CONFLICT AND CONFLICT-RESOLUTION IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

Shamsuddin L. Taya, Ph.D.
Department of International Affairs
Faculty of International Studies
Universiti Utara Malaysia
E-mail: shamsuddin@uum.edu.my

Abstract

This paper examines and analyzes the conflict in the Southern Philippines and suggests recommendations that might bring an end to the decade-old problem in the region using a peacebuilding model. It is divided into several parts. First part describes the conflict in the region. The second part suggests recommendations: the political and administrative, economic, security, humanitarian and social dimensions. And finally, the concluding remarks.

The data for this analysis came from primary and secondary sources, namely newspapers, policy statements, speeches, press releases, joint communiqué, peace agreements, books, magazines, and journals. Interviews with some informed people were also conducted.

The study found that the parties involved in the Southern Philippines have no better option other than to reach socio-political and economic accommodations. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) should grant self-determination to the Bangsamoro through Bangsamoro Juridical Entity which has full constitutional power and authority over the political, social, economic, and security domains of the region. At the same time the Bangsamoro leaders, in general and, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in particular, should accept political settlement short of independence. With this formula, we believe that the conflict in the Southern Philippines is solvable.

Introduction

The Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination started during the period of Spanish colonialism and has continued up to the present. However, the Bangsamoro independence movements became better organized from the American period (1898-1946) and the Christian-Filipino era (1946 up to the present). The *Jabidah Massacre* in 1968, the *Manili Massacre* in 1971 and the *Malisbong (Palimbang) Massacre* in 1972

during President Ferdinand E. Marcos' time sparked resentment against the Philippine government.[1] The Jabidah Massacre, in fact, led to the founding of the Bangsamoro movements for self-determination such as the Mindanao Independence Movement in 1968 (MIM) led by Datu Udtog Matalam, a former governor of the Cotabato Empire. This was followed by the creation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) led by Salamat Hashim, and others.[2]

The MNLF as a movement for Bangsamoro self-determination survived for decades. It, however, succumbed to pressures from its foreign supporters (the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and more specifically the Libyan and Saudi Arabian governments) and the GRP. As a result, the two GRP-MNLF's Peace Agreements were signed: the 1976 Tripoli Peace Agreement (Libya) and the 1996 Jakarta Peace Agreement (Indonesia). The 1976 Tripoli Agreement had sparked internal divisions among the MNLF top ranks and one division moved out and established the New MNLF (Founded by Salamat Hashim- who passed away in 2003). Now the MILF is led by Murad Ebrahim. With the incorporation of the MNLF into the mainstream of the Philippine-body politic and eventually, the imprisonment of its leader, Nur Misuari, the MILF has emerged as the only revolutionary organization. Currently, the GRP is pursuing its peace efforts with the MILF. Indeed, both parties (the GRP and the MILF) signed confidence-building measures in Libya (2001) and Malaysia (2002). The MILF is pursuing its objective of total independence while the GRP is willing to compromise stopping short of independence. Both parties have hardened their positions in the past,[3] but in recent exploratory talks (2004) held in Malaysia, there were accommodation and gestures of friendship on the part of both negotiating parties (the GRP and MILF).

Aside from the MNLF, and MILF, the Abu Sayyaf Group or the ASG (founded and led by the late Janjalani Abdul Rajak- now, led by his brother Khadafy Janjalani) is another Bangsamoro independence movement, which is demanding an independent Bangsamoro state. The GRP claims that this group (ASG) is a small, but radical and violent group. In November 1992, a daily newspaper in Zamboanga city carried a brief item about the issue of the ASG as a terrorist group.[4] Since then, the group has been considered as a threat to the security of the country according to the GRP. The group (ASG) was also suspected of the beheading of 10 Philippine Marines after their

---

[1] Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation under Endless Tyranny,* (Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin Sdn. Bhd., 1999), 134.

[2] Ibid., 135. See also Samuel K. Tan, "The Bangsamoro Struggle," *Opisyal na Publikasyon ng Universidad ng Pilipinas*, Tomo 1, Blg. 7 (Mayo/Hunyo 2000): 6-8. <http://www.up.edu.ph/forum/2000/06/mayjune/bangsamoro.htm>.

[3] Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "The Philippines: Governance Issues Come to the Fore," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2000): 251-3.

[4] Mark Turner, "Terrorism and Secession in the Southern Philippines: The Rise of the Abu Sayyaf," *Contemporary Southeast Asia,* vol. 17, no. 1 (1995): 1. See also "Sorting out the South," *The Economist,* July 7, 2001, 21. See also "The Continuing Search for Sustainable Peace in Mindanao: A View from a Distance," *Center for Sustainable Peace and Economic Justice*, February 28, 2005, 12-3. <http://www.philsol.nl/A00a/Minda-CSPEJ-chronology-june00.htm>.

encounter with MILF forces in Basilan on July 10, 2007 that threatened the fragile peace process between the GRP and the MILF.[5]

Bangsamoro factionalism, compounded by declining foreign support and general war weariness, has hurt the Bangsamoro Islamic and nationalist movements both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. The GRP continues to struggle with Bangsamoro insurgencies, in general, and the MILF, in particular, in the Southern Philippines. The MILF is pursuing its objective of total independence and the GRP is willing to compromise stopping short of independence.

Description of the Conflict

The end of the Cold War gave rise to a popular belief that the United Nations would at last be able to make important progress towards its objective of maintaining international rule of law and that the diffusion of the principles of human rights, market economics and democracy would promote its aims of freedom and development.[6] This optimism, however, has been marred by an outbreak of violent communal or secessionist conflicts, more specifically, in the last quarter of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. These violent outbursts are global phenomena that can be found almost everywhere and need urgent, strong resolve by both local and international communities.

The destructive effects of violent secessionist conflicts, not surprisingly, also have its human and social consequences.[7] These global secessionist conflicts have exacerbated the gross reality of underdevelopment and poverty. Most of the affected are the poor people of those regions, more especially, the countries in the volatile regions of Africa, South America and Asia.

The quest for self-determination and the right to secede can be traced back to the implicit constitutional rights in the 1800s, when the Southern states of the United States decided to secede or withdraw from the Union and formed their own nation, the Confederation States of America.[8] Secessionist or independence movements are the very characteristics of the 20th and 21st centuries. Brown argued that secessionist movements are the products of disputes over the control of political, economic, social,

---

[5] Froilan Gallardo, "Marines failed to notify ceasefire teams before entering MILF town in Basilan," *MindaNews* (2007), 3 August 2007, 1-3.
08http://mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2975&Itemid=75.
See also Yvonne T. Chua, "Luz Rimban Reinforcements can't contact troops on the ground," *Inquirer*, 3 August, 2007, 1-4.
http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view_article.php?article_id=80276.

[6] Kenneth. Christie, *Ethnic Conflict, Tribal Politics: A Global Perspective,* (London: Curson Press, 1998), 15.
[7] Elfatih Abdullahi AbdelSalam, "The Islamic Doctrine of Peace and War," an unpublished manuscript, Department of Political Science, IIUM Gombak, (2004), 1. See also Said Sadain, Jr., "Culture of Peace," *Bugs and Bytes*, vol. 4, 4th Quarter, (November 1999): 1-2.
<http://www.bugsnbytes.tripod.com/bbnewsletter990901html>.
[8] Allen Buchanan, "Self-determination and the Right to Secede," 346.

cultural, or territorial domains between two or more tribal or ethnic communities.[9] For instance, the Bangsamoro have these sentiments against the Christian-Filipino-controlled led Manila government. An endless conflict in the region is a clear evidence of that political deprivation and economic inequality. There is an increasing demand from the Bangsamoro, especially the younger generation, to have greater and more genuine political participation and just and fair economic opportunities from the Philippine government. Carment discussed the competition between different groups for control over the other, basically due to the fear that others might endanger their core values. He argued that secessionist conflicts pose a threat to core values based on an ethnic boundary between in-groups and out-groups which have the potential to give rise to group mobilization and politicization qua-separate community, society or state.[10]

Secessionist conflicts arise when people perceive a 'divergence of interest' where one party believes that its goals are incompatible with those of the other party.[11] Such competition for scarce or limited resources is a central idea to secessionist conflict. The inability of the central authority to distribute natural resources justly or when the people perceive unfair distribution of limited resources ignite feelings that may lead to dissatisfaction on the part of those different sectors. These may reinforce the quest for self-determination and independence. These phenomena are rampant everywhere, particularly in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). In fact, secessionist movements are springing up from Western Europe (Basque) to Southeast Asia (the Southern Philippines).

With this, some fundamental questions would arise: Why does conflict occur? What are those factors that lead to conflict? What is the best mechanism to resolve conflict? There are many theories that explain the occurrence of conflict. Here are three of them.

Schock's work is a comprehensive model for understanding conflicts that drive the quest for self-determination and the right to secede. He discussed three theories of conflicts. Firstly, the relative deprivation theory that can be defined as the perceived gap between people's value expectations and their value abilities, that is, the discrepancy between what people think they should get from society's abundance and what they believe they actually do get.[12] The Two Peace Agreements (The 1976 Tripoli and 1996 Jakarta Agreements) are best illustration of this discrepancy. In this respect, Rizal G. Buenda argued that the conclusion of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the GRP and MNLF did not terminate the separatist movement in

---

[9] M. Brown, *Causes and Implications of Ethnic Conflict,* (London: Princeton University, 1994), 5.

[10] D. Carment, "The International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: Concepts, Indicators and Theory," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 30 (1993): 147.

[11] Elfatih A. AbdelSalam, "A Typology of Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in the Muslim World," an unpublished manuscript, Department of Political Science, IIUM, Gombak, (2004): 1.

[12] Kurt Schock, "A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 1996): 101.

the Southern Philippines,[13] because the GRP could not deliver the expectations of the MNLF and the Bangsamoro. As a result, frustration and anger prevailed. So, in 2001, Misuari staged the rebellion once again that claimed more than a hundred lives. Rizal G. Buenda also stated the ignominious failure of Misuari to effectively wield governmental powers to attain the Bangsamoro's quest for lasting and viable peace over their homeland.[14]

Buenda's view was echoed by Nathan Gilbert Quimpo. He argued that the long awaited expectation of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the GRP and the MNLF has been dashed away. He further argued that instead of much prolonged peace, what the people of the Southern Philippines, particularly, the Bangsamoro, were facing with was an escalating and intensifying armed conflict.[15] It seems that Quimpo doubted the viability of the concluded peace agreements between the GRP and the MNLF. Indeed, there is a serious public concern about its often violation and disrespect by the parties involved.

It seems that the primary source of relative deprivation is economic inequality in any given society, while other factors might be equally important. In this sense, we can see that one of the most dominant pre-conditions that drive the quest for self-determination and independence is relative deprivation. There are serious disagreements among disputants who believe that their core values are threatened by the actions of others.[16] Of course, there are some factors or a combination of them (like normative justification such as cultural traits that may reinforce their quest for self-determination and freedom) that are likely to channel them into political violence.[17] Thus, all these contribute to reinforce the drive for secession.

Secondly, Marxist theories of rebellion based on class struggle which viewed history as the driving force behind social change, political conflict and rebellion. The

---

[13] Rizal G. Buenda, "The GRP-MILF Peace Talks," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2004): 205-6. See also "Bangsamoro People Stand for Peace and Social Justice: Recognize and Respect for the Bangsamoro People's Right to Self-determination," 2-5. See also M. D. Vitug and G. M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*, (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs and Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), 289-91. See also "Opening Statement of Murad Ebrahim, Chairman of the MILF Negotiating Panel during GRP-MILF Peace Talks," in Libya, (June 22, 2001).

[14] Rizal G. Buenda, "The GRP-MILF Peace Talks," 205-6.

[15] Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Options in the Pursuit of a Just, Comprehensive and Stable Peace in Mindanao," 1-3. See also "The Continuing Search for Sustainable Peace in Mindanao: A View from a Distance," pp. 2-4. See also Abhoud Syed M. Lingga," Democratic Approach to Pursue the Bangsamoro People's Right to Self-determination," 8-9. See also Virginia Swain, "Report on the Mindanao Peace Process,"2. See also "Mindanao Leaders Manifesto for Peace," Held in Dynasty Court Hotel, Cagayan De Oro City, (May 13-14). See also Eliseo R. Mercado, "The Five Basic Issues Confronting Mindanao vis-à-vis the Roles Played by the Civil Society,"1-2. See also Paul A. Rodell, "The Philippines: Playing Out Long Conflicts," 199-201.

[16] Elfatih A AbdelSalam, "A Typology of Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in the Muslim World," 1.

[17] Kurt Schock, "A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict," 110.

exploitative system of capitalism against the working class through economic exploitation paved the way for a constant struggle between those who have and those who have not. Economic exploitation is an expropriation of surplus value, the total value of a product minus the cost of production, by capitalists from the workers.[18] Although the primary emphasis of the Marxist theory of rebellion is on the economic bases of discontent and grievances, it also takes into consideration organizational and ideological factors that facilitate class struggle.[19] The Marxist theory of rebellion is relatively less relevant to the case of the Bangsamoro, but it cannot simply be ignored because some Bangsamoro secessionist groups have resemblance of this model despite their rejection on it. For instance, MNLF was accused of being a socialist or Marxist oriented organization which the organization denied. The strengths of this theory are its concern for inequality, injustice, exploitation and oppression. It is a perspective of the oppressed class that is the working class.[20] However, the Marxist theory of rebellion suffers from a lack of accuracy in its analysis. History has shown us that most conflicts have occurred in LDCs rather than in the most developed countries (DCs) of the West as predicted by its proponents. Despite its lack of theoretical accuracy, it is still usable as a tool for analyzing class struggle.

Finally, theories of ethnic mobilization and conflict, which are largely a response to economic and political discrimination, assert that those ethnic divisions usually polarize societies much more than class-based divisions as expected by the Marxist theory of rebellion.[21] This theory explains that cultural identity is often a more accurate predictor of political behavior than class identity.[22] Indeed, grievances and discontent are usually a product of intense and widespread socio-economic and political discrimination, oppression and injustice. Such a situation usually provides room for the rise of violent separatist movements that will challenge the institutionalized system of economic inequality. The cases of the Malay-Muslims in Southern Thailand and the Bangsamoro in the Southern Philippines are some typical examples of those contemporary secessionist movements who actively struggle to regain their lost freedom and independence from their respective colonial masters.

In this regard, Michael O. Mastura insisted that any negotiated political solution to the conflict in the Southern Philippines must be based on a genuine and balanced representation between the primacy of identity claims and the priority of interests.[23] The identity crisis is one of the serious issues that confront peace advocates in their quest for lasting and viable peace in the region. Chalk also stated that the political objective of MILF is the establishment of an Islamic state in all areas where the

---

[18] Ibid., 102.
[19] Ibid.
[20] David N. Balam and M. Veseth, Introduction *to International Political Economy*, (London: Prentice Hall, 2001), 67-9.
[21] Kurt Schock, "A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict," 103.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Michael O. Mastura, "Just Peace: Understanding the Frameworks Document," 6.

Bangsamoro are majority in the Southern Philippines.[24] Thus, the creation of an Islamic independent state became the battle cry of the MILF's leadership and its members, because, they wanted to have their own government on the basis of their tradition, practice and religion, that is Islam.

Therefore, those theories of secessionist conflict stressed the relationship between economic inequality and political violence.[25] They emphasized how various forms of economic inequality produce feelings of discontent and deep grievances. The basic assumption of these theories is that violent political conflict within any nation is contingent on the extent of economic inequality and the lack of political dispensation. However, conflicts need not turn violent. It is widely recognized that the occurrence of violence depends on the actions of the disputing parties.[26]

The Recommendations
The Political and Administrative Dimension

Since the Bangsamoro's population has surrounded by controversy. It, however, constitutes about 8 per cent of the total population of the Philippines, and since the region has its historical, cultural and administrative unique character, and since the peace agreements (the 1976 Tripoli and 1996 Jakarta Agreements) signed between the GRP and the MNLF fell short as a comprehensive and workable model, a new formula must be explored and utilized to address the decade-long conflict in the region. The on-going GRP-MILF Peace Talks perhaps would present a new political and administrative reality in the country, which necessarily affects the situation in other regions; we suggest the following points with regard to the situation in the Bangsamoro Homeland:

1. The Bangsamoro Homeland should be governed with a genuine autonomy through the proposed "Bangsamoro Juridical Entity," in which the leaders of the executive body and the legislative council are elected by all the Bangsamoro. This institution should be given a constitutional mandate and authority over its respective region. It should also have a full authority to exploit and use all resources within the jurisdiction of the BJE. However, shares of revenues between the autonomous region (BJE) and the central government (GRP) to the incomes must be fixed in a just, but agreeable to both parties. These are important for the BJE so that it will enable them to

---

[24] Angel Rabasa,; Peter Chalk, *Muslim Separatist Movements in the Philippines and Thailand* ," Ins: *Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Asia*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 87. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1344.ch9.pdf>. See also Crescent International, interviewed Salamat Hashim, MILF Chairman, "Bangsamoro Muslims' Determination to Establish an Islamic State," *Crescent International*, 16-31 March, 1999, 11. See also John McBeth, "Across Borders: A New Generation of Terrorists is Training in the Philippines, and Traveling, a New Report Says*," Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 July, 2004, 27. See also S. S. Islam, *The Politics of Islamic Identity in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Thomson Learning, 2005), 37.
[25] Ibid., 100-1.
[26] Ted Robert Gurr, *Violence in America: Protest, Rebellion, Reform*, (London: Sage Publications, 1989), 13.

develop the region and provide the medical and educational services for its people, so as to bridge the gap between this region and other regions in the country.

2. The Bangsamoro should be given the opportunity to have a free democratic practice to unite their region under unified executive and legislative institutions, while, preserving the government institutions at the state and local levels; keeping in mind the geographic and social peculiarity and the administrative feasibility.

3. The formation of the autonomous government and the legislative councils during transitional period should reflect the general popular consensus. That should be realized through a wide consultation with the political powers, which have influence in the region, and with the leaders of Civil Administration, which has the popular support, and with the freedom fighters and intellectuals from the Bangsamoro Homeland. An agreement should be reached on a shared popular mechanism to be formed from the government, the fighters and the leaders of the region with the participation or even mediation of international community, to assure the success of negotiations, and follow-up on implementing the outcome of the final agreement and solve the emerging problems.

4. The region should be represented in the higher constitutional positions during the transitional period. It should also be represented in the government cabinet and commissions. Its representation in the congress should reflect its population weight, and the representatives of the region should be selected by the executive of the BJE based on their professional qualifications and good conduct.

5. A committee should be formed to assess the damage that was caused by the conflict, and compensate the victims-individuals or groups-for their losses.

6. All those who committed criminal atrocities against the civilians should be tried on court, and the recommendations stipulated on the reports prepared by the GRP-MILF Fact-finding Committee and the International Fact-finding Mission should be implemented, and that be done through a natural and civil supervision. This process should no stop pardoning and forgiving of revenges, with the consent of the victimized parties, in order to preserve the neighborhood relations, and repair the social fabric and seek the forgiveness and reward from Allah (SWT).

7. All those who were detained for political reasons associated with the Southern Philippine problem should be released. Investigations on the cases of women's rape should be opened; and the perpetrators must be punished, and victims should be provided with spiritual, psychological and

medical care. In addition that, those who were sacked from the civil and military services should be reinstated in their previous jobs.

8. Because the Civil Administration is a deeply rooted traditional system in the region, which still has an active role in organizing the society, the selection of officials for this administration should be built on the concession and agreement of people in the area; and it should not be exploited for political and partisanship gains. It should be given both legal and judicial authority and should be supported financially and morally to enable it to perform its role effectively. A balance should be struck between its traditional, conventional role and the requirements of the new situation in which people are governed by a democratically elected authority with its executive and judicial institutions. The Civil Administration should be revived in the sphere of peaceful co-existence and social reconciliation and in taking care of the inherited traditions in fishing and farming, so as to benefit all individuals in the society.

9. A permanent committee should be formed in different areas with the task of specifying the "pusaka a lupa" or Ancestral Domain passage and their timings, based on a clear map that considers the interests of both the Bangsamoro and the Christian-Filipino settlers. The GRP and MILF with the aid of international community should ensure the implementation of the decisions taken by this committee.

The Economic Dimension

As the land-grabbing issue and the complaint of poor development and services constitute some of the most important causes of conflict in the Southern Philippines, then the economical factor becomes a principal approach for solving the problem. In this regard we advise that the following should be taken into consideration:

1. Study the problem of land-conflict in the region, in a way that makes the life styles that depend on farming fit with the available land and plant resources. Consideration should be paid to settling land disputes and the Philippine government should revoke laws declaring ancestral land or "pusaka a lupa" as public land. Thus, the Manila government should pass protection laws to preserve the Bangsamoro ancestral domain.

2. A special commission should be set up to look into the land possession in the region, in the light of the inherited rights which are locally accepted and based on the citizenship rights in which all citizens are equal despite of their religion or tribe, and according to the economical feasibility in exploiting the land. The commission should take care of planning for land uses, and specify the bases for land possession and take care of the process of land registration. The commission has the right to recommend the compensation, for the groups or individuals who lose their inherited or acquired right as a result of implementing the above-mentioned bases.

3. The establishment of a special commission for development and reconstruction of the region using local and international funds through Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), so as to build the infrastructures and complete the development projects which have been halted such as the Mal-Mar Irrigation Project and others.

4. Encouragement of investments and diversification of resources, and living-gaining sources for ordinary citizens, according to a comprehensive development plan for all provinces, and encourage the small industries that depend on local raw materials, through funding their capital and facilitating the marketing of products outside the region.

The Security Dimension

Since the lack of security in the Southern Philippines has already reached its limit because of the influx of weapon from foreign countries, and because the forming of militias and the spread of the phenomenon of armed robbery and the appearance of opposition armed movements, both official and popular efforts should come together to maintain the security all over the region, so as to instill tranquility in the hearts of the displaced and refugees, especially women, children and elderly people, through the implementation of the following steps:

1. The strict abidance by the cease-fire agreement signed by the GRP and MILF since 1997 and its implementing guidelines and the withdrawal of both parties form the positions taken after the date. In addition to the full cooperation with the International Monitor Team (IMT) forces in protecting the civilians in villages and camps. Indeed, the GRP-MILF Coordinating Committees on Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), in general, and the Joint Independent Fact-Finding Committee (JIFFC), in particular, has shown its relevance in preventing war in Basilan that many feared it would escalate throughout the Southern Philippines. The committee managed to preserve the peace process in the region at least at the time of writing this paper. The JIFFC which was organized by the GRP and MILF peace panels on July 23, 2007, is composed of nine (9) members with equal representations from the GRP-CCCH, MILF-CCCH and Bantay Ceasefire. It was established to investigate a ceasefire violation, the death of Imam Alkanul and the beheading of 10 Philippine Marines as a result of July 10, 2007 BIAF-AFP clash in Basilan (Guinanta).

2. Necessary measures should be taken to collect the weapons from any individuals or parties carrying it outside the regional regular forces, and the sources of weapon and ammunitions supply should be dried out; and the legalization of the permitted light weapons for individuals, and the encouragement of the different groups to handover their weapon voluntarily in exchange for development projects in their areas, and the payments of compensations for weapons collected earlier.

3. Instill the authority of the regional government and show its power to reinforce the rule of law and achieve justice, and the immediacy in settling the criminal

cases waiting in front of the courts; and the quick solution for and administrative and economic problems that face the executive body.

4. Scrutinize the individuals who are selected to serve in the regional regular forces in the regions and train them, so that they perform their duty professionally, and with the required discipline, away from any racial or tribal bias.

5. Hastening the implementation of the civil record for all citizens of the region, and control the incoming migration from Luzon and Visayas and monitor the borders using mobile and effective regional forces.

6. Cooperation of all parties: Ruling aristocrats, freedom fighters and other influential groups to fight against the phenomenon of lawless groups and abstain from providing refuge or hide any body who has committed any of the crimes that could jeopardize the stability and development of the region.

The Humanitarian Dimension

The humanitarian dimension in the Southern Philippine conflict is the main issue that attracted the attention of the world. As thousands of people were killed and hundreds of villages were burned down, and tens of thousands took refuge in Sabah, Malaysia, and hundreds thousands were displaced inside the country known as Internally Displaced People (IDPs). All this has created a real humanitarian catastrophe. The humanitarian side should be given the priority in the solutions, because most of the victims are weak people such as women, children and elderly. In this regard we recommend the following:

1. The full abidance by the humanitarian Protocol, which requires the parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief for the victims of military operations, and open the roads for humanitarian organizations, and not to obstruct their workers, and protect the displaced camps.

2. Secure the delivery of humanitarian needs for all affected by war in the camps, towns, and villages. The distribution of relief for sufferers in the different areas should be balanced; and concern should be shown for the Bangsamoro refugees in Sabah, Malaysia. The BDA and other duly accredited organizations should monitor and coordinate the work of the relief organizations both within and abroad (Sabah).

3. The voluntary relocations of displaced and refugees in their home areas after providing them with security, food, shelter, medication and education. The remains of war should be removed, and the damaged amenities and institutions should be maintained. In addition to that, sufficient strategic reserves of medicine and foods should be stored to avoid any shortages.

4. The formation of a committee to asses post-war needs, in par with the committee formed by the Philippine government and the MILF and other secessionist movements in the Southern Philippines. The international community should support this committee, which could be attached to the Southern Philippine War-affected Areas Rehabilitation Fund.

5. The provision of intensive programs and comprehensive activities to provide physical and psychological treatments for the victims of violations, and train them to do jobs that suit them. Those victims should be made aware of their human right. The formation of local organizations that can work in the same field should be encouraged. Their activists should be trained in the International and regional laws and techniques of work. The capacity of civil society organizations should be built and women should be empowered, and their political, economic, cultural and social role should be activated, and ensure their participation in the decision-making bodies at all levels.

6. The establishment of maternity and childhood fund to alleviate the war damages.

The Social Dimension

The Bangsamoro Homeland was known for its stability, social solidarity and intertribal mix up in the past that was because of their commitment to the pure Islamic values and the established traditions in tolerance and co-existence. However, the fallouts of the current crisis gave that social fabric a deadly strike. That is why a long-term plan is needed to patch it up and take it back to its previous state. In this regard we suggest the following:

1. The promotion of the Bangsamoro Homeland's historical, social and cultural unifying characters. The institutions of higher education and the organizations of civil society should contribute to this role. The regional government should encourage the establishment of corporations and organizations that involve many tribes and that work for the service of all people in the region.

2. Make use of the educational, religions and information institutions to patch the social fabric and to overcome the narrow tribal fanaticism, religious differences and denounce the call for arrogance, exclusions, and the rush towards political and administrative positions, relying on pure tribal bases, and criminalize the call for violence and the sedition among tribes.

3. Care should be taken for education and improve its services and widen its bases, because it is very influential in shaping the character and educating the individuals. The boarding school system should be continued in some model schools in big towns because of their role in cultural integration and social cohesion.

4. Involve the local communities and the grassroots entities in the process of social reconciliation and the settlement of pending disputes, and the revival of the traditions of tolerance, co-existence and integration; and legalize the traditions of dispute solving and give them the legal consideration.

5. Activate the role of Civil Administration in settlement of tribal disputes, and in the process of patching the social fabric; and involve the organizations of civil society and the women in the call for discarding violence and fighting. Shared social entities should be built. Contacts and ties between tribes and religions and their relatives both within and outside the region should be encouraged.

6. The international community, the Manila regime, the regional government, the political and civil powers should pledge to support the reconciliation and social co-existence in the region. They should refrain from exploiting tribal fanaticism in political competitions. A voluntary and popular entity for all people of the Southern Philippines should be created to protect their unity and support their social fabric, and contribute to solving the emerging problems and serve the interests of the region.

Conclusion

The conflict of the Southern Philippines has reached its limits and the masses are becoming impatient. The GRP and MILF and other Bangsamoro secessionist groups should realize that there is no better option for them than to reach compromise position so as to live together in that part of the world. This conflict is a solvable problem, especially if the dominant Christian-Filipino people and their leaders realize that there is no better option for them than to give the Bangsamoro self-determination through BJE. Indeed, if a determination of the wise men and influential leaders in the region is put to work and the efforts are gathered together they can definitely solve the root causes of the problems according to the observed traditions, and to the emerging concepts, laws, and social situations. The GRP must lead an active effort to rectify the social disintegration and build the trust and confidence, in addition to its role in maintaining security and realizing stability and development in the Southern Philippines.

Bibliography

Abubakar, C. A. (2004). Review of the Mindanao Peace Processes. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* 5, 3.

ARMM Designed to Perpetuate Colonial Occupation. (2004, October 13). *Luwaran.com: Moro Islamic Liberation Front.*

Arroyo, Dennis M. (2004, July 26). Poverty: Root Cause of Mindanao Conflict. *INQ7Money.*

Beckett, Jeremy. (2001). Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology,* vol. 12. no. 2.

Buendia, Rizal G. (2004). The GRP-MILF Peace Talks. *Southeast Asian Affairs.*

Christie, K. (1998). Ethnic Conflict, Tribal Politics: A Global Perspective. London: Curson Press.

Diaz, Patricio P. (2003, January 20). Understanding Mindanao Conflict. *MindaViews: A Publication of the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center,* vol. 2, no. 108.

Patricio P. Diaz, What's New,? (2005, August 20). *MindaViews: A Publication of the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center,* vol. 15, no. 087.

George, T.J.S. (1980). *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics.* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Hamzah, Abdullah M. "MILF Alternative Government." (1997). *Homeland*, vol. 4, no. 6.

Hashim, Salamat. (1999, March 16-31). Bangsamoro Muslims' Determination to Establish an Islamic State. *Crescent International* Interviewed Salamat Hashim, Leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front at his Main Base at Camp Abu Bakre As-Siddique, Central Mindanao.

Layson, C. L. (2004, August 25). Partners in Peace. *MindaNews*. Retrieved November 20, 2004. http://www.mindanews.com/2004/08/25vws-layson.html.

Lingga, A. S. M. (2002, July 17). Democratic Approach to Pursue the Bangsamoro People's Right to Self-determination. *Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly*. Retrieved March 20, 2004. http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/bangsarights.html.

Lingga, A. S. M. (2002, September). Referendum: A Political Option for Mindanao. *Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly.* Retrived March 20, 2004. http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/referendum.html.

Lingga, A. S. M. (2004, June 4). Mindanao Peace Process: The Need for New Formula. *Institute of Bangsamoro Studies*. Retrieved November 20, 2004. http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/peaceprocess.html.

Malaysia to Refuse any Rebel Demand Outside Philippine Laws. (2003, April 29). *Utusan Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2004. http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/content.asp?y=2003&dt=0430&pub=Utusan_Express&sec=Front_Page&pg=fp_10.htm\.

Melencio, S. (2002, August 1). The Struggle of the Bangsamoro People. *Bangsamoro. Org*.

Mezzera, M. (2001, March 7). The Camps of the Sun: MILF's Stronghold after Military Offensive. *Focus on the Global South*.

Muslim, M. A. (1994). *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*. Marawi City: Office of the President and College Affairs Mindanao State University.

Nu'ain bin Abdulhaqq. (2001). *The Bangsamoro People's Struggle against Oppression and Colonialism* (ed.). Mindanao: Agency for Youth Affairs-MILF.

One Victory More Needed. (2000, July 15). *The Economist*.

Peace by Christmas? (1998, June 27). *The economist*.

Quevedo, O. B. (2003, July 18). Injustice: The Roots of Conflict in Mindanao. *Tabang Mindanao*.

Salah J. (1999). *Bangsamoro*: *A Nation under Endless Tyranny*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: IQ Marin Sdn. Bhd.

Vitug, M. D. & Gloria, G.M. (2000). *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*. Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs and Institute for Popular Democracy.