

Muslim Perspective of the Mindanao Problem: Contextualizing the SPCPD

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The Mindanao problem is a complex problem that requires extraordinary solutions. Underlying its complexity is the fact that the Muslims in the Philippines constitute a nationality distinct and older than the Filipino nationality. American colonization forced the two nationalities to unite and interact in "uneveled playing field" of a new political system that is governed through a unitary and highly centralized government. Reduced to a deplorable state by an unsuitable government structure and by unjust policies, the Muslims now seek justice through genuine autonomy. With the signing of the Peace Agreement between the government and the MNLF, and the creation of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, the initial steps towards institutionalizing a systemic solution to the "Moro problem" have been taken. To carry the tide in favor of a just peace and a meaningful development in the Southern Philippines through genuine autonomy, Muslims and Christians must leave behind the hatred and the deep wounds of a centuries-old conflict and reconcile.

Introduction

The coming to Manila of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Chairman Professor Nurullaji Misuari to formally sign on September 2 the 1996 Mindanao Agreement is an opportunity for focusing one's attention on the Mindanao problem. The discussion presented in this paper is timely in the light of many questions and doubts raised about the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). I believe the main reason why this Council is met with a lot of emotions and widespread opposition is because the problem in Mindanao is not yet well understood. "Misunderstood war leads to misunderstood peace" — so goes the title of the July 29 special report of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI). What I am going to discuss is the Muslim perspective of the Mindanao problem, specifically, its historical dimension. Looking at the problem from this dimension is important to provide the context for appreciating the SPCPD and the envisioned Moro Mindanao autonomy.

The need to understand the Mindanao problem from the perspective of history was raised by former senator Wigberto Tanada who, in his speech in General Santos on July 3, 1996, urged the government "to

Editors' note: Although dated 1st and 2nd Quarter 1996, this special issue's planning and production spilled over to the latter part of the same year. Owing to the relevance of the Mindanao Peace Agreement and the creation of the SPCPD to the theme, the staff thus decided to publish the above article, though written in the last quarter of 1996, in this particular issue.

■ Considering the complexity of the Mindanao problem, its different dimensions can be summed up in the definition of the "Moro problem" as a *system problem* at the bottom of which is the fact that the Muslims in the Philippines constitute a nationality *distinct* from and *older* than the Filipino nationality.

It is basically through the knowledge of history that the Moro struggle could be understood.

take the lead in enlightening people about the historic roots of the Mindanao Problem and why the rectifications of the historical wrongs inflicted on the Moro people requires extraordinary measures" (in *Today*, July 3, 1996, p.11). Another call came from the PDI editorial staff who observed that the information campaign of the government intended to win support for the SPCPD suffered the greatest blunder when its "peace primer" did not say at all what the MNLF war was all about (PDI, July 29, 1996, p.1). Carol Arguillas noted that "absent, but very much needed, are a historian, a sociologist or anthropologist."

The Muslim Perspective of the Mindanao Problem

The Mindanao problem is a complex problem that needs extraordinary solutions. The SPCPD is too small a solution to the centuries-old "Moro problem". However, as an initial measure to institutionalize a systemic solution to the problem, the SPCPD should be welcome as a positive development in the direction of resolving the problem.

The Mindanao problem has been explained in many ways and defined from different perspectives. The Muslim perspective of it was regarded by many people, especially by those in government, as just a ploy of some so-called misguided elements to justify secessionism or to demand for a greater share of political and economic powers. It was because of the misreadings of the "Moro problem" by the past Philippine governments, as conditioned by their lack of will, determination and sincerity to solve it, that the "Moro problem" remained until today — a problem. The Aquino government appeared to have the determination and sincerity to put an end to the conflict; however, the time and the condition during her presidency were made difficult by threats of coups which did not warrant the institution of real autonomy as the logical and acceptable solution to the problem. The Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) institutionalized during the Aquino administration was

not the kind of autonomy that can put a stop to the problem. Since then, the problem has been intensifying and opening new dimensions leading to the emergence of hardline Muslim groups like the Abu Sayyaf.

Considering the complexity of the Mindanao problem, its different dimensions can be summed up in the definition of the "Moro problem" as a *system problem* at the bottom of which is *the fact that the Muslims in the Philippines constitute a nationality distinct from and older than the Filipino nationality*. The distinctions that characterized the two Philippine nationalities were moulded by differences in religious and cultural orientations and by separate historical developments. American colonization forced the two nationalities to unite and interact in an "*uneveled playing field*" of a new political system that is governed through a unitary and highly centralized government. Within the unitary system of the Philippine Republic, the two nations had found adjusting with one another most difficult because of the imbalances that favor the Christian nation, which enjoyed more access to political and economic powers and to other opportunities and privileges for growth and development. One may imagine a picture of an *imbalanced playing field* which shows the advantages of a team playing from the higher and more strategic ground. It is in this regard that one should understand why one of the major thrusts of the 1996 Davao Accord is the "leveling of the playing field" in order to make the Muslims productive, competitive and secured. Reduced into a deplorable by a manipulated history, unsuitable governmental structure, and unjust policies, the Muslims are seeking justice through genuine autonomy — with the SPCPD as the initial way.

The Historical Dimension

Philippine Muslim history is a history of nationality antedating the history of the Christian North. Before the coming of Islam and Christianity to the Philippines, the two ancestors of these two nations were racially related as Malays. The racial affinity, however, did not have significant socio-

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political bearing because of the lack of a cohesive political construction and unifying ideology. To say that "before the coming of Islam and Christianity, the Philippines were inhabited by one people" is not accurate and has no meaningful socio-political sense. Evidences from Philippine pre-history and folk traditions suggest that inter-barangay and inter-island warfare was common. Rivalry and hostility existed between highland and lowland and between inland and coastal groups (Phelan, 1959: 15-18). If there was anything in Philippine history that served to bring about a sense of unity which prepared the way for the emergence of national consciousness, it was the adoption of Islam by some Filipinos and of Christianity by the others. Even the so-called "native state construction" cited by former President Marcos in his book, *Tadhana*, is not convincing in the presence of proofs about the so-called "common political culture in the Philippines" prior to the coming of Islam and Christianity (Marcos, 1976: 105-114). For sure, the Muslim Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao differ from the "native state construction" in the North not only in name — one non-Muslim and the other Muslim — but in substance of political power and extent of control. The power, extent of control and sovereignty of the Muslim state construction are manifested in the various treaties the Muslim Sultanates entered into with the European sovereigns. In the case of the Sulu Sultanate, it had treaty relations with Spain in 1578, 1646, 1725, 1737, 1805, 1837, 1851, and 1878; with the British in 1761, 1764, 1769, 1849, and 1878; with the French in 1843 and 1845; and with the Americans in 1842, 1889 and 1915 (Abubakar deriving his data from Majul, 1983: 20). Commenting on the 1737 Peace Treaty between Spain and Sulu, a Jesuit scholar named H. de la Costa stated: "[It] is important to note in view of later development that it was a treaty, strictly so-called, that is, one between two sovereign and independent states, each recognized as such by the other." (H. de la Costa, S.J., 1965: 97).

The Philippine Muslim state construction was strengthened and sustained by several factors: (1) the force of Islamic ideology which provided the cohesion for national unity; (2) the political system of the Sultanate, which exercised sovereignty and jurisdiction over wide territories; and (3) the Muslim-controlled international trade which provided the economic resources that sustained the growth and development of the Muslim principalities and fueled the resistance of the Muslims against foreign invaders for centuries. According to Renato Constantino (1975: 25-26), "The Muslims of the South had the most developed social

organization. This was due mainly to the Islamization of Mindanao and Sulu....If history had taken its course undisturbed, the Muslims might have Islamized the whole archipelago. They could have seized the leadership in nation-building....The Spanish conquest aborted this historical trend, developed the other regions and froze the evolution of what has once been the more advanced society — the Muslim South."

Two "Streams" of Philippine Historical Development

The distinctions that characterized the Muslim and the Christian nationalities in the Philippines were conditioned by their respective historical developments that proceeded along two different directions or orientations. As the Filipino Christian history took the course of European and Western line of historical development, the Muslims continued to develop their history along the Arab and Malay line. Separated by time, the Muslims and Christians met only in the battlefield of wars as the latter served in many expeditions organized against the Muslims. It is in this light that one should understand why until now the two peoples continue to suffer from mutual distrust, uneasy relationship and reciprocal negative images.

In the context of separate or parallel historical development, one should also understand why the Muslims did not have participation in the Propaganda Movement and in the Katipunan Revolution because they were busy fighting their own revolution. Philippine history should not blur the fact that, in the Philippines, there were parallel struggles of racially related but nationally distinct peoples — the Muslims and the Christians — with the former defending hard to *maintain* their independence, while the latter fought to regain the independence that they had lost to the colonizers. Both peoples have helped bring about the present situation where they find themselves trying to integrate into the nation of Filipinos. (Rasul, 1970: 4)

Philippine history today, as highlighted in the celebration of the Centennial of the 1896 Philippine Revolution, is viewed by the Muslims as telling only about that part of Philippine history that was oriented towards Europe and the West — with its set of heroes and villains, and accounts of occasional victories and series of defeats. The Muslim side of Philippine history is almost unheard of. It is ironic to celebrate historical events embodying opposition against colonialism when internally the

celebration is colonizing a historical reality — that of the Philippine Muslims — by not giving the honorable space it deserves. The Muslims say, "Now that we are citizens of this country, why not regard our history as Philippine history?"

As citizens of the Philippine Republic today, the Muslims have been demanding that their right to Philippine history be given justice. Cesar Adib Majul, a highly respected scholar on Philippine Muslim affairs, argues in behalf of the Muslims that "if the Philippine Revolution is to be considered not just a movement of some Christian natives against Spanish colonialism, but by the Filipino people, then there is no reason why the more than three centuries of struggle against Spain and America cannot be considered as significant part of the Filipino struggle for freedom" (Majul, 1966: 304). Surely, the Muslim struggle for freedom was not a mere case of revolt, as being belittled in some Philippine history books. It was a patriotic struggle of a duration, scale and magnitude that had even surpassed those of the Northern Philippine revolution, albeit struggling for the same goal of national liberation.

The right of the Muslims to an honorable place in Philippine history has been denied by the so-called Filipino historians, such as Teodoro Agoncillo, who, according to a Filipino observer of Philippine history, "is oversimplifying the history of the Philippine Revolution by associating it only with Bonifacio, Rizal, Aguinaldo and their associates in the Propaganda Movement and the Katipunan" (Azurin, 1993: 36). This kind of chauvinism had disenfranchised the Philippine Muslims of their glorious and heroic participation in the struggle for national liberation, for which the "nationalist" scholars are guilty of intellectual bias and selective scholarship which ran counter to the facts of true Philippine history. The Muslims, as citizens of the Philippine Republic, deserve an honored place in that history. Such important role should be given recognition in history books and national symbols corresponding to the high degree of its historical contribution. In the design of the national flag, for example, Agoncillo was pointed out as "the most strident oppositionist to the clamor of the Philippine Muslims in the 1970s to add a ninth ray to the Philippine flag's sun to symbolize the long anti-colonial struggle of the Muslim communities. Agoncillo debased such clamor as 'ludicrously unhistorical'" (Glenn May in Azurin, 1993: 36).

Effects of Colonial History on the Muslims

The wars against colonization that the Muslims had to fight had left behind negative legacies that posed as obstacles in the realization of harmonious Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines. One such legacy is the negative Moro image which is operational in the mind of many, if not most, Christian Filipinos (Bulatao, 1974: 8-11, 13; Lacar and Hunt, 1972: 3-9). This Moro image pictures the Muslims as cunning, ruthless, untrustworthy and blood-thirsty, among others. Unfortunately, this attitude is also reciprocated with equally negative Christian image in the minds of the Muslims who viewed the Christians as cowards, colonial puppets and land-grabbers, among others. The persistence of these reciprocal negative images in the minds of both protagonists in the Mindanao conflict, constitutes the single most important factor that explains why until now the desired harmonious Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines has remained illusive. This negative legacy of history has to do with a lot of emotional responses that characterized the opposition to the SPCPD.

Another effect of the wars on the Muslims was to strip them of their productive potentials since they focused all their energies and economic resources in fighting to defend their cause. The victory that they won was paid for with enormous costs of political, economic and educational setbacks.

It was when the Muslims were in the state of vulnerability that the Americans, acting on the pressures of the Filipino nationalist elites, forcefully incorporated the Muslims into the modern Philippine state, thus bringing together the separate lines of history that divided the Muslims and the Christians in the country. Drawing legitimacy from the Treaty of Paris of December 10, 1898, the Americans colonized the country and defined the territory of what was to become the Philippine Republic. This new territory included the Muslim areas which the Spaniards had not controlled, but which they sold to the Americans as part of the 20 million dollar deal embodied in the 1898 Treaty. The Muslims regard the Treaty of Paris as illegitimate as they were not supposed to be included because they were independent at the time of the signing of the Treaty. They considered, therefore, their incorporation into the new Republic as without moral and legal bases. The supposed transfer of the Spanish possession to the Americans by the Treaty of Paris

and the further transfer of the same by the Americans to the Republic of the Philippines is an exercise of the Regalian Doctrine, plain and simple (Rodil, 1987: 28).

It is a fact that the Americans forcibly conquered the whole of the archipelago. But for the Republic of the Philippines to base its possessory rights from the Americans is in complete disregard of historical realities. The Philippine possession is to sustain the legitimacy of the Regalian Doctrine and uphold colonialism. Worse, this colonial act is enshrined in the Philippine Constitutions of 1935, 1973 and 1987 (Rodil, 1987: 28). This is the reason why the Muslims, especially the MNLF, do not regard the Mindanao war as a war of secession but one of liberation. This is also cited as the basis of the Muslims' regard of the Mindanao war as their war against Philippine colonialism.

Rodil notes that many people are already aware of the colonial foundations of the Philippine state. They have come to realize that the problem in Mindanao is rooted in colonialism and the perpetuation of the colonial order. It affects all aspects of the Philippine system including its legal system which is very much conditioned by the United States' kind of "democracy". Most Filipinos thought of democracy in terms of "majority rule" (Rodil, 1987: 28). This measure, however, when applied arbitrarily and unjustly to the Muslims in Mindanao in complete disregard of their historical rights, is an exercise of what Rodil referred to as the "rule of the mighty" or the "democracy of colonialism." Applied to the present development in Mindanao, the insistence by some sectors to submit the SPCPD and the Muslim autonomy question to a plebiscite, which is euphemistically described as a "democratic process", is an exercise of colonialism which subjects to the illegitimate "rule of the mighty" the fundamental right of the Muslims and the Lumad people to self-determination over their affairs and their ancestral lands — thus making the imposition of the plebiscite a mockery of this right (Rodil, 1987: 28).

Since that time when the Americans were preparing to grant the Philippines its independence, the Muslims have been opposing their inclusion in the proposed Republic (See Gowing, 1978: 168-170). This opposition, expressed in the form of petitions and occasional small-scale armed resistance, continued even after the Philippine Commonwealth and the subsequent Republic have begun to operate. Under this new

political set-up, the Muslims were made to play difficult new roles "over a field tilted in favor of the non-Muslims." Suffering under the state of poverty and looked down with suspicion, the Muslims were regarded by the new dispensation and by the majority population as the "Moro Problem". To this "problem" the response of the establishment was two-pronged: one was assimilation, which was disseminated as integration and propagated by means of education; and the other, migration of non-Muslim settlers to Mindanao, thus marginalizing the Muslims and diluting their population. Administered by the centralized system of government, the policy of integration assaulted the Muslim way of life and the program of resettlement and migration took away many Muslim lands.

Migration and Muslim Population Dilution

The Cadastral Act of 1913, which called for a general survey, parcelling and allocation of "public lands" to American planters and homesteaders, opened up the portals of Mindanao that would soon displace the Muslims and the Lumads or the "Highlanders". Between 1913 and 1917, seven agricultural colonies were established in Moroland — six in Cotabato Valley and one in Lanao. During this period alone, some 8,000 colonists and their dependents settled in Cotabato and Lanao (Magdalena, 1990 in Moro Kurier, Vol.V Nos. 1 and 2: 17). By 1930, Moroland received 4,194 families of colonists or a total of 19,441 persons (Mastura, 1981 in Magdalena: 17). A vigorous program of agricultural colonization came into place with the creation of the National Land Settlement Administration in 1939 to sustain the earlier aim of greater migration (Pelzer, 1945: 125 in Magdalena, 1990: 18). Upon the grant of independence in 1946, the Philippines embarked on an accelerated program of moving people into the areas inhabited by the Muslims and the Lumads in Mindanao. This program also turned into a means of political placation by the government to reduce the effects of insurgency in Central Luzon arising from agrarian problems. Several resettlement programs were organized after World War II. These are the following:

1. The 1949 Rice and Corn Administration (RCA)
2. The 1950 Economic Development Corporation Farms

Population Data on Zamboanga			
Year	Muslim	Lumad	Christian
1918	43,292 (61.56%)	25,633 (36.44%)	1,332 (1.80%)
1939	9,208 (25.85%)	53,311 (14.97%)	208,243 (58.46%)
1970	20,099 (5.06%)	39,252 (9.59%)	349,250 (85.31%)

Source: *Journals*, Institute of Political Economy, Manila, February 1996, pp. 31-32.

3. The Land Settlement and Development Company during the time of President Quirino

4. The 1954 National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration during the incumbency of President Magsaysay; and

5. The Land Authority (1960s) and now, the Department of Agrarian Reform

The impact of agricultural settlement and the consequent migration into Moroland can be discerned from the "phenomenal growth" of the population in Mindanao since World War II. A case to illustrate this trend is the data on the population shift in Zamboanga. The skyrocketing of the Christian population from just 1,332 in 1918 to a shocking 208,243 in 1939 was disastrous to the Muslims whose population decreased from 43,292 in 1918 to 9,208 in 1939. The increase of the Christian population by as much as 16,633 percent in just 21 years, and the decrease of the Muslim population by as much as 470 percent, show the lack of institutional protections on the Muslims at a time when they were most vulnerable.

Commenting on the population shift in Mindanao as a result of the government's program of migration and resettlement, Rodil (1987: 15) writes that "it was aimed to obliterate the distinct character of the Muslims and the Lumadnon. The consequent dislocation and displacement of the local population by migrants, eventually led [to] the takeover and control over economic resources and political power."

Further comments on the effect of migration in Moroland were made by another scholar on Moro affairs, Federico Magdalena, who writes that "it is one of massive displacement of the native Moros deeper into the interior, where they are found today. They have become marginalized and minoritized in their own homeland where they were previously the absolute lords and masters (Magdalena in *Moro Kurier*, Jan.-June, 1990: 18). Today, out of the 23 provinces in Mindanao, the Muslim population is still significantly found in 14 provinces (those identified in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement). However, the Muslims only enjoy a demographic majority in four of those provinces: Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. Cotabato, which was once a bastion of Muslim settlement, literally became a Christian province after World War II (Wernstedt and Simkins, 1965 in Magdalena, 1990).

The Muslims have been protesting against the sending of settlers into their territories. They resented the detachment of lands, even those which had gone unused, from the traditional pattern of community and clan ownership, with its *addat* and Islamic sanction. The Muslims resented the steady occupation of fertile lands by settlers. The land laws of the government defined all unregistered land in Mindanao as "public land". The bureaucracy made it difficult for the Muslims to secure titles; not many Muslims bothered to apply, being either unfamiliar with the procedure or unable to pay the cost for the required survey and processing of papers. In some cases, powerful business interests or wealthy Christians, in connivance with corrupt bureau officials, took advantage of Muslim ignorance or indifference to Philippine land laws and grabbed from them large tracts of their best lands (Gowing, 1978: 190).

In 1971, the Senate Committee on National Minorities had come up with a more objective and well documented analysis of the land problem in Mindanao (Philippine Senate, 1971: 22, 23):

Through either indifference, insincerity or lack of foresight, the seeds of discord were sown when the Commonwealth Government embarked on a policy of bringing settlers from Luzon and Visayas to Mindanao without a parallel program of helping the natives legitimize their landholdings or assisting them in making their farms productive....After the second world war, the influx of settlers and immigrants to the verdant valleys of Cotabato continued....The prior rights of the natives were disregarded and even trampled upon.

The government policies and programs intended to solve the Mindanao problem fell short of success because they were based on the wrong reading of the Mindanao problem. The government failed to read the problem as a problem of nationality at the core of which is the preservation of Muslim identity. Compounded by economic, political, agrarian, and socio-cultural and psychological problems, and intensified by the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s — like the Jabitah Massacre of 1968, the local election of 1971, which pitted the Muslim Barracuda with the Christian Ilaga, and the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 — the Mindanao Problem erupted into the disastrous Mindanao War of the 1970s. The latest chapter of the "Moro wars" had claimed the lives of about 200,000 people (President Ramos puts it at 120,000 lives lost in his July 22 State of the Nation Address) dislocated hundreds of thousands of refugees, and destroyed huge amount of properties. Rough estimates of government military expenses on the Mindanao conflict was put at 73 billion pesos which when spent on social welfare projects could have enormous effect on the alleviation of the poor condition of the Filipino masses.

The destruction that the Mindanao war brought to life and property should serve as lessons for everyone to take serious part in the campaign to put the Mindanao problem to its final end. The present experiment with peace and development through the SPCPD is a welcome and promising development along that line.

The Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD)

When the government announced a breakthrough agreement in its peace talk with the MNLF in June 1996, many Christian residents of Mindanao went into frenzy over the controversial SPCPD. The Christian residents, many of whom are descendants of the settlers in Mindanao,

have aroused a hysterical response against the Council. A Presidential visit to the South was met with a hail of tomatoes and inverted flags, symbolizing a state of war.

Led by Senator Francisco Tatad, many Christians see the Council as "the first step to the Islamization [of] Mindanao." Senator Tatad, in his article published in the July 30 issue of the *PDI* summed up the view of the opposition against the SPCPD in one word — FEAR. A thorough investigation of the Council reveals that the "fear" and other misconceptions about the SPCPD are unfounded.

The SPCPD is a transitional mechanism leading to the establishment of an Autonomous Government in Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan and Palawan after three years when the proposal will be subjected to a plebiscite where the constituents of the areas envisioned in the autonomy will vote for the approval or disapproval of the inclusion of their respective provinces or cities.

The SPCPD envisioned a special Zone of Peace and Development (ZOPAD) in the 14 provinces and 10 cities mentioned in the Tripoli Agreement. It will be headed by the MNLF chairman who will be assisted by a Vice-Chairman and three deputies, each representing the Muslims, the Lumads and the Christians. All officials of the Council will be appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the SPCPD head. An advisory body called *Darul-Iftah* is to be created to assist the SPCPD. A Consultative Assembly composed of 81 members is to be organized to serve as a forum for consultation and the ventilation of issues of concerns.

The Council appears to be like Marcos' Regional Consultative Commission or Aquino's Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao. But unlike the two, it has no real authority for governing and peace-keeping. The Council is purely an executive creation completely under the Office of the President. The Davao Accord clearly provides that the powers and functions of the SPCPD and the Consultative Assembly are *derivative* and *extensions* of the powers of the President.

In defense of the SPCPD, amid mounting opposition by some sectors in Mindanao, President Ramos in his July 22 State of the Nation Address outlines the nature of the SPCPD as "not a provisional government; it is

not a governing authority; and it has no law-making power; it has no power of governance over local police and the military." The lack of power of the SPCPD is the reason why Chairman Misuari ran for governor of the ARMM. This is also the reason why the MNLF is pressing for a regional security force and for the integration into the regular Armed Forces of the Philippines of MNLF forces.

"The SPCPD," according to the President, "is neither an autonomous region nor a political subdivision of government; it is not a public corporation; it has no separate juridical personality. It is simply a transitory administrative arm under the control and supervision of the President. Its powers and functions are derivative and extensions of the powers of the President which he may lawfully delegate."

The SPCPD is a reasonable and flexible framework and a good starting point for an enduring peace in Mindanao. According to Doronila (PDI, July 10, 1996: 9): "It can only work if there is a culture for or disposition and good faith toward peace. If most of the parties concerned with Mindanao believe that the Accord cannot work and will do their utmost to scuttle it, the Agreement will not work."

The SPCPD and the Future

■ The SPCPD is too small a solution to the complex Mindanao Problem. With power derived from the President, it could spell failure or success for the Council. Without full commitment and substantive support, the Council could not deliver the needed resources and services to overhaul Muslim society and to deliver it out of the devastated condition that has characterized Muslim Mindanao.

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rate in the country and with all of the Muslim provinces in the poorest category of Philippine provinces, the breeding ground for more determined and violent reactions against the government is nurtured and made fertile.

One may think that the SPCPD is the sole responsibility of Nur Misuari or of the Muslims, so that any shortcoming or failure should be blamed on him or on the Muslim's "lack of capacity to manage their affairs." The politicians in Manila or in the affected region may make it very difficult for Misuari to provide or deliver the needed resources and services so that in case the SPCPD fails, the blame could be hurled against Misuari or the Muslims. It should be remembered that the power of the SPCPD is derived from the President. The success or failure of the SPCPD depends on two vital factors. One is to make available the right amount of resources corresponding to the actual need for the total development of the Muslim areas. Piece-meal development would just end up in a wastage of resources. The other is the *sincerity* of the national leadership involved in the administration of the Council. The people opposing the SPCPD may wish that this Council would fail in order to prove that they are correct in opposing it. They should not wish for its failure, for when this happens, both Muslims and Christians and both those in government and in the MNLF will be losers. The failure of the SPCPD would intensify more the conflict to the level that may not have been experienced yet in the country. If Misuari would not be given the necessary support to let peace and development happen in Mindanao, then the conditions for conflict remain, and a new generation of Muslims would likely continue the struggle with more lessons to learn from where their predecessors may have stumbled.

■ The success or failure of the SPCPD depends on two vital factors. One is to make available the right amount of resources corresponding to the actual need for the total development of the Muslim areas. The other is the *sincerity* of the national leadership involved in the administration of the Council.

It is not likely that the solution to the Mindanao problem will come only from the ruling elite, both Muslims and Christians, when talking about peace and development in Mindanao. The kind of people that can bring lasting peace and meaningful development to Mindanao are the ones that use knowledge and awareness of global imperial designs that perpetuate oppression and injustice. It is only by denouncing injustice

and by showing partiality towards the poor and the oppressed is it possible for the lead actors in Mindanao affairs to bring about lasting peace and development to that Southern region.

On the matter of Muslim-Christian relations in the country, serious efforts should be made to reconcile both peoples as citizens of the Republic. The need to reconcile these two peoples can be facilitated through dialogue and through information dissemination using the schools and the mass media. This educational campaign could have substantial effects only if Philippine Muslim studies would be incorporated in school curricula and be made required subjects in schools. This should be done as a matter of necessity. Unless this is so done, the educational campaign may achieve only unsatisfactory results, so that the condition for conflict — a product of centuries of biases, derogatory and negative images — would remain. Integrating Muslim studies in the Philippine school curricula will "level the field of information" on each other's (Muslim-Christian) way of life.

The need to reconcile is necessitated by the fact that there is no alternative, if the conflict is to be avoided. For centuries there has been cruel warfare between the Christians and the Muslims in this country. Those wars left behind deep wounds and sown bitter hatred. There is no way that those wrongs of the past can be made right — neither the injustices can be avenged. What is needed now is a determination on both sides to put the hatred behind and to be reconciled. Both groups can change. The reciprocal negative images can be corrected by right education and by positive disposition. It is a matter of will, of attitude and of inclination to be reconciled. Many people believe this is easily said, but a hard task to do. *But, it has to be done*, because the alternative for not doing it is more painful and destructive. It has to be done so that the future generation of Filipinos would be spared from the bitter consequences of the conflict that has been experienced in Mindanao.

As reconciliation is being done, the Muslims and Christians should be made aware of the fact that the force responsible for the demeaning of human order in our contemporary world is the same force that has been responsible for the trouble that has characterized their relationship. So, in this moment of confusion, it is important to look deeper into the problem to be aware of the fact that *new enemies have emerged, so, new friendships must be born.*

In order to reconcile and to bring lasting peace and development to Mindanao, the Muslims and the Christians should keep an open mind about themselves. They should not be chauvinistic in a manner full of prejudice. The kind of Muslims and Christians that can bring true peace and development in Mindanao are the ones who use knowledge to understand the lessons of history and to appreciate the essence of both Islam and Christianity as reconciling faiths founded on peace, love and justice. The Christians should be reminded that in Luke, 6: 27-29, they are commanded to "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." For the Muslims, they should remember that the Qur'an reminded them in Surah Al-Ma'idah (Surah 5: 82) thus :

And nearest among them in love
To the believers, wilt thou
Find those who say,
'We are Christians.'

Indeed, both Islam and Christianity, when properly understood and practiced are two harmonizing faiths.

With the signing of the Mindanao Agreement by the Philippine Government and the MNLF, and with the SPCPD in place to pave the way for the institutionalization of the genuine Mindanao Autonomy, then it is only a matter of time, *Insha Allah*, for Peace to reign and for Development to happen in the Southern Philippines. ♦

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