

# The Contours of a Just and Lasting Peace

## (Coalition for Peace Manifesto, 27 July 1987)

### I. Introduction: The Situation We Face

Almost a year and a half have passed since we freed our country from an authoritarian and corrupt regime. But the ouster of the dictator has not brought us peace. Even as we celebrate our new-found freedom, our people remain gripped by fear of a civil war and everyday reports of senseless bloodshed.

Armed groups roam our town and cities bringing with them a violent way of life. They could be Communist guerrillas or private armies, military or paramilitary units, renegade soldiers out to destabilize the government or vigilante groups out to eradicate Communists in our midst. Whoever they are, they create an atmosphere of violence and lawlessness and add to the sense of helplessness of our people.

We have a new civilian government which tries to keep the nation together by operating in a non-authoritarian manner. By reversing the unjust policies of the old regime, it seeks to create the conditions for a return to normalcy in the economic and political sphere.

However, this government is faced by many threats to its good intentions.

We have an underground movement which, spurning the government's offer for national reconciliation, continues to seek political victory through armed revolution. Though momentarily frozen in its tracks both by the advent of the popular Aquino government as well as its own political blunders, this movement stands to gain ground for as long as the political and economic conditions from which it draws life remain unchanged.

On the other hand, we have an oversized military establishment jealous of the power and prerogatives it had during martial law. Now fragmented and struggling for its honor, it tries to divert the public's attention from its failings by harping on the threat of communism to our democratic way of life.

The military derives its support from a large conservative constituency who tends to oppose basic changes in society by attaching the communist label to every attempt at reform. This same group would blindly favor the militarist approach to the insurgency, insensitive to the fact that genuine social reforms would eliminate the need for armed struggle.

In Mindanao and the Cordilleras, our cultural minorities call for the right to rule their own affairs. The demand for autonomy is an off-shoot of centuries of oppression and exploitation in the hands of the majority represented by government and private business insensitive to the customs and traditions of the country's indigenous tribes.

In the midst of this domestic strife is a foreign power — the United States of America — which seeks to protect its military and economic interests in the country by pressing the Aquino government to adopt a full-scale military offensive against the communist rebels.

As if these threats to peace were not enough, the tightening economic situation makes it difficult for the government to meaningfully tackle the problems of poverty and unemployment. In short, we face an extremely volatile political and economic situation.

Peace has indeed become a greatly endangered value in our time. Any attempt to rescue it must confront the obstacles that lie in its path.

### II. Obstacles to Peace

The obstacles to peace come in two forms: (1) those that spring from the way we think, and (2) those that are rooted in the way our society is organized.

#### A. The Way We Think

1. The Communists have called our attention to problems facing our society such as agrarian reform, American domination, militarization and private armies. Whether or not we approve of the Communists solution to these problems, we must admit that the problems they raise are realities that we must confront.

2. Some of our leaders assert that Communism must be feared because it is a danger to democracy. However, we must not allow our fears to cloud our understanding of the objective conditions that have caused the disaffection of our people with the present system.

3. Both the Communists and the rightists find it all too easy to prescribe a military solution to our political and economic problems. Such an approach, would treat the symptom, not the disease. The history of nations has taught us that you can never kill an idea with a bullet. An idea can only be defeated by a better idea, a theoretical premise by superior practice.

4. The few among us who are wealthy must recognize that we can correct the injustice of the poverty of the majority not by acts of charity but by restructuring our social order.

5. Let us not be too quick in condemning those who take up arms against the state as terrorists. We must realize that when victims of injustice are denied meaningful redress they may have no other choice but to bear arms.

6. The existence of formal constitutional guarantees of our basic freedoms does not necessarily mean that democracy is in place. More crucial is the existence of conditions where these rights and freedoms may actually be invoked and practiced in a meaningful way. Otherwise, democracy is only a legal possibility, not a political reality.

7. We must recognize that a government can only be as progressive as its own people, that it will tend to reflect the dominant consciousness in society. It is important therefore for an informed, organized and articulate public to actively and persistently claim its rightful power to decide on matters affecting it.

### B. The Way Our Society is Organized

Our society is organized in such a manner that the ownership of property is the crucial element in determining one's future. And, in the context of our agricultural economy, land ownership had become the source of the major conflicts in our society.

Our society is characterized by various forms of exploitation: the labor of the working class sustains the wealth and power of the few who own the land and the industries. This exploitation is another source of the primary conflicts in contemporary Philippine society.

Such conflicts acquire new forms when the dominant elites in society try to preserve and expand their political and economic power through political oppression and militarization. They are also aggravated by the constant interference of the United States in its need to ensure the security of its bases and investments in our country.

It would be useful to keep the distribution between the basic causes of social unrest, on one hand, and the conditions which aggravate it and give it its distinct political expression. The resolution of the former rests on the basic reforms of our system of property, while that of the latter requires the return of our political system to democratic pluralism. In principle, the two sets of factors are interrelated. But from the perspective of the need to end all armed conflicts, the reform of the political system acquires greater urgency.

### III. An Urgent Legislative Agenda on Behalf of Peace.

We respectfully urge the members of both houses of Congress to join our nationwide quest for peace by taking immediate and sustained legislative action on the following:

1. A thorough going and genuine agrarian reform program free from loopholes and impossible conditions, which would meaningfully address the grievances of Filipino peasants.
2. A comprehensive labor policy which embodies a framework for progressive industrial relations that recognizes labor as a major force in the development of the economy and the larger society.
3. The institutionalization of channels for effective consultation between autonomous people's organizations and government.

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4. The consolidation and enlargement of democratic space and the meaningful reassertion of civilian supremacy over the military through:

- a. the professionalization of the military.
- b. the implementation of the constitutional provision on the dismantling of private armies, vigilantes, the CHDF and other para-military units.
- c. the repeal of all repressive laws left behind by the Marcos regime.
- d. the repeal of PD 1850 and the transfer of all cases involving military offenses against civilians from military tribunals to civilian courts.

5. A serious and thorough conversion study in preparation for the possible pullout of American bases in the Philippines by 1991. Meanwhile, Congress must enforce the constitutional provision banning nuclear weapons from Philippine soil.

6. A strong resolve to support the popular call for a continuing dialogue by government with the National

Democratic Front, the Moro National Liberation Front, the Cordillera People's Liberation Army and all other rebel groups towards a meaningful resolution of the problems that divide our society.

Congress must realize that peace is not hammered out on the negotiating table alone. Congress must legislate wisely and with compassion to create the climate that would sustain a just and lasting peace.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As we usher in our first democratically elected Congress in 17 years, let us not forget that this body, as the people's representatives, must reflect our aspirations. The solutions to our problems do not lie solely with them. It is our role as a pressure group to participate in the formulation of these solutions.

Legislative enactment of our peace agenda, however, would still be empty without the political will of the entire government, the military establishment, the various warring groups, and most important, the Filipino people, to make this peace a reality.

## The People's Christmas Ceasefire and the Challenge of Forging Genuine and Lasting Peace (Coalition for Peace Manifesto, 6 January 1988)

Today, January 6, marks the end of the people's Christmas Ceasefire, a three-week period during which citizens committed to peace raised their collective voice and called for a halt to the fighting in our land.

Those three weeks affirmed our belief that peace is possible in our country. However, they also made us realize that the attainment of genuine peace is a lifelong challenge that calls for an unwavering commitment.

While the government and the National Democratic Front quickly responded to the people's demand for a holiday ceasefire with their own declarations of limited truce periods, the call was opposed by forces of violence who prevented our people from enjoying a meaningful holiday season.

Majority of Filipinos, remained victims of the subtle violence inflicted by poverty and political marginalization. However, cruder forms of violence haunted and continues to haunt our people: the murders and kidnappings of political candidates by rival and warlords; and ambushes, raids and encounters perpetrated by government forces, the

New People's Army, civilian vigilantes, loyalist troops, separatist groups in Mindanao and the Cordilleras, and other armed groups roaming the country.

Our people are helpless in the face of such violence. Yet they are the most numerous victims of an inhuman war they neither want nor understand.

Against this grim backdrop of mindless violence, we take heart in the gains made by cause-oriented people's organizations in pressing for a people's peace agenda. Besides the 96 hours of truce declared by both the government and the NDF, we achieved the following:

1. A multi-sectoral human peace chain (Bigkis-Kapayapaan) was formed in Dagat-Dagatan, Navotas last December 15, the eve of the People's Ceasefire.
2. The Katiwasayan People's Peace Center was set up and multi-sectoral peace consultations were conducted by peace advocates in Naga and Legaspi.
3. Children's immunization and peace education programs were held in Quezon, Sorsogon, and Cebu.