

The situation in Mindanao - Maximum Understanding, Sobriety & Tolerance (MUST): Our Call

Monday 25 August 2008, by [CAMENDAN Habbas S.](#), [CARUMBA Amabella L.](#), [MPPM](#), [SENTURIAS AI](#) (Date first published: 25 August 2008).

In the midst of fear, suffering and hysteria generated by the abortive signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA AD) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM) appeals to the GRP and the MILF and all sectors for maximum understanding, sobriety and tolerance and calls on all to contribute to the enlightenment of everyone on the issues surrounding the MOA AD.

The Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM) is a grassroots tri-people multi-sectoral peace alliance/network/coalition of human rights and peace groups, non-government and peoples' organizations, schools, churches, civic groups as well as professionals and businesspeople in Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan (MinSuBaTaPa). Since MPPM's founding in June 2000, we have committed to the search for a genuine and lasting peace in MinSuBaTaPa. Our search has led us to conclude that unless the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro people is effectively addressed, no agreement will ever be fully realized.

We believe that the MOA AD contains the basic ingredients for addressing the root cause of the Mindanao conflict. However, its timing especially in light of the attempts of the incumbent President to amend the Constitution for purposes other than simply accommodating the provisions of the MOA AD has beclouded the peoples' appreciation of the MOA AD.

We therefore appeal to the GRP and MILF to respect the existing Ceasefire Agreement, for both parties to go back to their respective barracks, and cease and desist from making provocative acts that could lead to another armed confrontation;

Re-impose and recognize ceasefire mechanisms so that the civilian populations who are now displaced from their homes will be able to go home without fear and anxiety that another attack will happen;

We condemn the atrocities committed not only in the siege in Kolambugan, Lanao del Norte but as well as in North Cotabato and other areas like the killing and mutilation of the bodies of innocent civilians- women, men and children, and the burning of their houses and livelihood. Again, the civilians have become the collateral damage to this resurgence of armed conflict in Mindanao;

We demand that an impartial investigation be conducted on the above-mentioned atrocities and that justice should be done to whoever will be found guilty;

We also call upon the national government and the local government officials to stop and not encourage the arming of the civilian populations. These weapons can and will be used indiscriminately and irresponsibly by unscrupulous sectors and groups to further create chaos,

insecurity and division in the communities. The duty to protect its citizens lies primarily upon the State and its instrumentalities like the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP);

In view of the above appeals, MPPM would like to reiterate the grassroots peacebuilding framework that it continuously advances and adheres to.

Peacebuilding is a complex process and not merely a list of disconnected activities like disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants; it is a long term process and over a long term, there must be a mechanism to ensure that the peace building process is supported with coherent policies to address the sustainability gap on the ground.

What is happening right now is just repeating history. History tells us that because of unaddressed root causes of conflict, the recurrence of armed conflict and violence is inevitable. Ever since, the Philippine government applied the military-victory, pacification and demobilization approaches in its dealing with the liberationist forces in Mindanao and so-called insurgents, it has only displaced thousands of the civilian population and the greatest affected are the women, children, and the elderly; subjecting them to severe insecurity.

If all stake holders, especially the government, are serious about preventing the recurrence of armed conflict, peace-building should be institutionalized to facilitate the consolidation of genuine democratic participation of the constituency, social and economic reforms, gender and equity, and equal participation of the national minority in all aspects and levels of the society. Thus, while the MoA-AD is the ultimate expression of the Bangsamoro people's aspiration for their Right to Self-Determination and freedom, it should have also ensured and clearly defined the Indigenous Peoples' Right to self-determination and claims over their ancestral territory with equal rights as the Bangsamoro even within the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) framework;

In doing this, the basic framework should be the transparency of our intention and process of which peace building is initiated. The strategic objective of the above is to attain human security and promote human development.

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