



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

## **The Prospects for Peace in Southern Philippines: An Optimist View**

**By**

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The Continuing Search for a Negotiated Solution  
To a Deep-Rooted Armed Conflicts”.***

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In the invitation, I was asked to articulate the Moro Civil Society perspective on the prospects for peace in Moroland under the Gloria Administration in the light of the on-going peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

I must admit, I cannot get presumptuous and range through the spectrum of public opinion among our people on the issue and quantify their hopes and expectations. In the first place, no scientific survey has been done for the purpose, and it would be a case of sheer emotionalism to make one.

Lest I be misunderstood, I must clarify that our Civil Society as a purveyor of truth and exponent of democracy measures up to the demands of responsible citizenship and the common good.

The Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy for one, prays for the success of the peace talks. And so do other Moro non-government organizations like the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines, the Ulama League of the Philippines and the Markaz Shabbab, to mention a few.

### **Sideshow**

But does anybody overflow with optimism for the prospects of peace in the peace talks.

With barely five (5) months left to the Gloria presidency and the corky and porny election just around the corner, the peace talks could only make for a sideshow. The recent exchange of drafts of the Comprehensive Compact between the Government and the MILF did not turn heads. Apart from the exchange through the good office of the Malaysian Government, the negotiation is a turnoff. I understand the revolutionary organization is passing off any snorting contact with the GRP to express its distrust in the latter for its cavalier abandonment of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD).

I understand too that the drafts are kept from the public. Frankly, I can appreciate the secrecy of the negotiation. The MILF has made its track in the peace talks, and it does not worry me where the course leads. But I cannot say for certain what promise the draft Comprehensive Compact from government holds for the Bangsamoro.

### **Sad Experience with the Peace Talks**

Government has to do better than Sisyphus to overcome the height of distrust.

In the past, the government and the MNLF talked peace four times, and they're still at it finding ways and means to implement fully the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. On the other hand, the MILF has gone the extra mile with the government thrice, the latest being conducted through exchange of notes and documents as discussed.

In the first peace talks between the Philippine Government and the MNLF, a peace accord was forged in Libya in December 1976, known as the *Tripoli Agreement*. In violation of its terms and sans the participation of the MNLF, the Marcos dictatorship unilaterally implemented it and established two (2) autonomous regions for the Bangsamoro in 1979.

The MNLF obliged to the overture of the Cory Government for peace almost immediately after its inauguration following the ouster of the Marcos regime by People Power in 1986. The passage of the Constitution in 1987 delimiting autonomy scuttled the peace talks, and the MNLF returned to its armed secessionist struggle. In 1989 the Organic act of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was enacted, scrapping any chance for any peace talks with the revolutionary organization.

President Ramos, who ascended to Malacañang in 1992, forged with the MNLF a Final Peace Agreement in 1996. Up until now, however, the Agreement was not substantially implemented. Ramos lamented that he was not able to skipper its full enforcement, because by that time, according to him, he was into the last year of his term and therefore had only little time left to untie the knots and straighten the kinks for the implementation of the Agreement.

The peace negotiation with the MILF began by Ramos was abandoned by President Estrada who came to power in 1998. In the middle of 2000, he launched a total war against the revolutionary organization.

Estrada was ousted by People Power in January 2001, and Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo succeeded to the presidency and smoked the peace pipe with the MILF in earnest.

In 2008, representatives of the Philippine Government and the revolutionary Front initialed an important agreement called the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). On the eve of its formal signing at Kuala Lumpur and in the wake of the resolution issued by the Supreme Court enjoining its signing, the Government abandoned the agreement and disowned its Panel that negotiated it as possessed of no authority to conclude it.

Malacañang, through the Office of the Solicitor General, seethed with anger and announced that the government will not sign the MOA-AD and will not sign any such agreement in whatever form in the future.

Now, the peace talks goes by the circuitous course, the protagonists exchanging documents via the Malaysian Government and keeping off from each other's grass. A new mechanism was introduced into the peace process for good measure, the International Contact Group, initially composed of the Asia Foundation, Muhammadiyah, Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, Conciliation Resources, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Turkey and Japan. According to Father Jun Mercado, the Group keeps vigil and monitors the peace talks from the sideline, egging on the parties to carry on and keep to the path of peace and democratic dialogue.

### **Inclination to Peace and Aversion to War**

Despite their sad experience, the Moro Fronts have kept themselves to the ways of peace and democracy. And for obvious reason. This inclination to and preference for peace is a mark of discipleship in Islam.

Islam is derived from the Arabic root SLM, which means peace, purity, submission and obedience. (Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus: 1975*: American Trust Publications, Indiana, p. 7) One of God's names is Peace. The daily salutations among the Muslims are expressions of peace. The adjective 'Muslim' means, in a sense, peaceful. Heaven in Islam is the abode of peace (Ibid., pp. 36-37).

Islam gives weight to conciliation and amity over hostility and hatred. The Qur'an says:

*It may be that God will ordain love (and friendship) between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For God has power over all things and he is of-forgiving, most merciful. (60:7)*

It enjoins Muslims to forgive, regarding such an act as a form of worship (Qur'an, 42:40) Prophet Muhammad counsels that one who does not attempt to reconcile with his brother for a period of three days, his prayer and acts of worship will not be received by God with grace.

The injunction to make peace with the enemy is also ordained in clear terms in another surah of the Qur'an, thus:

*If the enemy is inclined to peace, you be also inclined (8:6)*

For another reason, the revolutionary Moro will keep to the ways of peace and avoid the fires of war as long as possible. War dehumanizes and demonizes. If there's any roadmap to hell, it is the battlefield. Thus, only defensive war is permitted in Islam. In all poignancy, the Prophet says his aversion to war, thus:

*If you kill an innocent man, it is as if you have killed all mankind.*

In conclusion, let me quote Abdalati again: “This is how fundamental and dominant the theme of peace in Islam. The individual who approaches God through Islam cannot fail to be at peace with God, with himself and with his fellowmen. Taking all these values together, putting man in his proper place in the cosmos, and viewing life in the Islamic perspective, men of good faith and principles cannot fail to make our world a better world, to regain human dignity, to achieve equality, to enjoy universal brotherhood, and to build a lasting place.” (Supra, p. 37).