



Endless Violence in the Philippines?

Perspectives on the Conflict in Central Mindanao



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**Violence doesn't solve any problems.
It is time to invest in achieving
peace.**

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Publisher

Forum Civil Peace Service / Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V.

Contact

Forum Civil Peace Service / Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V.
Abteilung Projekte und Programme
Wesselstrasse 12 ■ 53113 Bonn
Tel: +49-(0)228-5029650 ■ Fax: +49-(0)228-85029699
kontakt@forumzfd.de ■ www.forumzfd.org

Editors

Henning Borchers, Lara Dammer, Jens Halve, Olivia Hannemann, Daniel Jaeger, Carsten Montag, Inge Sauren

Picture Credits

See each picture, except for cover: Charlie Saceda

Academic Consultants

Dr. Peter Kreuzer, Dr. Rainer Werning

Layout

Shaun Bonje

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Preface

The Philippines is the newest project region where *forumZFD* (Forum Civil Peace Service) is active – and at the same time it is the farthest from our head quarters in Bonn, Germany. We have been working in the Philippines since 2008 and are now coordinating our activities from three field offices with local partners in Mindanao.

Through this publication, we want to direct more focus on the conflict between the Philippine government and the rebels of the Muslim minority that has been plaguing Mindanao, an island in Southern Philippines, for more than 40 years. Internationally, little is known about the violent clashes and the dire living situation of thousands of persons as mass media does not report on the conflict. Even in Davao City, located only a few hours of travel from the main conflict area, the issue is not widely tackled.

We want to contribute to closing this information gap in the Philippines as well as abroad. In this publication, people from the Philippines share their perspectives on the conflict and on the situation in their home country. The different accounts emphasize the diversity and occasional discrepancy of perceptions on the conflict. The last article is by Inge Sauren, *forumZFD* Program Manager in Mindanao, who explains how she and her colleagues contribute to transforming the conflict.

Solving this conflict is a task that needs to be addressed and to be owned by the Philippine people itself. Through the Civil Peace Service, however, we can contribute to a great extent to this goal. By telling about the situation, people in the conflict affected areas make the efforts of many peace activists and civil society initiatives more widely known, and can get the public attention they need to be successful in their endeavours to establish peace in Mindanao.



Carsten Montag

*Head of Department for Programmes and
Projects of Forum Civil Peace Service*



Jens Halve

Coordinator South East Asia

1 Historical Overview

1.1 A Long-Running Conflict In Search Of An End

As Southeast Asia's longest running internal conflict, the Mindanao Conflict begs the question why it persists. The answer lies in several related reasons – the first is the active opposition of powerful conservative elements in the majority population (both within and outside government) who view any clamor for minority self-governance as detrimental to their political and economic interests in Mindanao, and as a challenge to the conventional notion of a unitary and historically homogenous Filipino nation-state. Outweighing moderate elements in the government, their influence has enabled them to either prevent the faithful implementation of agreements between the government and rebels or, worse, scuttle attempts to sign such agreements.

The second is the latent prejudice of the majority population. Coupled with a lack of awareness of the roots of the conflict and of the minority's grievances, conservative elements have found it easy to manipulate public opinion into turning against the peace process. The conservatives' portrayal of the conflict as a mere security problem that deserves a heavy handed military response and any attempt to address its root causes as a sell-out of the national interest is readily accepted by the majority.

The third reason is the lack of a nuanced understanding of the conflict. This makes it possible to perpetuate ignorance and prejudice. As in other internal conflicts, the narratives are mostly shaped by the majority, through the media and history books. Therefore, it has been difficult to generate a larger constituency for a genuine peace process because conventional perceptions about the roots of the conflict are informed mostly by the interests, biases, and prejudices of opinion-makers. Alternative conflict narratives are rarely given the opportunity to be articulated. It is ironic that the Philippine national media report more about humanitarian crises in other parts of the world and little about the crisis in their own backyard. As the vice-president of the largest TV news network in the Philippines once infamously said, only 7% of their audience cares to hear about Mindanao.

Though not exhaustive, the list of factors mentioned here are the core variables. Each one in itself poses considerable obstacles. But once they feed into each other, they become more formidable and create a host of other problems, i.e. the lack of a common narrative makes it difficult to put forth a united front for peace which, in turn, the conservatives conveniently exploit. A clear example of how these factors feed on each other is what happened to the Memorandum Agreement on Ancestral Domain and its aftermath in 2008. But first, a brief background is necessary.

The Example Of The Aborted MOA-AD And Its Aftermath

The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (see box 1.1) had addressed the seemingly conflicting interests of the major stakeholders, in particular relating to Moro self-governance and control over ancestral lands and natural resources while at the same time ascertaining the territorial integrity of the Philippine nation. Also the Lumad had their concerns addressed by being accorded the same "first nation" status as the Moro.

All of these would have made the MOA-AD an ideal compromise. But it never materialized.

As soon as the negotiating panels of the MILF and the GRP initialed the agreement, the conservatives mobilized their vast political and economic resources and rallied the national public to oppose its formal signing. Nationalist conservatives misrepresented that the agreement will dismember the Philippines. Local politicians, wary of losing their political influence and control over the minority, employed scare tactics. In public fora, the audience was told that the MOA-AD will drive Christians



The three main regions of the Philippines: Luzon, home of the capital Manila, the Visayas and Mindanao

»This conflict will be going on forever. Because there is too much money involved. The government and the MILF deliberately keep up the conflict. Not for independence, not for freedom – but for money.«

Maki, 23, Civil engineering student in Davao City, born in Marawi City

out of their lands. The public who already possess a majority-centric narrative of the conflict fell for the propaganda. The media, which have been ignoring press releases from the peace panels, not only became useless in protecting the public from misrepresentation, but at times became party to it. Radio broadcasters were heard telling their audience that even Christian-dominated villages would be subjected to Islamic rule. Even some Lumad, who would otherwise have benefited from the pact, were convinced that they too would be driven out of their lands. Of course, hidden in the background of these concerted efforts are the powerful economic groups who stand to lose a lot of potential sources of added wealth should the minority recover control over their remaining natural resources.

The President reeled from widespread criticism and abandoned the agreement, even as the conservatives managed to convince the justices of the Supreme Court – none of whom hails from the minority population – to

annul the putative pact. Meanwhile, local opposition to the peace process instigated armed encounters. The ensuing war led to the highest number of new IDPs for the year 2008 among all internal conflicts worldwide. Even then, the crisis which United Nations agencies described as a “complex humanitarian emergency” saw little nuanced printspace or broadcast time in the national media. The fighting was portrayed as rebels on a rampage, without explaining the more complex nature of the reasons behind both camps’ reverse to armed conflict.

The current status of peace and conflict

The conflict is currently facing one of its quieter phases, with a ceasefire now in effect since 2009. A resumption of peace talks in January 2010 failed to produce substantive agreement, with conservative elements maintaining their influence.

On the other hand, civil society peace advocates, who were overwhelmed by the opposition to the MOA-AD, have also been trying to find their footing again. Fully aware of the lack of a well-informed national constituency for peace, these advocates seem to be in search of new allies and initiatives, both domestically and abroad.

Women, elderly people and children are the most vulnerable groups and suffer strongly from conflict and repeated displacements





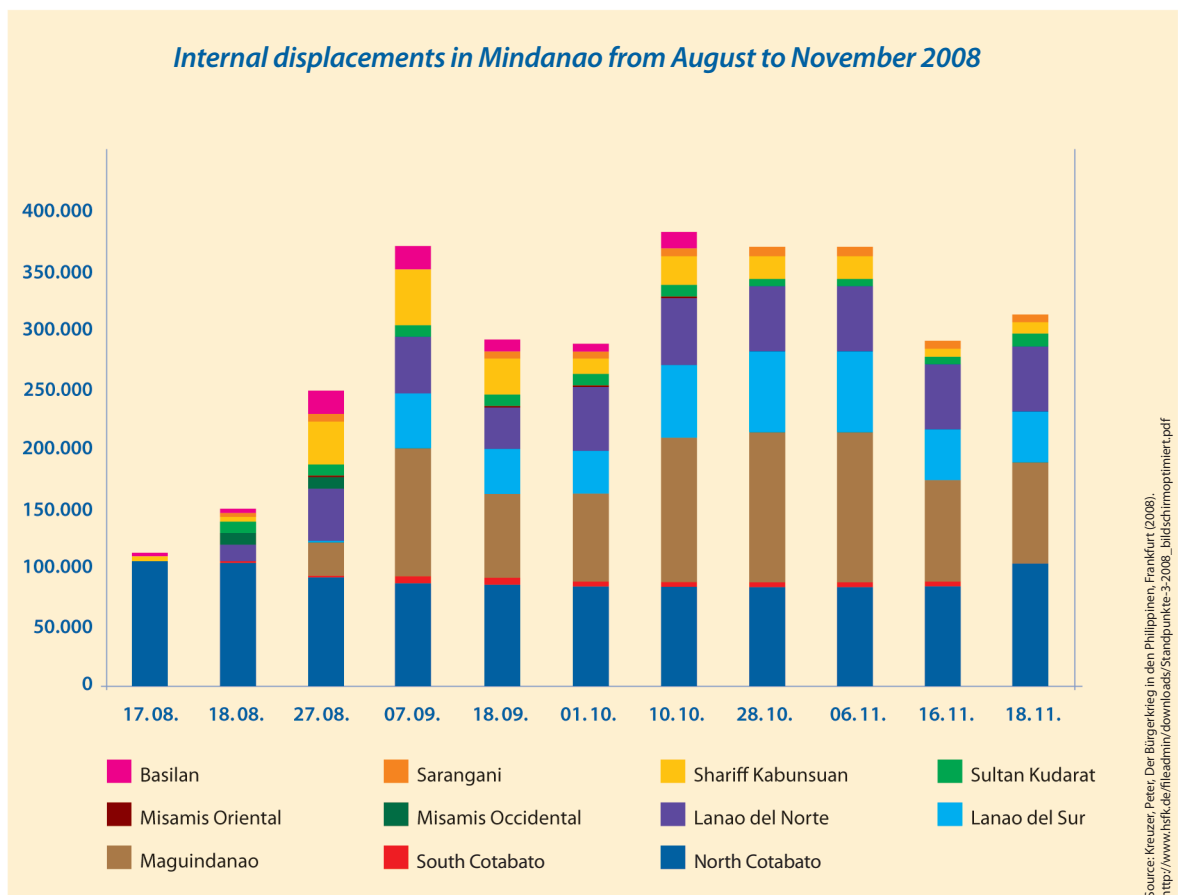
After the failing of the MoA-AD in 2008, whole villages were burnt down

Sadly, the longer the peace talks take, the more the peace process loses its credibility and the more tempting a violent solution becomes to both sides. Just as the MILF had taken over the armed struggle started by the Moro

National Liberation Front (MNLF) when the latter's peace agreement collapsed, the risk is that there are others within the minority who are waiting to see if the MILF's negotiations with the government will bear fruit or likewise irrevocably collapse.

Not all is bleak though. Among the positive developments is a rise in international attention, both from governmental and non-governmental institutions. Conscious that they need leverage in neutralizing conservatives and hawks, the two panels agreed to invite influential governments of foreign countries whose opinions cannot be ignored outright by the conservatives. This group of governments, already organized, is known as the International Contact Group (ICG).

The second is that the panels also agreed to include a Civilian Protection Component (CPC) in the International Monitoring Team (IMT) overseeing the ceasefire. Although the CPC, comprised of local and foreign NGOs, does not have the vast powers of a peacekeeping mission, it can assist in monitoring the government and the rebels' adherence to their commitment to international humanitarian and human rights laws.



This is indeed an encouraging sign as the peace process cannot move forward without increased involvement by the international community, just as other internal conflicts have been resolved with greater attention, concern, and help from other countries. Given the substantial political and economic interests at stake, peace spoilers can afford to ignore the voices of peace advocates, both within and outside the government. But calls for sincerity in the peace process coming from governments on whose continued friendship the Philippines need to survive cannot easily be dismissed by even the staunchest elements opposing peace. ■

Zainudin Malang

Controversy MoA-AD

The ceasefire talks taken up in 1997 between GRP and MILF were expanded into peace negotiations in 2001. Thus, the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain, MoA-AD, was reached as a precursor to a comprehensive peace agreement. This roadmap to peace presents a consensus of all partners involved about which also non-Muslims and indigenous peoples should decide eventually.

The MoA-AD's key points are: The Muslim population in Mindanao, in the Sulu Archipelago with its main island Jolo as well as in Palawan, attains the right to maintain its identity as "Bangsamoro" and to exercise their own legislation. This self-government is provisionally called "Bangsamoro Juridical Entity", short BJE. In additional annexes, the MoA-AD contains lists of villages which are to decide via referendum on whether they want to join this entity. Detailed legal capacities of the BJE and how to use its natural resources will be decided upon after the signing of the MoA-AD.

This process was originally supposed to lead to a legally binding peace treaty by November 2008. However, in August 2008, the signing of the MoA-AD was aborted by the Supreme Court of the Philippines which deemed the agreement unconstitutional due to the lack of transparency of the negotiations. As a consequence, both opponents resorted to armed warfare.

1.2 Land, colonization, and conflict in Mindanao

The contemporary armed conflict in Mindanao can be traced to the pre-martial law period of the late 1960s when the Moro youth and their political leaders demanded an end to discrimination and oppression and the return of their ancestral homeland. That flashpoint resonates across the centuries in the struggles waged by the Bangsamoro (Moro Nation) against the Spanish and American colonization of their land, their natural resources, and their way of life.

Before Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century, the sultanates ruled over the whole of Mindanao and parts of present-day Malaysia. The sultanates produced goods and traded with other feudal monarchs within the Malay region. The exchange of goods reached as far as China and India, the Arab peninsula, to the ports of the East Mediterranean, including Egypt and East Africa. Meanwhile, many indigenous communities in the northern, central, and western parts of Mindanao were Islamized by the Sultanates, which administered a huge territory that dwarfed the small and disconnected villages in the northern and central part of the country. Others converted only partially, to avoid slavery or enable them to inter-marry with other Muslims.

From Mindanao, the sultanate's writ extended to as far as Palawan in the west and some parts of Luzon in the north, areas, some of which form part of the wider Mindanao that present-day Moro leaders claim as their original homeland. The sultanates and their royal families lived off the tributes, gifts, duties, and payments given by their loyal datu chieftains (tribal chiefs) and their clans who were engaged in farming and trade, including the regular use of bonded labor.

Land was held in common and stewardship guided its use. When the American colonizers came in the nineteenth century they discovered that even poor peasants and bonded laborers could use the land to grow food and develop a surplus, build a home and start a family. Life revolved around an extended network of sultans, datu, and ulamas (Muslim clergy), along with their families and their clans. These networks provided a hierarchy of power, a system of authority, and a structure for organizing farming and food production, shelter and construction, crafts and trade, and most importantly - self-defense.

The Spanish and American colonizers came face to face with the existing structures in Mindanao, found

these were incompatible with their plans for building a state and controlling the country's resources, and soon proceeded to subdue or tame the local datu elites to their advantage. The Spanish colonizers established haciendas in the Northern Island of Luzon and the Visayas, Central Philippines, to grow food and other produce to feed the colonial regime and the profitable galleon trade in fiber, tobacco, spices, and valuable minerals. The American colonizers headed to Mindanao and established big plantations in rubber, pineapples, bananas and coconuts for export. Both haciendas and plantations existed side by side with subsistence farming and small agriculture.

Colonization introduced a system of private property rights that subdued pre-colonial systems of stewardship. Colonial documents and titles to land were written in the colonizers language, thus alienating the people. Communal use of land was replaced by production in large tracts of land by poor peasants and laborers. The concentration and use of land for large-scale production, and the introduction of a system of property rights for land became the subsequent basis for extracting exorbitant land rents and land grabbing. It motivated the colonizers to seize more land but it also created massive resentment and resistance, leading to revolts and a deep yearning to break free from colonization.

These acts of resistance and rebellion would prevent Spain from completely putting Mindanao under its heel until they left in 1898. The Moro insurrection would take its toll on the US colonial government as well, and lead to a violent campaign against the Moro communities in Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Zamboanga, Dansalan, and Cotabato, which enabled the US colonizers to subdue the entire country. Moro rebels were tamed by entering into deals with the sultans and the other Moro elite, such as by collaboration with the Muslim aristocracy in Sulu, setting the stage for Mindanao's gradual incorporation into the colonial administration.

The Moro clans and the various indigenous tribes of Mindanao did not respond in the same way to the threat of land grabbing. A few of the Moro datus rushed to secure titles to their land. However, the poor Moro majority and indigenous people ignored or refused to accept the land laws passed by the US colonial regime between 1900 and 1936, which favoured the Christian settlers and systematically discriminated against the Moro. They continued to adhere to the hereditary, communal, and stewardship arrangements that governed land use consistent with their religion and traditions. This proved costly for both the Moro and indigenous people (lumad) of Mindanao who were dispossessed of fertile land by



Despite of fertile soils and plentiful resources, the conflict areas belong to the poorest regions of the Philippines

farmer-settlers from the north and central parts of the country, local and multinational companies, and by their own Moro elites.

In the brief span between 1907 and 1940 Mindanao was transformed into a haven of investments by American companies, starting with the entry of commercial firms engaged in timber, mining, and industrial crop production in pineapple, abaca, sugar, and rubber. After the Second World War, the entire territory and government was transferred by the US government into the hands of the north-Filipino elites and the datu aristocracy.

After World War II, a second and third wave of migrants would dwarf the Moro population and radically increase the scope of land under the domain of the newcomers, and intensify inter-communal hostility and conflict between

Muslims and Christians. Masked as a Christian-Muslim conflict, the hostilities would create conditions for the further colonization of Mindanao and the marginalization of the Moro, though it was now administered by a central Philippine state managed by the landowning and business elites following the grant of independence from the US in 1946.

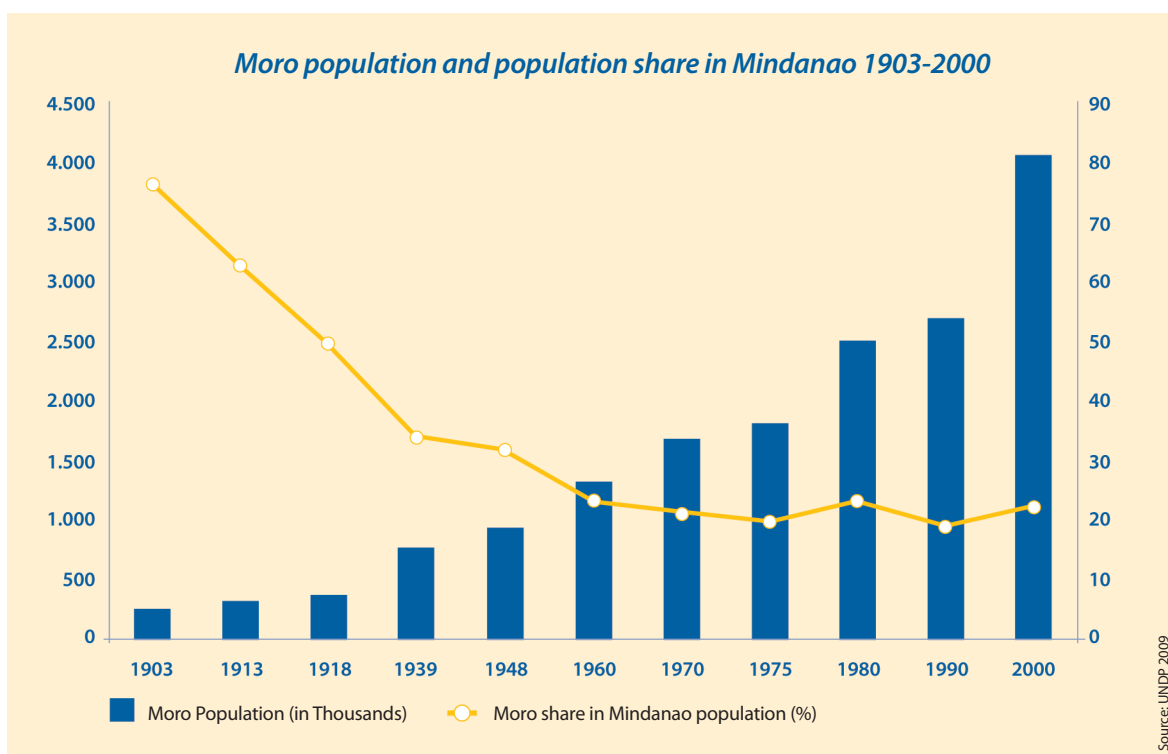
The second wave of settlers to Mindanao would occur in the 1950s when then President Ramon Magsaysay awarded homestead land to peasants to thwart a growing communist peasant insurgency in Luzon and the Visayas. In the immediate post-war period the areas peripheral to the lands directly occupied and cultivated by Moro farmers and fishermen, mainly in the northern, western, and southern parts of Mindanao, would be threatened by these new settlements.

The proximity of lands that were now owned and cultivated by settlers from the north to those cultivated by Moro communities would lead to the further intensification of inter-communal conflict in the 1960s. On one side the emergence of militias such as the “Ilagas” (meaning “rats”), an armed group with connections to non-Moro politicians and elites, intensified the threat of displacement of the original inhabitants. On the other side, the “Blackshirts” and “Barracudas”, armed militia groups associated with powerful Moro clans threatened the interests and security of the northern settlers and private businesses investing in the region.¹

These events provide the backdrop for the eruption of violence and conflict in the late sixties and early seventies. The flashpoint was the “Jabidah” massacre of a Moro armed group that had been trained for an invasion of Sabah, Malaysia, by the Philippine Army. The event triggered the establishment of the Moro National Liberation Front. At the time of the MNLF’s establishment, the population of Mindanao had increased three-fold from the separate waves of settlers to the island. Only forty percent (40%) of the population were Muslims in 1976, compared to 98% in 1913. By 1990 that percentage had dropped to 22%.

From 1970 to 2000, contract farming systems and the introduction of hybridization across crops led to the entry of more transnational capital and the further integration of Mindanao into the global economy. Food processing expanded alongside the growth of industrial

¹ Udtog Matalam, a Maguindanao clan leader, founded the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968. The MIM subsequently led to the establishment of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Meanwhile, Ali Dimaporo, a Maranao clan leader from Lanao del Norte, later became the principal ally and collaborator of Ferdinand Marcos during the martial law period.



and manufacturing enterprises and investments in Mindanao. However, the areas considered part of Muslim Mindanao would be mostly excluded from the expansion of corporate agribusiness, an area bypassed because of conflict, as the southern and north-central parts of Mindanao captured the gains from the expansion of major industrial projects such as integrated steel production, petrochemicals, paper and wood-based industries, fish processing, mineral exploitation, and energy generation.

Exclusion from the gains of economic growth elsewhere in the Philippines is today highlighted by the wide gaps in terms of longevity, education, incidence of poverty, and unemployment. Expected life at birth is only 52 compared to the national average of 71. Poverty incidence was at 45% compared to 36% nationally, while unemployment was at a high 56% compared to 10% for the rest of the country.

The resulting social exclusion created new sources of violence. It spurred a new reliance on warlord clans for security and a vast illegal economy for livelihoods and incomes. Violent clans and a shadow economy are double-edged swords that ensure some form of protection and inclusion. They are in stark contrast to the sources of violence and rebellion at the onset of the Moro people's armed struggle, when the links to rebel armies or the datu aristocracy were the keys to survival. These conditions are facilitated by significant demographic changes that have reshaped the economic and political contours of Muslim Mindanao. The region is experiencing high fertility and an out-migration by the

Moro to the ghettos of Manila, Cebu, Davao and other urban areas – places where a way out of poverty is as illusory as in the conflict-affected regions of Mindanao.

*»In Manila, they build bridges where there are no rivers.
In Mindanao, our rivers are still unbridged.«*
Datu Antonio P. Kinoc, Member of the current MILF Peace Panel,
IP tribal leader (B'laan Tribe)

As is often the case in much of the underdeveloped world, culture and ethnicity is often used as a convenient mask to hide the real sources of poverty and conflict. The story of the Bangsamoro people is no different. Here the cultural drama is one of religion, expressed as the struggle between Christians and Muslims, or a "clash of civilizations". In recent times the cultural divide is being couched in terms that provoke even more anger and conflict: as one between tradition and modernity, or between moderates and fundamentalists. Yet when you look at their history and you encounter the Moro people you discover that there are few differences separating their hopes and aspirations from our own. ■

Francisco Lara Jr.

1.3 The Internationalized Moro Conflict in Southern Philippines

Sometime in May 2000, at the height of the Armed Forces of the Philippines's (AFP) offensive to dislodge the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from its main camp in Mindanao, the Moro rebels declared a unilateral ceasefire in order that bodies of slain combatants and civilians could be retrieved. As the Red Cross prepared to enter the battle zone to take the corpses, the AFP command and the government in Manila balked, delaying Red Cross vehicles from moving. A government spokesman explained that they did not want the Red Cross to be involved as this may "internationalize" what Manila regards as a purely internal armed conflict.

Yet, the Moro conflict is already internationalized, i.e. the political, development, and lately, even the military agenda have been or are being shaped and influenced by international actors. The strategic role of the international community in shaping the political agenda of the conflict is best exemplified by how the then still undivided Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was made to scale down its demand from secession to autonomy.

The MNLF was formed to fight for an independent Bangsamoro (Moro nation) homeland. But in 1975, as its campaign reached a military stalemate, they were handed the Working Paper of the Committee of Four (Senegal, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Somalia) of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It was a *fait accompli*, asking the MNLF to drop its demand for independence and agree instead to autonomy, defined as self-government within the framework of Philippine national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Moro National Liberation Front later split into two groups, the more secular group which retained the name MNLF, and the more religiously-inspired group which adopted the name Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Despite the MNLF leadership's unwillingness, autonomy was eventually adopted and made legally-binding in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. Since then, while the OIC and its individual member countries have provided invaluable political, moral, and even material support to the Moro insurgency, they have been the strategic influence that have doused the demand for independence. This is quite understandable. Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, two OIC members that have played key roles by brokering peace negotiations in the Moro conflict, themselves face secessionist and ethnic unrest within their borders.

Hence, it is to their interest to demonstrate that the policy framework of autonomy and self-government can work.

The international community has also influenced the development agenda, especially after the 1996 Peace Agreement between the MNLF and the government, brokered by Indonesia. Even before the agreement was signed, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) had already started small-scale socio-economic and livelihood projects dealing directly with individual Moro rebels. These projects provided combatants with capital, farm assets, and technical assistance to support them in the transition from an armed life on the run to a settled, economically productive life. Soon, other major donors followed suit, like the European Union and some of its individual countries like the United Kingdom and Spain, as well as the Americans, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The approach of these donor organizations was basically to offer 'carrots' to help wean Moro fighters away from the conflict. But it was not just western donor organizations that were involved. Malaysia poured millions of dollars in aid for the development of palm oil plantations in the Lanao provinces. Libya has long been a supporter of small infrastructure projects. Indonesia attempted a novel approach. Rather than supporting agriculture on

Since 2001, Malaysia has been monitoring the peace talks between GRP and MILF as a third party. They also make up the biggest party to the international observer mission





the production side, President Suharto offered support on the marketing side, by facilitating the sale and trade of products from the Moro regions to Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. While Suharto's approach offered much promise, it was never implemented since Suharto was ousted soon after in 1998.

The impact of the development aid approach in consolidating peace is the subject of intense debates. While indeed the donor organizations delivered much needed assistance to the Moro regions, most of the projects were simply stop-gap, not comprehensive reconstruction programs. Furthermore, the scale of the destruction, not just on the region's infrastructure but also on its social fabric, was seriously underestimated. For example, many projects failed simply because there were no local accountants – most of the educated Muslim middle class had already migrated to safer areas after more than a generation of conflict. Another critical issue is that in many cases, it was Muslim elites who were able to benefit most from the projects. There was little effort

to ensure that the benefits of development would go to the most neglected areas or most vulnerable populations. The Malaysian palm oil project, for example, exacerbated rather than addressed land reform problems.

Land is the most basic issue underlying the Moro conflict, more than the so-called Christian-Muslim divide, yet it is an issue that has not been thoroughly addressed by the development agenda. At one level, the 'Mindanao problem' is a case of settlers hungry for land, who happen to be mostly Christian, coming into conflict with natives and original inhabitants, who happen to be mostly Muslim and Lumad, or animist indigenous communities. Since

»Self-determination? What does this mean? If a part of Mindanao would become independent or be granted wider autonomy nothing would change. The poor would still be poor, the rich would still get richer.«

Maki, 23, Civil engineering student in Davao City, born in Marawi City

the 1970's, both the Moro leadership and the government have avoided including the land issue in the peace negotiations because of its inherent complexity and potential to radically polarize the different stakeholders. The Lumad are particularly voiceless in this conflict, especially because their political representation has been weaker, compared to the Muslims. But they are key players too, whose aspirations could not be simply set aside. The Moro leadership has attempted to address Lumad restiveness, as well as justice issues raised by mostly Christian settlers, by redefining the meaning of "Moro". Moro are not just Muslims, they say, but also Lumad as well as Christian settlers who have rightful claims to land. The MNLF, for example, now have Lumad and Christian members in its governing council. Some civil society organizations have fostered a "Tri-People Approach" to peace – involving Muslims, Lumad and settlers. It is in this regard that the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain – a process for documenting land claims and settling land conflicts – assumes particular significance.

But a more important twist perhaps on the development agenda is how development aid appears to be increasingly linked to a military agenda. After 9/11, American involvement became increasingly shaped by its war on terror. US troops (although in non-combat roles) are now on the ground in the Moro areas, particularly in places where the al-Qaeda linked Abu Sayyaf militants are known to be located. The American goal can be described as two-fold. The military objective is to improve the efficiency of the Philippine military in tracking down the militants. This is then complemented by the development objective of supporting some form of economic growth, to keep a restive population to be more economically hopeful and therefore less prone to support militants.

Today, international non-government organizations have also started to be engaged with the problems in the Southern Philippines. Most of them provide support to local NGOs who, for example, are engaged in capacity-building projects that can enable local communities to have a stronger voice in shaping the development agenda – an agenda that is too important to leave to politicians and donor organizations alone. Local peace advocacy groups are not just promoting national-level mechanisms such as the Bishops-Ulama Conference, but also grassroots inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue. Lumad issues and concerns, are now given much more prominence and weight. Some NGOs contributed to generating solutions for more specific problems. An NGO, International Alert, for example, has convened an international exchange on the role of the military, police and intelligence services in periods of political

transition. The London-based Conciliation Resources has started partnerships with various local groups to promote inter-faith dialogues, capacity-building, or comparative learning on peace processes. Conciliation Resources has also become an observer in the continuing Malaysian-brokered peace negotiations between the MILF and the government. On the business front, conferences like the November 2009 Mindanao Peace and Investment Forum, supported by USAID, are becoming more frequent.

To conclude, it comes across as ironic that while the Philippine government is averse to any internationalization of the Moro conflict, previous international involvement had been to its advantage. For example, international involvement has led to autonomy instead of independence; or the pursuit of a development agenda that effectively empowers Manila's elite allies in the Moro regions. The Moro conflict in the southern Philippines is internationalized – the political agenda, the humanitarian agenda, the development agenda, and the military agenda are shaped to some extent, some more than others, by international players. However, a more promising form of international involvement appears to be consolidating now. More people-to-people contacts across international borders, based on more equal and transparent relationships, are taking root. The projects that emerge from such relationships promise to deliver a more lasting impact for peace, address the root causes of the conflict, and enable the poor and vulnerable to have a greater say on the decisions to be made on their future. There are still issues to resolve and debates to settle even with this 'people-to-people internationalization', but at least it can learn much from the failures of diplomacy and the internationalization of the past. ■

Eric Gutierrez

2 Perspectives on the Conflict

2.1 Reporting Mindanao: Perceptions and Perspectives

While the conflict in Mindanao is indeed internationalised, this is not reflected in international news media reporting, that very rarely revisits the island. The bias of international media in reporting on Mindanao is magnified by the national and local media's reporting.

Respective of the role media can play for a lasting impact on peace, the most urgent matter is for journalists to do their homework and "prepare themselves extensively before a coverage of the peace process at any juncture". This is often neglected, according to Professor Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, former editor of a Cotabato City based newspaper, The Mindanao Cross. Guiam notes that rebels and soldiers are not the only ones who can make war, but irresponsible and reckless journalists do, if their reporting is done without researching the historical basis of the conflict and inquiring about Philippine government policy guidelines on the peace negotiations, adding that these are long-term processes, and not isolated news events.

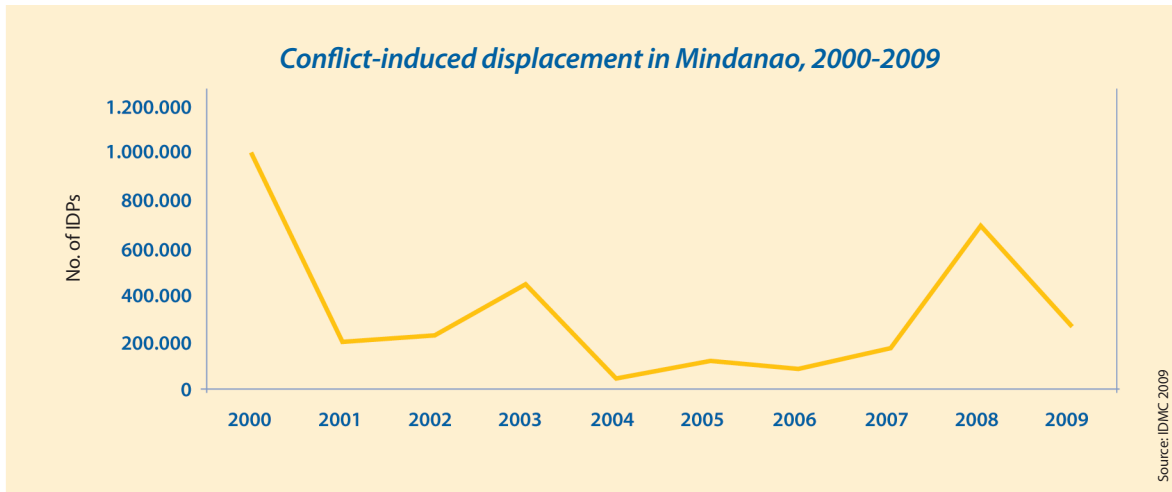
Indeed, how many armed conflicts could have been nipped in the bud? And how many supposed minor conflicts transformed into major wars because reports were exacerbated by the media?

Nearly a million villagers from South-Central Mindanao were displaced in the "all-out war" in 2000; some 400,000 during the violent clashes in 2003; and in the 2008 war, some 600,000 civilians were forced to leave their homes in what is known as "the biggest new displacement in the world" that year according to the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Hundreds of combatants were killed in the three wars. And as more villagers flocked to the overcrowded evacuation centers the incidence of death and disease among the "bakwits" (internally displaced persons) also increased. Millions, if not billions of pesos were spent on bullets and bombs and other materiel when these would have been best spent on basic services for the poor.

But more than the visible effects of the war, the invisible effects of war are even more disturbing: neighbors starting to distrust each other and the

Sensationalism and one-sidedness often dominate the coverage in the national media





erstwhile peaceful co-existence among the Moro, Lumad and settlers in the villages, threatened by biases and prejudices from either side.

Unknown to most, the 2000, 2003 and 2008 wars, all waged in the midst of peace negotiations, were preventable wars. The peace panels had, in fact, already set up mechanisms that could have been tapped precisely to prevent conflicts from escalating into full-blown wars.

This vital fact, however, was kept from the public by a media whose practitioners were mostly in the dark themselves, about the mechanisms in place. And there lies the tragedy. For here was an institution that could have helped stop the wars in 2000, 2003 and 2008; the dying and the maiming and the fleeing to evacuation centers; the waste of money; the societal divide, but failed.

Reporting the Conflicts

Reporting the conflict in Mindanao requires examining first what these conflicts are, who is reporting on Mindanao and the media used in reporting.

Before the advent of the internet, the world's information order was simple: international wire agencies dictate what is and what is NOT news for the rest of the world while national newspapers, television and radio networks do the same for the rest of the country.

Generations of Mindanao journalists have been asserting that Mindanao must set its own agenda. But the telecommunication system outside Metro Manila back in the 1970s was so poor that it guaranteed little resistance to Marcos' declaration of martial law. By January 2001, the telecommunications system had vastly improved and diversified, so that text messages sent through mobile phones could gather thousands of people in protest actions, and eventually topple a corrupt President, Joseph Estrada, a movie actor

who waged an "all out war" against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2000 and who promised to return as President in the May 2010 polls to continue his "unfinished" business – the war against the MILF.

With telecommunications improving, the media started assuming an even bigger role. In 2002 Mindanao's community newspaper editors and TV and radio station managers gathered for the 1st Mindanao Media Summit and crafted "Our Covenant". In 2008, at the 4th Mindanao Media Summit, the journalists tackled the theme "Mindanao 2020: The Vision Begins With Us" precisely to get the media to think of Mindanao's future beyond the 2010 to 2016 Presidency.

But the media composition in Mindanao is still a representation of the national media: concentration is in the key cities, very few in the towns, and the Moro and Lumad sectors are hardly represented.

When major stories break in Mindanao, most of the networks and national newspapers send over their reporters from Manila with very little or no briefing at all on the situation or the history of Mindanao.

»Defense beat.«

As far as the national and international media networks are concerned, Mindanao is just a "defense beat," a war zone. Mindanao has even been called "home to the world's largest university of terror" by one writer, as if bombs explode on every square inch of our 26 provinces and 33 cities everyday of our lives.

Mindanao has been called home to all the Moro liberation fronts and their struggle for justice and self-determination, which is historically determined, however, as Mindanao is the Moro's ancestral home where two sultanates – Sulu and Maguindanao – thrived with their own governance systems until the Spaniards came to

conquer these areas and failing that, sold for a measly 20 million dollars through the Treaty of Paris in 1898 what is now the Philippines, to the United States, including those areas in Mindanao they failed to colonize.

Such historical facts are rarely heeded by most writers. But tremendous advancements in technology and the 24/7 delivery of news should make journalists look deeper into their responsibilities. A teacher can pass on his or her mistake to 40 or 50 of his/ her students every semester; a journalist can pass on his/ her mistakes to millions of viewers or readers every day.

Often, accuracy is sacrificed for speed especially between competing networks; who gets to place “exclusive news” first, not necessarily who gets it right first is what counts.

The “Ampatuan Massacre”

The “Ampatuan Massacre” - “the largest ever massacre of journalists in a single day”^{*}:

In 2009, the Philippines attained the questionable title of being the most dangerous country for journalists in the world. In a politically motivated ambush in Maguindanao province, 57 people were brutally killed – among them 32 journalists. They were part of a politician’s convoy whose family members wanted to register his candidature for the governor’s office. Thus, they dared to challenge the Ampatuan’s dominance in the region – a powerful, government supported clan. And indeed, there is the strong suspicion that the bloodbath was committed by the current governor’s militia.

By now, charges have been pressed against 197 suspects in total, including 23 members of the influential Ampatuan family, for planning, executing and participating in the massacre. Critical voices from civil society and politics, however, fear that justice will not be achieved due to corruption, political pressure and the often bemoaned “culture of impunity”.

^{*} Reporters Without Borders (2009): Wars and Disputed Elections: The Most Dangerous Stories for Journalists. Round-up of Reporters Without Borders. Press Freedom in 2009. URL: http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Bilan_2009_GB_BD.pdf (last accessed on 07.12.2010)

All the while, media groups in Mindanao and in the rest of the country are increasingly exerting efforts to ensure journalists are aware of ethics issues.

While print and TV are nationally and interationally at the forefront of media reporting, radio is still a dominant medium in Mindanao. There are also still many portions in Mindanao that cannot access the internet, thus limiting use of this medium. But with the advances in telecommunications, reporters, including those from radio, can easily get in touch with sources, including military officials and even rebel leaders.

Reporting the ARMM

Former Presidential Adviser on Mindanao, Paul Dominguez, refers to the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi as the “second Mindanao” in contrast to the “first Mindanao” that comprises developed areas not or little affected by the conflict.

Reporting the ARMM is, to a certain degree, like reporting Mindanao from a distance: Nationwide and even within Mindanao, there are very few Moro reporters. Reporting is done mostly by the non-Moro, who have their own perspectives and biases that could color the reportage.

Another limitation is the fact that of the five ARMM provinces three are island provinces (Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi) – which are far from the mainland and where the media is mostly government-operated.

Most of the coverage from the islands then, is done by the military or police (ergo, expectedly, on the security situation) through reports to their regional headquarters based in Zamboanga City in Western Mindanao, which are then fed to the media in neighboring cities and nationwide.

Too often, only a few journalists bother to countercheck the data with sources from the islands.

No understanding of history

But understanding the past is necessary for us to understand the present and welcome the future. Seminars after seminars have been held on reporting about the conflict or reporting peace in Mindanao since 1988, but 22 years later, reportage about Mindanao is still wanting.

Why? Ours is a history written by colonizers. Very few Filipinos are even aware that there were two existing sultanates in Mindanao before the colonial powers Spain,



In order to direct the media's attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation of internal refugees, NGOs organise informative events for journalists in Mindanao

and later America, arrived to subdue the archipelago. Because of this, very few also understand what the revolts and rebellions in Mindanao are all about.

But today, there should be no excuse for ignorance. From 2000 to 2009 alone, at least 229 books on Mindanao, many written by Mindanawons, have been published, most of them on history, rebellion and peacebuilding.

Reporters as peace stakeholders

Despite all the improvements in telecommunications, despite seminars on conflict and peace reporting, why is reportage of Mindanao still wanting?

A former executive of a major television network put it simply: Mindanao stories, except for the usual violence and war headlines, "do not rate," meaning that in the world of television and radio stations, what does not rate need not be shown nor given air time.

For newspapers, space is a major limitation and even if the national newspaper has a section for news from beyond Metro Manila, this one page section is hardly enough for the number of active correspondents writing from various parts of the country. Therefore, stories that are "fresh" such as a bombing somewhere in the hinterlands of Mindanao, have more chances of publication than a waterworks system improving the lives of a thousand residents someplace else in Mindanao.

Instead of asserting the news agenda for Mindanao, instead of sending to Manila stories about the other aspects of Mindanao, Mindanao sub-editors continue the cycle of feeding Manila the kind of news it wants, further entrenching the image of Mindanao as conflict-ridden in the national and international consciousness. This, in turn, perpetuates the problem of reportage on Mindanao.

The media, along with civil society, should push for responsible reportage of Mindanao issues. One can only look back to the Media Covenant – now a nearly eight-year-old document – to emphasize the point that as Mindanawon journalists, "we play a crucial role in helping chart the future of Mindanao." It reads that "we are disseminators and interpreters of news. But we are also major stakeholders in the quest for peace in Mindanao. We want to re-shape and re-direct the themes on Mindanao currently dominated by terrorism, war, criminality, and other forms of violence, to one that presents a realistic, balanced and truthful reporting of the lives, initiatives, relationships, issues, pains, dreams and triumphs of our people". ■

Carolyn O. Arguillas

2.2 Perceptions of the Mindanao Conflict among the Philippine population

In the early days of August in 2008, a whirlwind of controversy erupted in the Philippines when the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) which would have been a prelude to the forging of a comprehensive peace pact, ending about eleven years of peace negotiations, was aborted.

A stunning sequence of events followed: Christian politicians publicly vilified and pilloried the MOA-AD as nothing but conceding a territory to the MILF, causing the country's "dismemberment". Lumad opposed the agreement for lack of consultation and fearing the loss of their own ancestral domain. Fighting broke out between three MILF commanders and government soldiers that displaced more than half a million people. In October that year, the Supreme Court declared the MOA-AD unconstitutional.

The MOA-AD controversy sharply divided Muslims and Christians and resurfaced deep-seated prejudices, biases and animosity. It also revealed the extent of public ignorance on the peace negotiations and the reasons why these were being held.

Perceptions on the Peace Process

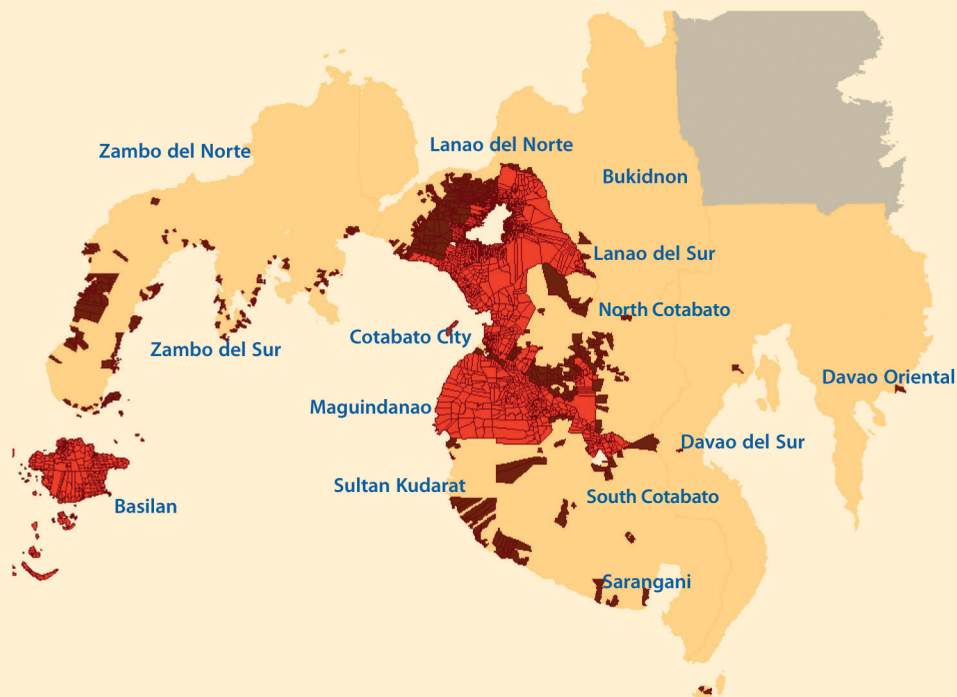
It is not entirely surprising that the MOA-AD met such a widespread opposition. To begin with, the intricacies of the Mindanao peace process are not easy to comprehend for a public that gets little information on the subject. A nationwide survey by The Asia Foundation in 2008 shows that the level of knowledge about the contents of the MOA-AD was low, which was not totally unexpected given that the document is complicated and was only covered very briefly in the news media. Moreover, information is minimal due to the nature of secrecy of the peace negotiations. But little knowledge about the MOA-AD, and the Mindanao peace process in general, resulted in a lot of confusion and misunderstanding from a public who tends to be easily swayed by nationalist rhetoric from politicians opposing the agreement.

Civil society in the conflict areas views the peace process with a mixture of hope and scepticism



© Charlie Saceda

Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and areas with predominantly Muslim population



Source: GTZ, Assessment of Options for German Development Cooperation in Mindanao, Philippines, 2007

Interestingly though, the same Asia Foundation survey reveals that people overwhelmingly support the peace talks as a way of resolving the conflict in Mindanao as opposed to military action. According to the report, urban Muslims and those in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) blame the government for post-MOA-AD violence. But responses to questions vary between people coming from outside ARMM and within ARMM. Asked, for example, about the Supreme Court decision, respondents from outside ARMM agree with the Court's rejection of the MOA-AD whereas those from ARMM, which has a predominantly Muslim population, disagree.

Against the backdrop of post-MOA-AD violence and the suspension of the peace talks, the Bishop Ulama Conference, an inter-religious dialogue forum decided to undertake "Konsult Mindanaw" – a series of consultations across the regions that was first of all meant to provide basic information and relevant documentation on the different issues relating to the peace talks. Over four thousand Muslims, Lumad and Christians from various sectors in Mindanao participated to share their visions of peace and also give recommendations on the current GRP-MILF peace talks.

»Muslims are naturally lazy. They say the settlers took their land. But we did not take occupied spaces or properties. But we came to Mindanao and started cultivating the untilled land. All this vast land would otherwise still lie idle and waste.«
Engineer, 49, Davao City, Christian settler from Ilo-ilo

During the consultations, strong emotions were expressed by the participants, ranging from anger, distrust, disappointment and frustration to confusion, worry and fear over what they see as the futility of the peace process. Opinions are split: many staunchly support the continuation of the MOA-AD; an equal number feels that the MOA-AD needs to be revised; some suggest that the concept should be abandoned altogether. Nevertheless, participants are one in voicing their call for the resumption of the peace talks on account of the suffering of civilians and the costs of war insisting on their right to participate in, be consulted on and informed about the whole process.

»The present ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) is a sham. It is nothing but an administrative mechanism of the government. It has no control when it comes to the utilization, exploration and exploitation of its natural resources. Where is the autonomy there?«

Datu Antonio P. Kinoc, Member of the current MILF Peace Panel, IP tribal leader (B'laan Tribe)

However, the prevalence of biases and prejudices by one group against the other became evident time and time again during the discussions. The people of Mindanao with their varying ethnic backgrounds oftentimes identify themselves as Muslims or Moro, Christians, settlers, Lumad or indigenous peoples who have witnessed inter-cultural conflicts among their respective ethnic groups. Misunderstandings occur because of differing

»When I grew up, my parents would always tell me to behave or else the Moro will come and do something bad to me. My friends also shared the same experience. Or they would advise you to be careful if there were moros or muslims in your neighbourhood because they are thieves and traitors.«

*28 Education officer at Philippine Eagle Foundation,
from Cagayan de Oro*

languages, beliefs, values, wants and needs which, over time, can ripen into prejudice. Being both a source and a consequence of violent conflicts, it is these mindsets that need to be dealt with in order to encourage and strengthen people's capacity to live in harmony amidst diversity and to non-violently work on local conflicts.

Prejudices and Negative Stereotypes

The Mindanao conflict has left a legacy of suffering and pain with Muslims and Lumad being usually the subjects of discrimination. They were once the original inhabitants of the island but government resettlement schemes in the past made it possible for Christian migrants from the northern parts of the Philippines to settle in Mindanao, to the extent that today they constitute a majority. Past discriminatory laws on landholdings favouring Christians over non-Christians also dispossessed the latter. These experiences brought about feelings of deprivation and injustice among Moro and Lumad that have triggered violent conflicts. Clashes that erupted in the 1970s between Christian vigilantes "Ilagas" (Rats) and Muslim vigilantes "Blackshirts," and attacks on civilian communities, for example, remain up to now one of the darkest episodes in Mindanao history.

These grievances and painful memories endured by both Muslims and Christians alike still evoke strong emotions and continue to divide communities. Inzon reveals that stereotypes among Muslims and Christians contain a depreciatory image of Muslims being described as bad, troublesome, hostile, stupid, poor and tradition-bound. On the other hand, Muslims show negative attitudes towards Christians, and towards the national government in particular. Muslims label Christians as infidels, land grabbers, settlers, proselytizers and baboy (pigs). Sadly, these attitudes and stereotypic beliefs remain unchanged even after more than three decades.

This concurs with surveys indicating a strong anti-Muslim bias among many Filipinos. The 2005 UNDP Philippine Human Development Report (PHDR) reveals an alarming

picture of apparent discrimination against Muslims. In the course of its research, people recounted personal experiences and anecdotes about how Muslims were shut out of jobs and study opportunities, ignored in public places, or greeted with patronizing, shocked comments about how come they are so "good" even though they "are Muslims." According to the report, a considerable percentage of Filipinos (33% to 39%) are biased against Muslims notwithstanding the fact that only about 14% of them have had direct dealings with Muslims.

A majority (62% to 71%) of Visayans living in the Central Philippines participating in the study believes that Muslims probably follow four of the common stereotypes, namely that they are oppressive to women, prone to run amok, hate non-Muslims, are terrorists or extremists, and do not consider themselves as Filipinos.

»I hope that people can forget about their differences some day. If the discrimination between Muslims and Christians stops then there will be peace. But as of now, this is impossible.«

*Kristen, 20, Restaurant- and Hotel management student,
Davao City, from Davao del Sur*

Many studies cite that prejudices and stereotypes are "multi-determined", meaning they cannot be traced back to one distinct cause. They emerge from different sources, among them social, cultural and psychological factors. Especially fear can be cited as a major cause of prejudice. The "other" is viewed as different which stimulates a fear of the unknown, a fear of the unfamiliar. As Michelle Maiese puts it, "if fear is the father of prejudice, ignorance is its grandfather".

Perceptions on the Roots of Conflict

Social psychology studies on the Mindanao conflict point out that Muslims and Christians perceive the conflict from varying positions and storylines. The marginalized Muslim population sees the conflict as structurally-rooted, mainly due to displacement, landlessness and loss of rights to self-determination. Montiel and Macapagal observed that the dominant Christian group, however, attributes the Mindanao conflict to person-related causes like corruption of the mind and moral fiber, as well as socio-cultural discrimination.

The construction of exclusive identities also plays its part as supposed traits of character are being attributed to the opposing party. Inzon's 2009 findings correspond



After 13 years of peace negotiations between GRP and MILF, representatives of civil society and NGOs especially demand sincerity of both parties

to earlier studies: Christians position the Muslims as oppressive, violent and power-hungry whereas Muslims see themselves as oppressed by the Christian-dominated Philippine government and the Christian Filipinos in general. Lumad, for their part, view both the Muslims and the Christians as aggressors and position themselves as peaceful and non-violent, caught in the crossfire between the Muslims and the Christians.

»The indigenous people's concept of land does not include land titles. But if we are excluded from any Comprehensive Compact then the IPs will be the next rebel front.«

Datu Antonio P. Kinoc, Member of the current MILF Peace Panel, IP tribal leader (B'laan Tribe)

To address these entrenched beliefs, inter-cultural understanding and going beyond prejudices and stereotype is one of the central topics of Mindanao peacebuilders. In its final report, the Konsult Mindanaw calls on “Sensitivity” as issue number one of the agenda for peace in recognition of the many layers of biases and prejudices, painful experiences of discrimination, dispossession, neglect, insult, misrepresentation, labelling, and ostracism rooted in a lack of understanding of historical crimes and insensitivity to other people’s identities, cultures and traditions. Part of it is to call for respect for the “right to self determination” and self-governance of the Moro and the Lumad within their ancestral domains, with the intent of correcting historical injustice, while at the same time considering how Mindanao peoples can move forward in peace. It also suggests that customary laws and indigenous peace covenants among local communities be seriously looked into and place them in dialogue with written and official history. ■

Charina Sanz

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2.3 Paths To Peace In Mindanao

During the early years of the Marcos dictatorship, there was hardly any group in the civil society of Mindanao that was in a position to respond to the challenge of peacebuilding to end, if not minimize the eruption of violence that had escalated in various parts of Mindanao in the late 1960s. Media was under intense State censorship; academic institutions had to deal with the military's close monitoring. Even though it was a common perception then that the State contributed to the eruption of violence to legitimize its declaration of martial rule, the few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that existed played it safe by ignoring militant issues. There were no people's organizations established yet. And the churches were also afraid to rock the boat. Therefore, nothing took place to resolve the conflict.

The Beginnings of Civil Society's Response to the Challenge of Peacebuilding

Eventually, a growing opposition to the Marcos dictatorship brought about a semblance of a civil society openly resisting his martial rule despite the risks involved. At first the issues tackled involved the blatant human rights violations perpetuated by the military and related issues mainly affecting the peasants, agricultural workers,

fisherfolk, urban poor and indigenous peoples. This nascent civil society would ultimately deal with the rise of violence in Muslim Mindanao and be engaged in peacebuilding, conflict transformation and inter-faith dialogue.

The first to act on the issue of violence in Mindanao were the churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Owing to their immersion among grassroots communities, church leaders saw the need to take tentative initiatives. On the part of the Catholic Church, bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders came up with a new thrust in terms of their presence among Moro and Lumad communities in the mid-1970s, namely, to conduct a dialogue of faith and life.

Various factors pushed for the urgency of such a dialogue. First was that martial rule created havoc in the lives of Mindanawons. Second was the establishment of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference Secretariat (MSPC), a triennial conference involving all the dioceses where church people came together to share their situations and come up with relevant responses. At its 1974 conference, held in the wake of mass evacuations owing to the eruption of hostilities between the State's Armed Forces and those of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the delegates tackled this issue and came up with guidelines on how they could help defuse the tensions and bring forth peace. Third, the late Bishop Bienvenido Tudtud of Marawi and his team of pastoral workers began to flesh out a concrete interfaith dialogue program at the grassroots.

The Program of Dialogue of Faith and Life among Muslims and Christians

Having studied Islam and immersed himself among Muslims, Bishop Tudtud was one of the first to take seriously the challenge of setting up an inter-faith dialogue in Lanao del Sur. With the priests, religious and lay people in the Prelature of Marawi, he began to implement a program for dialogue of faith and life between Christians and Muslims. He envisioned a program that would help neutralize the prejudices both groups had for each other and encourage them to collaborate for peace.



An inter-religious dialogue and shared prayers between Muslims and Christians constitute just one aspect of the many communal peace initiatives

Other dioceses began to also take initiatives in setting up dialogue programs. In the late 1970s, the MSPC came up with Duyog (Accompany) Ramadhan under the leadership of Bishop Tutud. During the Muslims' celebration of Ramadhan, the base Christian communities were encouraged to accompany their Muslim neighbours in their prayers, fast and other celebrations. These communities were also encouraged to come up with collaborative efforts in solving their common social problems at the grassroots level like dealing with health problems and access to potable water. Various other groups, organizations and communities adapted this program in order to foster unity and understanding among Mindanawons.

Responding to the Needs of the Indigenous Peoples

As many problems were also being encountered by the Lumad (indigenous peoples) in the upland communities of Mindanao, both Catholic and Protestant churches also fielded their pastoral workers to the indigenous communities to assist the Lumad especially in terms of protecting their rights to their ancestral domain. The Mindanao-Sulu Conference on Justice and Development (MSCJD), an ecumenical collaborative body, now responds to the urgent needs of Lumad who were victimized by corporate firms penetrating their territories, military forces who violated their human rights and land-hungry businessmen engaged in grabbing their land.

The Advancement of the Peace Agenda with People Power

With the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, more initiatives for peace emerged. At various levels of Mindanawon society, these initiatives became more systematically planned and implemented. On the part of Christian leaders, there was a move to bring Catholic and Protestant bishops together with Muslim religious leaders (ulama) for purposes of dialogue and collaboration for peace. Today, this group is known as the Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC). Various universities and colleges began to have peace education for their students. Media began to increasingly cover the conflict situation. NGOs like the Coalition of Development-NGOs and Tri-People Partnership for Peace and Development (TriPeaceDev) sponsored fora, conferences and seminars that brought together those in government and civil society to discuss what could be done for peace in Mindanao.

One of the church-based NGOs that has made a major contribution to the peace efforts, especially in the Zamboanga-Basilan area, is the Peace Advocates of Zamboanga (PAZ). Constituted by church groups, schools, civil society peace advocates and ordinary people, PAZ began the celebration of a Week of Peace. In 1999, the BUC encouraged other areas of Mindanao to duplicate the efforts of PAZ. Since 2000 – from the last Thursday of November to the first Wednesday of December – people across various sectors celebrate the Mindanao Week of Peace. All kinds of activities – prayer vigils, visits to mosques and churches, forum and symposia, concerts and art contests, media events and student parades – make the Mindanao Week of Peace the yearly event that bring Mindanawons together for peace.

The Grassroots Peace Initiatives

The most important development in the 1980-90s, however, were the grassroots initiatives facilitated by ordinary people – peasants, fisherfolk, housewives, chapel leaders of faith communities and even young people. In some cases, they were supported by church groups or by NGOs. Some were self-reliant in terms of being able to mobilize resources and support for their activities, in particular from religious groups and the media; a few managed to secure funding from outside sources. Some of these initiatives involved the cooperation of local government units and even military figures; others were opposed by military forces if they were suspected of links to armed rebel groups or in the case of a lack of commitment to a peaceful solution among the military. Some have been sustained through many years; while others did not prosper for various reasons, such as leadership issues, a lack of resources, a lack of support, or ongoing violent conflict that displaced (parts of) the community.

Barangay Maladeg, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur is one such community where ordinary citizens – Muslims and Christians – came together to set up a peace zone; they aimed to stop violent confrontations between the military and Moro rebels by declaring that members of armed groups party to the conflict could only enter the zone unarmed. It began with a small group meeting at the house of one of the local leaders; eventually, they set up an organization that would implement the directives of a peace zone. The success of this peace zone with its positive impact on social life and the local economy, encouraged other barangays and municipalities to duplicate the effort. Such initiatives can be successful especially if communities are unified and if they can

mobilise support by the media and civil society, as well as local and regional authorities, and commanders of armed groups. The stronger and broader the support, the more likely are parties to respect a peace zone.

Today these and many other grassroots initiatives continue to thrive and can be observed in many parts across Mindanao. Among the Moro communities - where the rido (clan-based outbreak of hostilities resulting in killings) has persisted through decades - there has been an increasing number of grassroots-based groups and organizations engaged in conflict transformation that facilitated the coming together of various contentious groups in the hope of resolving their long-drawn conflicts to stop the killings so that peace could reign in their communities. Sukudans or elders, traditional leaders and religious leaders like the ulamas have been the main actors in facilitating actions to neutralize rido practices.

Among the many Lumad communities, conflict transformation efforts have concentrated on the issues of ancestral domain as well as in protecting their control over their resources. With the passage of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, the Lumads have some access to the titling of their ancestral domain with the issuance of Certificates to Ancestral Domain Titles (CADT) which, however, still poses numerous bureaucratic challenges for land ownership claims to be acknowledged. Moreover, with the Philippine Mining Act, they have been at the

mercy of the mining firms. Among the upland grassroots communities, the path to peace today is in empowering the Lumad to be able to assert their rights.

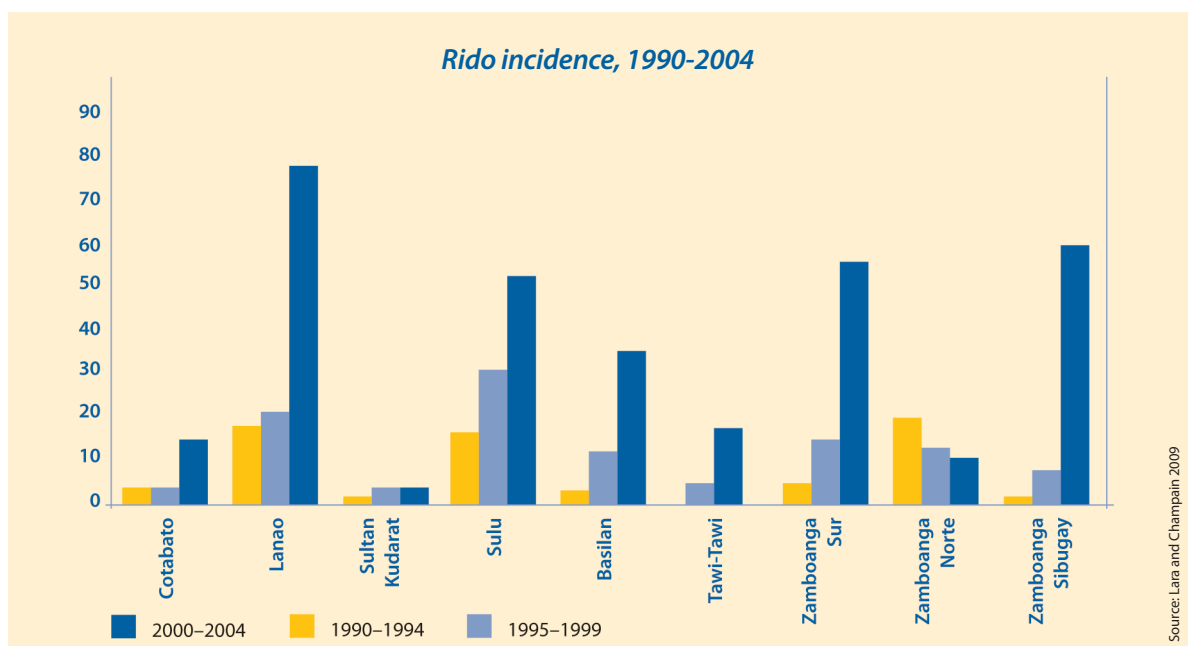
The Path to Peace that Lies Ahead for Mindanawons

Since the late 1960s until today, there have been major moments that saw the rise of armed hostilities between government forces and the Moro rebels. For four decades, the State has tried to make peace with the Moro rebels mainly through the peace talks from the time of Marcos (with the MNLF) until that of Arroyo (with the MILF).

Administrations change, but the peace efforts continue. Even the military and local government units have taken up the challenge of peace-building through the Peace and Order Councils at the regional, provincial, city/municipal and barangay levels. Many Mindanao-based NGO organizations, academic institutions and local groups will carry the torch to light the path to peace.

In the end, the hope that eventually peace will reign in Mindanao lies in the hearts and minds of the ordinary Mindanawons. With all kinds of initiatives taking place today among grassroots communities, there is hope that already the people of Mindanao are on the path to peace. ■

Karl M. Gaspar, CSsR



3 A Personal Stocktaking

3.1 Interview with Rexall Kaalim

Why did you decide to become a peace worker?

I grew up in Davao del Norte in a community that was affected by violence. What I saw happening to civilians encouraged me to work for strengthening the capacities of vulnerable communities, in particular the elderly, women and children, who are suffering most from the conflict. In evacuation centers, they die of very simple causes, like diarrhea or dehydration.

In 2003, I started organizing evacuees to assert their rights as civilians to be protected under international frameworks, like International Humanitarian Law and the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement. That triggered the first “Bakwit Power” event, where thousands of refugees, despite the looming threat of harassment by the military, took to the streets to demand a ceasefire, in order to return to their villages. Those evacuees who helped us organize were the first community-based Bantay Ceasefire, which originally had been conceptualized in 2003 by Mindanao NGOs. We facilitated their efforts to making their voices heard by the authorities.

What has happened since you first started engaging for peace?

When we started, the mechanisms that were in place to protect civilians were very weak. Now the conflict parties agreed on introducing a civilian protection component as part of the duties of the International Monitoring Team in the GRP – MILF Peace Process. That’s a good development. But despite ongoing peace talks, the MILF and the Government keep on fighting. Add to that other conflict lines such as clan feuds, leadership conflicts, land conflicts, political feuds and rampant criminal activities. It is very difficult to engage and ensure civilian protection when there are clashes.

Through advocacy, through public exposure of the issues in the media, we supported the monitoring of ceasefire agreements. In 2005, the main conflict parties acknowledged participation of civil society organizations in monitoring their agreements. But it’s frustrating because while there is a clear path to reach peace, the parties often go back to square one. Neither the Government nor the MILF provide support to the civilian protection component. On the contrary, NGOs have to fund themselves. So how can they be effective? Can they pressure the MILF or the Government to really commit to the initiative? Moreover, the Philippine Government has a track record of not pursuing what the previous



Rexall Kaalim (center) talking to members of the military

administration started. We never know what the next administration will bring.

What, according to you, are the root causes of the conflict?

Colonization, which resulted in marginalization, politically, economically, and socially. Now people say the root cause of the conflict is poverty, but I disagree. The wars in the 1970’s destroyed a lot of the local socio-economic infrastructure, including the local leadership system, entrenching corruption. Further, in-migration since the beginning of the 20th Century led to the marginalization of the native inhabitants, both indigenous peoples and Muslims. On the other hand, the settlers are also victims, in that they were often instrumentalized for fueling the conflict. Our history needs to be rewritten for people to know, and that’s happening now, but it’s a long process to do that. We need to reflect on history in a constructive way, not to fuel more anger.

Which group, if one could be singled out, is most affected by the conflict?

The most affected are the Bangsamoro in the context of the conflict. But in terms of economic displacement and disenfranchisement, it’s the indigenous peoples, because in the conflict between the Bangsamoro and

the government, they have to choose sides and in the end they are still displaced from their ancestral domains. History tells us that the Lumad don't resist the intrusion of other communities, they just tend to give up their territory until they are cornered to small areas. This issue is not sufficiently addressed right now.

In what way do NGOs have an impact on solving the conflict?

I think that civil society organizations can make a significant contribution, such as in the civilian protection component and the implementation of ceasefire agreements, as in the case of Bantay Ceasefire. In the political arena, civil society organizations such as the Mindanao Peoples Caucus have also impacted on the peace process through facilitating local people's participation in the peace process. While leadership is very important in the process, the healing between affected communities after decades of animosity and hatred must happen on the ground. Moreover, we need to strengthen infrastructures that will sustain the peace. However, donors also just stop supporting ongoing programs, like inter-religious dialogues that cannot continue because there's no funding, but there is no mechanism yet to address that sustainably.

How could international actors facilitate the peace process?

It should be through participation in the process by a country that has the credibility to really bring the two parties together. Malaysian facilitation in the process will not get the full support of some Bangsamoro stakeholders, who are apprehensive about the true intentions of Malaysia with regards to the issue of conflicting claims

over Sabah on the island of Borneo. The example of Aceh, where a more neutral European country with no political or economic agenda facilitated the process, could be a model for Mindanao.

What do you think could be a real political solution to the conflict?

I think the entire country should shift to a federal system, so that the aspirations of each regional group could be taken up. The Bangsamoro, for example, are not talking about separation anymore. But they have aspirations with regards to their culture, customs and traditions that also differ between Eastern Mindanao and Western Mindanao. So I think that's the way to do it for Mindanao.

What is your vision of peace in Mindanao?

I think there will come a time when people are more aware that we are one, that we have to co-exist, regardless of ethnicity and religion, to live and work together as Mindanaoans. This also requires proper functioning institutions of governance and a government that is sincere in fulfilling their commitments. Globally, more and more people are trying to come together and unite for a social, economic or political purpose. In the meantime, here we are trying to disunite, disintegrate the very small area of Mindanao. But there are formerly radical groups in Mindanao who now are engaged stakeholders for dialogue, using non-violent means for achieving their goals, like advocating for human rights, advocating for policy change. That for me is a sign that there will come a time. ■

3.2 Interview Lilybeth Ode Sulutan

Belonging to one of the non-islamized indigenous tribes in Mindanao, how do you feel about the Bangsamoro Issue?

The most important issue in the conflict in Mindanao is land. For us, land is very sacred. We believe that the people do not own the land but the land owns us. We practice many beliefs and traditions, believe in the spirits of water and rocks. We believe that our ancestors are still living in the grounds where we bury them. And therefore, we don't have the right to destroy these grounds but we are sent there by our god *Manama* to protect it and not cause conflict among people.

And how's life organized in your community?

We live together with Christian migrants in peace and harmony, because we respect their views. Respect and responsibility are two of the most important values in our culture and they are also fundamental to peace advocacy – we have to respect the different views of people, be they Bangsamoro, Muslims or Mindanao migrants. We can't send them away because we don't own the land. It is a gift from *Manama* and it is for everybody. We welcome people, but we reject those who are destroying our land like the mining companies.

Is your community affected by mining and other development activities?

Yes, at the moment, for example, a hydropower plant is being constructed and people are not allowed to live in the vicinity of the construction site. They are restricted from farming in the nearby areas, so they need to transfer to another place for minimal compensation. While the investment is providing jobs for the people and the plant will provide electricity, what will happen after construction is completed? Local workers will not be hired anymore, instead they will hire highly educated people to operate the plant. The villagers will be sent away, forced to look for another livelihood.

Why do you think the Lumad never get involved in violent struggle?

The Lumad are the inheritors of peace in Mindanao. That is how they call us and I think it is true, because the Indigenous Peoples were never involved in the conflict. However, when I was working with the youth in conflict areas, their mindset is revenge. What we are fighting for is our beliefs to be respected. The ancestral domain is not our main issue, but it's the protection of the natural resources of our sacred land. We are kind people and we love to share land because it is not ours, but do not destroy it. There have already been cases where indigenous peoples successfully prevented mining activities from proceeding. But in the end, we can not always stop those in power.



Lilybeth Ode Sulutan

Do you think the MOA-AD sufficiently considers the needs of indigenous peoples?

If the Bangsamoro want to take control of their own governance, the indigenous peoples should also have control over their governance. Aside from the local government, we also have tribal healers, leaders and chieftains. Our history tells that indigenous peoples and the Bangsamoro are brothers. But while there are also Muslims among the indigenous peoples, we are not Islamized Bangsamoro.

What do you think are the root causes of the Bangsamoro conflict?

It's the land. But causes of the conflict are also manufactured, for example by the media, who often singles out religion. They generalize that the Bangsamoro are bad people. But the Bangsamoro are people like us. If you do something wrong, you are in the frontline. But if you're doing something good, people will not recognize you.

Who is most affected by the conflict?

It's the people of Mindanao, the Bangsamoro, the migrants, and the indigenous peoples. We are affected differently, but in the end, we are all human beings and the conflict affects us all. Elsewhere, Mindanao is always referred to as a conflict zone. It's like you are a product of the conflict. The way people will treat you and see you reflects what they hear from the media.

How can peace be achieved in Mindanao?

There are many organizations working at the grassroots level. The problem is also one of leadership, it's about governance. The people of Mindanao are really tired of those wars. They want justice and peace so that we can live in harmony with others. It is a very long struggle to work for that peace. In the end, the government will have to show commitment.

What is your personal contribution to peace in Mindanao?

Growing up in my village, I saw the environmental destruction and the lack of social and economic infrastructure. For example, there is a medical center that only opens every Thursday when the nurse is on duty. We can only schedule illnesses and tell our bodies to get sick every Thursday. (laughs). That's how difficult the situation is in our place. And I was thinking, "What can I do?" I want to make a difference. So after my studies, I'm planning to go back to my community, strengthen and empower the people. I want to engage myself in an organization where I can work effectively. Currently I am a volunteer coordinator for the Midsayap Chapter of Peace and Reconciliation Process. We are organizing youths from

different communities of Midsayap to strengthen the peace builders community of the tri-people, meaning the unity of people in Mindanao - the Bangsamoro, Christian migrants and the indigenous peoples. We can see that one of the effects of the conflict and the ancestral domain issue is the separation or division between these three entities. We want the unity among the diversity of the culture in Mindanao.

So the unifying factor is that all those people are Mindanawons?

Yes. The MOA-AD is actually good. But the implementation at the grassroots is insufficient. Education is badly needed, because at the Bangsamoro grassroots level people are not well informed about the concept of MOA. They think that "this is our land" and "you migrants should go away". That's why we have to continue to educate, to work for peace, and build peace advocacy. The solution of the conflict will come from the people. At the same time, we need to build our networks with other organizations as well as decision makers. It's about connecting the people. ■

4 Steps towards a peaceful future

The violent conflict between Muslim rebels and the Philippine government has been going on for more than 40 years. It is considered to be one of the longest-lasting domestic conflicts worldwide and yet it only receives very little international attention.

The articles in this brochure have attempted to provide a range of explanations for the fact that no lasting peace agreement has been reached so far between the Philippine government and the MILF despite manifold local initiatives and ongoing peace talks.

The variety of contributions, perspectives, approaches and explanations show clearly that it is not only a single reason causing the conflict. There are several lines of conflict with different dynamics and a complex multi-dimensional system of violence affecting the situation. The ongoing clan feuds (Rido) for example which have only been mentioned shortly here also have a determining influence on the overall conflict.

The region seems to be stuck in a circle of ever returning violence: When fighting erupts, it is followed by ceasefire and a willingness to negotiate and peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF. But finally, all efforts always end in violence, agreements fail and there is growing frustration on all sides.

Many observers notice a lack of genuine political will of the central government to find a lasting solution, not least because of conservative elements in Manila and Mindanao who fear for their political and economic influence, as Zainudin Mailang has noted.

The former President Joseph Estrada had a clear agenda when he unsuccessfully ran for the Presidential office again in 2010: He promised to take hard action against the rebels in a remake of the “all-out-war” which he already promoted during his first term 1998-2001. The strategy paid off in predominantly Christian areas in Mindanao where he was able to secure many votes for himself. In areas populated by a Muslim majority, however, he lost.

The chasm between the predominantly Christian population in the Philippines and the Muslim minority is huge. Existing and continuously perpetuated prejudices even make it possible to reduce the causes of conflict to ethnic-religious reasons, to depict Mindanao as terror island and thus also to instrumentalize the fear of international Islamic terrorism. This is how the conflict is being legitimized as big parts of the majority population are convinced that the only possible solution to the conflict is to continue fighting until one side wins by military means.

forumZFD aims to support initiatives that can transform the conflict and bring peace to Mindanao



What kind of measures therefore should peace initiatives strengthen in order to make peace grow in such a complex conflict?

The authors of this brochure emphasize an important aspect with regard to the present mindset of the Filipino population: There is little knowledge and consciousness of the historical dimensions and backgrounds of the conflict as well as of the contents of the peace talks. This is not only the case on a local level, but also on national and international levels. Everywhere, information and awareness about the formal peace process and its central elements are lacking. The failing of the MoA-AD drove this point home. The lack of knowledge about what the agreement actually contained made it easy for its opponents to fuel fears and insecurities within the population which reinforced the existing bias against the unknown, in this case furthering the dislike between Christians and Muslims.

A promising approach to bridging this gap between the different ethnic groups is the perception of a comprehensive and inclusive identity of the tri-people which is gaining momentum in the civil society in Mindanao. It is all the more significant as the formal peace process alone can never lead to full peace. It requires an informed public which supports the efforts and which considers all social groups to be an integral part of the Filipino nation. Only if the whole of this conflict-stricken

society is willing to give peace an honest chance, it can be a stable and lasting one. So there is a strong need to create a basis for the belief in a peaceful solution. Ever since the failing of the MoA-AD, several civil society organisations have tackled this issue, hoping to consolidate and expand existing local peace initiatives.

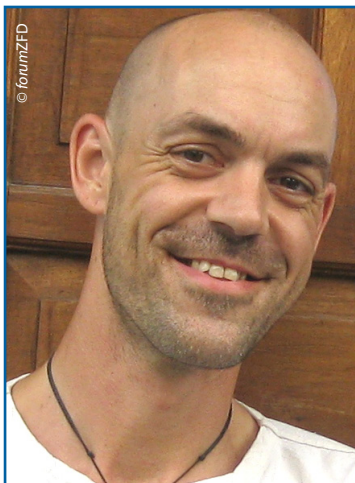
The work of *forumZFD* in Mindanao also focuses on this aspect of dialogue and the building of trust among the people in order to shape a lasting peace. The multitude of experienced and committed civil society actors in the Philippines is encouraging. However, there is a strong need for an improved networking among those organisations. For one, that could create a powerful peace lobby reaching an engaged civil society in the Philippines and all over the world. And furthermore, it would enable the regional players to engage in a productive dialogue on shared initiatives for social change. *forumZFD* supports the shaping of such a network in order to secure the work of existing and future peace initiatives on local, regional, national and international levels.

Many local civil society initiatives have limited access to national or international networks. Also, there is a lack of communication structures between actors on site that can paint a clear picture of the situation and decision makers in regional and national centers. This is why one of the *forumZFD*'s focal points is to strengthen local conflict sensitive media competences. Only if marginalized population groups can take part in a social discourse will the idea of the tri-people become a reality.

As Carolyn Arguillas has noted, the lack of information about the many facets of the conflict in most media publications leads to a very one-sided depiction of the situation. The negative picture of Mindanao that is thus being upheld and constantly reproduced is nationally and internationally widely accepted. Here, we are active in awareness-raising by holding presentations and talks, working with students and conducting teacher trainings or campaigns. This is how also people living outside of the conflict affected areas can learn about the many voices for peace as well as about the victims of the conflict, as for example the thousands of internally displaced persons.

Daniel Jaeger, forumZFD Peace and Conflict Consultant, talking to Alim Bandara, a Datu of an indigenous tribe





Inge Sauren, forumZFD Program Manager in the Philippines, and her colleague Henning Borchers

forumZFD has been present in Mindanao since November 2008 with a head office in Davao and two field offices in central and northern Mindanao. These branches make it possible for us to be close to the conflict and to local organisations. This way, we have direct access to information from the crisis affected area. At our base in Davao we are then able to continue working with this information on further levels: Political and economic key actors meet in several plenums and forums. Here we are able to get in touch with media, politicians and academics. As an impartial actor, *forumZFD* has opportunities that are inaccessible to others. As an external organisation,

we are not closer to any party of the conflict than we are to another. So we can equally cooperate with all players working on conflict transformation. Through our international networks, we can create connections between peace initiatives in the Philippines and abroad. By raising the international attention being paid to Mindanao, we can also increase the pressure on the conflict parties to take the peace process and civil society initiatives more seriously and give support to both. As an external observer, we have a different perspective on the dynamics of conflict and can give constructive advice to peace initiatives.

On the one hand, we would like to sensitize the public understanding in the Philippines and internationally of the conflict's historical roots and all its dimensions. Part of these efforts is a documentary film we have produced and that is available in English, German and Tagalog. On the other hand we want to show very clearly that the atrocious image of Mindanao needs to be revised – because despite many decades of fighting, there have also been numerous inspiring episodes in this part of the Philippines. ■

About the Authors

Zainudin Malang

Born in Cotabato City and raised in Manila, Zainudin Malang has been working on analyzing the peace process between the Muslim rebel groups and the Philippine government for a long time. He was a consultant for the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and is now active in strengthening civil society's efforts to reach a positive peace. The 43-year old lawyer is the director of Mindanao Human Rights Action Center (MinHRAC) made up of several NGOs and their human rights initiatives in Mindanao's conflict areas. Since March 2010, MinHRAC has been a part of the newly-created Civilian Protection Component (CPC) within the International Monitoring Team (IMT).

Francisco Lara Jr.

Francisco J. Lara Jr. was born in Manila and today works as a research fellow at the Crisis States Research Centre, an interdisciplinary institute for conflict studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He used to teach at the University of the Philippines and has worked for various NGOs, especially on the issue of agrarian reform in the Philippines. Since 2006, Lara has been residing in Great Britain, researching on the political economy and legitimacy of the Mindanao conflict for his PhD thesis. International Alert UK recently published a study on the linkages between conflict and economy in the Muslim dominated parts of Mindanao that he wrote in cooperation with Phil Champain (Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao, April 2009).

Eric Gutierrez

Eric Gutierrez, originally from Quezon City in Northern Philippines, is an expert on the Moro conflict in Mindanao. He is the leading author of the books "Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism in Southern Philippines" (Institute for Popular Democracy, Quezon City, 2000) and "The Moro Conflict: Landlessness and Misdirected State Policies" (East-West Center, Washington DC, 2003). He has published several articles in academic journals about new forms of privatized violence in Mindanao. Gutierrez has lived in London, Malawi and South Africa and has been working since 1998 for international NGOs. He is currently living with his family in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, and works as freelance editor, consultant and researcher.

Carolyn O Arguillas

Carolyn O. Arguillas is a journalist who used to head the Mindanao bureau of a major Filipino newspaper from 1991 to 2001. Together with several colleagues, she founded the Mindanao News and Informative Cooperative Centre (MNICC) in her hometown Davao City. One of their services is the online news platform MindaNews.–

Charina Sanz

Charina Sanz is a 42-year old author, researcher and lawyer from Davao City who has recently joined the *forumZFD* staff in the Philippines. She is part of the writing team of Konsult Mindanaw, a dialogue project initiated by the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC), as well as of the project management team of Dialogue Mindanao. This project conducts regional consultations on the peace talks between GRP and MILF in cooperation with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).

Karl M. Gaspar

Karl M. Gaspar belongs to the Redemptorist Congregation and lives in Iligan City, Mindanao. For more than 50 years, he has been engaged in the peace process, conflict transformation and an interfaith dialogue between Moro and Lumad communities in Mindanao. During Marcos's dictatorship, Gaspar spent 22 months in prison. Aside from his commitment to peace, he is also engaged in community theatre and environmental awareness raising. Furthermore, he teaches at various schools and seminaries in Mindanao and has published several books, such as "How Long? Prison Reflections", "A People's Option: To Struggle for Creation", "The Lumad in the Face of Globalization", "To Be Poor and Obscure" and "Mystic Wanderers: In the Land of Perpetual Departures".

Inge Sauren

Inge Sauren is the *forumZFD*'s Program Manager in the Philippines. Before, she worked with traumatized children and youths as a remedial teacher and was active in parents counselling. In 2008 she got her qualifications as a peace and conflict consultant. Since then, she has been living in Davao City and has been coordinating the *forumZFD* offices in Davao, Cotabato and Butuan.

Glossary

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines	Lumad	Collective name of the indigenous, non-Islamic population in Mindanao, encompassing approximately 18-23 tribes
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Administrative autonomous region created by law in 1989. Currently includes predominantly Muslim regions Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi as well as the city of Marawi	MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front Moro rebel group; founded in 1977, after disagreement about the increasingly moderate policies of the MNLF (see below) and the latter's willingness to accept limited autonomy led to a split
BJE	Bangsamoro Juridical Entity Provisional name of the new legal entity envisioned in the MoA-AD (see below) for the Muslim dominated areas possessing extensive autonomous capacities	Mindanawon	Inhabitant of Mindanao
Bakwit	Internally displaced persons who were forced to leave their homes by the armed conflict between AFP and MILF (see below)	MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front Moro rebel militia; founded in the late 1960s with the original goal of creating an independent "Bangsamoro" state
Bangsamoro	Term expressing the notion of "Nation of the Moro People" and name of the territory claimed by the MILF in Southern Philippines	MoA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain Agreement between GRP and MILF about the Moro's and Lumad's ancestral homeland from pre-colonial times that failed in August 2008 because of the Supreme Court of the Philippines's ruling
CPC	Civilian Protection Component Group consisting of local and international NGOs, holding the mandate to observe the protection of civilians	Moro	Originally derogatory term for Filipino Muslims (derived from Spanish); the independence movement turned it into a positive connotation that asserts identity and unity by expressing the religious, historical and political aspects of the Filipino Muslim resistance against foreign rule
Datu	Title and hierarchical status of royal chiefs in the social structure of Islamic and indigenous communities in the Philippines	Rido	Feud between clans, often acted out by violent means
First Nation	Term used in the MoA-AD (among others) to describe the indigenous as well as the Muslim population of Mindanao, ascribing them the political character of a sovereign nation with rights and obligations	Tri-People	Term coined for the community of the three big population groups in Mindanao, Muslims, indigenous populations and Christian settlers
GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines	Ulama	Religious leader in Islam
IDP	Internally Displaced Person		
IMT	International Monitoring Team International mission observing the ceasefire between MILF and GRP		

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Forum Civil Peace Service/
Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V.
Abteilung Projekte und Programme

Wesselstraße 12
53113 Bonn

Telefon: 02 28 85 02 96-50
Fax: 02 28 85 02 96-99

kontakt@forumZFD.de
www.forumZFD.de