

A Citizen's Proposal to the CBCP: Opposition to War, Solidarity for Peace

COALITION FOR PEACE

PEACE IN OUR TIME REQUIRES, AS A first step, the creation of a political atmosphere or these political conditions which allow all ideological groups, including those presently underground, to participate openly, meaningfully, and non-violently in the re-working of a more just social order. Peace advocates, are therefore, committed to expanding the democratic space, and enriching the pluralist nature of Philippine society.

It is in this spirit that the Coalition for Peace seeks to evoke the prophetic role of a citizenry united with their bishops towards peace. We seek the CBCP's moral suasion in laying the groundwork which will compel all protagonists to the armed conflict to talk peace and begin to build it with us.

The Basic Premises of the Peace Talks

1. The social conflict which the armed revolution represents is rooted in the basic structures of inequality, injustice, oppression, and exploitation.
2. This conflict will remain unresolved for as long as these structures are not changed.
3. These structures may be overturned overnight through a bloody and violent revolution, or they may be reformed through a long sustained and democratic process, characterized by discussion, debate, and peaceful methods of political pressure and mass education.
4. In the long run, peaceful non-military approaches to social change are always preferable, in the sense that they alone guarantee the survival of democratic processes and the meaningful participation of people organizations.
5. A distinction must be made between those conditions, which breed social conflict, and those which compel people to take up arms in order to redress their grievances and seek recourse in underground warfare.
6. The conditions which produce social conflict are best resolved through participatory means, when the public is permitted the opportunity to understand all sides of an issue and to compare contending approaches and visions with one another. The arena for this is open discussion and unrestrained debate, with different pressure groups, movements and parties attempting to win constituencies for their respective positions.
7. On the other hand, the conditions which leave people no choice but to express and redress their grievance other than through non-violent and peaceful means are precisely the conditions which limit the democratic space, impede political democracy and ideological pluralism. The correction of these conditions is the sine qua non or the precondition for the peaceful resolution of the long-term reasons of the social conflict.
8. The Coalition for Peace is convinced that peace talks must aim simply to clarify and negotiate the conditions under which underground armed groups like the NPA

may confidently re-surface and participate in open legal political processes and exercises. In other words, the talks should be confined to negotiations concerning political conditions that would guarantee genuine political and ideological pluralism and debate. Items such as genuine agrarian reform, immediate dismantling of the military bases, coalition government, etc., while important, should not, at the early stage, be allowed to complicate the agenda. Thus, for example, the talks can center on the immediate removal of the obstacles to the full realization of the freedom of political and ideological expression. Or the creation of new political mechanisms for enriching the utilization of the democratic space.

9. There is good reason to believe that the present 1986 Constitution contains enough guarantees for political democracy to thrive and that the immediate implementation of its promises would drastically improve the chances for ending the social conflict.
10. If the initial peace talks on such political conditions prove successful, a second round could concentrate on the discussion of the basic social conditions that underlie persistent social conflicts, and how these may be remedied.
11. We should not expect that agreement on political conditions or prerequisites will come easy. We should harbor no such illusion. But we must begin from the premise that it is better to talk and debate political and ideological issues publicly than win constituencies for certain positions in the middle of a civil war.
12. The following agenda items might be considered:
 - a) Paramilitary units, private armies, CHDFs, vigilantes, CVOs, CAFGU, etc.
 - b) Action on human rights violations.
 - c) Revamp of the police and military establishments.
 - d) Amnesty and rehabilitation for rebels
 - e) Revolutionary taxation
 - f) Abolition of laws that illegalize the Communist Party
 - g) Continuing legal constraints to freedom
 - h) Firearms in the hands of the CPP-NPA-NDF.
 - i) Reforms of the justice system.
 - j) Freedom of the press and pluralistic access to media.
 - k) Release of all political detainees.
 - l) End to foreign meddling in dealing with the insurgency.

Ceasefire Issues

13. A ceasefire is necessary however before any peace negotiation can commence. Therefore, efforts should be put into ascertaining the conditions demanded by both the military and the NPA before a ceasefire can be put into effect. A third party, perhaps represented by the Bishops, can then forge the outlines of a basic agreement for a ceasefire.
14. A ceasefire is basically a cessation of hostilities. The period must not be used by either side to hit the other party by some other means. All firing must stop, and possibly all other forms of hostility too, while the talks are going on. Judging from the record of the first ceasefire, it appears that the following issues would be the most difficult to resolve:
 - * Should the military be compelled to pull out of certain areas already occupied by the rebels?
 - * Should the rebels be allowed to carry their firearms in populated areas?
 - * Should the rebels be allowed to continue collecting so-called revolutionary taxes?
 - * Should the rebels be prevented from speaking or communicating their ideological standpoint in the open media?
 - * Should the government be stopped from enticing rebels to avail themselves of the amnesty and rehabilitation program?
 - * Should either side be allowed to accumulate firearms and other weapons during the period of the ceasefire?
 - * Should rebels be allowed to go anywhere provided they are not armed? Will soldiers likewise be allowed to roam into rebel territory so long as they are not armed?

Concrete Steps that Could be Taken to Hasten the Peace Process:

The Bishop's role

- a) Bishops to initiate series of dialogues with the government (and the military) and the NDF (and the NPA) to ascertain their conditions for agreeing to a ceasefire. One of crucial conditions must be a clarification of what the peace talks agenda must contain.
- b) Bishops to assess these terms from both sides, synthesize them, then formulate an acceptable compromise. This process must provide room for the participation of people's organizations and other concerned groups.
- c) Bishops to submit these terms to the two parties separately followed by an initial closed-door unpublicized meeting of representatives from both sides. By this point in

the process, the bishop(s) would have established the bases for formal negotiations.

- d) Bishops to continuously report the progress of these preliminary caucuses to the media.
- e) Signing of actual agreement for a ceasefire and a consensus on the peace talks agenda. Bishops to oversee the ceasefire and to open the peace talks.

The Coalition for Peace and other peace advocates would be committed to supporting the bishops throughout the process, in terms of conceptualization and operationalization of the peace campaign, where it is feasible on the national, regional, or provincial levels.

Counterpart Efforts of the Peace Constituency.

The primary mechanism of support for the call for ceasefire and peace negotiations — and an actual alternative to the war system — would be the Peace Zones to be established on the regional and provincial levels. These would be non-war zones declared by the communities themselves within the zones, communities

which would then lobby for local ceasefire and peace negotiations (paralleled to simultaneous efforts on the national level). Areas which are already committed as peace zones are Naga City, and communities in Commonwealth, Taguig, and Mandaluyong. Such peace zones would furthermore mobilize their constituencies around local issues which can be resolved by the community's collective peace-building action. Sectors to be tapped would be the church and school communities, local governments, community organizations, etc., aside from the local military and NPA.

From Ceasefire and Talks to Beyond

It is envisioned that the negotiations will bear an agreement on the political conditions for peace, and will be followed by an implementation stage, when all ideological groups will help create such conditions in a renewal of people power. Beyond that, a people empowered by their peace-building gains can formulate a comprehensive vision for our society, including the socio-economic conditions which will uphold a just and lasting peace.

KASARINLAN

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BENEDICT ANDERSON is Professor of Government and Asian Studies at Cornell University in New York and Director of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program. He is author of **Java in Time of Revolution** and **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism**. He also co-authored with Ruchira Mendiones, **In the Mirror, Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era**.

YOSHIKO NAGANO lectures at Koryo International College in Japan. She was a Visiting Research Fellow of the TWSC and author of one of the Center's ThirdWorld Papers entitled "Share Tenancy and Landless Rural Workers: Reflections on the Feudalism and Capitalism Debate."

EDEL GARCELLANO lectures at the Department of English and Comparative Literature in UP. He is known in academe and the intellectual circles for his poetry, literary criticism and philosophical essays on the impact of contemporary events on literature. He has authored several books, namely, **Ficción, Collection, and First Person, Plural**.

VIOLETA LOPEZ-GONZAGA has a doctorate in Anthropology and is presently the Director of the Social Research Center, University of St. La Salle, Bacolod City in Negros Occidental.