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A REVIEW OF 1996 GRP-MNLF ACCORD: A "SINE QUA NON" TO GRP-MILF PEACE PROCESS

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Introduction

The on-going peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) apparently seems to be heading towards a political quagmire, where issues entailing the historical, religious, cultural, socio-political, economic, and legal, among many others, have created a gridlock, where solutions to the present peace efforts are nowhere to be found.

By analyzing the present political situation and trend in the Philippines, where all political leaders in the country are busy preparing for the forthcoming May 2007 election, in addition to the present battle for Charter Change, dismal peace and order situation, the negative 57% rating of the President based on recent official survey, political bickering and squabbling, government's struggle of fighting terrorism, all these, the hope of forging a peace agreement between GRP and the MILF appears to go beyond the calendar year of 2007.

If this political trend does not change in the next six (6) months, the "impasse" on the on-going peace process may have a dangerous implication to the national security of the country, in as much that the Philippines, in its desire to attain peace, is like walking on a tight rope in negotiating a peace settlement with the MILF. On the other hand, it would likewise be equally dangerous for both parties (GRP and MILF) to hastily continue the talks for the sake of complying a pre-arranged timeline based on political exigencies and accommodations without addressing the root causes of the problem, as this will eventually lead to a myriad of bigger problems as best exemplified in the peace agreement inked between the GRP and the MNLF in 1996. Because a

peace agreement that accommodates personal interests in exchange for “co-optation” is a tool that legitimizes oppression and injustice.¹ It will bring peace, but only temporary, as the roots of the problem have not been addressed, thereby creating a vicious security threat cycle in Philippine society.

However, even before we address the root causes of the problem between the GRP and the MILF, a prudent mind who is familiar with the conclusion and failure of the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace accord would inquire whether the GRP is really *politically sincere* and *legally and financially ready* in embarking with a similar agreement with the MILF. As one would note, the Bangsa-Moro people, being represented by the MILF today, one way or the other, are the same people that were represented by the MNLF in the previous accord. The “political struggle” for independence or shall we say “autonomy” exemplified in the present Muslim Mindanao conflict is now represented by two (2) different Islamic political groupings thereby causing more headache and confusion to peace negotiators. In fact, if one would look at it geographically, one would notice that the same Bangsa-Moro people, who live in the same land in the Southern part of the Philippines, are now being represented by two (2) groups: MNLF and the MILF. In simple words, how would one people living under one land be governed by two (2) administrators?

Whether one would agree on this analysis or not, or even if one would try to masquerade the struggle with some political or economic metaphors and legal gobbledygook so as to separate the legal, operational and administrative issues interlocking between the MNLF and the MILF, the real problem here has stemmed from apathy over centuries of struggle of gaining a unique racial and cultural identity, which was further inflamed by the ideological clashes of religious faith between Filipino Christians and Filipino Muslims. To sum it up, both are victims of historical oppression and injustice through colonial machinations, and the spread of “some of the evils” of Western materialism and influences, of which both is not prepare to handle, thereby resulting to series of socio-political upheaval culminating into a catastrophic crisis of national identity. Ironically, at present, the Filipinos have failed to discover or accept the “historical truth” of their identity while pursuing on the other hand a different identity in order to catch up with the rest of the modern world. This induced and created in the Filipino a *unique moral psyche* centered on the present

¹ Bacani, Benedicto. *ARMM and the GRP-MILF Peace Process*. Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 06 October 2006

global trend of moral relativism and materialism. Our people have never learned the significant warnings and imperative lessons of our historical past.

Can the GRP handle two (2) peace accords with two (2) Muslim political groups representing one land and one Muslim people? Does the GRP have a clear political and economic blueprint or master plan after the accord is signed with the MILF (if indeed the MILF will sign an agreement)? Can it fulfill its obligation in "letter and spirit" with all the provisions of the accord that shall be signed with the MILF? On the other hand, did the GRP fulfill in "letter and spirit" the accord it signed with the MNLF? If not, would the GRP be able to manage positively to resolve its conflict with the MNLF in order to thresh out their differences in the 1996 peace accord? If all the answers are in the NEGATIVE, the on-going peace efforts between the GRP and the MILF will surely go down the drain at the expense of progress and security of the entire nation.

1996 GRP-MNLF Accord: Its Conclusion Today

In retrospect, one of the main pitfalls in the Mindanao peace process with the MNLF has been the GRP unilateralism or unilateral implementation of the peace agenda.² The main examples of this are the promulgations of the 1987 Constitution's provisions on autonomous regions and the two (2) Organic Acts for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), RA 6734 in 1989 and then RA 9054 in 2001, without the meaningful participation or even against the will of the MNLF, resulting in many problems, even some continuing hostilities.³

For all its failures and weaknesses, the GRP-MNLF 1996 peace accord was, indeed, a good peace agreement. It took peace and development as its framework with the hope that when development would take place, the agreement on political issues shall not be difficult to achieve.⁴ And in order to enforce or implement the accord to its "letter and spirit", a corresponding law was envisioned to be passed to give "flesh" to the life of peace brought about by the said agreement. This

² Santos Jr., Soliman, *Charter Change and the Peace Process: Some Key propositions*, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 12 September 2005.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mercado, Father Eliseo, *The Mindanao Peace Process: Mediating Peace between the Philippine Government and the Moro Fronts*, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 2004

was the original plan which was subsequently agreed upon by the GRP and the MNLF.

Today, however, while the GRP is undertaking a peace effort with the MILF, the MNLF grumbles on the side (with the international community through the influential Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC)) complaining about the violations of the accord. Father Eliseo R. Mercado, OMI, a Fulbright scholar who graduated from Georgetown University, has aptly observed that the new law, RA 9054 series of 2001, which is supposed to provide flesh to the "letter and spirit" of the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace accord, has violated the GRP's commitment to the said accord. He believes that the GRP had the responsibility to legislate the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) *in toto*, both in letter and spirit. Since according to him, the GRP referred to in the agreement is NOT only the Executive. It includes Congress since it has actively participated in the crafting of the said FPA through their representatives, designated LEGAL advisers, and Congressional Resolutions. Father Mercado summarized his contentions in the following outline:

- First, the law or RA 9054 is a violation of the 1996 FPA between the GRP and the MNLF. The MNLF has no participation in the crafting of the law. It is a unilateral act and an imposition of the GRP on the MNLF and the peoples of the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD).
- Second, RA 9054 is NOT the legislation of the 1996 FPA as agreed upon by the GRP and the MNLF. As a matter of fact, the Philippine Congress needs only to legislate the Peace Agreement and let the people decide to approve in the Plebiscite.
- Third, Congress has NO authority (though it believes to be SOVEREIGN in legislation) to mangle, select provisions or do anything outside the commitment of the GRP that includes the Executive and the Legislative as contained in the 1996 accord. The Senate and House were both represented in the negotiation of the 1996 agreement. The authority is only to reject or accept the agreement by the people in the plebiscite. This is the Constitutional process contemplated and agreed upon in Jakarta and Tripoli.
- Fourth, RA 9054 does not reflect *in toto* the FPA. This fact is a violation both in letter and spirit of the Tripoli as well as Jakarta agreements.

Comment:

The GRP, as a body representing the Executive, Legislative and the Judiciary branches of the Philippine Government, is supposed to be the representative of the people in forging international commitment, especially in crucial peace settlement such as this. Whatever the GRP signs in the international community (1996 Peace Accord) in behalf of the people, the same shall be brought to the SOVEREIGN people for approval or rejection. The end-product of their negotiation is supposed to have passed the scrutiny of their technical and legal advisers, aside from the review of the members of their panel from both the legislative and executive branches of government. Meaning, before they agree and sign the international treaty, it is expected that due diligence has been applied in the process.

In the case of the 1996 FPA, what was agreed upon as part of GRP's international commitment was to enact a law similar to that contained in the 1996 FPA, the spirit and intent of which is to let the people of Mindanao decide on a Plebiscite, whether to accept or reject the same. The job of Congress was supposed to provide the FLESH to the spirit and letter of the 1996 FPA so that "this flesh" could be judged whether to be edible or not by the people on a Plebiscite.

However, the flesh that was served to the people does not contain the spirit and letter of the 1996 FPA. On the effort to give life to the spirit, however, the bones and the other organs of the created body of the flesh was diluted by legal and technical contaminants when the spirit and letter of the 1996 FPA undertook a major surgical operation in the Halls of Congress, invoking sovereignty and independence from outside dictate, aside from citing Constitutional and legal constraints of giving life to the spirit of the accord.

This vital but factual event is more often neglected by present day peace negotiators and is forced to be thrown into political oblivion, never to be UNEARTHED, as this kind of blunder might only add confusion, thence, might only prolong the negotiating agony with the MILF. Be that as it may, how would the GRP move forward with its peace settlement with the MILF if it will not rectify its administrative and legal lapses in the past with the MNLF? How

would GRP strike a DURABLE PEACE DEAL with the MILF if these so-called LAPSES incessantly "haunt" the present peace negotiation?

With this contention, Father Mercado further argued that the new law and its subsequent Plebiscite in 14 August 2001 are unilateral impositions of the GRP. The agreement explicitly stipulates the contrary. If one would revisit the previous peace efforts undertaken by the Philippine Government in the past, first, the Marcos Presidential Decree and Plebiscite, were unilaterally imposed by the Philippine Government, that was contrary to the letter and spirit of the 1976 Tripoli agreement. Second, during the time of President Aquino, the government likewise unilaterally imposed the ARMM law of 1989 and its subsequent Plebiscite, which was again in violation of the Tripoli agreement both in letter and spirit. Third, the Philippine government, with the agreement inked with the MNLF in 1996, had again unilaterally imposed a new autonomy law, RA 9054 and the Plebiscite on 14 August 2001.

With all these in mind, would the MILF honestly and sincerely accept to be a party to the fourth peace effort when everybody, who is familiar with the previous peace efforts, thinks that the same would clearly end-up a failure? Have both parties presented DURABLE AND LASTING SOLUTIONS to the conflict to achieve eternal peace or merely PALLIATIVE POLITICAL MEASURES just to resuscitate and extend the life of the dying PEACE in Mindanao?

This unilateral imposition has resulted to the rebellion of Chairman Nur Misuari against the Philippine Government in November 2001, citing all the discussed afore-mentioned failure as his bone of contention. NOBODY listened to him. And the rest was history.

It is thus clear that the international commitment and obligations made by the GRP with the concurrence of Congress in the 1996 FPA LIMITED the powers of Congress to simply translate into law the agreed provisions as contained in the said political settlement. The final arbiter for the said amendatory law to correct the unilateral RA 6734 (ARMM Law of 1989), would be the people of the concerned areas in a plebiscite that would ratify or reject the new law containing the provisions of the 1996 FPA. But as explained earlier, the contrary happened.

More so, some "hawkish" sector in the government opined that such imposition of RA 9054 and its plebiscite in 2001 was justified in the light of the ineptitude of former Chairman Nur Misuari's in his

mismanagement of the ARMM. According to them, the 1996 FPA needs to be rescued by removing the obstruction to the successful implementation of the accord, and that is, by removing Misuari as governor of ARMM. And because of this contention, some "political operators" indeed machinated to encourage and induced the formation of the so-called MNLF 15 man council (who, incidentally, happened to be already disgruntled with the leadership of Misuari) to form a breakaway group from the Misuari camp.

The rebellion of Misuari in November 2001, which was perceived to be induced by GRP's neglect of his complaints, technically has removed him from the leadership of ARMM, which in effect, has paved the way for pushing the conduct of a plebiscite and the subsequent ARMM election in 2002. They invoked the provision of RA 9054 where after the law is passed, a mandatory plebiscite is necessary to complete the cycle of the peace process, without taking into account whether the complaints of Misuari is VALID or NOT, or whether the RA 9054 is really the flesh that is wanted by the spirit and letter of the 1996 FPA. The battle cry in ousting Misuari, then, was the MASSIVE CORRUPTION in the ARMM and the "people disgruntlement" in the non-delivery of the basic services and development as mandated in the 1996 peace accord.

However, as clearly dissected by Father Mercado, he opined that the utter failure to "connect" and "interface" between and among the government bodies, agencies and instrumentalities including the SPCPD and the CA was one of the principal reasons for the non-delivery of the promised intense focus of peace and development initiatives in the SZOPAD. According to him, there were three (3) devastating effects of the failure in the proper implementation of the 1996 accord:

- First, the failure to effect concrete and immediate doable bridging program for the MNLF combatants and their families which resulted to making ARMM as their employment agencies. Since ARMM has limited absorption capacities, it follows that some disgruntled MNLF members drifted away and became lost command.
- Second, due to the the absence of a government bridging program, the MNLF non absorbed combatants and families had led the international donor communities (USAID, UNDP, CIDA, EU, et al) to directly intervene with the SPCPD, leaving the former with so much pre-occupation in managing and

coordinating the projects of the donor countries while abandoning its specific job of monitoring the promotion of development in the SZOPAD.

- Third, there is no bridging program for transition in the important aspect of governance and public administration. *“Meaning, while Misuari and his associates in the MNLF may be good military field commanders, it does not follow that they may be good public administrators.”⁵*

In other words, Misuari may be blamed with all the frailties and mismanagement he had with the ARMM, but equally to be blamed was the apparent apathy and incapacity of the Philippine Government to deliver in letter and spirit its commitment to the 1996 FPA.

Having all these facts in mind, one could easily deduce where the GRP is heading with respect to its peace negotiation with the MILF. Intellectually, the following PRESUMPTIONS would crop-up in the minds of independent third parties watching how the peace story would unfold between the GRP and the MILF, and what the two (2) groups would “presumably” do in this peace negotiation:

Either the two (2) groups would.....

- The GRP will drag its feet to buy time to entice the old MILF leaders (corrupt?) to succumb to “political dividends” to sign a hastily prepared agreement.

Comment:

This will not provide durable, peaceful and lasting solutions to the problem. This is a dangerous move as it will induce frustrations resulting to the metamorphosis of more Islamic young fundamentalists among the populace. Because of the long hiatus or impasse, this will provide the jihadists the time to consolidate their forces and strengthen their capabilities. This will lead to a protracted war, lest, increase in terrorists activities. This will justify the support of the International jihadists to Filipino jihadists.

⁵ Italics supplied.

An attempt to suppress or quell the Islamic movement would just end-up escalating further hostilities. Theirs' is not just an ordinary movement but one founded on a DIVINE political ideology that has ingrained in their hearts and minds. Theirs' is a universal FRATERNAL movement. One could not kill an ideology, especially if founded in "religion". This is clear, especially coming from lessons offered to us by some war-torn countries in the Middle East and Africa.

- The MILF will likewise drag its feet to buy time and prepare to consolidate its forces and strengthen its networking with its supporters from the international Islamic organizations.

Comment: Same as above.

- The GRP will wait for the MILF to "IMPLODE", thence, strike a deal afterwards, similar to that with the MNLF.

Comment: Same as above.

- The GRP has simply no capacity to implement an international commitment with the MILF owing to the examples given to us by the failure of previous international agreements signed in Tripoli and Jakarta.

Comment: Same as above.

- The MILF will complicate the issue citing GRP's unsettled differences with the MNLF, making this as a justification not to continue with the next round of negotiation, in addition to making their demand more difficult for the GRP to accept by asking concessions which are legally untenable, e.g. issues on Ancestral domain, and the likes. This will surely create an impasse.

Comment: Same as above.

- The GRP and the MILF will NEVER be sincere in any agreement since both parties will have to protect their interests by all means.

Comment: Same as above

- The GRP and the MILF would be willing to sign just for the purpose of political expedience and for political survival, whatever maybe the form and substance of such agreement, without earnestly looking for DURABLE LASTING SOLUTIONS.

Comment: Same as above

- The GRP-MILF peace negotiation will simply take sometime (probably beyond 2008) because of the present political turmoil besetting the Philippines, viz. May 2007 election, battle for charter change, political bickering, peace and order, global war on terrorism of which the Philippines is active, economic uncertainties, and many more negative social ingredients affecting the peace negotiations.

Comment: A long hiatus or impasse shall only lead to the same observation cited above.

- The GRP will subtly threaten the MILF to declare the latter as an international terrorist group if they will not go back to the peace negotiation table. This will be made as a “sword of Damocles” hanging on the head of the MILF to force them to sign an agreement.

Comment: Same as above.

- The GRP will build a scenario to declare the MILF an international terrorist group. After all, this is what the U.S. wants the Philippine Government to do with the MILF. If this would be the scenario, the Philippine Government would be compelled to solicit help from the U.S., and probably, from volunteers in the European Community to contain politically and militarily the MILF. In this case, the OIC would definitely be on the side watching.

Comment: Same as above

- The MILF will wage a war as a result of the breakdown of peace negotiations and will drag the Philippines into becoming a war-torn area with the end-in-view of making the country a global hot-spot in the league of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, among others. Subsequently, they will align with international jihadist organizations, including Al-Qaeda, for political survival, citing Muslim oppression in the Southern part of the Philippines.

Comment: Same as above

- On the other hand, as an alternative to these gloomy scenarios, an optimistic mind would conclude a “ray of hope” that in the immediate days to come, perhaps, the GRP, MILF and the MNLF would wake-up to their right senses and think about unity and forge a formidable alliance, founded on SINCERITY AND HONESTY, to bring durable peaceful solutions to the saga that is unfolding in Philippine history. But the big question is, “When would this happen”?

Sailing the Political Doldrums

As can be gleaned from the foregoing analysis, the Philippine government is posing to lose heavily, politically and economically, if it mishandles its peace negotiation with the MILF. In the case of the 1996 FPA, if the GRP, from the start of its negotiation with the MNLF, has concluded that it could not comply with the demands of the latter, it could have been better for the GRP not to have signed the 1996 peace accord at all. Instead, the GRP could have looked for a better alternative or it could have dealt with the MNLF on a different dimension where it could have sustained SINCERELY its commitment within its legal and financial limitations. But this shortcoming has practically become the proverbial “water under the bridge” issue.

Our experience today would dictate to us that such non-compliance to the letter and spirit of the 1996 accord has already mutated into a highly more complex political issues, such as, in particular, the GRP’s stalled negotiation with the MILF, and the GRP’s complex fight against global terrorism. These two (2) issues are so intertwined and far too intricate to handle. Can we afford to add more complications to the already too intricate political situation?

In the road to peace negotiation with the MNLF and the MILF, the GRP should bear in mind that their opponents in the other side of the table are not just ordinary disgruntled Muslim factions in the Philippines, but rather, Muslim members of the global BROTHERHOOD community of ISLAM. One must dissect the HEART of ISLAM to understand these socio-political religious phenomena.

The GRP should not just “localize” the problem in solving the issue. It must look at the global perspective of Islam and take advantage of its

political, economic and religious face instead of looking at it on one face – the face of terrorism. Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine exemplify this Islamic phenomenon whereby the military might of the lone superpower of the world could not sustain the “military spirit” of the Muslims in ISLAM, despite their handicap in weaponry. The power that was unleashed in Islam is too complex to comprehend by non-Muslims and the only best analogy history could offer to understand this phenomenon is the Vietnam War where winning is not measured by the sheer number of people who died but by the hearts and minds of those who won – the Vietnamese.

But even with the Vietnam experience, the global Islamic phenomenon is too complex of a riddle to solve if one has no thorough and comprehensive understanding of its origin, emergence and resurgence in global history. It goes without saying that one must understand the heart of Islam in negotiating with the Bangsa-Moro People, and MUST negotiate with sincerity and honesty, in order to attain lasting peace in the “promised land” of Mindanao.

In the present GRP-MILF peace negotiation, it may seem that the government is hoping that the MILF will “implode”, so that they will accept nothing more than the agreement similar to that which the MNLF signed.⁶ The reality that confronts Chairman Murad today is that an agreement for the sake of an agreement, one that falls far short of the MILF’s stated goals, will surely cause the MILF to explode, thereby sowing the seeds of the next conflict. While the MILF has always made the resolution of the root causes of the problem essential to any peace deal, the GRP side seems content to have “stop-gap measures”, in resolving one Moro uprising at a time, without searching for a durable political solution.⁷

The GRP must take into consideration that frustration with the elder generation of the MILF is high. There is a critical mass of young Muslims trained in the Middle East, who are predisposed to more radical and intolerant interpretation of Islam, who believe they need to increase up the violence, in order to attain their brand of Islamic objective. More often, these young Muslims would tend to look for outside help (global Islamic community), from various international Islamic leaders who are friendly and supportive of their jihad, and from other international jihadist organizations, in pursuit of their political agenda.

⁶ Abuza, Zechery, *Crunchtime for the Mindanao Peace Process?*, United States Institute of Peace, 08 February 2005.

⁷ Ibid.

Politically and militarily, the MILF functions differently from the traditional Western influenced Philippine government (including in particular the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Police). With the adaptation of the Islamic ideology as their main reason to break away from the MNLF in 1978, the MILF is more difficult to negotiate with that of the MNLF, notwithstanding the fact that they have in mind the examples given by the “perceived failure of the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace accord”. The late Hashim Salamat, the then MILF chair and its ideological brain, defines the ideology of the the MILF as *“La ilaha illa-llah Wa Muhammadul-rasullallah”*, the Islamic confession that fortifies the Muslim heart with GOD.

With this ideology, Salamat espouses Islamic rule as the key of the MILF to reorganizing the Muslim Jumaah (community) in Mindanao. The Constitution is the Qur’an, and the Shariah is the law that would define human relationship. Meaning, this is short of establishing a theocratic government whereby the man-made Constitution of the Philippines is subordinated to the Divine Constitution – the Noble Qur’an. For them, militant reform is the answer to the secular and godless society, the spread of evils due to excessive materialism, and the evil influences of the Western societies in the way of life of the people. The reform may be considered militant and aggressive and considers violence in abrogating the excesses in society, especially those in violation of the Qur’an. To them, secular democracy is a deliberate violation of the Divine Law and a reversion to the era of pagan ignorance.

While some in the MILF see Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) as fellow travelers, brothers in need of protection, other sectors in the MILF are more pragmatic and see JI as a “political insurance” should the peace talks fail and/or an additional card to play in the peace negotiation. This raises several questions: are these ties sanctioned by the MILF leadership? Or does the leadership not exercise effective command and control? Which of the two (2) is more disturbing and problematic for the peace process?

Today, although it may appear for now that Chairman Murad holds the titularship of the MILF leader, to some MILF sectors, his cling to power may not be ultimate. Already, many in the MILF are skeptical of the peace negotiation and many hardliners, such as, Wahid Tondok, Salamat Samir and Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato saw the peace process as a betrayal of the original goal to establish an independent Islamic

State.⁸ It took Chairman Murad two (2) years to consolidate power following the death of Chairman Salamat in 2003. MILF leaders are very much concerned about the growing radicalism of their youth who are frustrated with the older leaders' inability to win the Islamic revolution. Should the peace process completely break down, their leaders' ability to resort to war is perceived to be greatly diminished. If Chairman Murad could not deliver a viable peace, he is expected to be replaced by Islamist hard-liners, such as Kato and Tondok, or more likely by the vice Chairman, Aleem Abdul Aziz Mimbintas.⁹ While it may be gainsaid that Chairman Murad is a popular leader, he is not a religious leader, a fact that has angered many in the ranks of the MILF, and because of this, his hold to power is **NOT** guaranteed.

This festering conflict in Mindanao has regional security implications beyond simple human security concerns in the Philippines. A weak government can easily become a "failed" government and serve to legitimize the vigilantism posed by the "transnational jihadist organizations". And if the peace process is not handled CORRECTLY, the breakdown would probably be an "Achilles heel" to the Philippines fomenting political and economic catastrophe to thousands of innocent civilian lives.

Some of the Earlier Proposed Political Solutions

While the talks with the MNLF in 1996 had to hurdle mostly Constitutional constraints, the on-going talks with the MILF will also have to contend with RA 9054 (Organic Law for ARMM) and most especially, with the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace accord and the existing political structures of autonomy. The ongoing peace negotiation will have to consider Mindanao and Sulu as territories that are already covered by the 1996 peace accord. Any discussion involving these territories will have to consider the MNLF, which at present, holds the franchise on autonomy in these areas. Let us try to recall and review some of the earlier proposals following the excerpts from the round table conference at the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City sometime in 2004 participated by some of the country's noted academe in their desire to provide proposed political solutions to the on-going GRP-MILF peace negotiation:

- First, the formation of a Federal State for the Bangsamoro

⁸ Abuza, Zechery, *Crunchtime for Mindanao Peace Process?*, United State Institute of Peace, 08 February 2005.

⁹ Ibid.

- Second, the formation of an Islamic Region State
- Third, grant of independence to Mindanao and Sulu
- Fourth, enhancement of existing autonomy by amending the ARMM Law
- Fifth, demobilization of MILF combatants through livelihood programs
- Sixth, rehabilitation of conflict affected areas
- Seventh, participation of the MILF in socio economic program

The first and second proposals basically need the amendments to the present Philippine Constitution. However, since the Supreme Court of the Philippines has recently turned down the proponent for the charter change, the said options may be considered "temporarily not possible" by now. These proposals may be resurrected someday, if the issue of charter change may be revived once again in the near future.

The third option is definitely not tenable, unless otherwise, Mindanao would want to become the next "East Timor" in Southeast Asia.

The fourth up to seventh proposals may sound doable and an agreement may be forged containing elements that may cut across all of some options. Enhancement of the RA 9054 (ARMM Law of 2001) may seem to be a doable option to accommodate the agreement with the MILF. But this is easier said than done. But before we proceed with the discussion, let us try to revisit some of the issues raised by the MNLF against the provisions of RA 9054 (ARMM Law of 2001) vis-à-vis the 1996 peace accord, which they claimed has not been fulfilled with by the GRP:

- Shariah legal system must be mandatory, not directory.
- Mandatory appointment of one (1) cabinet secretary from the ARMM to the national government. Likewise, an inhabitant from ARMM shall also be appointed in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.
- Strengthening of fiscal autonomy calling for a bigger fund from the national budget

- MNLF, with OIC technical advice, should identify mineral resources that would fall under the control of the national government, not the other way around.
- Establishment of a Regional Police Force and non deployment of its members to other areas outside ARMM
- The provision that compels ARMM to sell its property located outside the area of autonomy. The MNLF considers this provision confiscatory and violates the rights of the ARMM as a property owner.

On the other hand, let us try to review the observations made by the United Nations Multi Donor Program (UNMDP) with respect to the concluded 1996 FPA. In its "second assessment mission report", the UNMDP cites six (6) concerns that have negatively affected the 1996 peace accord, to wit:

- An Organic Act that does not offer meaningful autonomy (RA 9054)
- Absolute or relative defeat in the plebiscite of the new ARMM
- Ineffective new autonomous government
- Insufficient government investment
- Lack of citizen ownership
- Spiral of violence by the "hawks" on both sides that lead to anarchical situation

Interestingly, the report of the UNMDP may seem to appear similar in substance to the complaints of the MNLF. Considering UNMDP as an independent body in this conflict, this gives one something to think about with respect to the complaints of the MNLF and its subsequent report to the OIC regarding the alleged shabby treatment of the GRP with the implementation of the 1996 peace accord. The report of UNMDP has practically made the GRP appearing to be the non-complying partner in the peace efforts with the MNLF, thereby necessitating the recommendation for the urgent formation of an independent international body that would audit the enforcement of

the 1996 peace accord in addition to validating the complaints of the MNLF.

Bearing this conflict with the MNLF in mind, how would the GRP proceed with its peace negotiation with the MILF when its previous peace accord with the MNLF is not properly or inadequately complied with? How would the MILF accept the sincerity of the GRP when the latter's integrity is in question? How would the MNLF accept the peace accord between the GRP and the MILF if ever one is signed? Let us advance the idea that indeed the MNLF and the MILF would accept the concept of "enhanced autonomy" by amending RA 9054, how would they share power in governance and administration? Would this be acceptable to some of the radical MILF groups espousing Islamic theocracy? An independent inquisitive mind would suggest that everything on the present table of negotiation between the GRP and the MILF are appearing to be just plain "Moro Moro" (play), whether coincidental or deliberate.

In plain and simple language, the present GRP-MILF peace effort is viewed by some sectors to be just an exercise in futility, should both parties NEGLECT the fundamental elements and issues presently raised.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Analyzing the political dynamics surrounding the peace efforts in Mindanao past and present, one would be prudent in concluding that the on-going GRP-MILF peace negotiation will NOT be successful without the political element and cooperation of the MNLF on one hand, and the sincerity of the GRP on the other hand. The participation of the MNLF is a **"sine qua non"** to the peace process in Mindanao.

It is clear that even if the GRP and the MILF would miraculously forge a peace agreement in the near future sans the MNLF, such agreement is bound to fail since the fundamental issues raised by the latter are hanging on the air and will continue to linger and cause economic upheaval in the entire country in the months and years to come. One must remember that the MILF does not hold the monopoly of the so-called Islamic Jihad in the Philippines. MNLF, too, are Muslims, and a lot of them have imbibed the spirit of fundamentalism and have entrenched themselves with their MUSLIM BROTHERS abroad. In fact, thousands of them in the past had volunteered to fight in Afghanistan,

Iraq, and even in Pakistan, all in the name of Jihad. Today, it is “payback time” for their foreign brothers to help them rid their land from what they have termed the so-called “CHRISTIAN INFIDELS”.

To fully understand this jihadist phenomenon in the Philippines vis-à-vis the global trend, first, one must trace the evolution of the “Abu Sayyaf”, specifically in the early 1990s. The original founders of the group founded Abu Sayyaf in the context of Islamic Jihad to purify Mindanao from the “INFIDELS”. It was only sometime later that the group resorted to criminal activities. The members are mostly from Sulu, an MNLF stronghold. Today, learning from their mistakes in the past, the Abu Sayyaf is slowly repackaging its image from a criminal organization into a legitimate jihad organization. It has already started to link itself with the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Southeast Asia. Their leaders are not the traditional leaders whom government is dealing with during peace efforts. In their hearts, the leader is GOD, and the Qur’an is the LAW. How many such groups would surface in the future if the present peace effort is not handled properly? How many Filipino Islamic fundamentalists, not necessarily on the league of the Abu Sayyaf, would resort to violence out of political frustrations?

Second, looking on parallel issues in the global arena, the catastrophic violence besieging the peoples of Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Afghanistan today clearly mirrors on how oppression, apathetic international policies and irrational intervention would cause countries and its people to collapse. The seed of “terrorism” was planted on the “hearts and minds” of the people who, out of frustrations of not gaining positive and reasonable response of their legitimate struggle, have resorted to sectarian violence of cataclysmic proportion.

Third, in Lebanon, Hezbollah is viewed by many in the Western countries as a terrorist organization that perennially undermines the peace settlement effort in that area. However, to most of the Lebanese, especially the Shi’ite Muslims, Hezbollah is a legitimate organization fighting against the occupation of their homeland. Although they are viewed as “terrorists” by the Western world, in the eyes of the Lebanese, they are plain guerillas or “freedom fighters” legitimately fighting a war against external aggression.

Fourth, the story of the Hamas Party in Palestine, which incidentally won in a “DEMOCRATICALLY held election”, underscores the examples of apathy and double standards of international policy makers, encroaching on their freedom. Hamas is a product of “democracy” (democracy being a product of the Western world), and yet, they are

not recognized by most countries in the European communities and the U.S. as a legitimate political party representing their constituents for reason that they opposed some of what they perceived to be biased Western policies in the Middle East. On the other hand, the present regime in Pakistan is not a product of Western brand of democracy but of a bloodless coup d' etat staged by President Pervez Musharraf, notwithstanding the fact that this change of government is supposed to be an anathema to democracy, and yet, Pakistan has gained international recognition as a legitimate government, for reason that Pakistan is their strong ally against the "war on terrorism".

These are but few of the examples of apathy and double standards that have inflamed the radical Islamic movements across the globe. To some of these Islamic fundamentalist groups, Osama Bin Laden is their champion, as he is the only Muslim today who has emerged fighting this perceived monumental oppression against Islam. To radical Muslims across the Middle East and in Asia, particularly, Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and even Thailand, Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda is the rallying point against this oppression, aggression and "sacrilegious" imposition of Western influences in their way of life. To these radical Muslims, the cause or "jihad" they are fighting for has a Divine root which is founded on the Islamic precept of defending one's land, people, and most especially, religion. For them, Islam is the social, political, economic, cultural, legal way of life for all Muslims around the world.

Dissecting most of the political conflicts presently plaguing the world, particularly with reference to those related to the emergence of the modern-day pan-Islamic phenomena, most scholars and political scientists would probably agree in concluding that the misunderstanding has stemmed from the continuous neglect of the historical perspectives of the issues surrounding the conflict. Policy makers would tend to provide instantaneous palliative solutions just to easily get out from the quagmire that has entangled the web of conflict, often neglecting, or at times, arrogantly leaving "hanging-on-the-air" most legitimate historical issues, which in the first place, are the root causes that have led to hostilities. This attitude or behavior has led to the so-called global phenomena of *Islamic extremism*. In parallelism, the same socio-political commonalities and dilemma have befallen the Muslim Mindanao conflict.

Considering the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism globally, the perceived failure of the GRP to address the fundamental rights of Filipino Muslims would widely open the floodgates for "transnational

jihadist organizations” to emancipate their Filipino Muslim brothers from the bondage of historical oppression and present injustices caused by the perceived U.S. influence in the Philippine government. This political thought would radicalize and increase further their jihadist activities in the Philippines. If this event happens, there would be no room for government-to-government negotiation, or OIC sponsored negotiation since the counterpart of the GRP on the opposite side of the table would be faceless radical jihadist organizations and individuals fighting for the cause of liberating their oppressed brothers in the name of GOD.

As told, although the GRP may confidently feel that the US is its strong ally against global terrorism, on the contrary, it is doubtful if the US would be able to spare more of its troops and military hardware to the Philippines since the latter is presently beset fighting its own war in many fronts around the world. The US has its own dilemma on how to contain the threat of terrorism on its own backyard coupled with the fact that it faces seemingly a political defeat on its war fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan. These war fronts have already drained the coffers of the Americans and this issue will certainly play a major role in the forthcoming 07 November 2006 U.S. Congressional election.

On the other hand, if helping the Philippines would suit the political interests and external policies of the US in the Southeast Asian region vis-à-vis the economic emergence of China, the nuclear ambitions of both Iran and North Korea, and its global “war on terrorism”, this does not mean that the Muslim Mindanao conflict would instantaneously be resolved. In fact, it would only aggravate the present political crisis in Mindanao by pushing more Filipino Muslims to align themselves with the fundamentalist jihadist organizations ultimately paving the way for heightened confrontations not only in Mindanao but in other places in the Philippines, particularly in Metro Manila, to gain global attention. The military presence and support of the U.S. to the Philippines would only justify their brand of jihad to seek support from their foreign-based jihadist brothers financially and militarily. This alone may be considered a victory on the part of those who advocate the world view of “darul harb-darul iman (the House of War, the House of Belief, simply connotes and equated by radical Islamist groups as: if you are not a Muslim, you are an enemy).

The GRP should not underestimate the capacity of Filipino Islamic fundamentalists (whether MNLF or MILF members) in waging its brand of Islamic jihad, if the GRP’s political-economic estimate comes from its limited Intelligence resources and inadequate understanding of

Islam. War against terrorism is far too complex to be understood from solely a military point of view. Terrorism as an enemy knows no boundary. Its territory is based on Islamic ideology that has permeated in every house of Muslim jihadist sympathizers living around the world. Their battlefield is this world and their permanent place of abode is heaven. Its army is strategically positioned practically in all countries, and their weapons are safely deposited in their hearts, waiting to be unleashed when the appropriate time comes. The fact is their numbers are rapidly increasing everywhere by tens of thousands.

At any rate, the lack of religious understanding on Islam and limited political economic analysis on global politics would catch the country by surprise, leading towards the negative derivatives of mixed political blunders brought about by imprudent decision making process. The outcome of such imprudent political decision is expected to produce more complicated political turbulence and violent social conflict that would lead towards immeasurable damage to the national security and economy of the Philippines.

In addition, one should also consider that Filipino Muslims have resolutely accepted as a way of life the "Pathani psyche" (Afghan war psyche) that war is just a part of their routine activities, owing to the fact that they have been engaged in numerous wars for the past 500 years and the same has already been ingrained in their culture. Hence, it is safe to say that if there is no peace negotiation with the GRP, life still goes on for the MILF (and with the MNLF as well), since they are used to this kind of struggle anyway, notwithstanding the fact that they, too, share the same Islamic sentiments and belligerent attitude with their brothers in other countries fighting against the perceived imposition of this so-called "NEO-COLONIZATION doctrine" (occupation and social influence in the guise of democracy) by the WEST in their Islamic way of life. In short, this goes without saying that this peace negotiation with the MILF is badly needed by the GRP for its political and economic survival, rather than the other way around. And this is the stark reality befalling the conflict in Muslim Mindanao. We may have ridden ourselves with the ugly head of the conflict through achieving the "status quo" or the "temporary peace" for now, but if left unattended and unresolved, its ugly tail would definitely catch-up on us three (3), five (5), or probably, ten (10) years from now. It is on this respect that we MUST find a DURABLE, PEACEFUL and LASTING SOLUTION NOW!

In view of this, the following solutions are hereby proposed:

- Before proceeding with the peace negotiation with the MILF, the GRP, as a matter of principle and policy, must comply fully in letter and spirit with the 1996 GRP-MNLF FPA. The GRP could not just pursue another similar piece of contract with another group without first fulfilling its previous obligations with an earlier signed contract with representative of the other group. In other words, why should one sign a new contract with a second party, where its content is one and the same in spirit with the contract signed with that of the first party, especially if the said contract with the first is NOT complied with? It would just complicate matters. This in effect adds more conflict to the already conflict-ridden areas in Mindanao.
- In the best interest of the Bangsa Moro People, the MNLF and the MILF should cooperate in discussing on how to unify their efforts in providing shared governance and administration to the “concept of an enhanced ARMM”, should they agree in principle to collaborate in the conduct of peace negotiation with the GRP. This is also an important element that should be considered by GRP before proceeding with the peace effort with the MILF.
- A ceasefire should be declared by everybody. Earnest efforts shall be made by the GRP, MILF and the MNLF in ensuring the success of the ceasefire while waiting for the supposed outcome of the talks between the MILF and the MNLF. To instill GRP's sincerity on in the minds of the MILF and the MNLF, the subsequent recommendations presented below shall be served by the GRP to the two (2) groups in exchange for an honest-to-goodness ceasefire.
- An independent audit team shall be formed to assess the implementation of the 1996 FPA. This shall be composed by the representatives of the OIC, Indonesia, GRP, MNLF, NGOs, and concerned civil society groups in Mindanao. The team should also be tasked to ensure the full compliance of the 1996 FPA, prior to allowing the GRP and MILF to proceed into another round of peace negotiation.
- Inclusion of recognized and credible Non-Government Organizations (NGO) representing the various sectors in Mindanao, donor countries and OIC in the proposed “Quadripartite Comprehensive Peace Process for Mindanao” (QCPPM), viz. GRP, MNLF, MILF, NGO (donor countries, UMDP,

OIC, various sectors) to shepherd the implementation of a comprehensive Mindanao peace process. The Philippine Government may consider this proposal and may initiate the creation of the "QCPPM".

- Mandatory conduct of independent stakeholders' conferences in Mindanao insulated from the influences of MNLF and MILF political leaders, in order to get the true sentiments of the cross-section of Filipinos in the affected areas. This is to ensure that political and peace dividends resulting from the peace process would trickle down to the grassroots communities thereby empowering the people.
- While the afore-mentioned MUST DO proposals and measures are being undertaken by all concerned parties, the following economic processes and socio-political mechanism should SIMULTANEOUSLY be initiated and instituted by the Philippine government, OIC, UN, US, prospective donor countries, multi-national companies, before proceeding with the peace negotiation, and while awaiting for the outcome of the talks between the MILF and the MNLF:

Education

- Strategic construction of at least 3,000 school buildings (elementary and high schools) in SZOPAD.
- Infusion of "Pesantren" educational system (Islamic and secular education). In addition, educational subsidies in the form of feeding programs and school supplies shall be given to the students in the depressed areas. "Sponsor a school program" by wealthy benefactors, locally and abroad, shall be vigorously promoted. Tax incentives should be accorded to local businessmen who support such initiatives. Even with free education in the primary and secondary level, still, poor students could not afford to pay for the individual school supplies in furtherance of their studies. Most of them do not even have food to eat while studying in school. In addition, some of them are forced to help their parents in menial jobs to earn a living. These are some of the reasons why they stop studying in school.
- Professionalization of the Madrasah educational systems parallel to that with the Malaysian system.

- Allow American and Arab “volunteers”, sponsored by their respective governments, to teach English and Arabic languages respectively in the SZOPAD to rapidly ACCULTURATE the Filipino Muslims in the global community with the view of accelerating economic development in Mindanao.
- In the light of the inadequate number of teachers in primary and secondary schools, graduates of BS Education (board passers or not) shall be encouraged to seek employment in the SZOPAD areas.
- Inclusion of a rationalized Islamic studies in all educational levels in the Philippines with the view of increasing Christian and Muslim understanding towards achieving national unity and identity as one people. As a matter of policy, CHED and DECS should issue relevant guidelines in the implementation of such programs. The present policy of DECS regarding this issue is not enough. In so doing, this shall eliminate if not minimize biases, human rights abuses and separatist sentiments to both Christians and Muslims.
- Mandatory inclusion of Professor Cesar Majul’s illustrious and internationally acclaimed book “Muslims in the Philippines”, in addition to the popular Teodoro Agoncillo’s book in Philippine history, in all levels of education when Philippine history is offered as a subject. This shall provide the students a better dimension and understanding of our culture and struggle as a people way back at the 11th century. In doing so, this program envisions to unite the future Filipinos in the next generations to come.
- Vigorously implement a continuous process of inter-faith dialogue in the civil service, AFP and PNP. The Office of the President should shepherd this program and supervise its implementation. Christian priests, Islamic clerics (from the academe) and NGOs familiar with the Mindanao conflict shall compose this office, NOT those presidential appointees who have no significant background of the conflict.

- Establishment of the necessary IT infrastructure to be merged with the schools, municipal and provincial libraries with the view of increasing IT literacy in depressed areas.
- Sending of at least 100 Muslim scholars to European and American universities annually with the view of transferring SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY into mainstream Mindanao society. Likewise, the same number of Muslim scholars shall be sent to recognized Middle Eastern universities to eventually help transfer social technology and correct Islamic values and principles to the Muslim communities in Mindanao. These scholars shall be thoroughly selected and screened by special committees of educational NGOs based in Manila. In addition, 100 non-Muslim Filipino inhabitants of Mindanao shall be sent to leading Middle Eastern universities.
- Establishment of satellite Universities of Al-Azhar University, International Islamic University of Malaysia, American University of Beirut, Imam Saud University, Faculty university of Libya, among many other leading Middle Eastern Universities, in areas in the Philippines where Muslims form a significant part of the populations. The government should pursue this program officially through the various Middle Eastern Embassies in Manila.
- OIC, donor countries and GRP MUST provide funds for the infrastructure.

NOTE:

If the Philippine Government, after it signed the 1996 FPA, could have initiated ten (10) years ago the above educational measures, we could have empowered by now the Muslim youth towards the developmental peace effort. The face of the present day conflict would have been different or probably may have been alleviated, or perhaps, contained.

Justice System (Shariah)

- Creation of additional Shariah districts and circuit courts in the following areas: SZOPAD, Metro Manila, Cebu, Palawan, Bacolod, Iloilo, Bicol, Batangas, Baguio, Ilocos Norte and Pangasinan.

- Increase the numbers of Shariah judges and lawyers by temporarily accrediting Shariah law graduates from the Middle East, provided they have a doctorate degree in their field, in addition to a special examination to be administered by the Faculty of Shariah Law of Al-Azhar University in Egypt or by a committee of Shariah experts coming from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Malaysia and Syria. NO Filipino should be included in this committee.
- Create a research committee to review and evaluate the provisions of PD 1083 (Code of Muslims Personal Laws), with the view of amending or modifying the same in order to keep it attuned to the present needs of the Filipino Muslims. The conclusion of their work should immediately be forwarded to the Senate and Congress for the necessary amendments of the present law.
- Encourage members of the Philippine Bar or even law graduates to study the Shariah law in view of providing more legal assistance to indigent Muslims. State Universities and Colleges should spearhead this program.
- Encourage “qualified” Muslim College graduates to take up law by providing them incentives through scholarship grants in various State Universities and Colleges.

Governance and Public Administration

- Recognition of pre-existing indigenous systems of governance among the Moros and the Lumads instead of creating new Local Government Units (LGU). In effect, this would democratize governance to the hands of the people as well as saving unnecessary expenditures in the creation of additional LGUs.
- The Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP), in coordination with the State Universities and Colleges, should embark on a continuous education and training of the existing civil service employees in the SZOPAD. The education shall be made mandatory to all employees.
- For the purpose of professionalizing the civil service in SZOPAD, an independent recruiting body composed of

members of the private academic institutions and educational NGOs, shall screen and evaluate applicants to civil service positions at SZOPAD.

- Creation of livelihood projects focusing in the creation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), such as, in the field of IT, agriculture, cottage industry, among many others, for displaced members of MILF and MNLF combatants and their families. This shall be managed by accredited NGOs for a period of 5 five years or until the cooperatives become self-sustainable, whichever comes first. Identification of these SMEs must be undertaken.
- Infusion of much needed government infrastructure in Mindanao, such as building of farm-to-market roads, ports, railroads, bridges, express ways, telecommunications facilities, and the likes, to spur employment to displaced MILF and MNLF returnees and their families. In so doing, this creates new economies in the SZOPAD by way of providing employment to the displaced people. This is the same principle applied by the Roosevelt Administration during the great depression in the 1930's in the U.S.
- Provide protection and security to members of the Commission on Audit and Ombudsman who are on detail status in Mindanao to effectively audit, monitor and prosecute any erring local government officials.
- Once the above proposals are in motion, the GRP, MNLF, MILF, International Communities/NGO (OIC, UN, donor countries) shall now form and embark on the "Quadripartite Peace Process for Mindanao" (QPPM) towards forging a comprehensive and genuine peace process for all the people of Mindanao.
- An "independent body" shall be organized to oversee and shepherd the implementation of all the aforementioned proposals. This body shall be given enough teeth to move around the bureaucratic maze. If representatives from the various government agencies are assigned to this body, their assignment should be made semi-permanent on secondment by their mother agency without affecting their rank and position with their original offices. They can go back to their respective agencies after the peace process. Government should NOT

resort to forming committees, as this would only retard the process.

- The above proposals pertaining to education, justice system, and public administration shall be incorporated or made complimentary to the proposals already laid down in the 1996 FPA.

In a deeper analysis, if all the above proposals are well covered and is thoroughly complied with by all parties concerned, in addition to infusing the natural process of socio-political economic development in Mindanao, one may be surprised to find that peace negotiation between the GRP and the MILF might be just a short distance away from reality, or optimistically, we might not even need this peace process at all in our midst. And the road towards peace and progress would be within reach by all Filipinos, Christians and Muslims alike. After all, we belong to one people, one nation – the FILIPINO NATION.

This proposal in reality is actually building a strong foundation for economic development in the whole of Mindanao, thereby, preparing the “promise land” to be the real engine of growth of the country in the next ten (10) years. The envisioned socio-economic package is not only intended to benefit Muslims, but rather, all the inhabitants who live in Mindanao in particular, and the whole Filipinos in general. Ironically, much has been said by the Mindanaoans of the neglect of the “Imperial Manila” of their social condition, that despite of their substantial contributions to the annual national budget, the share they received from the General Appropriations Act (GAA) is not commensurate, and worst, “inversely proportional” to the revenue or income they provide to the whole country.

The appropriate time is now to pay back the Mindanaoans of what rightfully belongs to them. They have been deprived of this much-needed support over the years of neglect and apathy. Through the infusion of a proper and substantial socio-economic support, the annual revenues Mindanao contributes to the national economy may probably be quadrupled after ten (10) years, once the pillars of economic infrastructure are in place and in motion.

In addition, now is also the opportune time to heal the wounds that was inflicted on us by our colonial past. Let us correct the mistakes brought to us by the series of historical injustice and oppression over the centuries of colonial rule, and move forward towards discovering our own true identity of being a GREAT MALAYAN RACE: our national

soul and identity, and the source that would beckon as an elemental force that would unite our people into one common bond.

Let us NOT allow religious differences, apathy, historical injustice, and most especially, historical ignorance to divide our people. Instead, let us reckon back to the HISTORICAL TRUTH of our identity and make it as a cure against apathy and injustice to bring forth unity and prosperity in this beautiful land of the Filipinos. Once we understand and implant these roots in our hearts – starting from the legendary saga of our forefathers centuries before the arrival of the colonial rulers, up to this present day struggle for globalization - only then our people would be unshackled from the bondage of ignorance that had caused conflagration to our national psyche.

“And hindi marunong lumingon sa pinangalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paruruonan!”

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