

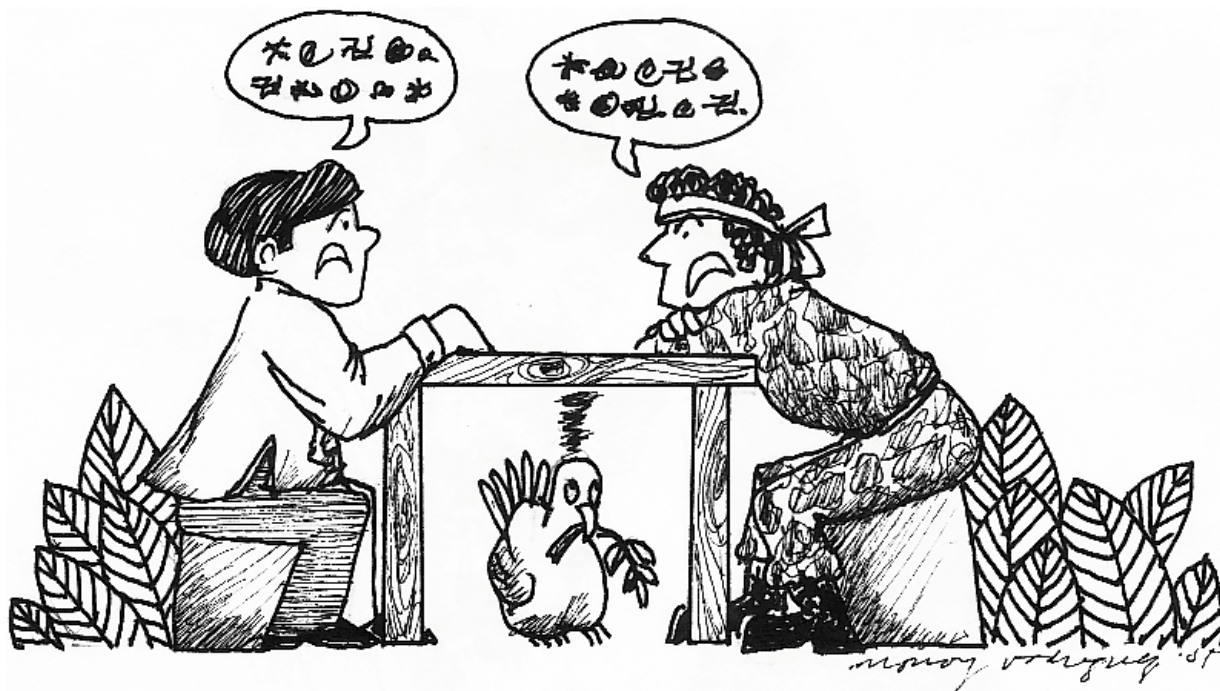


# Peace Monitor

Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM), Inc.

December 2006

## Wooing support, explaining peace



**T**he government of the republic of the philippines (GRP) and Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF) peace talks have been in an impasse since it broke down in September 2006, the stumbling block being the territory of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) and how to go about staking this.

There is so much to be said about this, especially because the major contention is in how big the territory to be ceded should be and the GRP's position that anything agreed on should be put forward in a plebiscite where the people in the territories affected will have a say on whether they want to be in it or not.

To ordinary Filipinos, they expect the government to insist on pushing the issue forward for the people to decide; after all they expect government to stand by its Constitution. And thus it appears that the talks have reached a point where both parties will not budge.

"We cannot accept a conditional offer and a failed formula exhibited by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) experience," the MILF was quoted as saying in turning down the government's condition of a plebiscite.

The MILF's intransigence, especially on the issue that it gives much importance to, may be rooted from the fate of 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA) between the GRP and the MNLF, the implementation of which has likewise been stalled.

"Not all that was stipulated in the agreement was implemented by the government," Mindanews quoted MNLF Central Committee National Coordinator Haji Gapul Hadjirul (Kinjiyo 2006).

"It was only the integration of the MNLF combatants to the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police which was almost completed, among the provisions in the agreement," Hadjirul explained.

The dissatisfaction, if not discontent, spawned by a final peace agreement that many regard as having also met an impasse, however, brings forth an openness to learn lessons from the past, as well as share these lessons with others. At a cursory glance, it may be just one disgruntled person speaking out his distrust, but a more thorough perusal might reveal signs of a coming together to address a common concern even among the Bangsamoro people as represented by the MILF and the MNLF.

In between, we hear more of the same... stories and accusations about violations of the ceasefire agreement, accusations on the part of usually the military and denials on the part of the MILF regarding responsibility for bombing incidents that continue to hound key Mindanao cities, and distrust for politicians identified as against the Moro rebels, specifically North Cotabato Governor Emmanuel Piñol and Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat.

The meeting in Kuala Lumpur in the first week of December, which the MILF insists is not a resumption of talks but is more of a clarificatory discussion and a question and answer (Q & A) session regarding the two panels' stands, is but a glimmer of a new level of understanding between and among the contenders – the realization that there is a long and hard

bargaining ahead that needs the support of even those outside the talks but whose fate lies in the way.

While not much hope can be gleaned from a Q & A session, the events and statements that followed showed a desire to include the stakeholders to be better understood, a level that was left wanting in the events that preceded the FPA with the MNLF.

"The MILF will not create barriers that would disable other groups and suppress their ingenuity and productivity; we need the cooperation and contribution of everyone. We need everyone to succeed," MILF Chief Peace Negotiator Mohagher Iqbal was quoted saying (Luwaran 2006j).

"Negotiation is not an easy undertaking that only few people have the perseverance and right attitude to withstand the challenges, pressures, and uncertainty surrounding the whole process," Iqbal said in another report (Luwaran 2006c).

If negotiation is difficult, so is the pursuit of peace.

It helps that in the process of the peace talks, more and more people are getting involved complemented by the International Monitoring Team (IMT). The presence of an international team of peace monitors headed by Malaysia – a country respected by both panels – somehow defuses the distrust between the GRP and MILF, specifically between the MILF and the military forces of the GRP.

The international community's interest on peace in Mindanao also serves as a constant reminder of what can be achieved once lasting peace is agreed on as well as a venue for learning from the experiences of other nations that have likewise dealt with issues of indigenous peoples, ancestral domain and the people's right to self-determination.

While indeed the peace talks have dragged on for years now, the gains gathered along the way cannot be belittled.

In this period of mostly stalled talks, the battle for understanding as well as insistence of not being the culprit in the skirmishes in between has drawn in a much wider audience and a more holistic concept of the peace that everyone is aspiring for and a better appreciation of other people's religion, specifically Islam.

The involvement of students, for one, in learning to appreciate Islam, has gained ground in some areas in Mindanao, specifically Davao and Bukidnon.

In Davao City, five high schools are part of a pilot peace education program of a Davao-based research and advocacy institution, the Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, that seeks to foster understanding among Mindanao's tri-people. Hedelisa B. Decolongon, a teacher of Davao City National High School, one of the pilot schools, in a report by Mindanews described the program as one that fosters deeper understanding of the Moro people, Christians, and non-Moro indigenous peoples. "She said the biggest problem in Mindanao is discrimination and lack of respect to the distinct cultures and history of the different peoples," the report said.

In Malaybalay City in Bukidnon, a public school is also teaching Islamic values and Arabic. Although this program at the Malaybalay City Central High School is still fraught with problems such as lack of funds and meager pays for the teachers, it has somehow fanned the realization that mainstreaming Islamic values and Arabic in public schools for Muslim students can be done, in time.

A decade and a half ago in 1992, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process noted that the five major causes of the armed conflicts in Mindanao were identified by a consultation undertaken by the National Unification Commission. These are: massive poverty, poor governance, injustice and abuse of power, control by a few of political power, and exploitation of cultural communities and lack of recognition of their ancestral domain.

A decade and a half later the situation still prevails and peace still remains elusive.

The formal peace talks with MILF began in 1997, broke down, resumed, and then suspended, with the hope being resumed, one more time, and hopefully concluded. In the meantime there is the coming to terms that at the bottom of all these is lack of understanding of a people who cannot even perceive why there are battles being waged for peace and why migrant settlers simply do not want to be included in talks headed by Muslims. These are issues that have to be taken stock of, recognized, and then brought out to the open for candid discussions. It's called coming to terms. Coming to terms with how ethnic differences are what distinguishes us as Mindanaoans. And while indeed there may be accusations and counter-accusations, the actual fighting have lessened and there are more efforts to gather everyone for "Q & A" sessions, much like what the GRP-MILF were said to have done in the first week of December 2006.

After all, the need for everyone's involvement and understanding is not just a key to better appreciation of what is being bargained for but also to address centuries-old distrust and discontent among peoples of different situations and beliefs.

The need for everyone's involvement and understanding is also the key to appreciate and work for peace, the kind of peace that lies beyond signed documents.

## Sources

**Arguillas, Carolyn O./MindaNews.** 2006. Government, MILF meet in KL to clarify issues. 6 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1396&Itemid=50](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1396&Itemid=50)].

**Balane, Walter I./ MindaNews.**2006. MILF: Peace in Shariff Aguak after relief of Army unit. 2 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1371&Itemid=75](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1371&Itemid=75)].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. Building peace from Davao's classrooms. 7 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1404&Itemid=50](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1404&Itemid=50)].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. Teaching of Islamic values and Arabic in public schools helps build peace. 28 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1505&Itemid=50](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1505&Itemid=50)].

**Kinjiyo, Gandhi C./MindaNews.** MNLF to send 20-person delegation to Jeddah meeting in February. 6 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1397&Itemid=50](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1397&Itemid=50)].

**Luwaran.** 2006a. A week and a day of silence in Shariff Aguak. 1 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=105>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006b. GRP-MILF holds Q & A session. 2 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=articles&sid=106>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006c. MILF sees hard bargaining ahead in talks. 6 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=109>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006d. MILF completes peace panel team. 7 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=110>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006e. Piñol embarking on new land grab? 11 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=114>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006f. Army asked to admit 'defiling mosque'. 12 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=116>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006g. IMT head to meet political and military top brass in Zamboanga Peninsula. 19 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=125>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006h. Zambo mayor rejects IMT anew. 20 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=127>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006i. Canada signifies intention to join IMT. 21 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=128>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006j. MILF: We are negotiating for all. 26 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=133>].

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006k. We have not softened our position, MILF says. 28 December. [Accessed at <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=135>].

**Mindanews.** 2006. Abu Sulaiman claims responsibility for Tacurong blast. 30 December. [Accessed at [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1510&Itemid=50](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1510&Itemid=50)].

### Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM), Inc.

Unit 1H Anda Corporate Centre,  
F. Iñigo St., Davao City  
Phone: (082) 226-4592  
Fax : (082) 226-3932  
Email : [infoservices@afrim.org.ph](mailto:infoservices@afrim.org.ph)  
Website : <http://www.afrim.org.ph>

### Peace Monitor

is a monthly publication containing analyses of the GRP-MILF peace process, culled from national and local dailies, as well as from alternative online sources. The monitor also includes efforts and initiatives of government and civil society groups towards peace and development in Mindanao.