

Philippines & Mindanao Peace Process - Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement: Bring the margins to the fold of inclusive peace

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Prof. Rodelio Ambangan (standing) joins the leaders of the Teduray and Lambangian in the public forum on the hopes and aspirations of the indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro in Cotabato City on September 16.

“Is inclusive right to self-determination possible? Is inclusive peace possible?”

These were the pertinent questions raised by Prof. Rodelio N. Ambangan, the chairperson of the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement to the various civil society organizations in the public forum of the Lakbay Tribu para sa Karapatan sa Sariling Pagpapasya (Indigenous Peoples' March for the Right to Self-Determination) on September 16 in Cotabato City.

He recalled that since the signing of the Final Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) on August 29, 1996 and the recent signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014, some peoples especially “the indigenous peoples have remained at the sidelines in the process of the peace negotiations”. “Where are now the indigenous peoples in the negotiations? Where are the grassroots Bangsamoro and the migrants in the negotiations?”, Ambangan further asked.

As an alliance of peace and human rights organizations, the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement have been consistent with its call for the inclusivity of the peace processes.

The movement began as a Mindanao-wide solidarity protest against the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in 1999 and as a peoples' peace movement in 2000 when former President Joseph E. Estrada declared an “All-Out-War” that reduced communities to battlegrounds and thousands of refugees flocked the town and city centers. Since then, it continued to exhaust all venues for dialogues, discussions and solidarity actions that push peoples' participation and decisiveness in matters of conflict and peace.

In 2002, the general assembly of the movement decided to make the referendum on the democratic political options for peace in Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan (MinSuBaTaPa) its flagship program in support for the Bangsamoro struggle for their right self-determination. This called for the United Nations to hold a referendum for the Bangsamoro people to determine their

political future, whether it comes in the form of independence, genuine autonomy, federalism and free association. The movement strongly believes that this campaign was its pro-active contribution to end the decades old conflict in Mindanao in a democratic, peaceful and bloodless manner. The campaign brought together the Bangsamoro, indigenous peoples and the migrants.

Meanwhile, aggression and human rights violations continued in indigenous communities amidst the on-going negotiations and even with the existence of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) that was supposed to recognize, promote and protect their rights.

In the case of the Teduray, Lambangian and Dulangan Manobo ethnic groups in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which was the product of the final peace agreement of the GRH and the MNLF, the IPRA wasn't implemented at all. It took 18 years before the National Commission on the Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was able to assert its mandate in the region and began the ancestral domain delineation process.

Timuay Alim Bandara, the head claimant of the Teduray, Lambangian and Dulangan Manobo ancestral domain claim on his speech during the congressional public hearing of the House Committee on the National Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples in Ateneo de Davao University in Davao City on June 26, 2014 referred to themselves "not only as affected or victims of war but also victims of peace" simply because they are "inside an autonomous region that is product of the peace process" and this autonomous region was not sensitive to their plight. In the more than two decades of the ARMM, it was only in 2008 that a law was passed to respond to the clamor of the indigenous peoples, the Tribal Peoples' Rights Act. However, provisions for the delineation of ancestral domains and funds for its implementation is wanting which made the law ineffective.

He went on to challenge the House committee headed by Cong. Nancy Catamco and Cong. Teddy Baguilat that in the upcoming legislation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law "to give peace another chance and hopefully not only for the Bangsamoro...but including all stakeholders in other affected communities and societies."

In its pursuit of inclusive peace, the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement brought these concerns to the attention of the public for an open discourse through the Lakbay Tribu para sa Karapatan sa Sariling Pagpapasya.

"Yes, inclusive peace is possible through the participation of the people in the peace process and their continuing efforts to assert their rights to land, food, governance, housing, restoration of tribal-based governance, management of community resources and much more", Prof. Rodelio Ambangan shared; emphasizing that the "Bangsamoro Basic Law is just one of the answers to inclusive peace in Mindanao. Quoting a line of the song by the Sugo Band, an Iligan-based group, Ambangan drove home his point, "Kung palayain natin ang isa, bakit di natin palayain ang lahat (If we set one free, why not set all free)?"

P.S.

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