford. He specializes in applied conflict resolution and peacebuilding in situations of violence. Nick has extensive experience in South Asia particularly in Sri Lanka.

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The Taguig-based Center for Muslim Moderates (CMM) in coordination with the University of the Philippines' Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) announces the search for the Ten Outstanding Muslim Youth (TOMY) for 2007. Muslim nominees must be 18-39 years old, natural-born citizens and endorsed by a prominent group. Awarding will be on April 23, 2007 in Manila.

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Who speaks for Mindanao?

BY REY TRILLANA

IT was a rare sight. Senatorial candidates, discussing issues rather than belting out the latest pop song hit. Candidates debating their agenda on Mindanao rather than dancing to the applause of the masses.

The forum, "Who Speaks for Mindanao?" was organized by the Philippine Business Leaders Forum (PBLF) and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) last March 22 at the Manila Polo Club. Six candidates confirmed but only two senatorial candidates showed up: former Senator Loren Legarda and Atty. Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel III. Rep. Miguel Zubiri was represented by brother Jose Zubiri, a congressional candidate.

Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process Jesus Dureza acknowledged the impoverished condition of Mindanao caused by decades of conflict but stressed that government is fully committed to a politically negotiated settlement of the conflicts and for equitable development of the region.

Dr. Santanina Rasul, the last

Muslim in the Senate, urged "the people of Mindanao to unite to make Mindanao productive, progressive and prosperous" by addressing the political, socio-economic and educational dimensions of the Mindanao problem.

Datu Ibrahim 'Toto' Paglas cited his own experiences in the town of Datu Paglas (named after his grandfather). A 'sword-to-plowshare' story, Datu Toto invested his own capital and managed to attract foreign investors to partner with him in conflict affected Paglas municipality. Thus, the town rose from the rubble to become the center for one of the biggest Muslim owned enterprises in Mindanao, a 1,300-hectare banana plantation that employs more than a thousand workers, mostly former MILF rebels.

A Roadmap to Peace in Mindanao Team Unity's Miguel Zubiri's platform on the environment, the youth, agricultural development and countryside development will greatly help in creating a progressive Mindanao, explained his representative.

Genuine Opposition (GO) bet Koko Pimentel stressed the need to promote peace in Mindanao by pursuing politically negotiated settlements with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and fully implement the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement. He proposed an "Affirmative Action Plan" for Mindanao, which calls for an equitable share of revenues and resources to fuel the drive for peace and development in Mindanao. He stressed the need to protect human rights in the face of growing abuses in the areas of conflict as well as the high level of extra-judicial killings.

Legarda deplored the "brutal poverty" and "dehumanizing illiteracy" that pervade in ARMM. She laid out her legislative plan for Mindanao, which included the adoption of a de-

tailed roadmap that will fully implement the 1996 Peace Agreement and support the peace process with the MILF.

Both candidates from the opposition stressed the need to recognize the distinct beliefs and tradition of Muslim Filipinos through legislation. Legarda argued that although the government has referred to RA 8371 or the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1996 as a framework for resolving the ancestral domain claims of Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao, "the law remains unresponsive to the Bangsamoro's demand for a system of life and governance that necessarily includes the Moro's exercise of political and economic control over their homeland". For his part Pimentel, who topped the bar in 1990, strongly advocated for the adoption of a federal form of government to preserve the ethnic and tribal customs & traditions in these areas.

Legarda, who authored RA9177 or An Act Declaring Eidul Fitr a National Holiday, elicited applause from the Mus-

lims present when she promised to push for the enactment of a law making Eidul Adha as a national holiday.

Both candidates presented comprehensive plans to foster agricultural development and economic growth. Pimentel proposes the creation of Department of Fisheries and transportation facilities by land, sea and air transportation to "enable Mindanao to competitively provide agricultural, aqua, and other products to the Luzon, Metro Manila, the Visayan and other lucrative markets both domestic and foreign".

Legarda meanwhile called for the adoption of a Five-Year Agricultural Development Plan designed to increase productivity of irrigated rice lands, to enhance Agrarian Reform Communities, to revive dying cooperatives through adequate funding support, and to open credit windows for farm cooperatives at the Land Bank and cooperative rural banks.

Mentor the Muslim youth

At the forum, the Muslim Youth

Mentoring Program was launched. The program allows participating businesses to provide Muslim interns with the necessary experience in the corporate world and the training they need to help them assume leadership roles in the future. The program seeks to encourage Muslim youth to join the private sector as this will allow them to help their homeland in terms of encouraging business and spurring economic development.

PBLF chief executive officer (CEO) Dr. Michael Clancy described the effort as "an equal opportunity program aimed at fostering dialogue and communication. The program "brings young Muslims into dialogue with non-Muslims thereby enhancing the inter-faith dialogue at the most basic level".

The PBLF is a network of CEOs of companies who are part of a privileged international group of business leaders who value the ability to interact with their peers - locally and within Asia - and who are prepared to learn from them.

Shahana "Shan" Abdulwahid

Moro conquers UP student council

BY HARIJA RIZA K. BARGHOUT

"TO see our Moro brethren succeed, to see them excel in various fields, and to see them live out of poverty and conflict." So proclaimed Shahana "Shan" Abdulwahid, a Sama from Zamboanga City, as she sought the highest position that a student can have in the University of the Philippines Student Council (UPSC).

Abdulwahid, who is currently taking up MA in Islamic Studies at UP was the top councilor of the UPSC before getting elected as chair of the council recently. She is the first Muslim to hold the position.

Happy to accept the challenge of being the UPSC chair, she says her victory proves that Muslim students are on "par" with other students.

What is she like? "Humble and quiet," said Rawina, a Muslim sister. "At first glance, you won't say she could win in an election like USC. But she is a *makamasa*." Darwin, a fellow student at the Institute of Islamic Studies described her as "intelligent, a bit radical and vocal when needed although more of the silent type. *Tipong* UP student *talaga*—an activist."

A devout Muslim, Islam is the basis of everything she does. "What-



■ Shahana "Shan" Abdulwahid

ever I do is based on the principles of Islam, and I uphold Islamic teachings," said Abdulwahid in an interview with the Moro Times. She kept her hijab (head covering) on, even as she campaigned.

Shan graduated cum laude from UP in 2006 and was a recipient of the

Prince Salman Scholarship Grant. In 2005, she was cited as one of the 50 Young Achievers. Shan received the President Macapagal-Arroyo Leadership Award in 2001.

Leadership is not new to Abdulwahid because she has always been active in different organizations in and out of the university. A few of the organizations she is affiliated with are: the STAND UP (Student Alliance for the Advancement of Democratic Rights in UP), secretary-general; Katipunan ng mga Sangguniang Mag-aaral sa UP (KASAMA sa UP); Vice President- External Relations, UP Muslim Students' Association (MSA); Delegate, Red Cross Youth International Exchange Program to Australia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore in May 1999.

A role model for Muslim youth, Shan is the second child of Court of Appeals Associate Justice Hakim S. Abdulwahid and Naida Edding Abdulwahid, a government employee. Shan will definitely go places: The Supreme Court? The Senate? As CEO of a multinational? A schoolmate said, "Shan makes us realize that it's possible for a Muslim to be president of the country." Decades ago this would have been unthinkable. But with budding young Muslims like Shan, why not?

Making peace between warring clans

BY SAADA NOR UNYPAD Information Officer

CLAN vendetta or rido is a major problem in Muslim areas across the country. In Mindanao, this phenomenon is mostly caused by land disputes and political rivalries. Rido tends to interact with, and complicate, larger conflicts such as the conflict between the military and liberation fronts. Rido cripples the local economy, displaces communities and instills fear thus the urgent need to pacify conflicting parties.

One of the most well-known rido among the Maguindanao is between the Mangansakan and Tayuan clans. This feud, which stretches back to the 1980s, has involved the military, CAFGU, and some elements of the Moro National Liberation Front, resulting in many casualties and displacing thousands of families across four municipalities.

With the support of The Asia Foundation (TAF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Cotabato-based United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) initiated a series of dialogues between the feuding clans to help settle the conflict. UNYPAD conducted an in-depth study about the conflict, organized and empowered the council of elders of both clans, found an acceptable mediator, and conducted consultations and information dissemination to grassroots members of both clans.

The families initially doubted the sincerity and capability of the youth in helping resolve the problem. The untimely death of a Tayuan clan council member also affected the dialogues. In addition, the Shariff Aguak incident in June 2006, which killed a Mangansakan leader and triggered a major armed conflict in Maguindanao, further complicated the resolution process. However, the youth persevered to help the families reach a final settlement.

Clan representatives of the feuding families were consulted on the possibility of reconciliation. Face-face meetings between them were organized leading to a healing process that culminated in a successful reconciliation.

On March 11, 2007, a grand kanduli or thanksgiving celebration was held in Paidu Pulangi, Pikit by the two clans to culminate the settlement and mark the end of their 21 year-old rido. The kanduli also commemorated the 14th death anniversary of Datu Bitol Mangansakan who is a patriarch of the Mangansakan and Tayuan clans. The kanduli was a very emotional event for all the families. For many of them, it was their first time to meet again after a very long time. The successful kanduli became a manifestation of their genuine commitment to finally end any future atrocities between the clans. It is also an affirmation of their conviction that hatred, conflicts, and misunderstanding are retrogressive and has no more space in either of the clans.

Muslim-led party-list groups seek democratic space

BY ARIEL BACOL

AT least five party-list organizations advocating rights of Mindanawans particularly Muslims are seeking a seat in Congress this coming May election as provided for in Republic Act 7941. The act is to "enable Filipino citizens belonging to the marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties to become members of the House of Representatives." Republic Act 7941 provides for the election of party-list representative/s "of registered national, regional and sectoral parties, organizations or coalitions."

Parties, organizations, and coalitions receiving at least two percent of the total votes cast for the party-list system shall be entitled to one seat each. Those garnering more than two percent of the votes shall be entitled to additional seats in proportion to their total number of votes, provided it won't exceed the maximum of three seats allocated for each party-list.

Among the party-list organizations are:

ANAK MINDANAO (AMIN)

AMIN was founded upon the principle that tri-people unity is key to the attainment of lasting peace and development of Mindanao. It believes that the Party List System will contribute to the overall advancement of the Mindanao.

Since its founding in 1998, AMIN had won a seat in Congress for two terms. In the 13th Congress, it authored and passed more than 22 bills and House Resolutions pertaining to various concerns for Mindanao - discrimination, the inclusion of Moro and Lumad histories in the educational curriculum, national policies for peace and development, to the creation of new municipalities and barangays in Mindanao.

AMIN also provided infrastructure support to Moro, Lumad and settler communities through the construction of farm to market roads and others. AMIN also maintains an educational scholarship program and relief missions

to communities affected by calamities. AMIN plays an active role in the advocacy of Human Rights by providing assistance to victims of human rights violations and by leading campaigns against any form of discriminations.

Among its objectives are: To effect reforms in the electoral and form of governance in Mindanao and the rest of the country, in general; Promote genuine peace and sustainable development (PSD) in the country, particularly in Mindanao; To work for a just and humane economic, political and cultural condition of all peoples, especially the marginalized sectors; Advance the issues and concerns of the Tri-people on ancestral domain claim and agrarian reform for food security; home for the homeless and the aged, and; Right to self-determination of all peoples; Develop a self-reliant agricultural-based economy and adopt protectionist policies on export-import control; Promote a scientific, people-oriented and nationalist system of education; Promote the interest of migrant workers and their right to vote

AMIN Representative: Hon. Mujiv S. Hataman

ASSALAM Bangsamoro

People's Association (ASSALAM)

ASSALAM is an association of Moro multi-sectoral tribes in Mindanao and in other areas where Moros are concentrated. It was established on November 2-3, 2002 in Manor Hotel in Malate, Manila. The continued political turmoil and economic downturn of the country with the unrelenting efforts of individuals in the NGOs and communities led to the formation of this association.

ASSALAM envisions a progressive and empowered Bangsamoro society free from clutches of poverty living in peace according to Islamic principles

Objectives: Increase government budget for Mindanao and Moro areas on basic social services to affect standard delivery of social development projects; Re-channel military budget to the anti-poverty programs; Creation of

Muslim Religious Leadership Exchange in Australia



Muslim delegates with the officers of the Commission of Inter-Cultural Communities in Sydney Australia. The Filipino Muslim delegation was composed of Esmail Ebrahim; Aleem Elias Macarandas; Aleem Abdulwahid Inju; Aleem Abdulla Utto; Aleem Sharif Abirin; Ustadz Bajunaid Ibrahim; Ustadz Albaya G., and; Bai Cabaybay Abubakar. (Warren Duncan)

the Regional Anti-Poverty Commission in ARMM; Government fertilizer subsidy to small farmers; Demilitarization of civilian areas in Mindanao; Promotion of inter-tribe and inter-faith participation and dialogue in the social development and peace processes; Genuine negotiated settlement on Moro right to self-determination; Increase the annual budget of ARMM

ASSALAM Representative: Mr. Pendatun Disimban

Action for Democracy and Development for the Tribal People (ADD TRIBAL)

ADD TRIBAL is composed of indigenous cultural minorities and other sectors such as women, peasants, and other similarly marginalized settlers. Its vision is that the tribal communities have representation in the halls of Congress through which they can voice their sentiments and fulfill their aspirations for equality and fair governance.

ADD TRIBAL aims to advance the socio-economic well-being of the tribal people by pushing for legislations that: Promote and protect their political empowerment; Promote and protect their cultural heritage, and educational and sports advancement; Advance and work for their health security; Provide legal assistance to the tribal people; Advance other programs to promote and protect the interest of indigenous cultural communities in coordination and cooperation with other marginalized sectors such as women, youth, and overseas and local workers.

ADD TRIBAL Representative: Dr. Abdurahman Amin

Suara Bangsamoro (SUARA)

Suara was formed on March 18, 2002 with the aim of advancing the Moro people's quest for self-determination in the Philippine Congress. It has headquarters in major cities and provinces in Mindanao and Luzon and continues

to establish chapters in communities in almost every Moro ethnic group around the country.

General Program: To assert the rights of the Bangsamoro to self-determination by working for the dismantling of all oppressive and discriminatory laws and programs which trample on and deny the Moro People's basic human rights; To promote a self-reliant economy by supporting programs on land reform, sustainable development through genuine industrialization and fighting against the continuing plunder of resources by powerful economic forces; To strengthen unity and cooperation between the Bangsamoro and the Filipino People by pursuing collective actions on common problems and common aspiration; To institute programs and mechanism that shall address the continuing displacement of the Moro people from their homeland while stopping corporate plunder and intrusion into the Bangsamoro land and resources; To promote initiatives that shall safeguard the social battlefront of Moro people who have resettled in different parts of the country and in other work places; To work for the attainment of peace based on social justice by supporting the peace talks that address the root cause of the armed conflict and initiate dialogue that bridge the gap between Moro and Christians, and to establish interfaith and inter-people programs and projects along this line; To Uphold the Bangsamoro people's basic human rights and freedom and ensure justice for all victims of human rights violations; To promote and develop the Bangsamoro culture to foster fraternal unity with its Christian and other ethnic brethren; To foster a just policy of international relations that is independent and mutually beneficial to both the Bangsamoro and the whole Philippine nation, promote fraternal unity with other Islamic groups and countries, make a stand and take measures against imposition of foreign powers' economic and political inter-

est which takes toll in the interest of the broad masses of various people and races.

Suara Representative: to be decided

Ang Laban ng Indiginong Filipino (ALIF)

ALIF was organized in Marawi City on February 10, 2003. It seeks to represent in the House the marginalized and underrepresented sector of the indigenous cultural communities, particularly those based in Mindanao.

ALIF has been working on the following: Enhancement of domestic tourism in certain areas at ALIF's initiative through the installation of tourism-oriented projects such as street lightings and park improvements; Improvement of water system facilities in certain depressed areas, as requested by ALIF's constituents; Promotion of socio-economic and livelihood activities through the repair and rehabilitation of farm-to-market roads to boost agricultural productivity and enhance small-scale trading activities; Enhancement of computer literacy and information technology skills improvement in certain pilot areas through distribution and installation of computer units; Promotion of sports activities through sponsorship of sports competitions and distribution of sporting goods among youths in depressed communities; Direct assistance to deserving constituents through referrals and endorsements of their requests to concerned agencies and parties; Grant of cash assistance, in extreme cases, for medicines and hospitalization expenses of indigent patients and for boat fare of deserving constituents who decide to return to their places of origin in Mindanao; Distribution of seedlings to enhance agricultural productivity

Its advocacy covers all issues relating to education, poverty alleviation, peace and order, economic growth, infrastructure development, social stability, ecological balance and related concerns.

ALIF Representative: Hon. Acmad M. Tomawis



BY NASSER SHARIEF

PHILANTHROPIST, educator, public servant. The beautiful Santanina Tillah Rasul, the only Muslim lady to have been elected to the Senate (and twice at that), does not look and feel 75. Svelte and strong, she continues to travel to promote the welfare of the Muslim communities, especially the women and children.

Childhood and Family

Nina Rasul grew up in remote places like Siasi Island and Ganassi, Lanao del Sur, following the assignments of her father, Superintendent for Education Miralam Tillah Sr. "When I was in grade four, I stayed in the household of Dayang-Dayang (Princess) Hadja Piandao Kiram, wife of then Governor Ombra Amilbanga." Dayang-Dayang Hadja Piandao, daughter of the Sultan of Sulu, inherited almost half of Sabah. The island girl graduated Cum Laude in A.B. Political Science from the University of the Philippines. After graduation, she was offered a Fulbright Smith-Mundt scholarship. Since she was already engaged to Atty. Abraham "Abe" Rasul, her father was against it. The American professor who recommended her for the scholarship sailed all the way from Manila to Siasi to convince Nina and her father, to no avail.

Nina instead taught in public high school and married Abe, a handsome young lawyer, son of the late Hadji Butu, Prime Minister of Sulu and first Muslim senator. Abe and Nina raised six children, all successful professionals. When she became a fulltime wife and mother, Nina Rasul said "I had to bid goodbye to a career." For



■ Santanina Tillah Rasul

a while at least. However, she did use her spare time to help in community work, promoting literacy, women empowerment initiating her lifelong involvement with civil society. She also wrote for the Sulu Star, a provincial newspaper.

A Refugee

War has been the greatest influence for Nina Rasul. She shared some of her harrowing experiences during World War II. "Whenever we heard the drone of Japanese airplanes carrying bellyloads of bombs, we would speedily slide from a pole down our house, and run for cover among the mangroves, and stay there till dark when it was safe again to go back to our house." She recalled vividly how a vinta was put on standby to take her pregnant mother to safety. Her brother Almarim was born in the vinta.

The outbreak of the rebellion in the 70s proved to be déjà vu for Nina Rasul. As the government and the Moro National Liberation Front battled over Jolo, the town was burned to the ground. The Rasulos lost all, as did the families living in Jolo.

"My preoccupation with the peace process in the south is brought out by my first-hand experience of wars." She has been a staunch advocate of peaceful reconciliation of conflict. Nina received the Golden Heart Presidential Award in 1998 for her "diligent efforts in reconciling contentious positions of both the government and the MNLF" in the final phase of the negotiations in 1996 that paved the way for the Final Peace Accord.

Literacy advocate and social activist

The Tillahs were pampered with books. As a child, Nina would read to the folks of her town. She would translate into Tausog such novels as 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Tale of Two Cities'. "What a rapt audience I had then!" Reminisced storyteller Nina Rasul, "Once, I related to them the story of Dracula by Mary Shelley. It was late in the evening and it was a moonless night. They

went home but many came back scared by my story that they waited for the sun to come up before going home!"

A teacher, she believes literacy and education are instrumental to the development of the Muslim communities. Her literacy project, Magbassa Kita (Let Us Read), started in the 60s, has been implemented by the Department of Education as a national literacy program. Nina's passion for literacy and education are at the heart of her activities. Sympathetic to the illiterate elderly, she organized the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc. which has trained about 1,500 teachers nationwide, particularly in Muslim Mindanao. She chairs the Kasannangan Foundation, Inc. which provides scholarships for deserving Muslim youth and is Convenor of the Muslim Women Peace Advocates.

An islander, Nina grew amidst rich marine resources. Destructive fishing techniques such as dynamite fishing, which have destroyed the corals and the reefs she loves, inspired her to establish the Bantay Dagat, Inc. The Bantay Dagat created a nationwide awareness on the need to protect and conserve coastal and marine resources through a campaign network.

The reluctant politician

Nina did not plan on entering politics. However, she was used to public service. Her father was the leader of her hometown of Siasi, during peacetime as well as during the war. Their house was always open to people with problems. "While my father attended to solving their problems, my mother would feed them. So serving people came naturally to everyone in the household", she recalled. Her husband, Abe, also came from a political family. A liberal Muslim husband, he encouraged his wife to run for office. Nina Rasul started her political career as a barangay councilor in the 60s. She was elected as a member of the Sulu Provincial Board during the Marcos years, the only opposition member to win.

In 1987, she was drafted by then President Corazon C. Aquino to run for the senate. Nina Rasul is the only Muslim—male or female—to be elected to two consecutive terms in the Senate. Unfortunately, she is also the last Muslim Senator.

Nina was chairperson of the Committee on Civil Service and Government Reorganization and the Committee on Women and Family Relations. Rasul's landmark legislations in the senate included RA7192, which mandated that government earmark funds for women as well as allow women to enter the Philippine Military Academy. She authored the law that enabled the country to officially celebrate Women's Day and introduced a provision in the Local Government Code to provide for a seat for women at all levels of local legislative bodies. Her legislation protecting civil servants has provided her with tremendous support from government employees nationwide.

Firm in her resolve to provide equity for Mindanao, she once staged a one-woman demonstration to protest the deliberate delay by the Senate leadership to calendar her pet bill, the creation of the Mindanao Railway System. Carrying a placard up the steps of the Senate, tailed by a crowd of reporters and Mindanaoans, the Senate security prevented her from entering the hall with her placard. Some senators intervened. Senator Ernesto Maceda stated that if a senator wanted to bring an elephant into the senate hall, he or she could. A placard was not a legitimate reason.

"In the end, I did deliver my privilege speech but that was all. For all my efforts *eh, wala rin nangyari*. Too bad. It could have made the difference between poverty and prosperity in Mindanao."

Before being elected Senator in 1987, Nina Rasul was Commissioner of the UNESCO Philippine Commission representing Muslims and the Cultural Communities in 1986 and a Commissioner of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) in 1976.

The future

Nina Rasul has no intention of retiring. There is one more achievement for her to attain. Awarded three doctorate Honoris Causa, she bewails "I cannot seem to get around finishing my doctoral units in Public Administration at UP." Nina Rasul wants to attain a real doctorate. "This is my *bete noire*, but I'll work on it, I promise." We will not have to wait long for Dr. Santanina T. Rasul, PhD, Public Administration.

The Princess who defied royalty

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

LONG before Margaret Thatcher or Condoleezza Rice became pioneering women politicians in world politics, the free world dealt with strong Moro women who held decision-making posts in their societies. Sittie Kabira was crowned Sultan in Sulu in the 17th century, her territory having entered treaties with colonizing spice-hunters. Rajah Potri, wife of Rajah Buayan's Datu Utto, was believed to have been de facto Sultan of Maguindanao between 1888 and 1901, when there was a dispute between Spain and Maguindanao.

The Darangen epic's central figure is a lady. Legend has it that a long time ago, there was an impending war between the Bukidnon and Maguindanao tribes. The Chieftain of the Bukidnon clan sent his son, Bagani, to discuss the rules of war with the Maguindanao Sultan. Upon so doing, Bagani saw the Sultan's beautiful daughter, Bai Lawanen, whose smile charmed the young man. Bagani forgot all thoughts of war and fell in love with the young princess. Instead of fighting, he asked for the hand of the princess. Thus, the marriage of Bagani and Bai Lawanen averted the war of the tribes. Bai is a Muslim term for "princess" and Lawanen means "without equal".

■ Tarhata "Tata" Alonto-Lucman
PHOTO BY NORODIN LUCMAN

ground in the man's world.

When then President Ferdinand Marcos called datus and politicians to Malacanang to consult on declaring martial law, Governor Tata's advisers and kin advised her against going to Manila and face the fearsome, notorious Marcos. But Tata prevailed. Tata, the only lady in the entourage, went with other political kingpins, Tamano, Dimapor, Pendatun. When Marcos asked, what could you say about my proposal for martial law? After a long silence, Tata stood up among the datus who could not oppose the forthcoming militarization of the South. She spoke sarcastically, "Even as I am an ordinary woman, I have to raise my hand. Thank you for inviting this group. As governor, I should be here to answer your call for a meeting with Muslims. What I can say with all the datus here is that they are unitedly agreed to support you in the announcement for reform. Thank you, god bless you and the Filipino people."

Constantly defying rules, Tata also didn't want to marry someone not her choice. She was constantly engaged by her family to men from Maranao buena familia, but she would break the betrothals. She would find that the constant visitor, mentor at her home would be interested in her. Founder of the Bangsamoro Liberation Organization, Sultan Al-Rashid Lucman would later propose marriage.

Lucman became a close ally of MNLF's Nur Misaari in the resistance movement. The Jabidah Massacre served to confirm their worst suspicions of Marcos' plans. At some point in early 1969 a decision was made within this group to initiate a training program for Muslim guerrilla fighters. In late 1969, ninety young Muslim recruits, most of them Lucman's fellow Maranaos from Lanao—but also Magindanaos and Tausugs—began military training in the forests of Malaysia by professional instructors. Nur Misaari was among the group, as was the son of Rashid Lucman and eight young Magindanaos. This was referred to as the Mindanao Independence Movement program.

Tata and husband would leave the country during martial law on exile. Their service for their kababayans would be measured by the amounts deposited to them while they were in Saudi Arabia. She was able to see other countries, appreciating the freedom her husband fought for as a revolutionary.

She also nurtured her children who would later carry on her legacy in public service. Both Nurudin and Nurmallah were active leaders of Liberal Party. Nurmallah would later win as Vice-Governor of Lanao del Sur. Nurmallah recalls, "The military destroyed our properties, bombed our rural bank and equipments in our plantation. Martial law physically destroyed us but not our resolve to fight for justice for our people."

"Even as she was on the opposite side of the fence from her husband's movement, Tata recalls her days in government with positive rekindlement. She cites her achievements—campaigning against guns in a guns-land especially when the Barracudas and Ilagas came. "Islam is peace." She shunned bodyguards and confiscated arms in the far-flung municipalities. She also cites irrigation program which welcomed the contribution of non-Muslim farmers. During her time, there were Christian villages.

As a rido settler, she was content in adding her money to the blood money required to pacify conflicts. She would choose to hike and let the opposing parties ride their cars so that they would see how serious she was in resolving their differences.

As she sipped the cigarette she learned to do when she was just 12, she brags she has never been to a hospital except during her first hospitalization at Amai Pakpak. "I don't feel the illness coming." Outspoken, fiery, the lady who defied its conventions lives to tell her story.

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