



Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR)
Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS)
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre)

Hopes and Frustrations in the GRP-MILF Peace Process

by

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**Welcome Remarks delivered at the
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION
“The GRP-MILF Peace Process:
The Continuing Search for a Negotiated Solution
To a Deep-Rooted Armed Conflicts”.**

5 February 2010, 2-5 PM

Aguinaldo Conference Room, AFP Commissioned Officers Club (AFPCOC)
Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

A peaceful afternoon ladies and gentlemen!

On behalf of our co-organizers, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research cordially welcomes all of you in this round table discussion on the GRP-MILF Peace Process.

Since 1997, the GRP-MILF Peace Process has been offering us enormous hope for a negotiated political solution to a deep-rooted armed conflicts in Mindanao.

But since 1997, we have also witnessed several frustrations to the positive outcome of the peace negotiations.

The GRP-MILF Peace Process, I must say, is the history of hopes and frustrations.

Hope was high in January 1997 when the first meeting of the technical committees of the MILF and GRP panels was held in order to set the agenda for a just and lasting

solution to the Bangsamoro Problem. Yet, frustration occurred in that same year when the military launched military offensives against the MILF in June 1997.

Despite this setback, the two panels remained hopeful when they resumed the talks in July 1997 and this led to the signing of the agreement for general cessation of hostilities.

It took almost two years of hopeful talks when both panels agreed in 1999 on the rules and procedures on the conduct of the formal peace talks. Yet, a great frustration ensued in June 2000 when the GRP declared an all-out-war against the MILF.

Both panels, however, wanted to give peace a chance.

Hope was again raised in March 2001 when the GRP and the MILF signed the agreement for the resumption of the talks. The Buliok offensives in February 2003 gave another frustration to the peace process.

Again, despite another set-back, both panels held their exploratory talks in March 2003 not in the Philippines but in Malaysia. But the GRP cancelled the talks in May 2003 when it blamed the MILF for two bombings in Davao in April that year. That was indeed another great frustration that may have exacerbated the health condition of MILF Chair Hashim Salamat who died of heart attack in July 2003.

Hopes from both panels remained. The GRP adopted the “Abaya doctrine” in July 2003 which upholds the primacy of the GRP-MILF Peace Process. Peace Talks resumed in Kuala Lumpur that resulted in the following discussion points: 1) gradual pull-out of the troops in Buliok; 2) deployment of the Third Party Monitoring Team to Mindanao; 3) formation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG); and 4) ancestral domain is set as next agenda for the peace talks.

Since then, Mindanao enjoyed a moment of relative peace until 2007 when the talks was stalled over the difficult issue of ancestral domain. That was another frustration that even prompted Malaysia to withdraw its troops in April 2008.

Nonetheless, both panels resumed their talks in Kuala Lumpur in July 2008 with the hope to elevate the peace talks to a higher plane. This process resulted in the signing of joint communique for the MOA-AD, which, as you already know, gave the greatest frustration, so far, to all stakeholders of peace.

Yet, the search for a negotiated solution to a deep-rooted armed conflicts in Mindanao continues. As long as we remain hopeful on the peace process, despite all the frustrations we have suffered, we can always give peace a chance.

It is my fervent hope that this round table discussion will provide inputs to both panels on how to overcome all the frustrations that have already marred the peace talks.

Before I conclude, allow me to stress that our round table discussion is guided by the principle of Chatham rule, a rule that governs the confidentiality of the source of information received at a meeting. It means that “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”

In other words, we assert the principle of non-attribution, unless there is a prior permission from the source of information.

The main purpose of applying the Chatham rule in this round table discussion is to allow the free-flowing of ideas so that we can truly generate valuable inputs for the development and improvement of public policy.

With that note, I welcome all of you again. Mabuhay!