

# The Moro Times

FRIDAY  
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## Project to empower Muslim religious leaders launched

A simple launch of a not so simple project". This was how Ms. Amina Rasul described the forum that transpired last June 8 at the University of the Philippines' Institute for Islamic Studies. The "Empowering the Ulama and Muftis of the Philippines" project, jointly supported by the British Embassy through their *Engaging the Islamic World Programme* and the Royal Netherlands Embassy, will be managed by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID)-Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc. (MKFI).

In his opening remarks Dr. Mashur Bin-Ghalib Jundam, Dean of the Islamic Institute stressed the importance of the words *Ulama* and *Empowering*. He explained that the word *Ulama*, plural for *Alim*, means knowledgeable. In Islamic context, the *Ulama* are the replica of the Prophet, messenger of God. Jundam clarified that in the Al-Quran's perspective the *Ulama* have been empowered by Allah to do what they are supposed to do as mandated by the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, what needs to be done is make them organizationally more empowered and systematic.

The project will provide support for the muftis and ulama to organize their national summit and network in pursuit of understanding, peace and development. Dr. Santanina Rasul related her personal experiences on what the ulama can do to promote better understanding and harmony among fellow Muslims and Filipinos. The last Muslim senator of the Republic also suggested that the proposed national summit can give the ulama the opportunity to come together to discuss, plan and exchange views on issues affecting Islam and Muslims. She cited crucial issues that may be discussed like: Islam is a religion of peace, what causes a Muslim to become an extremist? How can the Muslims help promote peace and development the Islamic way, in their respective communities?

For his part, His Excellency

Mr. Peter Beckingham, the British Ambassador to the Philippines related that the increasing number of Muslims in the United Kingdom makes them the largest ethnic minority in Britain. The contribution of Muslims in Britain have been great as many are members of the House of Commons, have businesses and are involved in media, sports and entertainment. As example, Mohamed Al Fayed, whose son Dodie had been linked with Princess Diana, owns the famous Harrods of London. Quoting from a speech delivered by the outgoing British Prime Minister Tony Blair before 300 Muslims gathered at Cambridge University, Mr.



From L to R: Dean Max Jundam, Robert Vornis, Ambassador of the Netherlands, former Senator Santanina Rasul, and Peter Beckingham, British Ambassador to the Philippines sign the MOA on the project *Empowering the Ulama and Muftis of the Philippines*.

PHOTO BY PCID/N. SHARIEF

Beckingham cited the importance of education where madrasahs are training their students to boost their employ-

ment opportunities and address issues in citizenship education. It is likewise important to focus on political reform as

well as women's rights.

The Ambassador of Netherlands to the Philippines, His Excellency Mr. Robert Vornis re-

counted the successful partnerships between his country and PCID in the past especially in terms of human rights and gathering the ulama in 2005. It was in that workshop where the idea of a united ulama summit was first put forward. Ambassador Vornis expressed his thanks and appreciation for being part of this important project and hoped that the project would be successful. He said that although the problems in Mindanao are alarming, he remains optimistic that with the empowered ulama, peace and development will once again have the chance to reign in the region.

Ustadz Abdulwahid Inju, the Mufti of Tawi-Tawi and acting Chair of the Assembly of the Darul Iftah in the Philippines, welcomed the launching of the project. He said that the ulama can also be partners in peace and development. He urged his fellow Muslim religious leaders to participate in the project and support all efforts towards peace and development in Muslim Mindanao.

Dr. Hamid Barra fields questions from participants of the Ulama regional consultative forum in Zamboanga City on June 27.



### Ulama pledge commitment to "One Message, One Ummah"

PROCLAIMING the need for the Ulama to play a more strategic role in peace and development in Muslim Mindanao, more than 40 Muftis, ulama, and imam from Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Zamboanga gathered on June 27 in a regional consultative forum dubbed "Empowering the Ulama of the Philippines" organized by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy and the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc.

Dr. Abulkhair Tarasun, one of the forum speakers, explained however that it is important for the Ulama to have pure faith as they are supposed to be models for everyone. He said that the most important role of the ulama is to lead their people towards peace and teach them to respect human rights.

Dr. Hamid Barra, former Dean of the Mindanao State University, for his part said that the forum's theme: "One Message, One Ummah" is founded on

the 'oneness of Allah almighty' and that all believers are brothers in a "Nation of one Ummah". He emphasized the need for the ulama to unite for the sake of the ummah because it is "like one structure, every part supports other parts".

Prof. Moner Bajunaid, executive director of MIND Center, gave the forum expectations and was also facilitator of the workshops held in the afternoon session. PCID Lead Convenor Ms. Amina Rasul explained that the forum held in Zamboanga City is the inaugural consultative workshop of the three-year project. The next meetings will be held in Cotabato, Cagayan de Oro and Manila culminating in a National Summit in November that is expected to be attended by 150 ulama from all over the country.

The project is supported by the Embassies of Great Britain and the Netherlands.

BY SHAHANA ABDULWAHID

THE Australian Embassy in Manila invited ten Filipino Muslim youth leaders for a seven-day visit to Australia last June 2-9, 2007 to allow Filipino Muslims to experience the lives of Australian Muslims.

The young leaders included Haslaida Abubacar, Oting Agting, Saide Al-Amin, Djohanna Anayatin, Tharhata Habibain, Abdulgani Lappang, Junaisa Mudsol, Nafeesur-Rahman Suhod, Anwar Upahm and the author.

Among the institutions visited in Sydney and Melbourne were Auburn Mosque, Virgin Mary Mosque, the Lakemba Mosque located in Australian Muslim-concentrated suburbs; Affinity Intercultural Foundation, Australian Federation of Muslim Students and Youth, United Muslim Youth of Australia, Global Islamic Youth Centre, Independent Centre for Research Australia (ICRA)—Muslim youth organizations that have advocacies in intercultural activities, sports and education; Al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development; and Islamic schools such as Rissalah College, Aus-



Young Moro students with Mehmet Ozalp, President of the Affinity Foundation, at the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, New South Wales: Haslaida Abubacar, Oting Agting, Saide Al-Amin, Djohanna Anayatin, Tharhata Habibain, Abdulgani Lappang, Junaisa Mudsol, Nafeesur-Rahman Suhod, Anwar Upahm and Shahana Abdulwahid

PHOTO BY S. ABDULWAHID

### Moro youth experience multi-ethnic Australia

tralian Council of Islamic Education in Schools, Australian International College which are mostly government-funded.

The young leaders also visited local city councils of Canterbury and Auburn to witness

how these government units have structured community services to attend to a multi-culture community. Dialogues were held with Australian government agencies that cater to the needs of the minorities such as the Multicultural Af-

airs Unit of Victoria Police in Melbourne, Community Relations Commission of New South Wales, and the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (an alternative broadcasting network that focuses on multiculturalism of the Aus-

tralian community).

Though a minority, Australian Muslims evidently take active participation in shaping their communities in promoting harmony, understanding, respect and tolerance among cultures. Regardless of

race, Australian Muslims manifest strong practice of Islamic faith and contribute to the rich social fabric of the Australian culture. Highlighting the importance of unity amidst diversity and multiculturalism as its main thrust, the Australian Federal government has continuously provided for its people legislative safeguards to ensure non-discrimination in many aspects including employment. A state which used to have a "white only immigration policy," Australia now thrives as one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. Australia is commendable in its humanitarian effort of accepting refugees from many neighboring nations. The Federal government gives necessary assistance to these immigrants, as they integrate into their adopted country.

The trip was a great venue for reflection, evaluation of the plight of Muslims in other nations and a source of inspiration on how to go about the many challenges that confronts Muslims today. This trip is the second of its kind initiated by the Australian Embassy in Manila. Last January, *imams* were invited.

### US ambassador hopeful on peace settlement this year

SAMIRA GUTOC

MIXED messages about a possible conclusion of the GRP-MILF talks this year were floated in a forum held at the Asian Institute of Management last June 19.

The peace talks have been deadlocked since September last year over the issue on ancestral domain. With the resignation of GRP chief negotiator Silvestre Afable two weeks ago, it could encounter rough sailing (See D4 about the controversy on Fr. Eliseo Mercado). Described to be on its final and crucial stages,

government and the MILF are being pressured to reach a settlement. Newly-designated acting GRP negotiator Prof. Rudy Rodil did not give a time-line or deadline for the talks citing there are no "short-cuts to a peace process. It is after all a process."

During the forum sponsored by the United States Institute for Peace, keynote speaker US Ambassador Kristie Kenney cited a possible breakthrough this year since "all stars are aligned towards peace." This was contradicted by Moro academics who were pessimistic that a peace settlement may

be reached within the 3 year remaining term of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

According to Prof. Julkipli Wadi of the University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies, "It is extremely doubtful whether a substantive and final peace agreement could be entered into between the government and the MILF". However, MILF representative, Rasid Ladiasan, chairman of the CCCH Secretariat, acknowledged that the GRP-MILF peace process had been yielding remarkable headway and breakthrough with the

cooperation of stakeholders.

Military representatives echoed the positive gains brought about by the joint ceasefire activities of the MILF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines since the 1997 signing of the Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities. General Edgardo Gurra, Chairman of the GRP Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) cited the gains to include: significant decrease in armed skirmishes between the GRP and MILF forces resulting in upward indicators in Min-

danao; relative peace in Mindanao allows the peace negotiating panels to tackle substantive issues of the peace negotiations; implementation of relief and rehabilitation projects; trust and confidence on both sides; international support.

Asked if there were prospects for a joint MILF and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) initiative, Rodil said the two groups are dealing with different agreements.

The long-delayed tripartite meeting among the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC),

MNLF and the GRP is set on July 9-11 in Jeddah.

Former US Ambassador to the Philippines Frank Wisner and the United States Institute of Peace conferred recognition on the AFP, MILF CCCH and Bantay Ceasefire for their facilitative peace efforts.

Presidential Adviser Jesus Dureza who is in Jeddah to firm up the preparations for the tripartite meeting among the GRP, MILF and the OIC, confirms the appointment of Retired Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia as the new GRP Panel Chair.



## Electoral practices in ARMM:

### Putting socioeconomic inequalities in the equation

ONCE again we witnessed the nasty politics of violence and flood of allegations of vote rigging in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. What has been largely ignored is the region's prevailing poverty, political and socioeconomic inequalities where electoral fraud and violence are rooted. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama describes Philippines as "masks [by] enormous disparities in wealth, prestige, status, and power, which these elites can use to control the democratic process."

The region consistently occupy the "Bottom 10 (2003)" of the Philippine Human Development Report 2005 in terms of: Most Poor Provinces; Human Development Index (where Basilan, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are in the lowest rank); Per Capita Income (except Lanao del Sur); Basic Enrollment (except Tawi-Tawi), and; Gender Development Index (except Lanao del Sur). As regards life expectancy, they placed at the lowest with Tawi-Tawi at 51.2 years. These inequalities result to 1.8 million migrants all over the country in search of opportunities.

The region's socioeconomic inequalities had given birth to political slavery where political dynasty gestated and, in exceptional cases, political warlordism evolved. Free election is supplanted by a process of *selection* among members of dynasties. It is based on ones' influence in the family rather than platform of government. Qualification, competency and character play no role. Public accountability succumbs to bloodline loyalty.

Owing to the absence of choices within the region, politicians are not motivated by power and prestige but a control of the limited wealth in the local units or districts—the Internal Revenue Allotment or Pork Barrel Fund. A victory in election will secure a three-year uninterrupted flow of millions of money. Their drive to ensure victory and the sense of losing increase political tensions and, at times, result to bloodshed.

Patronage politics thrives because of the political symbiotic-dependency between the politicians and the poverty-stricken majority. The former provides for basic human subsistence in exchange of the latter's continued patronage. Supporters will be in a three-year payroll that would somehow satisfy basic human needs for job, food and health. Being of limited choice, one has no sufficient freedom to break the bond. Freedom and liberty are elusive to men with empty

#### The Jihadist Algamar A. Latiph

stomach whose faculties are too infirm to exercise freewill. A different scenario, however, exists in the case of political warlord where fear and reign of terror is employed to assure political submission; the leverage of money-politics plays a minimal role. The will of the people is snatched by the barrel of the gun.

When job, health care, education, food and water, and physical security are wanting, people choices are shut off. The hapless marginalized people become vulnerable and exposed to exploitation aggravated by government's impotence to guarantee human security. Nobel laureate W.A. Lewis in his *Theory of Economics* pointed out that increase in per capita income "gives a man greater control of his environment, and thereby increases his freedom." But in the region is deprived of an condition where human development and security can be realized; where people choices and opportunities are much wider and where they could have greater control of their environment.

It is disturbing that the region gets that extraordinary interest only when there is blood-letting during election and armed conflict. In this election, Moro Problem and inequalities have been hardly taken seriously. What was underscored is who will control Congress rather than what Congress can do to the failing region.

Today's politics however is not that encouraging; it is built on a high wall of intense and uncompromising political antagonism where constructive political cooperation is jettisoned. It is Congress' constitutional duty to dismantle dynasty but conflict of interest exist as Congress itself is ruled by different species of political dynasties.

Legislative measures to make IRA and Pork Barrel spending more accountable and transparent are far from its agenda. It is disturbing on how the *visible* political warlords exist in a society claiming to be governed by rule of law. It will not require a legislation to disarm private armies, with the military might of the State it is sufficient to destroy their existence. With this bleak scenario, electoral violence and fraud in the region would still persist.

*Lawyer Algamar Latiph of the Bangsamoro Lawyer's Network is a Chevening scholar currently studying at University of Birmingham.*



## Cleansing after the dirty elections

#### Khutba

pilferage and the likes, which are counterproductive to the people's quest for progress. As a form of retribution, any or all of the following may happen: burning of buildings and properties, heavy and extended rainfall causing

preaching of what is good and prohibit among yourselves that which is bad.

Allah, the Almighty said: "The unbelievers are protectors, one of another: unless ye do this, (protect each other), there would be tumult and oppression on earth, and great mischief." (8:73)

If Muslims do not perform their own affairs in accordance with Shari'ah, in the

and the Prophet's Tradition, and instead implement corrupted policies.

When people want to seek the Blessings of Allah, the good and blessings of this World and the Hereafter, and want to be spared from sufferings and calamities, they must unite, and strengthen their resolve in inviting people to what is right. Not until righteousness prevails upon the community by forbidding evil and ably eliminating all forms of immorality and corruption, shall they attain life's prosperity.

Allah said in the Holy Qur'an: "The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, pay *zakat* and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: For, Allah is exalted in Power, Wise." (9:71)

O! Lord, we know for a fact that we are often influenced by the environment of the society that we Your servants live in; the speeches we hear and the things we see. So we seek refuge unto Thee from the ill-effects of such environment on us and our children.

May Allah direct me and you to the blessings of the Glorious Qur'an and benefit us in whatever is in it of the *Ayat* and Wise *Dhikr*. I say this and ask Allah the Great and the Most Honored for forgiveness for me, you and all mankind for every sin. Invoke Him for forgiveness, for He is Oft-Forgiving, of Most Merciful.

*Khutba is the sermon rendered by a respected Muslim preacher during the Friday congregation in mosques.*

My brothers and sisters, if graft and corruption becomes the rule rather than the exception from which this country has suffered long enough, then be not part of it; rather, do extend to one another the preaching of what is good and prohibit among yourselves that which is bad.

floods, hurricane and typhoons, earthquakes resulting to deaths, loss of properties and other forms of disasters to worsen the sad plight of the community.

My brothers and sisters, if graft and corruption becomes the rule rather than the exception from which this country has suffered long enough, then be not part of it; rather, do extend to one another the

homeland then *fitna* or widespread disbelief, weak *iman* (faith) and destructive calamities are likely to emerge or occur, as has been mentioned.

All these problems and maladies adversely affecting the communities are the indirect offshoot of these dirty political systems, wherein government administrators and workers tend to ignore the Shari'ah of the Holy Qur'an

THE political system under Islam is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Its basic rules and principles are set out in the Glorious Qur'an and this was exemplified by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him)

The sovereignty of God is the very foundation of the system. Legislation contained in the Qur'an becomes the basic law of the land.

In the Qur'an, Allah said: "For those who make decisions other than what Allah has revealed are indeed disbelievers." (5:44)

How do you assess the present political setup in our region? As a believer and follower of Islam, is this the kind of political system that suits our aspiration for good governance?

We are now victims of the so-called dirty politics where its reality is so far removed from the rule of law and the characteristics of good governance.

Dirty politics employs a kind of governance and system in the community or nation, contrary to the Shari'ah as modeled by Prophet Muhammad and which his companions had successfully put into practice.

Government administrators of Muslim communities who follow not the principles set forth by the Shari'ah (from the Holy Qur'an and Hadith), could be facing varying degrees of problems and difficulties, including calamities. They are also likely to face social ills that are difficult to overcome, such as thievery, extortion, robbery, killings,

## MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION

BY SAMIRA GUTOC  
and GANDHI KINJIYO

ATENEO De Zamboanga organized a prayer vigil for Italian priest Giancarlo Bossi inside the Zamboanga city campus with students and faculty last June 19. In solidarity were Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambrà an Italian priest who is directly helping in the negotiation of Fr. Bossi's release, and the Italian ambassador to Philippines, who went to Payao-Sibugay to visit the kidnapping site. Fr. Sebastiano called for prayers for the release of Fr. Bossi. "Continue hoping that this will be the last case that can happen in Mindanao."

Bossi was abducted in Payao, Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay last June 11, 2007.

The Islamic Association of Bahrain and Imam of Grand Mosque in Bahrain Sheikh Rashid Mohammad Fatees Saleem Aljahi visited different parts of Mindanao to mingle with the Muslims here through Mosque visitation and symposiums on June 16-19. The visitors who financed the construction of 7 Mosques: 2 in Maguindanao, 1 in Sultan

Kudarat, 3 in General Santos City, and 1 in Davao del Norte, turned over funding for the said mosques through the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) in a simple ceremony in each place.

A former military officer recently published a sourcebook on Islam *Soldiers Handbook to Understand Muslims*. Retired Lt Col Mohammad Yusop A. Jimlani, former deputy commander of Task Force Davao (TFD) said the information contained in the handbook aims to serve as a guide to soldiers or any non-Muslims who may unintentionally or violate the customs and traditions of Muslims. The handbook contains information about Muslim prayer, fasting, Jihad, giving alms, the meaning of Halal and Haram, marriage in Islam, Muslim women, and prohibited drinks and foods in Islam. Do's and don'ts in dealing with Muslims are also highlighted in the handbook such as refraining from the use of bomb sniffing dogs in checking the luggage of Muslims and eating pork in front of a Muslim "for those displease them

(Muslims)".

Last June 9, the City of Davao and the private sectors assisted 300 home-owners in a Muslim community whose houses were gutted by fire. The City government provided the victims P10,000 each to enable them to build new homes. Donors gave rice, used clothing, canned goods, packed noodles, school supplies, and kitchen utensils. The donors included the Davao Filipino Chinese Foundation, Mindanao Taiwan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc., Congressman Prospero Nogrerales, the local government units of Davao, the Davao City Police Office, Task Force Davao, University of Immaculate Conception Students Council, Philip Morris Philippines, United Methodist Church, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth-Philippines, the United Muslim Council for Peace and Development, ShopWise and other commercial establishments.

At least 77 Muslim out-of-school youths from the conflict

zones in Midsayap, who underwent skills training, are helping build homes for residents of St. Bernard, Ginsaugon, Southern Leyte which had been devastated by flood. The Habitat for Humanity commissioned the young men, all of them out-of-school youth, after their completion of the basic construction skills training with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda). The training program provides participants with marketable skills in construction through classroom and hand-on sessions. Habitat for Humanity is a program supported by the European Commission. For its *Build for Peace* project, the Habitat targets to build 1,000 houses in areas declared as Peace and Development Communities in South Central Mindanao. It has also provided low-cost houses for homeless communities in other parts of the country. For the Southern Leyte project, Habitat will rebuild the flood-stricken village of St. Bernard. Alterplan, a non-government organization that partners with community-based organizations in building capacities to analyze, implement, plan and

steer area-based development, is a well known experts on technical services.

The Washington-based United States Institute of Peace (USIP) conferred recognition on individuals and organizations who with their visionary work contribute to facilitating peace in Mindanao during a forum on Peril and Promise in Mindanao held at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM), Makati City on June 19, 2007. The awardees included Brig. Gen. Edgardo Gurra (Chairman, GRPCCCH) of the GRP Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (MILF CCCH), MILF Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (MILF AHJAG) through Atty. Abdul Dataya (Chairman, MILF Ad Hoc Joint Action Group), MGen. Ben Dolorfino for the GRP Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (GRP AHJAG), Bantay Ceasefire through Rexall Kaalim, Team Leader, Bantay Ceasefire, Mindanao People's Caucus and Young Moro Professionals Network.

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# THE MATRIX OF DISAGREEMENTS 1996 GRP-MNLF PEACE ACCORD

(Philippine Council For Islam And Democracy)

Provisions of the 1976 tripoli agreement	Provisions of the 1996 Peace Agreement	GRP Position	MNLF Position	Civil society position
Establishment of Autonomy in the Southern Philippines within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.	Establishment, through an executive order, of the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD), the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), and the Consultative Assembly.	Executive Order No. 371 —  Proclaimed a Special Zone of Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines (SZOPAD), Established the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) Established the Consultative Assembly (CA).	EO 371 was a watered down version of what was agreed upon. The three transitional structures - the SPCPD, the SZOPAD, and the CA - were too powerless to pursue meaningful changes.  The control and regulatory powers of the SPCPD were not specified in the FPA. All functions and powers of these bodies remained derived from (and dependent on) the President. It therefore lacked authority in implementing its own development initiatives.  The SPCPD was inadequately funded by the National Government and had to primarily rely on foreign donor assistance such as the UN Multi-Donor Assistance Programme.	The SPCPD was ineffective due to its limited mandate and dependency on the President. It had little resources to implement development strategies. It had no influence over LGUs and national government agencies.  The Consultative Assembly, with an important civil society component, was largely ignored.
National Defense would be the concern of the Central Authority provided that the arrangements for the joining of the forces of the Moro National Liberation Front with the Philippine Armed Forces be discussed later.  Special Regional Security Forces would be created in the area of the Autonomy with the relationship between these forces and the Central security forces to be fixed later.	Establishment of procedures for the integration of former MNLF guerrillas into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as well as into the Philippine National Police (PNP).  The second sentence of Paragraph 8, Article III, of the Tripoli Agreement "the relationship between these forces and the Central security forces ..." provides for the separate framework for the Regional Security Forces and the Central security forces.	National Government (NG) has successfully facilitated the Integration of MNLF members into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police. 1,500 MNLF members have been integrated into the PNP and 5,750 MNLF members have been incorporated into the AFP.	In violation of the Peace Agreement, the GRP did not organize the MNLF integrees into separate units under the command of the Deputy Commander (Article II, Para. 20c.). The GRP deployed, as it continues to deploy, the MNLF integrees in combat duties to fight Muslim brothers in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and recently used to fight against the MNLF forces.	While integration of former MNLF guerillas has been successful, this has had little effect on the overall climate of 'war and fear' felt throughout the area. Further, many MNLF soldiers and their families were not provided assistance. The military and private armies continue to have an overt and decidedly negative presence on local communities. There is a need to create a Human Rights Commission for the ARMM to monitor violations
Area of the autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines : 13 provinces and all cities and villages located therein  The provinces are: 1. Basilan, 2. Sulu, 3. Tawi-Tawi, 4. Zamboanga del Sur, 5. Zamboanga del Norte, 6. North Cotabato, 7. Maguindanao, 8. Sultan Kudarat, 9. Lanao del Norte, 10. Lanao del Sur, 11. Davao del Sur, 12. South Cotabato, and 13. Palawan.  A Legislative Assembly was to be created through direct election and an Executive Council was to be formed through appointments by the Legislative Assembly.	Congressional action either amending or repealing the RA 6734— Organic Act of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which must be submitted to the people in the affected regions in a plebiscite for ratification.  Section D of the Agreement gave broad powers to the ARMM Government pertaining to economic, financial, business, and commercial matters.  The FPA calls for the devolution of development related offices/agencies under the SPCPD and, under RA 9054, allows for further devolution pursuant to ARMM Regional Assembly legislation.	Congress passed into law RA 9054 supplanting RA 6734 as stipulated in the agreement, and that a plebiscite was called and held for the purpose of ratifying its provisions.  Sulu, TawiTawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao joined ARMM in a plebiscite conducted on August 20, 2001	The GRP, specifically the Philippine Senate and Congress, unilaterally determined and fixed RA 9054. The MNLF does not recognize the plebiscite unilaterally conducted by the GRP on August 20, 2001. The MNLF maintains that the plebiscite is violative of the Tripoli Agreement, Paragraph 8, Article II, which specifically enumerates the areas to be included under the New Autonomous Government to include 13 provinces and all the cities and villages therein.	There is a need to study the defects of RA 9054 and pursue amendments so that it is in conformity with the PA.
Stipulated that Muslims would have their own administrative, economic, and financial systems though the relationship between these systems and the Central administrative, economic, and financial systems was to be discussed in the future.	Establishment of the Regional Economic and Development Planning Board to be chaired by the ARMM Governor. It stipulated that it shall "prepare the economic development plans and programs" for the Autonomous Government.  Section D of the Agreement gave broad powers to the ARMM Government pertaining to economic, financial, business, and commercial matters.  The FPA calls for the devolution of development related offices/agencies under the SPCPD and, under RA 9054, allows for further devolution pursuant to ARMM Regional Assembly legislation.	Over 67 Billion Pesos has been appropriated since 1996 Peace Agreement to finance infrastructure and other government programs.  The Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) passed "ARMM Special Economic Zone Act of 2003" that created the Regional Economic Zone Authority (REZA) and sets the regulatory and legal framework for investments in the region. Currently, DTI-ARMM is functioning as REZA to oversee the development of economic zones, industrial estates, and export processing zones.  NG is working with the RLA in legislating further devolution such as a Regional Aquatic and Fisheries Code and greater control for the Regional Government over natural resources within the ARMM.  NG has undertaken a medium-term development strategy for ARMM: Formulated a SZOPAD Integrated Development Framework and Public Investment Program in connection with the Mindanao National Initiative (Mindanao Natin)  NG's anti-poverty campaign has reduced poverty incidence in Tawi-tawi, Lanao del Sur, and Sulu from 2000 – 2003.	The MNLF claimed that between 1991-2005, only P53B was actually released for the regional government, which represents only a portion of what is needed and what has been allotted.  Furthermore, from 2002-2004, more than P1B in ARMM funds were not released. This failure to release allotted funds, and delays in transferring funds to the regional government, is aggravated by the fact that out of the total budget, 86% goes to personal services, leaving almost nothing for infrastructure and development programs.	There is a need to strengthen the administrative capacity of the ARMM government.  The National Government, ARMM Government, and donors must provide policy space and engage the further collaboration of civil society and the private sector.
Guaranteed Muslim representation in all Courts including the Supreme Court. Also, guaranteed right of representation and participation in the Central Government.	Article I of the Agreement guaranteed the Participation of Muslims in the Executive Council, the Legislative Assembly, the Administrative System, and Representation in National Government.	The fifth elections organized for ARMM, which were held on 18 August 2005, resulted in the election of Dato Zaldi Uy Ampatuan as the new Regional Governor as well as the election of 24 new members for the Legislative Assembly.  This Legislative Assembly is comprised of representatives of the five provinces and one city in ARMM, which was headed by Hatimil Hassan, an MNLF leader. (Hassan no longer RLA Speaker)  Muslims appointed with the rank of Cabinet Secretary: Nasser Pangandamam, Department of Agrarian Reform, and Mr. Zamzamin Ampatuan, National Anti-Poverty Commission Chairman.  In addition, two Muslim candidates were elected to the Philippine House of Representatives as Sectoral Representatives and two senior Muslim magistrates were appointed to serve in the Court of Appeals.  As of 2004, in the AFP, there are seven (7) Senior Officers in AFP (1 with the rank of Brigadier General) and 169 Senior Officers in PNP (4 with the rank of one-star General.)	The GRP has not made any single appointment pursuant to Paragraph 65 PA and to RA 9054, Article V, Sec. 2, where it provides that appointment should be through the recommendation of the Regional Governor.  The same provision emasculates the Regional Governor through the insertion of the phrase "in consultation with the elected officials and the concerned sectors of the autonomous region". This is digression if not a violation of Paragraphs 63 and 66 of the Peace Agreement.  All the appointments so far made by the GRP fall within Paragraph 64 PA and RA 9054, Article V, Sec. 4, which are optional appointment or appointment deemed not within the ambit of the Agreement.	The GRP has not sufficiently promoted the advancement of qualified and talented Muslims in National Government.  The Sectoral representatives won on their own merits and should not be counted as GRP compliance to the terms of agreement
Mines and mineral resources were to fall within the competence of the Central Government, and a reasonable percentage deriving from the revenues of the mines and minerals was to be fixed for the benefit of the areas of the autonomy.	Relative to natural resources, RA 9054, Article 12, Section 5, provides for the Use and Development of Mines, Minerals, and other Natural Resources, and Revenue Sharing.	Although, the National Government continues to control and supervise matters of extraction, with their devolved mandate, the Regional Government effectively has full authority over all areas of environment and natural resources within the ARMM.	The GRP, acting through Congress, has unilaterally arrogated to itself the power to define strategic mines and minerals, which violated Paragraphs 146 and 147 of 1996 PA. This contravenes the agreement, which mandates that the MNLF and the GRP, with the positive contribution of the technical experts of the OIC, will mutually agree on the definition of the strategic mines and minerals on a later date. It also derogates from the plenary legislative power accorded to the Legislative Assembly through Paragraph 27 of the Peace Agreement to pass laws on all matters, concerns and issues within the autonomous region.  RA 9054 also contravenes the provisions of RA 8371 known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), which provides, under Sec. 3 thereof, that ancestral domains refer to all areas generally belonging to the Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) and Indigenous Peoples (IPs).	The Bangsamoro, through this provision, have been deprived of the natural resources that are part of their ancestral rights. There is a general need to resolve the issue of land ownership in much of Mindanao.
The autonomous government would have the right to set up schools, colleges and universities, provided that matters pertaining to the relationship between them the general education system shall be subject of future discussion.	Article III, Section C calls for the creation of an integrated system of education that promotes Filipino and Islamic values. The Regional Autonomous Government is discharged to manage and control, in line with existing laws and national policies, the entire educational system in ARMM. The Regional Autonomous Government would supervise the Madaris. Religious instruction in public schools would be optional.	The National Government in partnership with the ARMM Regional Government is pursuing a road map for the development of primary-level education for Muslims. Implementation of Order No. 51 of the Department of Education is helping with the student integration between public to private schools. The ARMM Educational System is currently providing salaries to teachers from 36 schools.	There continues to be an insufficiency of funds being directed towards the educational system in the ARMM. There is a general disconnect between what is stated as policy and what is effected on the ground.	Donor assistance and government programs have begun to lay the groundwork for a unique educational system in the ARMM. However, there is still a large gap in the quality and resources of schools in the ARMM as compared to other regions.
Muslims have the right to set up their own Courts which implement Islamic law or Shari'ah .	The PA (Article III, Para. 152) calls for the establishment of a Shari'ah court system for Muslims.	The ambiguity of the Peace Agreement was redressed through RA 9054, which provided a comprehensive Shari'ah legal framework for ARMM's Muslims.  Currently, there are five Shari'ah District Courts with two District Judges, and 30 Shari'ah Circuit Courts with 27 Circuit Judges functioning with and outside the ARMM.	The PA provision for the establishment of a Shari'ah legal system was decidedly vague about the scope and mandate of the Courts and qualifications and appointments of Court officials.	The Shari'ah provisions of RA 9054 are suitably comprehensive. The ARMM government must create a judicial system that strengthens the rule of law, severely lacking in ARMM. Inadequate number of Shari'ah courts to service Muslim communities
A cease-fire was to be declared with a Joint GRP-MNLF Committee to guarantee the free movement of people and refugee return and to supervise the amnesty program in the South of the Philippines.	The Agreement was to create, pursuant to Article III Section 13, the GRP-MNLF-OIC Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) to monitor the implementation of Phase I.	The Joint Monitoring Committee completed its objective of observing Phase I. The GRP (and OIC) are open to a revival of the JMC.	The MNLF would also like renew and extend the JMC to monitor Phase 2 of the Peace Agreement.	Civil society supports the JMC. There is also a need to include civil society and all stakeholders for consensus-building and for participation in monitoring mechanisms.



# A horse with no name

## Interview with Fr. Eliseo 'Jun' Mercado, OMI

BY AMINA RASUL and  
NASSER SHARIEF

FR. 'Eliseo Jun' Mercado was recently invited by the government to be its chief negotiator in the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), to replace Silvestre Afable Jr. who had earlier resigned. Fr. Mercado is no stranger to negotiations with the MILF. However, a flurry of criticisms has surfaced. Leaders of the MILF, who had appreciated his role as a member of the government panel during the early stages of the GRP-MILF talks, suddenly became critical. To help clarify some of the controversies behind the issue, *Moro Times* had an exclusive interview with Fr. Mercado at the Oblates of Mary Immaculate residence in Quezon City.

*Moro Times: Mohagher Iqbal of the MILF was quoted as saying that it is very dangerous to be changing horse at a time when the GRP-MILF peace negotiation is in its final stretch.*

Fr. Mercado: Far from it. I go with the statement of Jesus Dureza that my assumption as the new panel chair would ensure a "seamless transition and a continuity" in the peace process with the MILF. I think that's a key word to live by if we want the peace process to go on.

I'm packaged for the purpose because the formula for a final GRP-MILF agreement is almost completed. The government has full confidence in my skill to glue together all the parties concerned and smoothen out loose ends.

I'm not privy to whatever reason that made Afable resign from his job, which I think will crystallize in a few days. In fairness to him, I disagree with the claim of some NGOs that he has been eased out of his work. Afable was very close to the president, mind you, and he has his own independent budget.

*Moro Times: MILF feels that*



■ Fr. Eliseo 'Jun' Mercado, OMI

*the peace process is somewhat downgraded with your appointment because you are not a cabinet secretary.*

Fr. Mercado: This is the easiest to answer (laughs). I enjoy a cabinet rank and I have the full authority from the President with my appointment. I have the blessings of the president. She had told me to write down all my recommendations so that they can be acted upon. The charge that the peace process would be less smooth with me heading the government panel just doesn't hold water.

*Moro Times: At this stage of the negotiations, what do you think should be done?*

Fr. Mercado: Everything had been laid out already. What we lack is bridging all the stakeholders, and the more

comprehensive it is, the more it will hold long and the more lasting it will be. In the first place, we cannot do away with peace agreements that had been signed by the government, namely the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 and the Final Peace Agreement of 1996.

*Moro Times: By 'bridging' you mean involving everyone?*

Fr. Mercado: Exactly. And this is where people like me can make a difference. See, we cannot overlook everyone and pretend they don't exist at all. We have to bridge the MNLF because obviously they were there, way, way before. We cannot afford also to disenfranchise the traditional leaders—the sultans and chieftains of the villages. We also must take into account the elected officials, the

governors. We cannot, say, disregard the Tulawies, the Sinsuats, the Sadikuls, and the Ampatuans for they will all be factors. In short, we have to take into account everyone.

*Moro Times: This seems like tremendous work.*

Fr. Mercado: Definitely. If this is the final stretch of the peace negotiations as it is billed, we cannot take this into isolation. We have to address the whole Bangsamoro people. And I almost forget, we have to bridge Congress also. We have to have some lawmakers in our fold who must make a hard-sell of the resultant agreement to Congress. I had intimate talk with legislators like Nene Pimentel and a host of others in the circuit on the best way possible to pass the agreement.

The very reason *kaya ko tinanggap ang alok* (why I accepted the offer) is because I'm no longer partisan. This stage of the negotiation needs a different tack, and I hope everyone involved in the final leg of the peace process will not overlook this simple fact. We have to do some wining and dining with Malacañan, Congress, and the senate. We have to toast with the business sectors too to realize our objective.

*Moro Times: You are highly regarded by the MILF leadership as a peace advocate. Do you have any reason to suspect that some in the organization might be misreading your statements?*

Fr. Mercado: Possibly. I had this *Memorial Lectures on the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement* at

the Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Center in Cotabato in August, last year. I feel that perhaps my metaphoric allusion to the Final Peace Agreement of 1996 as the North Star did not bode well with some. Michael Mastura, for example, intoned that with 'Fr. Mercado heading the government panel, any resultant agreement between the GRP and the MILF will only serve as an appendix of the 1996 FPA'. I dare not dwell on this footnote metaphor. I want to think of the agreements as part of a thread that started with the 1976 Tripoli agreement. It gives us a sense of continuity.

*Moro Times: How do you read the MILF at this stage?*

Fr. Mercado: At this stage, a lot has been resolved in terms of substance. What we need is fine tuning. We have agreed already on the extent of the territories although the number of barangays involved will have to be resolved, but that's a matter that we can solve as we go along. The question of ancestral domain has more or less been resolved. Now, it's a question of marshalling the compensation and the funding. I think a lot of questions put forth by MILF have been resolved. The leadership of the MILF appreciates that they can't start at zero—a clean slate so to speak. So we have to work with what is already on the negotiating table before they were there. We cannot think of past agreements as failed agreements. They are legal and binding. Any new agreement must be done in the purview of previous ones. To do otherwise would be counterproductive and will only lead us nowhere.

*Moro Times: What about the forthcoming tripartite meeting among the OIC, GRP, and the MNLF in Jeddah.*

Fr. Mercado: I've been invited. The three groups welcomed my participation as an adviser to the parties. Chairman Nur is especially delighted. Incidentally, the MILF mistook me as part of the government during the 1996 Final Peace Agreement of the GRP-MNLF. I've never been that. I was only an observer

# What the Moro say about the Independence Day

BY ALIYYA SAWAADJAN

SINCE this is the month of June, we want to know if the Independence Day holds any significance to the Filipino Muslims or Moros. Historically, Mindanao was not controlled by the Spaniards and Muslim Mindanao already has an established form of government since the 14th century; long before the whole of Philippines has established theirs. The Sultanate of Sulu consisted of the islands of Jolo, Tawitawi, Sabah, etc. has long been independent from any foreign forces. So why should June 12 have any significance to the Moro, if they have already been enjoying independence since ancient times? This is where it gets interesting. For some, socially and politically the Independence Day should be celebrated because as Filipinos, it is only our civic duty to do so and since we only have one government, it means that we are one despite religious and cultural differences. While for others, the holiday is just an ordinary day. And for some, they celebrate the meaning and essence of the word "independence" rather than the day itself.

• *Di dapat, dahil kung ibabase sa history isa tayong malayang bansa lalung-lalo na ang Sulu. Di tayo nasakop ng*

*sino man o ng ibang bansa. Katunayan more than 600 years na ang Sultanate ng Sulu magpahanggang ngayon nag-rule pa, lalung-lalo na dito sa Patikul. Katunayan ang Sultan ngayon ay si Sultan Muizuddin Jainal Abirin Bahjin.*

**Bong Bahjin,  
Patikul, Sulu**

• Yes, as Filipinos we should join in the celebration. Muslims or Christians, the fact is we are Filipinos with one flag and one constitution.

**May Bahjin, Jolo, Sulu**

• I celebrate the independence of the Bangsamoro people and the continuing struggle of our people to be free and self-determining.

**Atty. Suharto  
Ambolodto, Cotabato City**

• June 12 has no significance for the Bangsamoro because we were INDEPENDENT from Spain at the time.

**+639216923946**

• *Hindi masama i-celebrate ang Independence Day dahil Pilipino naman tayo. Wala naman kinalaman sa relihiyon 'yan e. Dapat nagkakaisa tayo lahat bilang Pilipino, pati na rin sa pagdiwang ng Independence Day dahil nag-iisa lang ang gobyerno natin. Pare-parehas lang naman tayo lahat Pilipino e.*

**Jamal Omadan,**

**Las Piñas**

• *Kung bilang Pilipino oo, dapat. Kaya lang sa relihiyon namin hindi talaga namin ipinagdiriwang ang araw na 'yan.*

**Rohaina Dibangkitun,  
Las Piñas**

• *Depende. Nasa tao naman yan. Iba naman diyan kahit hindi Muslim di rin sine-celebrate ang Independence Day. May gusto at may ayaw.*

**Angsi Umpat,  
Las Piñas**

• *Pwede oo, pwede hindi. Pero sa amin mga Muslim talaga hindi e.*

**Allan Asis, Las Piñas**

• *Hindi, kasi kahit kelan hindi tayo natalo ng foreign invaders, especially tayong Muslim Tausug.*

**Meng Hairal,  
Jolo, Sulu**

• I don't think there's anything wrong if the Filipino Muslims also celebrate Independence Day. I don't think one's religion has anything to do with it. It's about us as Filipinos, our freedom regardless of what our beliefs.

**Fatima Makki,  
Las Piñas**

• We don't celebrate it because it's really not necessary to do so. I think anyone regardless of his or her religion has the option to celebrate it or not. As long as he or she will not

forget its value and significance then its okay because that's what matters.

**Rose Mosa, Las Piñas**

• *Pwede, hindi naman masama. Pinagkakaiba lang naman ay ang relihiyon eh. Pare-parehas naman tayong Pilipino.*

**Rasat Alizmuzaaman**

• *Mahalaga talaga, sine-celebrate 'yan dahil Pilipino tayo wala talaga sa relihiyon 'yan basta sang-ayon kami sa araw na iyan dahil naging malaya ang bansang Pilipinas sa araw na 'yan.*

**Satar Colalo, Taguig**

• *Mahalaga, dahil kalayaan natin 'yun e dahil Pilipino tayo. Kailangan natin makisama sa kapwa Pilipino, kailangan makibagay tayo.*

**Hadji Fatimah Panggaga,  
Taguig**

• *Normal na araw lang yan para sa amin, ordinary holiday. Kasi meron din kami araw na mahalaga para sa amin tulad ng Ramadan, Hari-raya, mga Friday; yun ang mga araw na mahalaga talaga para sa amin.*

**Nur Ashree Dawami,  
Taguig**

• June 12 has nothing to do with the Muslims, as we were never part of the Philippines. In Sulu, we celebrate the centennial of the Sultanate government every year.

**Delmar S. Bahjin, Jr.**



## Yes, Hanifa, heroes do exist

BY NASSER SHARIEF

I HOPE our Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) forgive us but we believe the term "hero" does not really fit those who go abroad to earn a living and send money home for their families. The term for the OFW is "Family Income Earner" or "Responsible Filipino Family Member" or "Philippine Economy Supporter".

We need heroes who make us feel safe, who inspire us to go beyond the ordinary to create a world that is just and fair and peaceful. But how far is anyone willing to go to be a real hero—sans the cobweb reach of Spiderman and the acrobatics of a Jacky Chan?

Former Human Rights Commissioner Nasser Marohomsalic brought the story of such a hero to the attention of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV).

Norsaide Dipatuan, a young BS Forestry graduate of the Mindanao State University, wanted to contribute his efforts towards changing the conduct of elections in his hometown of Malabang, a coastal town of Lanao del Sur fringing the Illana Bay. He volunteered as coordinator for PPCRV.

But poll watching in Lanao is not like watching paint dry. Lots of images float

before your eyes: fake ballots; switching and vote padding done wholesale in the presence of election inspectors, soldiers and other officials who were supposed to be upholding the integrity of the poll.

The trouble with Norsaide was that he tried to play by the rules. According to his affidavit, while attempting to stop the wrongdoings, he was shouted down by Hilorn Macalipa, the local chairman of the Board of Election Inspectors. Norsaide became a marked man.

When the ballot boxes were transported to the capital of Marawi City, Norsaide was there, vigilantly watching over the boxes. The following day the son of one congressional candidate and 6 other armed escorts forcibly burned the ballot boxes with Lipovitan bottles filled with gasoline. A hero to the end, Norsaide tried to stop them. The butt of an M16 rifle pummeled his cheekbones, head and ribs. A chair was slammed on his back. Norsaide collapsed. When he woke up, he was in the public hospital.

When he was able to move, he rendered his affidavit with Atty. Edgar A. Masorong.

Yes, Moros do care a lot about protecting their right to choose who will govern them. Norsaide is a true hero.