

The Moro Times

FRIDAY
April 27, 2007

Muslims Unite for Clean Elections

DETERMINED to erase the negative perception of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) as the "cheating capital" of the country, a dozen Muslim non-government organizations and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) got together in Davao City last April 2 and 3 and signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) which provided for the merging and sharing of resources in the May 2007 elections and "establish(ing) a single network of volunteer monitors and watchers which shall take the lead in monitoring, watching and canvassing of votes in the ARMM region (Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sharif Kabungsuwan, Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Basilan)."

Ambassador Henrietta de Villa, chairperson of PPCRV, hailed it as an important landmark in Philippine elections. She said that this is the first time that a comprehensive interfaith effort has been mounted to ensure clean elections. Ambassador De Villa said that "this is a good example of how we, as a nation, can move past our differences and focus on what we have in common: the interest of our country." In previous elections, individual organizations have carried out poll-watching activities in ARMM. This is the first time that these separate activities are rationalized into one concerted effort among the different organizations. Ms. Amina Rasul, Lead Convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID), stressed the significance of the effort to ensure clean elections in the context of strengthening democracy in Muslim communities. She



■ **GUARDING THE POLLS.** Representatives from 12 Muslim organizations are shown here with PPCRV Chair Ambassador Henrietta de Villa, (4th from right) and PCID Lead Convenor Ms. Amina Rasul (5th from left). The group signed a memorandum of agreement that unifies their efforts to ensure clean and honest election in May 2007.

added that the success of this endeavor can become a model for other areas in the country.

Aside from PCID and PPCRV, the memorandum of agreement was signed by other organizations in ARMM namely: the Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reforms, Inc. (C-CARE); Concerned Alliance of Professors and Students, Inc. (CAPS); Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS); Electoral Reform Advocates (ERA); Maguindanao Foundation for Good Governance and Development, Inc. (MFGGDI); Maranao People Development Center (MARADECA, Inc.); Muslim Mindanao Consumers Association, Inc. (MMCA); Muslim Women Peace Advocates - Sulu Council (MWPA); Sulu State College Master in Public Admin-

istration Alumni Association, Inc. (SSC-MPA-A, Inc.); Tulung Lupah Sug, Inc. (TLS); United Youth for Peace and Development, Inc. (UNYPAD).

The workshop, held at the Grand Men Seng Hotel through the assistance of The Asia Foundation (TAF), featured a discussion on effective poll-watching conducted by the PPCRV counsel Atty. Howard Calleja. The different organizations also agreed to set up coordinating groups in each of the provinces of ARMM to manage the networking with the PPCRV whose operations rely heavily on its dioceses.

Darul Ifta issues khutba for clean elections

An additional signatory to the MOA was the Assembly of

Darul Ifta of the Philippines—the biggest and most influential group of Muslim religious leaders in Southern Philippines. The Darul Ifta, through Mufti Abdula Hamja Utoh, signed the agreement in simple ceremonies held in Zamboanga City last April 26. Also in attendance were Amb. De Villa, Bro. Clifford Sorita and former Senator Santanina Rasul. This was done in the wake of a khutba (see full text on page 2) issued by the ARMM muftis calling for the Muslims to strengthen their resolve to push for meaningful peaceful reforms. The statement likewise asserted that peaceful reforms redounding to the general welfare "constitute a Jihad in its highest form".

In a defining moment, the

muftis (Islamic jurists) issued a statement denouncing the use of the Holy Kor'an to bribe voters and election officials.

The muftis highlighted relevant verses of the Koran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, including one that says: "The one who gives bribe and the one who accepts it (in changing) a judgment, are both cursed by Allah."

Ustadz Esmael Ebrahim, spokesperson for the Assembly of Dar'ul Ifta (House of Opinion) said this was the main reason muftis are urging voters in Basilan, Lanao Sur, Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi "to (exercise their) inherent right in seeking reforms through all peaceful means available, including the right to cast vote and to protect

that right as a matter of duty and responsibility of a Muslim."

The one-page statement, entitled "Fairness, Accountability and Transformation for the Welfare of ARMM" was signed in Zamboanga City on March 29. The muftis exhorted the faithful: "O, Muslims! Rise above this sarcastic perception that the ARMM is the Philippines' cheating capital for elections; rise against the cheaters' expectation that electoral fraud in ARMM has been a commercial transaction of a few people."

Continuing Efforts

As part of this continuing effort to protect the integrity of the electoral process in ARMM, an election forum was also held in Jolo, Sulu last April 25 organized by PCID, the Muslim Women Peace Advocates of Sulu (MWPA), Tulung Lupa Sug (TLS), and the Sulu State College Master in Public Administration Alumni Association, Inc. (SSC-MPA-A, Inc.). COMELEC Commissioner Rene Sarmiento and Amb. De Villa flew to join forces with more than 20 additional civil society organizations who have decided to join MUSCLE. Commissioner Sarmiento, Commissioner in charge of ARMM Sarmiento, spoke during the conference on the need to ensure clean elections especially in the ARMM and highlighted the interfaith character of the initiative. Sarmiento lauded the efforts of the different civil society groups in Muslim Mindanao to ensure honest elections.

PPCRV Chair de Villa, encouraged by the 170 participants during the Jolo conference, conducted a briefing in the afternoon with the volunteers. Muslim organizations that have been accredited by PPCRV will be authorized to monitor the elections.

Mercia Alli, MWPA Secretary General, encouraged her fellow Tausug to rise up to the challenge issued by the muftis to safeguard the electoral process.

UK Envoy Visits the Golden Mosque in Manila

DR. KIM HOWELLS, Member of Parliament and Minister of State of the United Kingdom, gave a speech at the Golden Mosque in Quiapo, Manila last April 11. Howells dialogued with Muslim leaders on the current cultural, political, and security issues that confront both East and West in the post 9/11 and 7/7 events.

The UK envoy was welcomed by Mosque Administrator Ansari Ali, Office on Muslim Affairs NCR Director Mohammad Tanggote and a number of Muslim officials. Among them were: Senator Santanina Rasul, Datu Toto Paglas, General Mohammad Benjamin Dolorfino, Alim Elias Macarandas and a host of imams from mosques around

Metro Manila. Accompanying Howells was British Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Colin Crorkin, and Sarah Hulton, Second Secretary.

Dr. Howells was in Manila for a one-day visit that focused on engagement with the Muslim world. He began the day with a series of discussions on issues of bilateral interest with top Philippine government officials, including Foreign Affairs Minister Alberto Romulo. UK-RP co-operation on security and counter-terrorism was the subject of talks with the Department of National Defence whilst discussion with the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process focused on effective means to foster peace and wider inter-faith dialogue and

understanding.

Chargé d'Affaires Crorkin expressed his appreciation for the openness and support that the British Embassy has received from leaders of various faiths in the Philippines, and particularly the Muslim community.

He said: "Their commitment to dialogue and our shared mission of enhancing peace and understanding between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao is a high priority for the UK government. This is why it has featured prominently in the Minister's programme. The visit is taking place in an environment of co-operation and a desire to learn from our joint experiences in peace building."



■ **UK Foreign Minister of State Dr. Kim Howells MP (second from left) was greeted by Muslims in Manila Golden Mosque in Quiapo. Left to right: Mack A. Macalangan, Golden Mosque Administrator Ansari Ali, Dr. Kim Howells, British Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Colin Crorkin, Alim Elias A. Macarandas, Datu Ibrahim "ToTo" Paglas, former senator Santanina T. Rasul, and Baibonn Sangib**

Australian Embassy and PCID Sign Partnership Agreement

■ **Australian Ambassador Tony Hely, and PCID Lead Convenor Amina Rasul, pose for a picture with Fred dela Rosa, the Australian Embassy staff after the signing of the agreement on research program.**



THE Embassy of Australia in the Philippines and the Magbassa Kita Foundation Inc signed an agreement last March 28 that would provide support for the research program of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy. The PCID provides the content for the The Moro Times, a monthly supplement of The Manila Times which appears during the last Friday of the month. The first issue came out in July 2006.

The agreement was signed by Australian Ambassador Tony Hely and PCID Lead Convenor Amina Rasul. Rasul said, "The grant from the Australian government will go a long way to assist Muslims present a wholistic picture of the situation in Muslim Mindanao, educate the majority on Muslim issues and support the advocacy of Muslims for peace, development and democracy".

The grant was provided through the Strengthening Grassroots Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding (SGIDU) Program of the embassy.

Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, HE Tony Hely, said that "the Embassy is proud to be supporting this important work of presenting balanced and diverse stories on issues affecting the Muslim community in the Philippines. We hope the Moro Times, through its reporting, can also encourage greater fostering of interfaith dialogue, particularly at the grassroots level."

Beating the Odds

"HOW did you win? You are a Muslim and a woman," someone asked me after the election results of the country's supposed premier university were released.

This remark echoed as I recalled my sleepless nights during the campaign period last month. Like senatorial Jamalul Kiram, I have my reservations about running much less winning in a predominantly non-Muslim society. Much to the surprise of many, I emerged as the first Muslim female student leader to be elected University Student Council chairperson of University of the Philippines-Diliman. This feat is usually dominated by males and non-Muslims. In the recent past, Rommel Romato of Lanao emerged to be elected as the first Muslim ever elected in this position.

Never did I entertain the thought of entering campus politics until I was in my third year in undergraduate in the University of Philippines. Two years in campus politics equipped me with necessary skills to handle conflicts, negotiate with various people and to serve the studentry. After my two years serving as college representative and university councilor, I was asked to run for the position of chairperson. This was one of the hardest decisions I had to make because the position entailed a lot of responsibility and sacrifice. After months of ponder-

The Jihadist Shahana Abdulwahid

undertake the path of another year of service. It takes determination and principled stand to do it. But I am ready to face the hurdles that would come my way. Allah will not give us a task if we cannot do it.

What difference can I make? This question often serves as my point of reflection as I commence my daily routine. In a community diverse in cultures, ideologies and lifestyles, Muslim minorities find space to hone their skills and to explore other paths. Having finished my undergraduate degree in Philosophy in the University of the Philippines and continuing my graduate studies in Islamic Studies in the same university, I come to realize the significant role of youth in taking part in shaping our identity as Muslim. We must make most out of life in service to Allah.

Struggling for identity in the society, a Muslim can prove that he too can be at par with others. Muslims have emerged triumphant in various fields, all of whom helped uplift Muslim's status in society. Some even excelled and created a totally new breed of Muslim—more dynamic and assertive. This is a living testament that Muslim can truly excel as others. They have proven

As people search for what epitomizes a Muslim woman, it is a challenge for me to brave the odds of conformity.

ing on the matter, I finally accepted the offer.

The position is both a challenge and a privilege. Admittedly, this is a great challenge to prove my worth as a Muslim and a woman. Also, this is a privilege because it will be a venue to show that Muslims too can do it. As people search for what epitomizes a Muslim woman, it is a challenge for me to brave the odds of conformity. But I am ready to take on the challenge. The mandate given me will serve as my inspiration to further the cause of my constituents.

My hijab (head covering) is a constant reminder of my faith. It serves as my strength as I

their worth as they continue to seek other ways to contribute for the uplift of our image as Muslim, as Bangsamoro.

With great power comes great responsibility. To whom much is given, much is expected. These are the quotes which I believe must serve as reminder.

As I humbly accept the challenge to lead the Iskolar ng Bayan in the University's centennial, I constantly seek guidance from Allah to give me the strength to face the future challenges.

(Abdulwahid, of Sama ethnic grouping, from Zamboanga City is now the chairperson-elect of the University Student Council of UP Diliman).

Another 7.1 billion US pledge for the South

THE United States will extend its GEM program in the Southern Philippines, pledging an aid worth between \$125 million to \$145 million (roughly P7.1 billion) to further spur development in the island.

Initially conceived as a five-year program which would run from 1996 through 2001, USA Agency for International Development (USAid) subsequently decided

that the GEM program was such a useful and effective effort that it would continue the program through to the end of 2007. Raymond L. Edler, USAid supervisory regional contracting officers, said they are looking for a contractor to implement the program across Mindanao.

Interested contractors are given until April 27 to submit their proposals for GEM's phase 3 program.

The extended program will focus on infrastructure development, with each project cost in the barangay level pegged between \$5,000 to \$50,000, Edler said.

Regional impact projects will have construction cost exceeding \$50,000 up to \$4 million, he added.

The GEM Phase 2 program, which focused on livelihood development, is winding up this year. Its contractor is Louis Berger Group Phils., Inc.

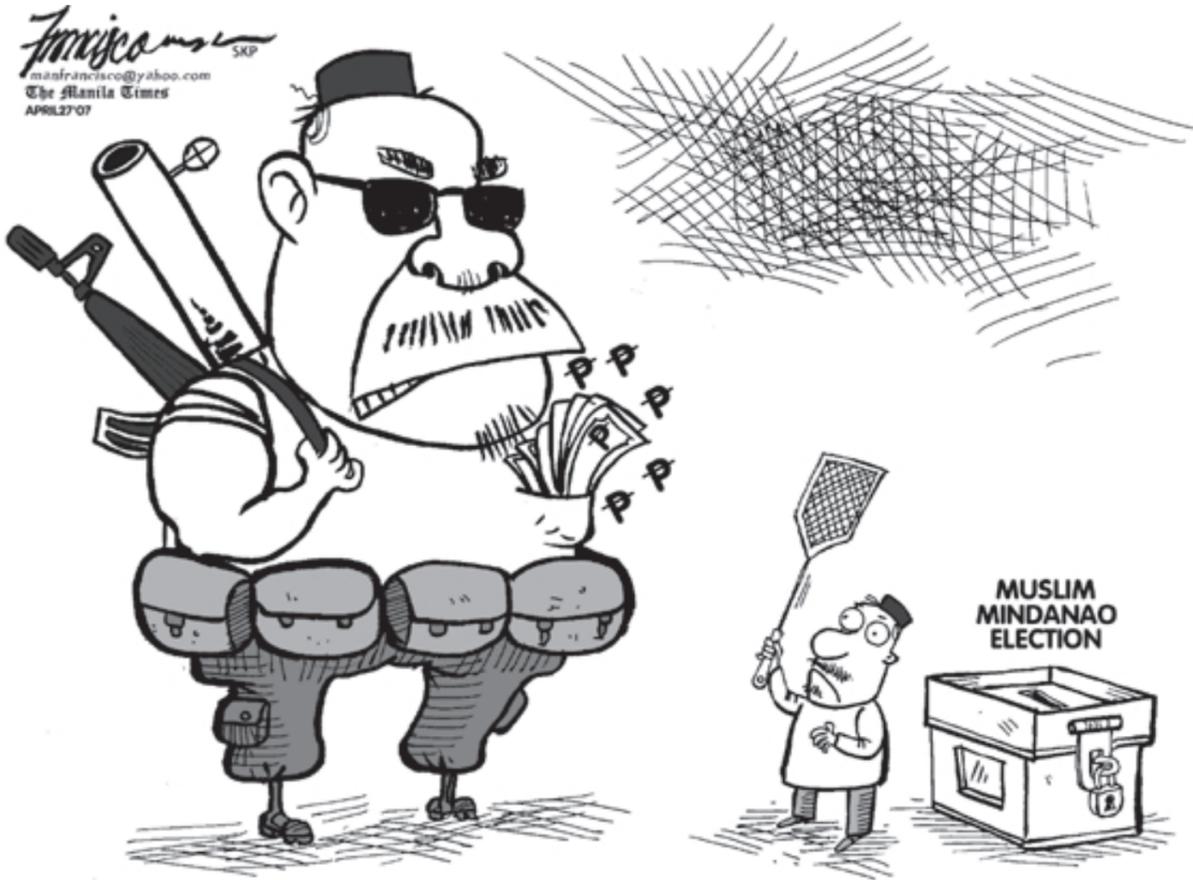
Aside from the basic contract of up to \$145 million, the new five-year program is allocating \$12 million to \$16 million for optional components.

The GEM program has been USAid's "flagship" activity in Mindanao since 1996, USAid said.

It is the largest and best known of all the various USAid programs and activities in Mindanao. It is an "umbrella" program under which USAid is able to support a wide range of different activities in Mindanao, all intended to contribute to peace and development in Mindanao.

A few years ago, US President George W. Bush committed \$30 million aid for Mindanao once the government and the MILF forge a final peace deal.

Peace negotiation between the government and the MILF, however, is stalled by the contentious ancestral domain and territory claimed by the MILF.



Muftis call on Ummah: renounce electoral cheating and violence

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE DA'RUL IFTA OF THE PHILIPPINES in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Call for the Muslim People's Right to Fairness, Accountability and Transformation for the Welfare of ARMM

Peace Processes of Reforms Constitute a Jihad

We, the muftis in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, hereby assert that peaceful through which reforms are achieved for good governance or administration of public affairs for general welfare constitute a Jihad in its highest form.

Most unfortunately, however, the country's Muslim community, notwithstanding the vast natural resources of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), has not been any richer with its reality of widespread poverty, rising illiteracy rate and increasing social and spiritual concerns such as corruption, morality

Khutba

and the reign, in our midst, of hypocrisy.

O Muslims! Rise above the sarcastic perception that the ARMM is the Philippines' cheating capital for elections," rise against the cheaters' expectation that electoral fraudulence in ARMM has been a commercial transaction of a few influential people. And would you forever tolerate the perennial use of the Holy Qu'ran in candidates oath to renounce violence only during election in Islamic Sha'riah.

Under the banner of Islam's universal system, Allah calls upon you leaders and the people, saying:

"Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All Hearer" (Qu'ran 4:58)

"And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) (i.e. Allah) tried him (certain Commands, which he fulfilled. He (Allah) said (to him). "Verily, I am going to make you a leader (Prophet) of mankind." Ibrahim includes not Zaliman (polythesis and wrong-doers) (Qu'ran 2:124)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"Verily, the leader among you is the vicegerent of Allah on that community, he will protect the rights of the wronged among the populace, if the leader judges justly he will receive the reward of Allah and the people should say thanks, while if the leader judges unjustly he is sure to receive the anger from Allah and the people must be enduring and patient."

"People who have chosen a leader, knowingly that against whom there is another (who is) better qualified to lead, then, indeed they have transgressed Allah and His Messenger and the whole Muslim community."

And: "Do not seek to be a ruler, for if you are given au-

thority on your demand, then you will be held responsible for it; But if it is given to you without asking for it, then you will be helped by Allah in it; If you ever take an oath to do something and later on you find that something else is better, then you should make up your oath and choose which is better."

"The one who gives bribe and the one who accepts it (in changing) a judgment are both cursed by Allah".

We therefore enjoin upon you, Muslims to settle for a moment of reflection and du'a (prayers) on the day you will be casting votes that you may be guided by these words from the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him);

SIGNED: ALIM SHAI F JUL ASIRI J. ABIRIN, Mufti of Sulu; ALIM KAMARUDIN M. BAULO, Acting Mufti of Maguindanao; ALIM ABDULLA HAMJA UTOH, Mufti of Basilan; ALIM MAHMUDS. POLANGI, Mufti of Lanao del Sur; ALIM ABULWAHIDA. INJU, Mufti of Tawi,Tawi

Of Sulu Politics, the AFP and the ASG

THERE is a certain complexity to Sulu politics not present in other areas. Like other provinces in the Philippines, electoral cheating, buying of votes and heated political contests are normal staples in Sulu. What sets Sulu apart from the other provinces is the prominent role of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Sulu elections. This skews governance in such a way that politicians often defer to the military commander on the ground. While such is good in many ways, elected politicians often accept that the AFP is an important constituency, often even more important than their own people.

The AFP, however, is more concerned with its mandate which is to preserve peace and security. In Sulu, such mandate means going after the Abu Sayyaf and sometimes the MNLF. The most unfortunate thing is that the AFP does not concern itself with the failure of governance of the elected politicians. As Governor Ben Loong once complained, mayors are rarely in their towns. Include the issue of corruption, maintenance of armed thugs, and you have a massive breakdown of the local government system. It is therefore a wonder how the

Commentary Edilwasif Baddiri

Ombudsman and the DILG can suspend the Governor of Iloilo and Batangas and all the other mayors but fail to look at provinces like Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Maguindanao, and even the ARMM itself wherein the salary of the public school teachers have been delayed and unpaid for some months now.

The Governor and Mayors of Sulu have been working with the AFP in stamping out the Abu Sayyaf. At the height of the ASG strength in 2001 and 2002, I know of a particular mayor that mobilized his armed group and operated with the Marines. The operation involved pushing the ASG to a particular area, leaving them trapped and encircled. When the mayor and his men engaged the ASG and began pushing them to the particular, the expected Marine forces that was supposed to blocked exit areas were not there. Thus, the operation failed. The incident planted some doubts in the Mayor's head that somehow there was more to the ASG than just a

band of bandits operating on their own.

The general rule is that guerrillas do not have strongholds. There are exceptions though. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the FARC in Colombia, the MILF before 2000, are some of the few exceptions that managed to have strongholds. It is therefore FALSE for Philippine and foreign media to banner Sulu and Basilan as Abu Sayyaf strongholds. If you go to Basilan today, Governor Wahab Akbar reigns with his own band of forces equipped with very high powered weapons. There are no ASG camps or enclaves that are no-go zones to the AFP. In the early 90s, as documented in Marites Danguilen-Vitug's book Under the Crescent Moon, the ASG camp was just located across the Marines Camp. That would have been the closest that ASG had a stronghold. It does not appear to be a fluke this time. The Armed Forces of the Philippines appears to have killed Jainal Sali also known as Abu Solaiman. We have been burned by many AFP announcements so much that there is a tendency for a wait and see before believing them. The body and the picture, however, are the ultimate proof. It appears that the plan-

ning and implementation of the current operation are working to perfection. It remains to be seen whether the AFP will be successful in getting Radulan Sahiron aka Commander Putol and Gumbahali Jumdalil aka Doctor Abu. If those two leaders are captured or killed, then Sulu will certainly be cleanse of the remnants of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Philippine and foreign media banner Sulu as an Abu Sayyaf stronghold. Such is far from the truth. If Sulu is anyone's stronghold, it is that of the AFP and the local politicians. The AFP is all over the province with a tight grip on all events. The local politicians hold sway over their turfs and rarely will other armed groups or even the Abu Sayyaf engage them in a fight. The ASG has never fought, for instance, with the forces of Talipao Mayor Tambrin Tulawie or Patikul Mayor Ismunlatiph Suhuri even though they roam in their towns. So, they may be present in Sulu but the province is NOT their stronghold.

(Lawyer Edil Baddiri, a former Board Member of Sulu, is a founding convenor of the Young Moro Professionals Network. He has a MPA from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard)

[LETTER TO THE EDITOR]

Moro Times is like a looking glass (what you see is what you get). A stupendous phenomenon! It tells stories to the local and foreign people, vivid and genuine reflections about the plight of the Moro multitude.

Hence, consider it a new antidote, alternative or pabulum against skepticism, discrimination, and prejudice towards us. I'm endorsing Moro Times to everybody, Christians and Muslims alike.

I think, only Moro writers can give information accurately or write stories articulately at the top to the bottom, internal and external affairs of Moro lives, etc. for they have shared the same blood, lifestyle, and

origin, as a whole culture.

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Bonifacio Drive, Port Area,
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Excerpts from "Step by Step manual on Election cheating: Experiences in ARMM"

DISCLAIMER: The following are culled from the testimonies of individuals directly involved in the electoral process. To protect their security, their names are kept anonymous as well as the barangays, municipalities they claim to have observed irregularities in. Many of the practices are done in other parts of the country.

According to the "Manual", ARMM candidates have to spend not only on voters but also for barangay leaders, propaganda, lawyers, advisers, headquarters, donations (solicitations arrive daily). They also have to make sure they provide for three other critical actors in the electoral process "to protect their vote" - the teachers, security forces (the military, PNP) and most importantly the election officers and the COMELEC.

Expenses begin as early as a year ahead of elections when politicians have to fund followers to register until the canvassing period, reaching up to COMELEC National in case of protest.

Voting

Voting is done in the precinct, usually in public school classrooms. The officials involved are called the Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) composed of the Chairman, poll clerk and a 3rd Member. A security force is on guard 50 meters away. They may be called in to substitute if no teacher is willing to serve as BEI.

Last minute vote-buying is done at the polling centers. "Tarita" or sample ballots stapled with money are distributed to voters to remind them to vote for the name on top of the money.

Vote-buying is an election offense and is prohibited under Sec. 261 of the Omnibus Election Code.

Any voter or watcher may challenge illegal voters - not registered, using the name of another, suffering from disqualification to which the BEI would check proof of registration or identity of the voter (Sec. 199). He/she may also challenge a voter who has re-

ceived or expects to receive, has paid, offered, or promised to pay in consideration for the vote of another ... (Art 14 - Sec. 200).

Outsiders and non-voting residents are not allowed inside the precinct. Beware of bystanders in precincts who claim to "assist". They will influence the voters to write the names of their employer/ candidates. Some even fill up the ballot themselves for the voter.

Someone in authority such as the barangay chairmen may push in one voter to vote ahead of the others even if he isn't listed.

Creating a disturbance is a normal diversionary tactic. Threats, intimidation, terrorism, coercion of voters and election officials and employees are election offenses.

A rapid calling out of names, without waiting for voters to finish casting their vote, can be a way for voters who have already cast their vote to return back in line to vote AGAIN.

Voting for local candidates is usually the first priority of a voter. Voters would be urged to hurry voting so that the national candidates such as the party list or senatoriables would be left blank, giving room for future negotiation to fill up the blanks at the canvassing level.

After the voting proper, all the ballots that were not used or voted upon should be torn at the bottom so that these won't be used.

Counting

In a manual counting, three persons must be watched at the precinct: Chairman (the one reading the ballot), Poll Clerk (the one tallying at the blackboard), and the one writing on the election return.

They hold the most controversial document - the election return, which is subject of the appreciation of ballot in the canvass later. Factors that can affect the counting are:

- lack of electricity or good lighting that can limit the transparency of ballot reading, tallying and writing of entries

- absence of BEIs that can delay the counting

- absence of watchers for councilor and board member could work to their disadvantage

Upon opening the ballot box, examine if there are any missing ballots or paraphernalia by taking down their serial number. After hearing out the name voted, the act of putting the entry on the tally board and putting an entry in the ER must be SIMULTANEOUS, instead of filling it up AFTER the tallying on the board, when all the watchers have left for the day.

If a watcher is not vigilant, different names might be announced from the ballot or numbers, then hurriedly putting down the ballot saying NEXT BALLOT. In what is called double entry, using a chalk/ pentel pen speedily enough could mark one line or "taras" with another or add a cross to another. When the reader, tally-maker or documenter shields the material which they are announcing, something suspicious can be missed.

If a watcher is weak upon any threat or intimidation, he may not be able to guard the alterations and corrections that can be made. A security force or an interested party could shoo away watchers to leave the precinct.

Check also if the number of registered voters matches the number of votes cast.

Upon transferring entries to the ER in the recording of votes and in the Certificate of Votes (COV), be on your guard for the following: switching of numbers or difference in wording and number.

Upon completion of the election returns, the chairman of the BEI shall orally and publicly announce the total number of votes received in the election in the polling place by each and every one of the candidates, stating their corresponding office (Sec. 213). It is the duty of the BEI to issue a certificate of the number of votes received by a candidate upon request by the watchers. All the members of the BEI shall sign the certificate

(Sec. 215).

The COV shall be admissible in evidence to prove tampering, alteration, falsification or any anomaly committed in the election returns concerned, when duly authenticated by testimonial or documentary evidence presented to the board of canvassers by at least two members of the BEI who issued the certificate (RA 6646 Sec. 17).

Beware of BEI member who would keep the COV under his chest instead of depositing it in the ballot box as it should be.

If a watcher witnesses any form of irregularity, he/she must immediately fill up the complaint form and submit to COMELEC. COMELEC will also not act on any complaint not notarized.

Canvass

The Municipal Board of Canvassers (MBC) is composed of the Supervisor, Treasurer and secretary. Lawyers and watchers must watch out for discrepancies of numbers between the ER, SOV and Certificate of Votes (COV).

If the SOV has entries which were "snowpaked", one must officially note them.

Operators from national parties and candidates would hover at the tabulation sites and offer a bid for their candidate's names to be the one written in blank spaces of the SOV.

"Snacks" given to the officials from candidates should be noted.

(Study undertaken with the help of the Local Governance Support Program in ARMM by the Canadian International Development Agency)

Excerpts from Dr. Kim Howells speech at the Golden Mosque, Quiapo

1. How do we protect our communities from extremists who wish us harm?

"We need to deepen the links between our people at all levels. We need to share knowledge and experience. We need to help each other understand the threats and opportunities in our own backyards.

But the security that we seek, and that we owe to our people, is just as much a local phenomenon as it is an international one. Ultimately, we only feel safe if we trust, respect and—importantly—know our neighbours.

Governments must look beyond the obvious. When a bomb goes off, we rely on the courage of our security staff to save lives. We need our police and intelligence agencies to work together to track and uncover terrorist plots. But the long term solutions come through education policies, through local community initiatives, through electoral laws and, perhaps most of all, through promoting values of fair play, of inclusion and of tolerance.

2. Is British foreign policy biased against Muslims?

I reject unequivocally the notion that our foreign policy is biased against Muslims. Just look at the evidence: In Iraq, we aim to support the democratically elected—and largely Muslim—Iraqi government in their efforts to promote reconciliation between the different communities in Iraq. At the same time, thousands of our young men and women are risking their lives to help ex-

tend the authority of the democratically elected government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. These are not the actions of an anti-Muslim country, and it is a lie to suggest they are.

Our global security depends on the ability of people of different faiths to live together. It is true of the globe, and it is also true of the village. The Philippines, like the UK, is an island nation seeking to build bridges with the wider world. We are both looking at how we can use democracy as a tool to fight extremism, not as a fragile object at risk from terrorist attack.

3. On UK support for education as a bridge between majority and minority.

I was heartened to learn that the Filipino government has introduced a new curriculum offering Arabic and Islamic studies to state schools in Muslim dominated areas.

This mirrors what we are doing in the UK, bringing minority religions and beliefs into the mainstream education system so that all of our schoolchildren, whatever their religion—and in the UK there are many—can learn that Islam and all other major religions prize peace and reject violence. They can learn that those who espouse hatred and destruction are undermining, and not defending, the faith they claim to speak for.

Such education is a feature of a healthy democracy. The wonderful thing about democracy is that it gives everyone a voice, and everyone the opportunity

See **HOWELLS D4**

[MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION]

A THREE-DAY TRAINERS' TRAINING activity in preparation for the National Youth Peace Congress (NYPC) to be held in August 9-14 at Cotabato City was conducted by the Office of the President, National Youth Commission in partnership with the Service for Peace on April 19 - 21, 2007 at Ponce Suites, Bajada, Davao City. It was attended by 25 participants from Mindanao Young Leaders' Parliament (MYLP) Executive Board, NYC Youth Volunteers, NYC Staff headed by NYC Commissioner representing Mindanao, Mohamad Hanny Camid and SFP Staff headed by Ms. Caroline Niñonuevo, Executive Director-Philippines and Massimo Trombin, Vice-President International with special participation with DENR National Youth Desk Officer, Ms. Ma. Magnolia Danganan. Around 1,000 participants nationwide and 50 international delegates are expected to attend the upcoming congress. □□□

The United Nations World Food Programme said today it will provide 85 metric tons of rice (1700 bags) to help more than 42,000 people displaced by recent conflict in the troubled island of Jolo, Sulu Province

Three days of clashes weeks ago between Philippine troops and a Moro National Liberation Front faction on Jolo resulted in 12 deaths and drove some 8,500 families from their homes in seven municipalities of Sulu.

"We hope this support for hungry families will help stabilize the situation in Sulu," said Valerie Guarnieri, WFP Country Director in the Philippines. "The province is one of the most conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, and the World Food Programme will provide assist-

ance to these families in their time of need." □□□

Delegates from the Thailand Programme of Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) expressed hopes for a final peace agreement between government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) while they visited local communities here recently.

Oxfam is a United Kingdom-based development agency known worldwide for its humanitarian and relief work. The delegates, headed by Programme Officer Chalerm Sak Kittittrakul, along with Mr. Ni-Hasem Waesalae and Ms. Soraya Jamjuree of the Community-Based Reconciliation Management of Resources for the Participatory Rehabilitation of Local Livelihoods, Culture and Resource Base Project, visited Mindanao to learn about the peace and development conditions in the island. The visit was arranged for Oxfam to gain more exposure about the peace process, in order to help them better understand the "protection concept" implemented by Oxfam and its partners in Mindanao.

According to the Oxfam representatives, Mindanao and Southern Thailand have similar peace and order conditions and that learning the mechanisms of the peace process would be beneficial to them and to how they pursue development in their country. The group made a courtesy call at the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) office in Cotabato City. They were received by GRP-CCCH Secretariat Head Capt. Carlos Sol, Jr. who discussed the ceasefire agreements as well as the chronology of events that have led to the current situation in the

region. Capt. Sol also explained the nature and conduct of rido, or feudal wars, and how this affects the peace process. □□□

Isis International-Manila & Mindanao Women Writers invite Muslims to apply for "Women Making Airwaves for Peace" A Training on Using Community Radio for Peace Building on July 4-8 in Cotabato City. The training seeks to enhance the crucial role media plays in conflict resolution and peace building in Mindanao. It will stress the importance of community media, particularly radio, as a tool for peace building; elaborate on the contribution of women to conflict resolution, particularly in Mindanao, and how media has promoted women's active participation in peace initiatives; and explore other creative ideas and strategies on how women - through media - can build peace in the context of existing direct and structural forms of violence. □□□

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issued Memorandum Order No. 201 or the Halal Development Program which aims to harmonize the Halal programs of the different government agencies. DOT designated Director Shalimar Hofer Tamano as the department's representative in the implementation of the Halal Development Program. Halal, taken from the Arabic term meaning "lawful" or "permitted", is food and non-food products that are acceptable not only to the majority of people but most of all for Muslims around the world, according to the Shariah Law. In a larger sense, its promotion can provide a wide range of opportunities, as far as the Philippine Trade Development Program is concerned.



British Embassy



A British Embassy Manila-funded Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy project is looking for bright, self-starting university graduates with the ability to develop and manage a pioneering project, which mainly entails identification and organisation of different Ulama groups into one national directorate.

PROJECT MANAGER

The **PROJECT MANAGER** will:

- Create and execute project work plans in accordance to the agreed budget, standards and schedules.
- Manage the day-to-day operations of the project.
- Identify tasks of and liaise with project assistant and Ulama regional co-ordinators.
- Ensure prompt submission of Project Team deliverables to the British Embassy.
- Provide regular written and oral progress reports to PCID and the British Embassy.
- Provide overall direction in the organisation of the regional forums and the National Summit.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

1. A university degree (masters an advantage) related to: Islamic studies, Philippine studies, or social sciences.
2. Three years of progressively responsible experience in managing peace and development projects, preferably in Mindanao.
3. Strong project management and budget skills.
4. Fluent in spoken & written English and Filipino. Fluency in Arabic, Visayan, Tausug &/or Maranao is an advantage.
5. Sufficient understanding of Islam & cultures in Muslim Mindanao.
6. Willing and able to travel to different parts of Mindanao.

(This position will be for a one year renewable contract, with an initial 3 months probation.)

PROJECT/RESEARCH ASSISTANT

The **PROJECT/RESEARCH ASSISTANT** will:

- Assist the project manager in the execution of project work plans.
- Provide logistical support to project team in the preparation for forums and National Summit
- Produce written, tabular and visual materials for reports, conference kits and presentations for forums and National Summit
- Collate requisite literature on relevant practices of organising Ulama groups as well as issues relevant to the crafting of common positions, khutba, statements, etc.
- Provide baseline data research on the different Philippine Ulama.
- Prepare materials related to the project's activities, including articles for publication, speeches, talking points, press releases.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

1. A university degree related to: Islamic studies, Philippine studies, or social sciences.
2. At least two years of professional experience in working with peace and development projects, preferably in Mindanao.
3. Fluent in spoken and written English and Filipino. Fluency in Arabic, Visayan, Tausug and/or Maranao is an advantage.
4. Sufficient understanding of Islam & cultures in Muslim Mindanao.
5. Strong research and co-ordination skills.

(This position will be for a one year renewable contract, with an initial 3 months probation.)

How to apply:

To apply please submit, in a short envelope, a copy of your CV (maximum 2 pages), 2 references, 1 passport size photograph and a hand-written letter explaining your suitability for this position to:

Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy
Unit 2D Tower 1 Governor's Place,
Shaw Boulevard, Mandaluyong, MM Philippines

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS WILL BE ON **MAY 7, 2007**



A Tale of Two Moro Champions: Towards Fair Elections

BY NASSER SHARIEF

COME May 15 the Filipino people will decide once again who they will elect for public office. Will their votes be properly accounted for, or are we in for another exercise in futility?

Moro Times interviewed two distinguished Moro lawyers HEAVILY INVOLVED IN CLEAN ELECTIONS

Nasser A. Marohomsalic: Human rights champion

THE Moro former human rights commissioner and street crusader Nasser A. Marohomsalic was never expected to live. In April 1955, a great earthquake hit Lanao del Sur causing lakeside mosques to fall into the lake. Nasser's pregnant mother was buried under the rubble when the roof of their house fell in on her. His mother survived; four months later, on July 21, Nasser was born in Romayas, Lumba Bayabao.

"I think the incident made me spiritual in some ways and it also explains why Ina insisted that I marry early. I was 16 then and my wife was only 14, and we had no inkling how to raise a family. Mother subconsciously wanted to assure the continuity of a bloodline, so supremely important among the Maranao."

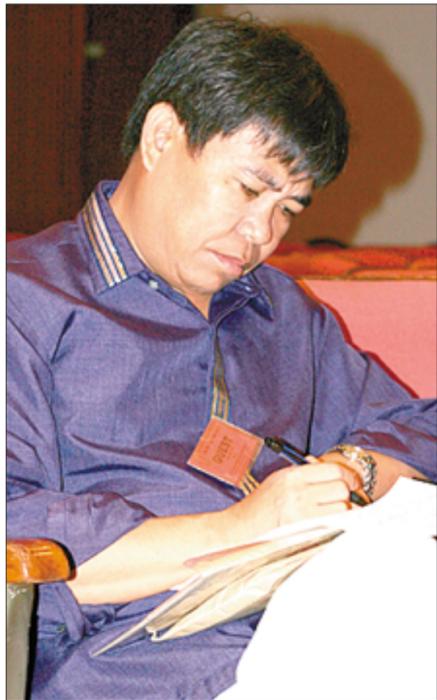
With trinkets of children in tow, Marohomsalic went on with his study. His education was partly financed thru scholarships. In 1981, he finished Law at the University of the Philippines and he passed the bar exam the same year.

Nasser's peers expected him to go corporate like so many of his friends. However, having witnessed so much oppression and violation of human rights around the country, the calling of the Bangsamoro was too much for him to turn his back.

Indigenous Rights

Nasser became a keen exponent of promoting human rights. "The Indigenous People's Rights Act is something I always feel emotional about because it's close to my heart. Its constitutionality had been questioned in the Supreme Court and I defended it. It was a closely contested case which guarantees the rights to ancestral domain. Originally the Human Rights Commission was opposed to it but I gradually won them over. The wisdom is that what the indigenous people are claiming is the land they control before the establishment of the State."

During the Estrada administration, Marohomsalic publicly assailed the President's "all out war policy" against the MILF. "The move was counterproductive. It's more of rage rather than a considered solution. And it's not working on the international level."



■ Nasser A. Marohomsalic

Marohomsalic, since leaving the Human Rights Commission in 2001, has continued his work and actively involves himself with private organizations. He is the Founding Chair of the Muslim Legal Assistance Foundation; Co-convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy; Convenor, Movement of Concerned Citizens for Civil Liberties; Lead Convenor, Union of Muslims for Morality, Accountability and Truth, and lately; Governing Board of the Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) of the PPCRV's Lawyers' Group.

"So my career is punctuated by writing, then a private practice here and there to keep my head above water. Looking back I feel that I've made the right decision and I have little to regret and none to agitate my conscience."

Safeguarding the Moro votes

These days, Marohomsalic is preoccupied with keeping democracy alive in ARMM. "The rampant vote buying and the rigging of elections keep vexing us. Much more so because in Islam, these practices are all *haram*. And what better persuasion we need to convince these people to straighten their votes? My approach is what many would call *pangungutya*. I said, *dapat ang mga Muslim ay ikahiya. Binansagan tayong cheating capital of the Philippines*. So we should actively involve ourselves in the process. *Ipalitawanag natin na in Islam cheating is an abomination and cheaters will all roast in hell*."

"We spearheaded the MUSCLE umbrella—the Muslim for Clean Elections—for Muslim groups, to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process."

Why, all forms of electoral fraud prevalent in Muslim areas? Why do national candidates focus on ARMM votes?

"Leaf over the majority of election related cases, for instance. You will find that majority of the cases are from Lanao. I myself was surprised that many of the landmark decisions in COMELEC concerns Lanao. This only goes to show that a well-orchestrated program to put in line all the election processes in this area will go a long way in ensuring a clean and honest election for the whole country."

"I think there is a cultural explanation to that. The Moro public is afflicted with a social disease called the 'electoral dementia' which distorts their sense of balance or mechanism of social control. And this proceeds from the value system called among Maranaos as *maratabat*—roughly akin to Japanese Bushido, the Spanish *amor propio* or the Filipino "*kahihiyang*". All of these rolled into one and more is, I think, what defines the *maratabat*. So during elections candidates and supporters would do everything in their means to win the election which breaks down the fabric of morals. Not even the lofty ideals contained in the teaching of Islam could thwart cheating."

How Moro votes become critical?

"Because Moro are indifferent to the national candidate they tend to distort the result of the electoral process. They lack appreciation of their role in uplifting the status of the country and the government system. The money they get from vote-buying is at least concrete than the promised reform. We need to be educated in political stability and the workings of democracy."

Marohomsalic's vocation culminated in his publication of his book *Aristocrats of the Malay Race: A History of the Bangsamoro People*, a 439-page saga of the Moro people which, as he said in the introduction, was written on-and-off during his "lean years". The Institute of Foreign Service also published his book *Towards Peace, Autonomy and Human Rights*.

Mehol K. Sadain: Election reform advocate

THE first assignment that Mehol K. Sadain undertook when he was newly appointed as Commissioner in the Commission on Elections in 2000 was to restore the lost record of voters' registration in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, whose Office was gutted by fire. This was supposed to be routine, albeit tedious, but the Commission knew better.

What Mehol did was virtually unheard of. He obliged all local election officials to swear (*sapa*) before the holy Qur'an to abide by the rules of the registration and the prospective voters to register only once and then get on with it.

Unorthodox? Yes, but it worked.

A lawyer, Mehol K. Sadain, graduated Bachelor of Islamic Studies in the University of the Philippines. Mehol said that understanding Islam and shariah eventually defined his method on how to deal with the pesky problems of elections in the Moro provinces. "I simply let loose the engine of conscience and it worked. More or less we got an accurate registration and curbed the incidence of 'flying' voters."

Mehol was born on December 24, 1955 in his native town of San Raymundo, Jolo, Sulu to Said D. Sadain, Sr. and Angelina T. Kiram. He is married to Nilda S. Sadorra with whom he has an eighteen-year old daughter named Jameela.

Mehol had spent part of his childhood in many places in Mindanao like Jolo, Sulu and Iligan City. He graduated valedictorian in high school at the Ateneo de Zamboanga in 1972. When Martial Law was declared that year, the rebellion affected his family's livelihood and his ability to finance his college education was in question. Mehol luckily got a scholarship at the Institute of Islamic Studies in UP. He continued his study and in 1986 he was graduated 16th in the University of the Philippines College of Law.

Mehol had been a lecturer, researcher, professor, Sharia lawyer, and a Shari'ah Bar Examiner. He also wrote a column for *Diario Uno*, focusing on the development among the Muslims in the Philippines in 1998. He was Corporate Secretary of the National Power Corporation from 1994-1998 and OIC General Counsel in 1998 with the rank of Vice President.

Before he went on to become Commissioner of the Commission on Elections, Mehol was lecturer, then Assistant Professor of the Institute of Islamic Studies in UP where he eventually became Dean of the Institute in 2000.

Alien culture

Why is there so much irregularities in elections in the Moro provinces in the South?

Mehol's answer was succinct, if blunt: "Because we don't identify ourselves with the government, we don't put much premium on elections. We take it lightly. The thing is if we violate the rules of elections—it simply means nothing to us."

"Election is something alien to the Moro people. Not that it is inequitable. We have tradition you see, of succession. It's our culture. Consensus is not as direct as voting. We arrive at it in a roundabout way. That's the genius of our system."

Mehol argues that as long as the traditional system is not accommodated, or not given vent, it could be a long way to go for the Moro electoral process to improve: "Many of our people do not have a keen appreciation of the democratic electoral process. As it stands now, the setup is not sensitive to the cultural background of the constituents. And nothing could be more pretentious as to assume otherwise."

Proxy voting

Mehol has non-traditional views on voting. He says that individual voting is alien to many indigenous tribes, not just to the Moro dominated areas. Many individuals just do not have the sophistication to decide on their own.

"We are into what I call communal voting. Sometimes in a place where many are illiterates they would appoint one person to fill all the ballots for them. They trust him."

"The predicament could be avoided if communal voting is allowed in the same vein as proxy voting which is a fact in corporate voting. Because some trust the judgment of a few, this is possible. Why not legislate it?"

"Casting ballots individually—our leaders knows that it's not the best for us. Many people are gullible



■ Mehool K. Sadain

to wrong propaganda. There is pervasive cheating because certain means of expressing votes is not allowed. It's that simple."

Last act

Mehol's term of office with the Commission on Elections ended last February 2006. He remembers well the last act he did before leaving the Commission: "At the tail-end of my service with the Commission I supervised the elections in Basilan where we investigated ballot snatching and charged a number of teachers. We nullified no less than 15 precincts for irregularities, recommended for prosecution Barangay chairmen involved in irregularities, and the pre-filling up of blank ballots. But believe me you can do only so much. A much, much deeper digging into the root causes of these malpractices is needed to give a long-term solution."

Since then Mehool has been engaging the public in various fora and discussions on how to make the elections credible in the country. He is co-convenor of Halalang Marangal together with former Senator Bobby Tañada, retired General Frank Gudani, statistical expert Roberto Verzola, Sister Mary Rose Marangan, Lawyer Ipat Luna and environmentalist Gani Serrano. Halal seeks to foster a citizen's audit of the precinct count in the 2007 elections.

Finding time

Given the magnitude of responsibilities heaped on high public officials, one would think that Mehool's world is dominated by the nitty-gritty of technical works, research and board-room meetings. But like former human rights commissioner Nasser Marohomsalic, Mehool finds time for literary works.

Besides writing essays and manuscripts, Mehool wrote some short fictions in various magazines like 'The River Below' in Philippine Graphics, 'Old Father' in Philippine Focus and 'Brother Hunt' in Perception.

He has written poems in Brown River, White Ocean: An Anthology of 20th Century Philippine Literature published by Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, USA, and a scattering of other poems in local literary journals, folios, and magazines.

THE POLITICIAN

BY MEHOL K. SADAIN

Our politician has stuffed his fist into his mouth,
He is intensity mirrored in promises,
Scattering them sandlike and windblown.
He gesticulates victory on stages and captive minds
Etching the message: I am your savior,
I am your hope, you dregs of the southern shores.

He weaves a tale of family cult and pedigree
Where guns breed power and money moves the saints,
Where man and commune co-exist as one vote,
And penitent heads are blind to sacrilegious cheats.
There is no relief in sight, only certain demise
Of morality, of popular will and pride defying defeat.

To our politician, politics is a sorcerer's illusion,
And we are an audience dazzled by magic.

■ HOWELLS From page D3

Excerpts from Dr. Kim Howells speech at the Golden Mosque, Quiapo

to decide on the policies and laws that govern their lives. I represent the constituency of Pontypridd in South Wales. If my constituents disagree with my position on Iraq, or on my government's economic policies or anything else, they can vote me out. They don't need a revolution or a gun, they just need a ballot box. So it is important that the Philippines, like every other nation, ensures that the elections later this year are demonstrably fair and free.

Other reforms, equally important in the fight against terrorism, flow from the basic principles of democracy—fair trials, a free press, social justice. Our challenge, just like yours, is to embed these values into every strand of government so that our citizens are confident that their rights will be respected.

I find it hugely encouraging that people define themselves by the values they share, be-

cause it means that newcomers to our communities, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, can be accepted into society providing they share those basic values.

Conversely, it means there is no place for that small minority of extremists who reject the values which bind our society together. Governments need a strong response to these people. We must protect our populations from their violence and we must disrupt their intent to cause bloodshed and mayhem.

4. On peaceful resolution of conflict

We encourage your efforts to find a negotiated peace to the Mindanao conflict. We in Britain have some experience of resolving conflict in Northern Ireland. We learned the hard way that security measures will only get you so far and that, eventually, if your aim is a lasting

peace, you must be willing to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

It is not an easy process, nor is it quick. It took us about thirty years to get to the point where we are now—where violence has stopped and we can afford, at last, the luxury of optimism.

During this visit, I have had the pleasure of meeting members of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy. They understand the importance of tolerance and we are fortunate to be working with them to build a unified Darul Ifta that talks not just to the Philippines' Muslim community but which also reaches out to establish interfaith dialogues.

I am confident that community based work is the most effective way to prevent terrorist outrages - whether they are on the London Underground or on a ferryboat in Manila harbour.

If tolerance can be built on a local level it will

be felt at national and international levels too. Look again at this exhibition celebrating Muslims in Britain. Mr Sanders has photographed images of Islam across the world. He has pointed out that Islam in China is Chinese. In Africa it is African and in Britain it is British. To me, this is the point of this exhibition. These pictures are recognisably both Islamic and British. That is exactly what we are trying to achieve in the UK.

("The Art of Integration" photo exhibition by Peter Sanders is currently on show at The Jewellery, Greenhills Shopping Center til 30 April 2007)

(Dr Kim Howells, Minister of State, Responsible for the Middle East, Afghanistan and South Asia, Counter Narcotics, Counter Proliferation, Counter Terrorism, UN and UN Reform.)