



PROCEEDINGS

On the Mindanao Reform Agenda

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
WITH SENATOR AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.
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UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN

TERESA S. ENCARNACION TADEM (DIRECTOR, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): On behalf of the Third World Studies Center (TWSC), I welcome you all to our roundtable discussion on developing a legislative and reform agenda to achieve sustainable peace and development in Mindanao. As noted in the concept paper, Mindanao is beset with very complex development problems as characterized by extreme poverty, a resilient insurgency waged by different revolutionary groups, breakdown of the rule of law, clan violence, among others. Different political administrations have tried to address these problems but the record showed that their approaches have not decisively resolved the said conflicts. Our major concern is how to achieve a durable peace based on justice and a development program that is most sensitive to the needs of the poor, especially the Muslims and the *Lumads* (the indigenous peoples). Thus, it is pertinent that we review again the development programs.

The objectives of the forum are the following: provide an overview of the social, economic, and political situation of Mindanao; identify the key development problems of Mindanao; develop a reform agenda based on a working paper; and, firm up the working paper by way of critique. We look forward therefore to the presentation and discussion as a way by which we can open up further venues for contributing as well as collaborating in future activities towards peace and development in Mindanao.

PROSPERO E. DE VERA III (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, NATIONAL COLLEGE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): This discussion really has been long overdue. About a year ago, we started putting together—when I say “we,” this is a group of academics, local officials in Mindanao, and Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr.—a couple of thoughts on a very simple and readable material that will serve as a starting point for discussion on reforms in Mindanao. The think-piece on this one was actually produced by Dr. Fermin Adriano who is here with us. We started to throw ideas around. After we put it together, we presented it to the Senator. It went through about three revisions. After the series of discussions, not much of the original think-piece has remained. Originally, this material was supposed to be for the 2004 elections. We were planning at that time to put it out as the Mindanao Platform of Senator Pimentel’s campaign for the presidency. The original idea included provisions on what a Pimentel presidency would prioritize as far as Mindanao is concerned. Of course, events have overtaken the original material and what we have now is really a simple, readable first step as a framework for Mindanao. It is not intended to capture everything about Mindanao or propose a rather extensive solution. What it does is give a ten-point agenda that can be further developed, not only by the Senator but by stakeholders and interest groups. What we are hoping this morning is that—thanks to Action for Economic Reforms (AER) and TWSC—to bring in academics from UP, particularly those who are interested in Mindanao, to put their own thoughts and critique the material. Hopefully, we get some consensus that those who are here will support and disseminate to their respective constituencies, their friends and other groups. We intentionally wanted a small group to discuss this. We did not want a big forum where we will discuss again the problems of Mindanao. We wanted to get a select group of practitioners, academics and friends to put their thoughts into it.

AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR. (SENATE MINORITY LEADER): I was really hoping that Aminah Rasul, along with the rest of us who are here who are concerned about Mindanao, should put our heads together in an attempt to develop a cohesive, coherent and doable formula to set right what is wrong with government attitude towards Mindanao. I would like to say that these ten steps are not the Ten Commandments. These are actually ten suggested steps for the purpose of having a national discussion of how we should proceed regarding the problems

faced by Mindanao today. So let me begin by saying that—and this is a deeply held concern of mine—I believe that it is only by adopting a federal system for the entire country, not only for Mindanao incidentally, that we can speed up the economic development of the nation. Through a federal system, we can institute a basis for a just and lasting peace in Mindanao and for the entire country for that matter. I am apprehensive that many people in Luzon and in the Visayas look at Mindanao as a distant place, as though whatever is happening in Mindanao does not affect those who are in Visayas and Luzon. They forget that when the government spends P4.5 million pesos a day for ammunition alone in a full-scale war in Mindanao, the whole country is deprived of development funds that could otherwise be used for schools, for books, medicines, and others. It all goes to spending for bullets. In other words, the attempt to settle the problem of Mindanao once and for all is not sincere. However, even though I believe that the federal system of government is not the final solution to all our problems, I still would like to see a federal system in our country. There will be four federal states in Luzon (northern and central Luzon, Bicol, and southern Tagalog), three in the Visayas (eastern, western and central Visayas), and then three in Mindanao (northern, southern and the Bangsamoro).

Why is it important that we must have a Bangsamoro federal state? Because it has been articulated by many Moro and Muslim intellectuals. Among other things, they fear the extinction—there is no better way to put it—of the Muslim or Islamic culture if the present system of government persists where central government imposes its own cultural desires and policies, even among the Muslim tribes in Mindanao. Now, my proposal to have a federal state of the Moro peoples in Mindanao has been met with some criticisms because of the presence of three major Moro tribes in Mindanao—the Tausugs, the Maranaos and the Maguindanaos. I said that the idea of having autonomous regions within a federal state is not incompatible with the purpose of establishing a federal state. For the Moros of Mindanao in the Bangsamoro federal state, it is possible to have autonomous regions to address the concerns of the tribes in that area. That is as far as the adoption of the federal system.

The number two proposal is to pursue peace in Mindanao. It stands to reason that if there is no just and lasting peace in Mindanao, then how can we talk of development? Again, I want to speak very candidly that the situation of the war in Mindanao is complicated by

the fact that it is not a purely domestic problem. There is a lot of external intervention, not the least of which is those of the United States (US). That is why they are having the *Balikatan* (shouldering the load together) military exercise in Carmen, Cotabato, which is essentially an act of provocation. A situation can easily escalate into a shooting war between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the *Balikatan* exercisers. That said, I would like to say that there are supposed to be some advantages for the locals when the *Balikatan* exercise ends. They will claim that the Americans have fixed the roads and conducted medical missions and so on. However, these are only very superficial improvements, if at all. I would rather see the institution of a just and lasting peace in Mindanao. I think what the Americans really want is to come to a situation where they will have no other alternative but to crush militarily any Muslim rebel group operating in Mindanao as part of the so-called global war on terrorism. The danger here however is the lumping together of all the rebel groups in Mindanao as one terrorist organization, which is not correct. The MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) are armed rebel groups that have a political agenda. My call is that since they have a political agenda, we should address the problem politically, not through a military or police solution. The Abu Sayyaf is different. The Abu Sayyaf—I apologize to those who are partisan or who see the group differently—is a bunch of hoodlums and terrorists who have no legitimate political agenda other than to make life miserable not only for the Christians but also for the Muslims. They are exacerbating problems that already exist between the two rebel groups in Mindanao. They are bandits, therefore they have become a police problem, which means that if they refuse to surrender, then to exterminate them is a legitimate act of police defense.

I think we should also have a healthy respect for the fact that the US is the only superpower in the world today. Whether we like or not, they will intervene in other countries' concerns around the world because they want to maintain the predominance of US interests. Therefore, the best way to do that is to rechannel their warlike propensities to more peaceful ends. My other friends are surprised when I say that the Americans should be allowed in the peace efforts in Mindanao. That is the reason why I said we should use the American initiative to look for peace in Mindanao, not to engage in war. Let us try to toss the idea of getting the Washington-based United States Institute of Peace (USIP) as conduit of the American effort towards

looking for the possibilities of peace in Mindanao. The US has a checkered history of success and failure in brokering peace around the world. One of their, I might say, successes to some extent is the fact that they have at least minimized the conflict between the Irish Republican Army in Ireland and the Irish government. Though there are still skirmishes every now and then, I think in Northern Ireland, by and large, they were able to institute the basis for a treaty that called for the establishment of peace. Maybe this is one example where we can maximize [US intervention]. I raised that issue on the Senate floor and adopted a resolution. Because of which, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage also endorsed the idea. As a result, the USIP has been coming here back and forth. I told them when they met me that we also have to address the problem of Malaysian involvement, aside from the US. Many obstacles along the way are still to be threshed out. However, the overall thrust of my suggestion is that the Americans should have a role in searching for peace rather than in waging war in Mindanao.

In this study that Dr. de Vera and our friends, Dr. Fermin Adriano and Dr. Filomeno Sta. Ana III, and the others have done for us, we found out that there are a lot of areas in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the other conflict areas in Mindanao where the delivery of socioeconomic development projects have been stymied or delayed or, shall we say, neglected. In one of my conversations with Governor Parouk Hussin, he told me that there are official development assistance (ODA) projects for Mindanao, especially for ARMM, that were diverted to other places. I begin to question that. The average annual per capita income and human development in specific provinces especially in Muslim Mindanao will show that there really is a need for development projects. And I would like to mention along this line that the senator speaking before you today is the only senator from Mindanao, which makes my fight a very lonely fight. When the President announced her Cabinet members, not a single person from Mindanao was included in the high-ranking positions of the Cabinet.

We have to prioritize provision of basic amenities and services in the poor and conflict-affected communities. What do people in Mindanao need? Number one is peace. Number two, livelihood opportunities. Third, water. Many of our people, especially those in the Muslim communities, drink from open wells. If there is a plantation in the vicinity and they are using all kinds of pesticides, the

pesticide residue will eventually go to the water source. Therefore, it is very important that we have all these facilities.

What is amazing is that many people in Mindanao still give peace a chance. In fact, 53 percent of the people who have been surveyed say that they do not want to take sides. While the statistics is probably not too good, it indicates the basic desire of the people to have peace in that area. They want a functioning government that can bring about peace and development in Mindanao.

Mindanao has to its advantage the production of agri-fisheries. From General Santos to South Cotabato, Mindanao controls the tuna industry in the Philippines. We also supply most of the tuna requirements of Japan. The large airport facility in General Santos City which the Americans constructed before 1991 hoping that the bases could be retained now serves as a point where many of our cargo planes could take off for destinations abroad carrying fish products. I hope that we can continue doing that because we do have a lot of agricultural products from Mindanao. In terms of production, as far as *palay* (rice) is concerned, we produce 24.78 percent; corn, 60.3 percent; coconut, 57.24 percent; pineapple, 87 percent; banana, 73 percent; mango, 17 percent; and coffee, 72 percent. It is clear that we have so many resources in Mindanao that could be maximized for the good of the country.

The big, Filipino-run fish conglomerates have asked me some time ago, during the Estrada administration, to create a new department, the Department of Fisheries. They thought that the fisheries sector should be given a separate attention. President Joseph Estrada agreed with that proposal so I filed a Senate bill to that effect. Somehow, I think, Senator Edgardo Angara did not want the idea for it would split the Department of Agriculture; so it was not pursued. In all honesty, I think it is a good idea to have a fisheries department. Not only it would give due focus on the fisheries sector but even on the seaweeds industry which is a good source of all kinds of medicine and food supplements.

I would like to focus now on the need to support Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) to expand the markets of Mindanao. The BIMP-EAGA was historically a trading location where Filipino Muslims mostly interacted with their counterparts elsewhere, thus we should continue and enhance it.

Then we must have an extensive peace education campaign so that our young people will understand that a just and lasting peace among the peoples of Mindanao is to their advantage. I hope we can somehow integrate this idea into our school system so that there will be more interaction between Muslims, *Lumads* and the Christians in Mindanao. I hope that this can become a nationwide agenda.

We would like also to propose the creation of a Mindanao Development Council (MEDCO). Right now, there is already a council but with very limited powers. It seems to be ignored in the projection of what is good for Mindanao.

Before I close let me mention that as part of my work as legislator for Mindanao, I had organized the Mindanao Caucus of the Congressmen and Senators during my previous term. We still had Senator Robert Barbers then. Now, I am the only one left. Still, I will continue with that Mindanao Caucus. I already talked about this with former Senator Barbers and Gerry Salapuddin, and with other Muslim leaders and legislators, including the 49 [congressional representatives], Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

The last pages of our paper have to do with the projects that congressional representatives have identified as priority measures for their own particular districts and for the entire Mindanao. We would like to pursue this. The only problem however is that when it comes to budgetary discussions the unity among the Mindanao congressional representatives disappear. Each has their own agenda for their own district. That is fine. However, let us also look at the needs of the entire Mindanao. If the representatives from Mindanao will come together, we can have an influence in the making of the budget. A 49-member Mindanao bloc in congress is a sizable vote that can really influence the outcome of the budget.

AMINAH RASUL-BERNARDO (CONVENOR, PHILIPPINE COUNCIL FOR ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY): First, if we are going to have a peace and development plan for Mindanao, we ask ourselves the question: Is this what the peoples of Mindanao need and want? Our experience over the past few decades is that the national government creates the plan. We have very little inputs into the infrastructure plan, the investment plan and any other kind of plan that government wants to implement. The latest national plan is the *Mindanao Natin* (Our Mindanao), which was launched two years ago at the Mindanao Leaders' Forum. I remember that very distinctly because President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo talked

about it and formally launched it at this gathering of Muslim leaders from Congress down to mayors, to those of civil society. When she was talking about the *Mindanao Natin* people were whispering all over the hall because nobody knew what it was. The ARMM government did not know what the *Mindanao Natin* was, neither did the mayors. When we looked finally at the points raised in the plan, it turns out it was really a repackaging of everything that was being implemented in Mindanao and then calling it *Mindanao Natin*. This is the kind of planning process that derails the search for peace, the search for solution to conflict, and the pace of development. If there is going to be any kind of development planning, it has to come largely from the people affected, from the stakeholders themselves, whether they are common citizens, rebel groups or leaders. I think the proposal of Senator Pimentel, which we will really bring this discussion down to our groups in Mindanao, will address this issue of lack of consultation in the creation of national plans.

Let us talk about where the resources will come from. First, national budgets. Unfortunately, the percentage of national budget that goes to the ARMM is very ridiculous. As of 2002, ARMM got less than one percent of the national budget. However, statistics that are shown by national government show that Mindanao, particularly ARMM, budget is increasing. True it is increasing but two things: one, it is still much, much less than what is required; and two, when you put in the defense budget, of course, we get a big share. I have seen presentations where they show that Mindanao actually gets a higher percentage even compared to some areas in Luzon and Visayas, but then what percentage of the military defense budget goes to us? I think we have to have some transparency in the presentation of statistics. The share of Mindanao vis-à-vis the national budget definitely has to be remedied.

The other resource, of course, is the ODA that Senator Pimentel has mentioned. Again, two things: one is the issue of where and how the decisions are made, and which areas and projects to fund. Generally, the lack of consultation in the development plan causes an imbalance when you are looking at the ODA because the multilateral and the bilateral [institutions] will pick up first from the priorities identified and set by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the national government. Then once they have decided to do that, the bilateral institutions make their own decisions. What they want to fund is based on their priority. So the question is:

does the national government and the donor agency have the same priority as the stakeholders? Sometimes no. I have had occasion to advise both a multilateral and a bilateral project for Muslim Mindanao and we had consultations. A lot of the people that we met talked about greater investment in human resource development, specifically women, so that they could be better trained, have more access to resources, and become a force in their own communities. Sadly, the resources that should have gone into strengthening women and women's projects never really did materialize. The other thing that Muslim Mindanao was asking for is Islamic education to strengthen the *madrasahs* (Islamic schools) so that it could be a catalyst for change and to strengthen education in general. However, when you look at the percentage that went into the training of teachers, into strengthening what the constituencies thought was necessary, they were not that big. Funds from multilateral and bilateral institutions went into infrastructures—maybe because it is easier to see your accomplishment when it is a building rather than an improvement in human resources. Thus we really have to take a look at the focus of the ODAs, whether multilateral or bilateral, if we expect any kind of effective implementation or if we expect change to happen from any kind of Mindanao development plan.

The third issue that I wanted to look at, if we really do want sustainable peace and development in Mindanao, is to really look at the political situation at the ground level. If you want peace and development you have to have a strong foundation for the respect for law, the rule of law, and a strong civil society. In effect, strong democratization processes. This is not happening in Mindanao. And those of us who are still rooted in the area will agree that instead of moving towards democratization, we are actually moving towards reestablishing feudalism. Fiefdoms are mushrooming, not just in Muslim Mindanao and the areas of the *Lumad* where we are no strangers to fiefdoms, but in enclaves where you least expect it. In enclaves where you have highly-educated, Western-educated leaders, they are developing their own feudal blocs now. What are we going to do about this?

Next, let us talk about business, economic development and Muslim Mindanao. Today there is this impression that Muslims will forever be the poorest of the poor because we have no business acumen—that business will not prosper in our areas. That is a false concept. I have already written a paper which has come out in a book that looks at economic development and business in the Muslim areas

prior to martial law. Clearly, the Muslim provinces—Lanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi—were progressive prior to martial law. Sulu, for instance, had more banks than Camiguin. Before 1974, Philippine Airlines flew twice a day to Sulu. We had American tourists come in, stay for the weekend, and then fly out. We had a working telephone system. The rate of provision of electricity and water in Sulu was higher than some provinces in Luzon, including Pangasinan, and that is all part of the data you can find in the National Statistics Office. So what happened? You had martial law, you had the attack on Sulu, you had massive loss of infrastructure, therefore you had capital flight and brain drain. So you lost all of the necessary factors to develop the economy and to strengthen business. We lost all our businessmen. They went to Zamboanga, Cebu and Greenhills. Five years ago, when I make my presentation, I used to say there are Muslim communities now in all provinces except Batanes. Then Butch Abad told me, “Aminah, you are wrong, there is now a community in Batanes.” They have been leaving our own areas because we do not have the infrastructure, support, and peace and security to develop our own businesses. Instead, we are enriching your provinces and cities that are outside our own. If we are going to have a Mindanao peace and development plan, to be truly sustainable, we have to bring back what was taken out of the Muslim areas: the necessary infrastructure, the peace and security. Bring back the brains and bring back the capital and that will now lead you to the financial institutions that are ill-equipped and unwilling to bring in the credit to the areas where you have conflict—Muslim Mindanao and the areas of the *Lumads*.

Then there is the issue of corruption and accountability of local governments and their officials. Even if you bring in all the resources, all the funds, even if you have a very workable and sustainable development plan, this is worth zero if your local governments do not know how to implement a plan. Or, they know exactly what to do to implement a *personal* development plan. I think, these two things have not been really given much attention. I know we talk about the issue of corruption constantly because this is true not just for us in Mindanao but all over. Maybe corruption at the higher levels may be more massive than whatever it is we can dream of in Muslim Mindanao. But we still have to address this. Therefore, in a development plan, we have to focus on human resources development, not just on the communities and sectors, but especially for those who will lead the development effort—the local governments, the ARMM government and all of those who monitor and supervise the development plan.

We were lucky during my mother's (former Senator Santanina Rasul) first term in the Senate. With her, we had Senator Pimentel, Senator Mamintal Tamano, and an adopted Mindanaoan, Senator Vicente Paterno. During their term, they came up with a bill, which almost made it, and this was the creation of the Mindanao Economic Development Authority, which is basically the NEDA for Mindanao. This would have brought in the government officials plus the private sector into an agency that would focus on integrating all of the development planning for Mindanao. This was passed in both Houses but President Corazon Aquino vetoed it, largely because two national government agencies were very critical of the supposed overlaps—NEDA and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

I hope that when we try and support this sustainable development plan for Mindanao that we could also look at the creation of this body that would truly integrate all of the regions, if not by law maybe through the assistance of the ODAs. It is going to be MEDCO and the regional development councils (RDCs) coming together and really having a structure. I know that the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) and the non-ARMM social fund each have a monitoring committee. But can we not bring everybody together so that we know exactly what each one of us is doing as far development goes?

Lastly, about the USIP, I was a Senior Fellow there from 2001 to 2002. I begged Senator Pimentel to come and speak at a forum because he was able to give the policy analysts who joined us in this conference his idea about peace and development in Muslim Mindanao. Since then I think things have gotten worse because the US government had its own agenda. As Senator Pimentel said the idea seems to be to crush the insurgency. It seems to be the easiest thing to do, but we all know that it is not. As of now, things are changing because the US national government has seen that the international community no longer believes in the rationale for the "coalition of the willing." I think those of us in Mindanao who are and will be directly affected by their intervention in Mindanao should come out and be more vocal about US intervention and where we think they can intervene that would really lead to stronger peace and security in the region.

ABDULLAH DIMAPORO (CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, SECOND DISTRICT, LANA DEL NORTE): The national interest is very much affected

by the lack of policy until now for Muslim Mindanao. We really do not know what we are addressing and how we are addressing the Muslim problem. In a recent meeting with Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar Purisima, he was looking at the efficiencies or inefficiencies of government, on how we can make the pie bigger, and how we can create wealth. He was talking of several projects, but most of these are centered on Metro Manila, none in Mindanao. I suggested to him that he should look at ways of developing Mindanao as a means of solving the peace and order problem so that he can attract more investors in the Philippines.

The peace and order problem that we are now facing in Mindanao is affecting not only Mindanao but also the entire country and the entire region in Asia. We can see that this has an effect on attracting investments to the country, not only to Mindanao. If we are to pursue the opportunities that we have in Mindanao, we must address first the Muslim issue. And I think what we need is a strong voice coming from the government and private sector, and this is where you play an important role. There are many non-government organizations now addressing our problems in Mindanao. I hope that someone like Aminah Rasul could integrate all of this.

We, in the House of Representatives, and Senator Pimentel can unite ourselves. During a meeting with Speaker [Jose] De Venecia and President Macapagal-Arroyo, we told them that if they want us to be effective in trying to find opportunities and solutions to the problems in Mindanao, we should be given responsible positions in the House of Representatives. Thus we have Basilan Representative Gerry Salapuddin as Deputy House Speaker, Sulu (first district) Representative Amin Hussin as deputy majority leader, Sulu (second district) Representative Munir Arbison as chair of the Committee on Muslim Affairs, Lanao del Sur Representative Faysah Dumarpa as chair of the Committee on Social Services, Maguindanao (second district) Representative Simeon Datumanong as chair of the Committee on Justice, and Lanao del Sur Representative Benasing Macarambon Jr. as chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Food. Maguindanao (first district) Representative Baisendig Dilangalen is new but I understand that she is being given important positions by the minority. Tawi-Tawi Representative Anuar Abubakar is new, as well, but he is getting membership in committees that he wants (such as the Committee on Higher Technical Education, Committee on National Cultural Minorities, Committee on National Defense and Security and

Committee on Public Works and Highways). We have two party lists representatives from Mindanao—Mujiv Hataman of AMIN (*Anak Mindanao* [Sons of Mindanao]) and Acmad Tomawis of ALIF (*Ang Laban ng Indiginong Filipino* [The Struggle of Indigenous Filipinos]) who is vice-chair of the Committee on National Cultural Minorities.

We Muslim leaders must also unite so that we could be heard. We used to have strong voices with the likes of Salipada Pendatun and my father, Mohammad Ali Dimaporo, and we have been heard. If we can be united we can have a better voice.

JULKIPLIM. WADI (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): I received with a certain sense of ambivalence the invitation to react to Senator Pimentel. For one, who would dare react to one of the most respected leaders of our country, one who has followed the Mindanao issue and who knows well the Mindanao problem? On the other hand, my ambivalence is really dictated by the fact that I have seen this kind of enthusiasm. We can compare it with the enthusiasm during President [Fidel] Ramos's time as far as addressing the subject of peace and development is concerned. In fact, some of us here in the university had that sense of euphoria when we participated and helped in the articulations of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). We came up with some studies, only to find out that after the Ramos's term, the whole peace dividend collapsed like a house of cards. And we know what happened with the all-out war policy of the next administration. This rhetoric of peace and development had not been pursued relentlessly for the past several years after Ramos. That is why the peace process had not really gone that far, thus making room for other actors to come in because the government is not taking the peace problem seriously.

I have followed from a distance the project of Senator Pimentel to transform the unitary structure of the government into a federalized one. I firmly believe in Senator Pimentel's project. My only concern is that it has not really moved forward that strongly. And now I learn that it is still the top priority in the proposal he presented concerning the economic development of Mindanao.

Our support for the need to transform the current unitary structure of the government to a federal one is really dictated by the fact that the problem in Mindanao, particularly Muslim Mindanao, is highly political, and that part of this political problem is dictated by

structural problem between the national government and Mindanao. It is only by transforming this unitary form of government to a federal one that we can stabilize the relation. For instance, I did a very modest survey of the number of political tiers and administrative units that have been established since the American colonial regime. From around 1899 to the time of President Estrada in 1999, what the government had done was to create and to change political tiers and administrative units in Mindanao. We insist in coming up with palliatives political and administrative units to somehow stabilize national-local relations and we feel this will continue unless the structure is transformed from a unitary to a federal set-up of government. In the present peace process, my fear is that the government is embarking or is focusing on the Bangsamoro Development Authority to serve as the conduit of development projects, particularly in some MILF-controlled areas. This is not something new. Even in the time of President Arroyo, to somehow stabilize the relations, the trend of putting up tiers and units has not changed. To me this will not really solve the problem.

Second, if you will advance economic development without putting up the necessary structures, there is no guarantee that this development will really go to the intended beneficiaries. We all know that the present set-up of an autonomous region in Mindanao really is not enough to provide stability. What's the guarantee, that if say war would erupt, that this development would not be affected? There were many cases for the past several years where development projects were used, and in fact, transformed into instruments of war.

Articulations on federalism in the past have been not to federalize the whole country but were dictated by the need to separate from the country. Now the articulation is not only for Mindanao but also for the whole country. This is something very positive. If the central government is not really capable of providing control and authority over a part of our country, then there is need to decentralize authorities and powers to local areas, especially to Muslim areas. It is only by federalizing that we can stabilize national-local relations.

I would like to reiterate certain points to maybe salvage this lack of enthusiasm on the part of the government as far as the issue of federalism is concerned. Despite the lobby and the proposal of Senator Pimentel, it was only quite recently that House Speaker Jose de Venecia adopted the agenda for federalism. Their desire was simply to transform the government from a presidential to a parliamentary one. Shifting

from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government will not answer the whole Mindanao question. This will only address the problem of separation of powers and not the issue of division of power, which is really a national-local relation. We should address first the need to stabilize national-local relations before we can even address the need to stabilize the relations among the three major powers of the government.

Another point: add to the lack of enthusiasm and sense of urgency President Arroyo's indifference to this issue since it is coming from the outside and not her own idea. In other words, if there will be some questions on this, she will not take seriously this agenda. The issue of federalism was set aside when the business community started asking her administration to address business issues. And unfortunately, Speaker de Venecia acceded to the desire of the President. To me this is a setback, for this is the time by which we can salvage this lack of enthusiasm and promote the urgency to federalize the country. It is good we still have somebody left in the Senate like Senator Pimentel and some NGOs that keep on pushing the issue of federalism.

OPEN FORUM

ASIRI J. ABUBAKAR (PROFESSOR, ASIAN CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): Talking about sustainable peace and development in Mindanao has been going on for a long, long time. The problems in Mindanao from the time of the Spaniards down to the present regime are still there. Perhaps the solutions are not yet found. Look at education, for instance. Education in the Philippines including Mindanao education did not emanate from the moral values of the Filipinos themselves. The Mindanao peoples in particular have their own moral values from the time before the coming of the Spaniards. It is a borrowed education from the West, planted on the Filipinos who were dominated by foreigners from the time of the Spaniards down to the present.

Looking back at the educational history of Mindanao, when the people of Mindanao were recruited for education during Spaniards' time, many ran away to the mountains and became *remontados* because they thought that their values would be developed into something that was not known to them. Again, when the Americans came it was almost the same situation. So unless educational reform is also introduced in Mindanao, I think the same situation will

continue. And educational reform should include not only physical reforms but should include moral value reform in education.

The source of legal system in the Philippines as a whole, and in Mindanao in particular, is based on civil legal system. The customs and traditions of the *Lumads*, Muslims and other inhabitants of Mindanao were not taken into consideration in the formulation of law. The Muslims have their legal system, which could be a part of the legal source in the legislation of Mindanao, yet ARMM has no Islamic legal system. Although there is an ARMM, the political system in the Philippines emanates from the central government; the autonomous region cannot do big things without the approval of Malacañang.

The three-year term limit of elected officials in Mindanao also runs counter to all the economic planning being done for Mindanao. If we, for instance, take into consideration the so-called short-, medium-, and long-term economic planning, what can a three-year elected official contribute to this? They only plan for the next election not for economic development of their constituents.

In talking about sustainable peace and development in Mindanao, we have to consider educational reform, the legal system reform, the political reform as well as the economic reform not only in general terms but it should be spelled out.

AMINIHILDA J. SANGCOPAN (CHIEF OF STAFF, OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE MUJIV HATAMAN, *ANAK MINDANAO* [AMIN] PARTY-LIST): We would like to give some responses to the ten steps to sustainable peace and development presented by Senator Pimentel. The first one would be on the delivery of economic development projects in ARMM and the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. The long history of conflict in these communities had discouraged potential investors. Based on our consultations, not only that there is a lack of potential investors but also there is discrimination against Muslims in terms of employment. For that reason we are filing a bill prohibiting and penalizing discrimination, not only against the Moro people, but also against the indigenous peoples (IPs) considering the tri-people composition of Mindanao: the Christian settlers, the *Lumads* or the *katutubo* (indigenous people) and the Moro people.

On the issue of understanding among the tri-people of Mindanao and conducting a serious and extensive peace education campaign, we are about to file another priority bill and that is the inclusion of the Mindanao history, giving more emphasis on the struggle of the Moro

people and the indigenous people in the study of Philippine history. At present, Philippine history books do not have chapters on the Moro history or the Mindanaoan struggle. If the history of the Mindanaonons would be included in the study of Philippine history, giving more emphasis on Moro and the *katutubo* struggle, then maybe we could bridge the gap between the majority Christians and the Moros and the IPs. This should be part of the curriculum. Presently we have drafted a Mindanao Peace and Development Act where we introduced the concept of a tri-people framework, giving consideration to the Christian settlers, the Moro people, and the indigenous peoples. If approved, this bill would provide a policy framework for Mindanao peace and development and the eventual creation of a Mindanao Peace and Development Commission with representatives from the tri-people of Mindanao, civil society, and so on.

MIRIAM CORONEL FERRER (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): The question of reform of the security sector is very much related to the question of transforming the economy from conflict to a peace-based one. The economy feeding on the conflict—all the industries that support the conflict including, for example, illegal arms trade, smuggling activities, kidnapping, drug trafficking and so on—provide employment. After all, the Abu Sayyaf, being part of the kidnapping “industry,” provides employment for out-of-school youth so that they can have some kind of life where they earn. To improve agriculture and the legitimate industries is basic. But how do you address directly the economic activities that feed on the conflict? Then you need the rule of law, you need people in the security sector to do its job.

About the intervention earlier from our friends from AMIN, I share the goal to integrate the history of Mindanao but maybe let us emphasize not just the struggle. We should emphasize the peace-building initiatives so that there can be a change in the framework of resistance. While it is part of our history with all the wars that we had to wage, let us also try to build on the values of peace and emphasize good examples in the planned history book to develop peace-building and peaceful means to advance social transformation.

MASHUR BIN-GHALIB JUNDAM (PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): I would like to

comment on Professor Wadi's intervention. Yes, I support him when he said that the government is not taking seriously the Mindanao problem. For me, however, it is not a matter of not taking seriously the Mindanao problem but on how sincere that government is in dealing with the Mindanao problem. The implementation of the Tripoli Agreement is not yet through, but Nur Misuari, the signatory of the peace agreement, is now in jail. The second phase of the peace agreement signed in 1996 is not yet implemented, but the Arroyo government already wants to be a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) even when the MNLF is an observer of the same organization. Now it is negotiating with the MILF, which it calls a friend of terrorists. How do you expect them to talk in the negotiating table? Where is the sincerity of the government in that, Senator Pimentel?

Professor Wadi also mentioned that there is a need to decentralize. That is a good idea but we, in Maranao People's Development Center, Incorporated (MARADECA), think that if it is possible for you, Mr. Senator, to draft a bill that the election of senators be conducted by regional representation. Mindanao will elect their own senator, Visayas and Luzon will do the same. At present, there are no Muslim senators in the Senate. Aminah and Parouk Hussin are nowhere to be found in the list of elected senators. I am hoping that in the future, we can have an election where there is representation of Mindanao and the Visayas.

FERMIN ADRIANO (FREELANCE CONSULTANT): Whatever I'm going to say represents my personal view rather than the institution I am temporarily affiliated right now. My comments are actually divided into three: the first one is on the issue of federal government, the next is on the issue of conflict in the area, and the last is on conflict, terrorism and the role of the US. I think these three things are interrelated.

The first one, federalism is a good idea but it has to be further worked out. As Professor Wadi said, a lot of questions are still left hanging. I think there are more substantive issues than the time frame. One has to look at how the resources will be distributed. This will determine whether federalism will work out. If it is going to be the same federal government as we have in the Local Government Code, the net beneficiary, just like in the UP system, will be National Capital Region and the surrounding areas because they generate the greatest revenues in the country. Without working out in detail the economics of

federalism, you will find out that ARMM, Moro areas or whatever will be left out in the division of revenues or income. Where will their development funds come from in terms of fostering peace and development in these areas? That has to be worked out not only by the political scientists but also by economists, tax experts, and others. In other words, there is a long task to be done before you can satisfy me and other people that the federal form of government is worth going into.

Another main problem aside from conflict is the issue of local governance. There is just so much warlordism. Even the Western-educated guys go back from their Western education just to create their own fiefdoms as mentioned earlier. So you propose federalism, but when you have warlordism at the ground level what are you going to do to really put substance to autonomy, to really put substance to empowerment of the people? I was reminded by a book by Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, where he said that there are two things that you have to be reminded of: that countries prior to their development experience a certain stage of absolute dictatorship or absolute monarchy before they develop as the cases of Spain, England, US, Russia, China, Taiwan, and others. They did not fragment. They in fact centralized to be able somehow to stop this cause of warlordism and feudalism.

We are talking about federalism at the national level but people there are talking about basic needs: peace, security, sanitary toilets, elementary school, and potable water. These are the things that people need and want. The development and political stability approach that can be used is a chicken and egg problem. You put those development projects as a confidence-building measure between the government and the rebel groups, so that somehow you can sit down and be able to talk peace. Without that I do not think you are going to get much headway in terms of peace negotiation. Therefore, that kind of thinking about federalism has to be balanced with addressing the real needs of the people, because in the final analysis, we look at federalism as one of the key approaches in forging peace not as a panacea. There are so many things to be done at the grassroots level that should be done now instead of waiting for a federal government to come in before doing it.

But what really brought down the Mindanao economy, as highlighted by Aminah, is conflict. And if you analyze conflict, there are two common elements that you will see. One is the presence of a large pool of unemployed out-of-school youth. That is a sure formula for conflict.

The second one is competition for scarce resources existing in the area. Somewhere, somehow you have to address that. When you talk about large, unemployed youth, what immediately comes to mind are livelihood projects, education, and so on. Those are the key interventions that you want. You cannot address the root causes of conflict without addressing those two common denominators that you find all throughout the world in conflict-affected communities.

Thirdly, on conflict, there are chances of success in conflict-affected communities. Conflict-affected communities are not homogenous communities. They are heterogeneous lots. There are degrees of peace and unpeace. There are degrees of security and insecurity. Therefore one has to look, come out with a typology of conflict-affected communities before one can come out with a good intervention or development program. The problem in conflict-affected communities has been aggravated by the extensive presence of drug trafficking. It has become a major business in the area. There are rumors that some local government officials are involved, all the way from Central Mindanao down to the Zamboanga archipelago and Sulu. It is a major problem in these areas. Even in remote places like Talayan, South Cotabato there is a drug problem, which again, the government needs badly to address.

Lastly, conflict, terrorism and the US. I think the major concern of the US is about terrorism. And as Senator Pimentel said, there are groups, which are connected to terrorist elements, and there are groups who have legitimate political grievances. One has to be able to establish that. Of course, the issue now because of Maria Ressa's *Seeds of Terror* and other publications is that there is really a direct link between the leadership of the MILF and some terrorist organizations. How far does the current leadership have connections with terrorism? The US is very particular about this. Of course, the MILF has been saying that they have no link with terrorist organizations. One can say that it can be isolated in terms of just the local commanders having links with these terrorists. Still, this will affect the very results of the peace negotiations itself. Because if somehow the terrorist elements are there, there is no way that the MILF or the government can guarantee that the provisions of any peace agreement that will be signed can be implemented.

Lastly, the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) panel has a clear idea on what they want to do but I do not think the President has one. It is a politics of plodding on her part. She addresses issues when they arise in the media rather than anticipating them,

rather than have a consistent vision and agenda for peace building in Mindanao.

JULKIPLI M. WADI: I would like to concentrate my response on the views raised by Professor Adriano. I think we are not advancing an approach of what comes first, the chicken or the egg. What we are saying is that the government has to calibrate its policy. The government representing the national leadership should have a certain vision and the idea of how to go about the problem. I agree that we have to address all those local problems—warlordism and so on. But as a government, for that government to be true to itself, it has to be in control. It has to have a certain vision of what to do rather than tell people to address their own problems. I agree with Senator Pimentel that we can start by stabilizing local-national relations. Federalism for me is a way by which we can divide the work. There are things that have to be done in the local level that can be done by local government officials without necessarily going to Malacañang.

As to the problem where to get the resources, I think in the new federal constitution there must be a provision that will allow the local or federal state to link or to network with funding agencies from the outside to develop their own economy.

At present, my view is that the government has been consistently using the Mindanao problem as an argument to justify its effort to seek assistance, say from the United States or from Japan, when in fact the assistance are not necessarily going to the poorest part of Mindanao but somewhere else. Worse, the government is actually inflating the war on terror, like calling the Abu Sayyaf terrorists, in order to call the attention of Washington, to ask for help in solving the problems in Mindanao. If only we have the right vision and policy I think it is easy to isolate and to solve the problem of local terrorism on the ground. However, the current administration is party to the globalization of terrorism in Mindanao. By inflating the threat, it has to a certain point transferred the burden of solving the problem to the Americans. The government evades the need to stabilize local-national relations.

Pursuing relentlessly the peace process can stabilize local-national relations. The the MNLF, the MILF and the Philippine government should enter into some form of tripartite partnership. In other words, we can transform the rebels into partners of peace and development. Just as what Ramos did in 1996. He transformed the enemy of the state into a partner for peace and development without firing a single shot.

Before the Estrada administration, I believe that there are already 36 ceasefire agreements signed between the GRP and the MILF. The approach of Ramos was, after taking in the MNLF, he talked with the MILF, and later on come up with a kind of partnership, and put in place all those economic programs and development in the area, then isolate the Abu Sayyaf. Now, it is not happening like that. The government, as I said one time, is addressing the problem by installment. In other words, there has to be a strong political will on the part of the national government to address the problems in Mindanao.

AMINAH RASUL-BERNARDO: Professor Jundam was talking about how plans could work with the government not being sincere. I must say that events have proven you right. There really is a question on the sincerity of government with Misuari being in jail, when no proof has really been shown to prove his guilt.

The more serious concern really is the relationship between the MILF and terrorism. A copy of the International Crisis Group (ICG) report on terrorism and the Philippines shows you, in its first two pages, the thesis of the ICG: that there is a link between the MILF and terrorism in the region. In 2001, you can ask anything from the US and you will get it as long as you add the word “terrorism.” You want support and advocacy for vitamin A, you say vitamin A makes you see at night to neutralize terrorism and you will get the money. This was the way it was in Washington, and the Philippine government made a big play about the roots of terrorism. The ICG report and all other reports including Maria Ressa’s book talk about indisputable sources linking the MILF leadership with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the al-Qaeda. If you talk to the people on the ground, nobody will dispute the fact that there is JI. But the contention is this: when two rebels who do not belong to the same camp meet, are they going to refuse each other common courtesies when they are fighting basically the same enemy? There are common courtesies but it does not mean that the groups are linked. The problem is, all of these reports coming from undisclosed sources support the contention that there is a link. The latest statement by Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita—which is really worrisome—shows the world that terrorism is really rooted already in Mindanao.

Now, for all of these protestations about terrorism in Mindanao, what have we gotten in exchange? A big thing was made of \$30 million being given by the United States, which was supposed to be coursed

through the USIP, to help in the peace process once the agreement is signed between the MILF and government. So this is your traditional carrot. Of course, \$30 million is not a small amount, but compare this to the hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance that went to other allies of the United States like Pakistan, Afghanistan and the others. Our government has been very good at shooting itself in the foot. They have now created a very bad image for us. We are now a terrorist hub but they have not gotten anywhere near the amounts that the other allies of the United States have acquired.

In a conference in Malaysia between Australian leaders and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders, there was a presentation about the economic drivers and the economic leaders of the region, including Australia. Clearly, the leaders in the region are Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia. The up and coming leaders are Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. We are with Bangladesh. When the discussion was about terrorism and regional insecurity, that is where we were at the top. Those of us who are really linked with Mindanao and know the reality should have a stronger say in the status of security in our region. Nothing good is coming out from the government's insistence that there is terrorism.

AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL JR.: I would like to thank all those who have given their comments. Certainly, they have broadened my own perspective on how to go about trying to propose a coherent program for Mindanao that will achieve both peace and development.

Indeed, consultation has to be done. We can even say that this is just the opening salvo in that attempt to consult with the people. I find this a very useful forum because you are in the academe and the multiplier effect of this discussion is certain. I cannot say the same thing if I were just to stand before politicians and talk about federalism and all that.

I think it is very important to look at the proposal to adopt the federal system not only from the perspective of political advantage but economic as well. Under a unitary system that we now have, there is only one center of development, and that is Metro Manila, where the seat of government is located. However, if you adopt a federal system, as I have proposed, you will have federal states. Immediately you create ten centers of development: Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Bicol, Southern Tagalog, Eastern Visays, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Southern Mindanao, and the *Bangsamoro*. You have three centers of development even in Mindanao alone.

The thoughts of the people here in Metro Manila, including the media, control the development of this country. Are there any media outlets elsewhere in the Philippines that are quoted, for example, regarding their opinions on many things? None. Because the center of development is in Manila and this is where people would flock to in search of the better life. This situation in fact strains the ability of government to deliver the basic services even here in Metro Manila. This is one of the things that federalism will be trying to solve. By parceling out development opportunities throughout the nation, those in the poorer sections of the country will not feel the urgency of going to Metro Manila to find a better life.

Professor Adriano pointed out how we are going to deal with the disparities in the economic capacities of the various states. That is a problem that we have to address. And Australia has shown the way. Australia has eight federal states and the economic development of the federal states are not the same; some of the federal states are poorer than others. Thus, they devised a system. They have a so-called equalization fund that is handled by the central government that will be parceled out based on the need of the various states. If one state needs road, for example, then that state will get a particular amount based on its actual need demonstrated. If a certain amount is allocated for schools or for medicine, the states cannot realign the fund for personnel development or for personnel use.

We still need to talk about many things regarding federalism, but it should not stop us from advocating an overall vision because that is the function of leadership. You must anticipate. You cannot just wait until the situation becomes ideal. Putting these structures will precisely address the basic concerns that have been pointed out because among the virtues of federalism is the principle of subsidiarity. The smaller states can do what they think they can. But you have to empower them with the necessary structures and with law. The interrelationship between the federal states, among themselves, and between themselves and the central government must be addressed in that proposal to amend the Constitution.

Despite the ambivalence of the President, I am pushing for the adoption of the federal system. Happily, Speaker de Venecia is also moving. Maybe we can push things together and somehow work out an amendment to the Constitution to adopt not only the federal system, but maybe also the parliamentary form of government subject to a debate by the national constituency. We are not proposing, as

Professor Adriano has pointed out, that the federal system is the panacea for all the ills of society. We are just trying to say that if you adopt the federal system you address the pressing problem of insurgency in Mindanao and also problems like the Oakwood mutiny. Because if you have ten federal states and there is one who will try to depose a government, there are still nine functioning all over the nation. You know one of the deleterious effects of the unitary system of government is the fact that when the Oakwood mutiny took place, the whole nation stood still, even the people in Mindanao. There were no transactions because people were worried about what will happen in Oakwood. But if we have ten federal states, even if you have war in other parts, life can still go on in other parts of the country. The people must be informed about the federal system so that we can discuss this issue with the concerned constituencies all over the nation.

ASIRI J. ABUBAKAR: I would like to emphasize that Mindanao is a favorite place of adventurous people especially during elections. I think part of this federalization project should emphasize the democratization process that should either take place before we step into federalism or right there when we go to federalism. Many people have become president or senators, with due respect to Senator Pimentel, because of *dagdag-bawas* (vote-padding and slashing) in Mindanao. Clean elections can be done because it has been done before the martial law. Massive cheating was introduced because of the reelection of the late President Marcos. Before 1969, it was of their own volition when people went to polling places to vote. Even the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) does not allow that only one or two individuals cast the votes for everybody. The military and the police also had the same attitude. When there was massive fraud in 1969 and 1970 elections, the COMELEC intervened under the late Chairman Jaime Ferrer. The COMELEC was able to do it because we have a relatively independent police, meaning the Philippine Constabulary and the armed forces. In the case of Sulu, the late Chairman Ferrer went there and told the Provincial Commander to protect the witnesses. The Nacionalista elements were not able to do anything. So if you have an honest, relatively independent police and military, it can be done, as well as if you also have an honest and relatively independent COMELEC. You cannot use the argument saying that the Muslim culture is a factor why an honest election in Mindanao cannot be done. There was a budding, relatively democratic electoral process right there in Sulu. Martial law

removed it and we have not yet restored it up to this time. Now we see some local officials electing themselves to power. That is the reality. Are we going to do the same thing under federalism?

DORACIE B. ZOLETA-NANTES (CHAIRPERSON, DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN): I just noticed that the ten steps that the Senator has laid out for attaining sustainable peace and development in Mindanao is silent on two issues that I thought are very important. The first one is the very complicated issue of agrarian transition. If you are going to look at the roots of conflicts and on the issues of development, and on what industrialization programs should be undertaken, it is very much associated with decisions that are very much influenced by land distribution, access to land, and the representation of the peasants. This is a well-known problem in Mindanao. It is the interest of the landed groups that are always placed ahead of industrialization policies.

The second issue is the ownership and access to environmental resources. The local residents and communities in Mindanao are calling the attention of the government because of increased foreign control over our natural resources. If you are going to look at peace, law implementation, development, and all these things, we need to take these things into account, because the displacement of communities and the violation of rights of women, the elderly, and the young are all rooted in these two issues. I want to ask the Senator if these two issues can be highlighted in the several steps that he is proposing.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: First, my question is, what is the realistic timetable for this? Will it be ten years, seven or five? Second, there had been two sultanate states in Mindanao. In talking to some people, I have learned that they are hoping that there should at least be two or three Muslim states—Lanao, Maguindanao, and Sulu. Can this be accommodated? Third, when I talked to some MILF political thinkers, they have made a distinction between negotiating for a state and negotiating the terms of federation in a federal government. They want an independent Constitutional Convention and it is quite hard to convince them to accept federalism.

LOU ROQUE (FREELANCE RESEARCHER AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST): I find that the ten steps are comprehensive enough to address specific

questions, except I think you forgot something about how you would address the abundant mining and oil resources in Mindanao. On agriculture, from your statistics, Mindanao is high in agricultural inputs in corn and coconut. These have industrial and commercial uses. What are your specific plans on these? Because in our studies, corn and coconut have great potentials but still not tapped for lack of post-harvest facilities, and inadequate research and development effort. On the question of budgetary allocation, the government gives little resources to Mindano despite its agricultural potential because agriculture is not one of its priorities. The government, because of its World Trade Organization (WTO)-based policies, does not emphasize agriculture. I would like to know from Senator Pimentel how he will address the current adverse impact of globalization, like the dumping of imported agricultural products that is making our small and medium producers bankrupt. On fisheries, we have learned from our fisherfolk organization that big trawlers, mostly run or owned by foreign entities from Taiwan, China, and Japan, violate the municipalities exclusive right to the sea within 15 kilometers from its shore. On the role of the US even in the so-called non-military aspect, I am wary because historically and currently, US is very much interested in our natural resources. On the federal form of government, I think, theoretically decentralizing the political power is also a positive step. But the more vital question is: who will be represented in the federal system of government? How will the ordinary people, the marginalized people *par vis-à-vis* the traditional politicians who go into politics because they want to protect their economic interests?

AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL JR.: On our adherence to WTO, I do not think we can get out of it. We just have to make good in a very bad situation. We should insist that the safety nets promised should be put in place before allowing the entry of foreign goods under a regime of reduced tariffs to the prejudice of our own industries. I have this idea that I broached to the International Parliamentary Union that if the idea behind WTO is the liberalization of goods so that they can travel freely across national boundaries, then the counterpart of that is the liberalization of labor so that labor can also travel freely. Philippine labor should be allowed to work in the industrialized countries so that they can produce the goods that people in the Philippines can buy. WTO policies are not going to work without purchasing power, except to knock out the weaker industries that are operating in developed countries.

Regarding the town's exclusive use of the 15-kilometer municipal waters, the answer is in the proper implementation of the Local Government Code. Implementation is the function of the President and the implementers of the law, no longer of Congress. It is there already to be implemented. Many of the things we are griping about can be corrected by a proper implementation of the law. There is so much talk against corruption; there are so many laws against corruption including death penalty for plunder. What more can we do? It is a matter of implementation. The people should also assert on their government officials that the laws ought to be implemented.

On the agrarian issue, that is a matter that need not be repealed or put into the freezer just because we are adopting a federal system. In my theory, many of the laws that we have in the country will continue to operate across the boundaries of the federal states. Affording land to those who have no land to till is an ideal goal. However, there is now a counter opinion that perhaps the plantations need not be broken up into non-productive small segments to be apportioned to those working in the plantation, but rather to enable the workers to have a right over the income of that plantation and that this income be divided equitably among the various stakeholders.

As far as the timetable for the adoption of a federal system, that will really depend on the attitude of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. She is the sitting president and if she wants to make it easier for us, the adoption of the federal system can be done within the next three years of her term because you have to either call for a Constitutional Convention or you call for a Constituent Assembly. Now, which is the better between the two? I am a product of a Constitutional Convention during Marcos's time. I would like to tell you that if not for the imposition of martial law, we would still be working in that Constitutional Convention up to now for the simple reason of self-interest setting in. Delegates were given per diem and you have to put up your staff. In other words, there are additional expenses and a time frame that you cannot control. In a Constituent Assembly you can define the agenda. Aspects of the Constitution, which in the minds of some people are good enough to stand the test of time, will not be included in the discussion.

In terms of the use of resources, my own idea is we should leave that to the federal states. They have the option to impose restrictions. That is in fact what Malaysia is doing. Allow the federal states a certain degree of leeway to define their own economic policy if they want it. In the

meantime, the policy of the central government about ownership will stand, as is, until and unless the federal states will provide otherwise. On mining, the federal state should be free to determine the level of activity that is acceptable to them. Let them decide that for themselves and let them answer to the people for their decision.

At this point, I think it is important that we convene the Mindanao Caucus of Congressmen and Senators, to make them listen to people from the academe. What do you think are the things that we can realistically do? I will get the Mindanao congressional representatives to attend with me and other Senators who may be interested in this issue to be listeners. Inputs should come from the academe this time.

PROSPERO E. DE VERA III: I will just try to summarize some of the main points that have been raised. What we are looking at is where do we go from here after this short meeting, what logical and necessary steps can be undertaken? I have noted two big blocks of things that have to be done. There is a common sentiment that there needs to be a stronger voice for Mindanao to be articulated not just by Senator Pimentel and Aminah Rasul and the others. One concrete outcome of this activity is really to increase the voice for Mindanao among the participants. One common thread that has come in is that the voice for Mindanao must speak in unison, which means we focus on areas of agreement rather than disagreement.

The second and the more important one is that interested parties or groups that are interested in the Mindanao agenda should start working together. The issues that have been raised are really not so much what is lacking in the ten steps but the details that need to be further clarified. Maybe AER and TWSC, together with the UP Institute of Islamic Studies and UP Asian Center can start meeting informally, with Senator Pimentel as convenor. The meetings should focus on how to develop and share information materials and studies. There are a lot of studies on Mindanao but these are not shared across groups. Second, maybe we can start some sort of a research agenda that can be further developed. We should have details, for example, on the resource allocation, sharing, and budgeting so that when Congress, either through a Constituent Assembly or a Constitutional Convention will start debating, they will not be debating merely on the political and administrative aspects of federalism but on the more substantial resources issues. It is the role of academic institutions to develop a mechanism to measure budgetary allocations for Mindanao. This will

allow Mindanao legislators and advocates to really discuss the issue and push for a bigger share. These are the kinds of research requirements that need to be filled up. Academic institutions and those interested in Mindanao can fill in this big gap.

The third, and probably the most important, is really to expand the audience of activities like this. We have to make a stronger effort to go beyond the “converted,” to go beyond the convinced. I think these are very logical steps that can be done. ❁