



Pact among MNLF factions further confuses Central Mindanao sectors

COTABATO CITY - The "Tripoli Declaration" forged by factions in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) last May 18 further confused different sectors in Central Mindanao on who really is at the helm of the front's central leadership.

In the declaration, 10 MNLF leaders, including Nur
[PACT/p.11]

HOMeward BOUND --- A Malaysian military transport plane that brought members of the International Monitoring to Mindanao in 2003 will be frequenting Central Mindanao again to gradually transport IMT members home as part of the programmed pull out in batches of ceasefire monitors in the South.[]

MILF to government: Pursue talks

COTABATO CITY (Tuesday, June 3, 2008) - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has urged the government to settle the issue of ancestral domain to get the 11-year-old peace talks back to the negotiating table.

In a message on the MILF website, chief rebel negotiator Muhaquer Iqbal and other MILF leaders insinuated that the most pressing concern to get the peace talks "back on track" is how both sides would implement all consensus points on ancestral domain.

Peace talks between the government and the MILF started Jan. 7, 1997, but gained headway only in 2003 with Malaysia as mediator.

The ancestral domain issue, the thorniest topic in the GRP-MILF talks, encompasses the MILF's concept of a Southern Muslim homeland to be governed by its proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE).

The peace talks have been stalled since last year over misunderstandings between the two panels on how to fuse together geographically scattered Moro communities, which the MILF wants governed under the BJE.

[MILF/p.10]

MILF warns 5-year-old truce may collapse unless talks resume

MANILA, Philippines - Muslim rebels warned Friday that their five-year-old truce with the Philippine government may collapse unless the two sides resume stalled peace talks.

The talks broke off last year after the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which has been fighting for self-rule for minority Muslims for decades, protested the government's insistence that any proposal granting the rebels autonomy must adhere to Philippine laws and go before voters as a referendum.

The peace process hit another snag in May, when neighboring Malaysia grew impatient with the stalled talks and began pulling its more than 40 peacekeepers from the region. The peacekeepers have been credited with safeguarding the 2003 truce.

Rebel negotiator Mohagher Iqbal said in a statement Friday that the ceasefire may collapse on August 31 unless

[WARNS/p.11]

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The Mindanao Peace Process: On a Carriage with Two Horses

The analogy seems incongruent. But like any another metaphor whose object it is to describe a phenomenon vividly - characterising the Philippine government's handling of the peace process with two major separatist movements, namely the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro Islamic Nationalist Front (MNLF), as akin to riding in a carriage pulled by two horses, simplifies the rather complex picture of the peace process in Mindanao.

Whether the MILF and MNLF like it or not, the government has been in the saddle, manipulating the pace of the peace process over the last few years. At times the government has pulled at the seemingly separate but interconnected reins, while at other times, managed each horse with varying intensity, sometimes with a slight tug or a harsh whip, depending on the desired direction and purpose of the occupants of the carriage.

Rarely have both horses have run in step without having to suffer from the weight of carriage behind them, notwithstanding their unique ideological, ethnic, revolutionary and personal persuasions. As both horses are not privy to the determination of the government, mainly because of how they are positioned vis-à-vis the peace process, the former is in a privileged position to

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Malaysian Monitors, stay another day, help the peace!

We are members of civil society, government, academe and other stakeholders in peace from Mindanao, Luzon and Visayas and National Capital Region (NCR), with individuals working for global peace affiliates, who are SERIOUSLY concerned with the possible withdrawal of international monitors led by Malaysia in the Southern Philippines. This has grave repercussions and dangerous implications to the peace process and to the lives of thousands of residents in communities who are still reeling from the impact of decades of sporadic violence while undergoing rehabilitation efforts.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to the Malaysian Government for the vital contribution in peacekeeping in the Southern Philippines through facilitation of the peace talks and being the largest contingent in the International Monitoring Team (IMT). Since GRP-MILF peace talks started in 1997 and Malaysia led the IMT in early 2000, the number of armed incidents between the government (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have dramatically decreased from an estimated 700 incidents to less than 20. Violence that affects communities have been minimized. The monitors have instituted confidence-building measures such as ceasefire mechanisms and joint military actions between the GRP and MILF, opened lines of communication between the GRP and MILF and helped bridged differences by backroom channeling.

The IMT has acknowledged and involved local communities in peacekeeping thus empowering these local stakeholders to sustain a peace environment.

The harmonious working relations among the IMT, Military and local Bantay Ceasefire groups has tremendous impact in stabilizing security in the Southern region.

We acknowledge the significant and even leadership role of Malaysia in promoting peace, democratization and stability in the region. As lead convenor of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Caucus for Good Governance, Malaysia plays a key role in steering the region towards fulfilling human development goals. As Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said as an overarching principles for the ASEAN Community, "there should be a universal acceptance that community interests would prevail over national interests on issues affecting the community and that ASEAN has to do better in giving national effect to wider international treaties and conventions, including ASEAN treaties and agreements by putting in place

[*MALAYSIAN*/p.7]

Libya, Brunei to send more peacekeepers to South

(Wednesday, June 4, 2008) Libya and Brunei are considering sending more peacekeepers to the southern Philippines to safeguard a fragile 2003 ceasefire between government troops and the country's largest Muslim rebel group, a Philippine official said yesterday.

Malaysia has been brokering peace talks between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since 2001, and leads a 60-man truce-monitoring team also comprising representatives from Libya, Brunei and Japan.

But Malaysia began pulling its more than 40 peacekeepers out in May in a sign of impatience at a months-long impasse in the peace process.

The Philippine government has appealed for more peacekeepers from Muslim countries to help fill that vacuum, National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales said.

Malaysia plans to complete the withdrawal in August, but has nevertheless made it clear it will broker any future peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF.

The monitors are deployed in conflict areas and have been credited with a sharp drop in clashes since they arrived in 2004. The Malaysians' withdrawal has set off fears of renewed fighting, and at least two brief clashes have erupted since they began pulling out.

"We became concerned because of the sudden pullout of the Malaysians but we're confident the ceasefire would hold," Gonzales said.

Libya and Brunei, which both have less than 20 truce monitors here, have pledged to increase their numbers to 25 each, Gonzales said, adding that Indonesia was considering sending representatives.

Any new presence of foreign monitors needs the permission of the government and the rebels – a potential problem because no new meetings have been scheduled since the talks stalled. The monitors' current authority expires in August.

The peace talks hit a snag in December when rebel negotiators walked away from a meeting to protest Manila's insistence that any accord should conform to the Philippine Constitution.

The MILF, which is estimated to have about 11,000 fighters, has been battling for self-rule in the southern region of Mindanao, home of minority Muslim Filipinos, since the late 1970s.

US and Philippine officials hope a peace pact can transform the south into a booming economic hub instead of combat zones that can be a breeding ground for terrorism. – AP

Gov't peace panel chair says only three more issues to be resolved

COTABATO CITY (MindaNews/07 May) – The government peace panel is resolving only three issues among the "eight or nine" that they had to clear with Malacanang shortly after informal talks in early February, government chief negotiator Secretary Rodolfo Garcia, told a roundtable discussion here Tuesday.

Garcia initially hesitated to cite them, citing protocols of the peace negotiations but later identified "governance, resources and institutions," as the three issues that are still being reviewed.

Garcia told a roundtable discussion on "The Malaysian Pull-out from the International Monitoring Team: Implications and Responses," that on the issue of resources, the subject for review is "jurisdiction and control."

On the issue of institutions, Garcia referred to "institutions that will be built under a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity" and how this is being viewed by some in relation to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

He declined to provide additional details.

But Datu Michael Mastura, senior member of the MILF peace panel, later told forum participants during the lunch break that what Garcia cited was practically the entire ancestral domain agenda.

The government and MILF had agreed to discuss only three major agenda items – security, relief and rehabilitation and ancestral domain. The latter is divided into four strands: concept, territory, resources and governance – all of which the government and MILF peace panels had already agreed upon.

In fact, before the talks were stalled anew in December 2007, the two parties were supposed to have finalized the draft of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain.

Apparently to allay fears expressed by settlers, Mastura told the roundtable discussion that the MILF is not talking land tenure or land confiscation. "What we're talking is very broad."

But both panels expressed hope the moves could move forward. The talks stalled in December when government in its draft of the ancestral domain agreement, cited Constitutional provisions, a condition which at the start of the talks, was not invoked by the Philippine government based on a March 2001 "gentlemen's agreement" between then MILF vice chair for military affairs Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and then Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Eduardo Ermita," the signatories to the March 24, 2001 agreement to resume talks under the new Arroyo administration.

Mastura said President Arroyo and the Cabinet "cannot use (the Constitution) as an excuse," as he cited

Foreign biz's interests caused gov't to backtrack in talks with MILF

MARAWI CITY (MindaNews/14 May) – Representatives of civil society organizations believed that “foreign businessmen in cahoots with national government officials” have caused the backtracking of the government in its peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The sentiment surfaced in a peace summit organized by the Maranao People Development Center (Maradeca) participated in by 112 representatives from various sectors of society here, including representatives of the MILF, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Army.

Salic Ibrahim, Maradeca executive director, said they organized the activity held at the session hall of the Sangguniang Panlungsod here to discuss the effects of the withdrawal of the Malaysians in the International Monitoring Team (IMT).

Blo Adiong, a lawyer who serves as legal consultant of the MILF, said that “interests of foreign businessmen” were the negotiators’ prime consideration when they identified the areas to be included in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity. The BJE covers over 600 barangays in Mindanao that the government has offered to the MILF.

But when the villages to be included in the BJE were “identified already and an agreement was about to be signed in Malaysia, foreign businesses came in that made the government virtually turn 180 degrees, a reason for us to ask if the government is really sincere,” said Adiong, who claimed he was also consultant in the GRP-MNLF negotiations.

The draft agreement on ancestral domain provides that “70 percent of the natural resources will be given to the Bangsamoro,” Adiong added as he explained that it was a way of ensuring that “we do not have to always kneel for government to give us funds.”

“Our problem now is how to convince the government to sacrifice the interests of multinational corporations,” Adiong said.

Lawyer Mary Ann Arnado, secretary-general of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus who was one of the resource speakers at the summit, relayed to the crowd that “our mineral wealth is estimated between \$800 billion and \$1 trillion as against the country’s foreign debt of \$57 billion. Revitalizing the mining industry as the country’s salvation from total collapse is tantamount to a total sell-out.” She was citing data culled from an earlier research on the country’s political-economy

“This is the bottom line of the issue of ancestral domain. There are people in the Cabinet who are also involved in mining. There are economic interests that are more decisive on this,” the lady lawyer stressed.

“We also have to scrutinize the people in Manila, including the foreign interests who have gone to the MILF’s Camp Darapanan,” Arnado said.

The MILF has earlier criticized the government for creating the legal team that has been tasked to review all

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Indonesian police details how JI forge int'l terror links

JAKARTA, Indonesia (Sunday, June 1, 2008) – After months on the run, two alleged leaders of a Southeast Asian militant group were holed up in a cheap Malaysian hotel, ready to fly to the Middle East to link up with other Islamic extremists, possibly in Iraq.

The pair had bribed Indonesian immigration officials to smooth their way out of the airport in Jakarta, where they started their journey. An Algerian gave them fake passports, airline tickets and militant contacts in Syria.

But they never made it farther than Kuala Lumpur. It is unclear what led police in the Malaysian capital to their room early this year, but – befuddled by sleep – they did not resist arrest.

The foiled flight of Abu Husna and Agus Purwantoro, who were sent back to Indonesia in late March, is just part of the story outlined in police investigation reports obtained by the Associated Press.

The documents detail how the regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah has maintained the ability and desire to forge international links despite a crackdown that most experts believed left it severely weakened and isolated, with hundreds of its members behind bars.

The papers also provide rare details on the inner workings of the network, showing how Husna and Purwantoro were able to travel around Indonesia, using passwords to meet up with other wanted men at mosques, bus stations and cheap restaurants before fleeing the country.

Members and associates of Jemaah Islamiyah are blamed for a string of suicide bombings in Southeast Asia – which have together killed more than 240 people, most of them Western tourists – as well as a number of failed terror plots. The group had ties with al-Qaeda and other foreign extremists before 2002, but most experts have thought the links had been broken since then.

“If there is a North African in Jakarta assisting the Jemaah Islamiyah network, then that is not a good thing,” Sidney Jones, a leading authority on Southeast Asian militants, said about the Algerian sympathizer that the captured pair identified as “Jafar.”

According to the police documents’ accounts of their interrogations, Husna and Purwantoro allegedly met with Jafar in both Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.

“It suggests an international network with a base in Jakarta and raises all sorts of questions about who else might be here,” Jones said.

The investigation reports – one each for Purwantoro and Husna – were given to the AP by an official close to the police probe. The person agreed to turn over the reports only if not identified, fearing he could be fired for releasing the papers. Together, the documents run 48 pages.

Police say the men were arrested in Malaysia in January on their way to Syria to “link up with radical groups.” Malaysian authorities have not revealed what led them to the men, but Indonesian police suggested the pair were caught in an operation targeting illegal migrants.

Indonesia’s anti-terror squad, trained and financed

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MNLF leaders declare "unity and reconciliation" in Tripoli: Nur sends rep

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/20 May) - Leaders of various alliances from among the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) ended their two-day meeting with outgoing Presidential Adviser Jesus Dureza in Tripoli, Libya, on May 18 with an agreement among the MNLF to "form a transition leadership and unification committee" that would include Nur Misuari.

Misuari, who is still facing charges of rebellion but was freed on bail late last month, was not present in the Libya meeting but sent two representatives, including Ustadz Shariff Zain Jali, his spiritual adviser, Dureza told MindaNews from Dubai.

The committee will be composed of Misuari, Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema, Dr. Parouk Hussni, Mujahab Hashim, Isnaji Alvarez and Sulu-Basilan Rep. Yusop-Jikiri.

Misuari and Hussin were former governors of the ARMM, Misuari serving from September 1996 to his arrest in Sabah in November 2001, and Hussin from January 2002 to September 30, 2005.

According to the Joint Press Statement, the MNLF called on the Philippine government, "to enable the MNLF the governance (sic) of the autonomous region (in) Muslim Mindanao," expressed their appreciation "on the initiative of the government ... to set up a federal system," and urged the government to "involve the MNLF in this political exercise."

The copy of the Joint Press Statement states only "to enable the MNLF the governance."

Whether or not the MNLF meant "to regain" or "to reclaim" the governance of the ARMM, is not clear but it can be surmised that the MNLF meant "to regain" governance of the ARMM, which it lost to Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, son of Maguindanao governor Andal Ampatuan. ARMM Governor Ampatuan had said in November last year that while he was willing to sacrifice his post should it be warranted by the peace process, he would run for reelection if the election pushes through on

August 11.

The new committee, according to the "Tripoli Declaration on Unity and Reconciliation of the MNLF Leadership" signed by 10 MNLF leaders, will be the "sole legitimate body of the MNLF and the only one authorized to enter into any negotiation and agreement" and will determine among themselves "on the appropriate way of resolving leadership crisis through democratic process before the end of June 2008."

It is also tasked to "convene the Bangsamoro people's congress that shall finally decide on the issue of leadership and adopt a programme of action before the end of August 2008."

The campaign period for the August 11 elections in the ARMM's six provinces and two cities starts on June 27. According to the Commission on Elections' Resolution 8442, the last day for filing certificates of candidacy in the ARMM is up to midnight of June 4.

"No certificate of candidacy and/or party nomination shall be received after 12:00 o'clock midnight of June 04, 2008, except in cases of proper and valid substitution under Section 14 hereof. 4," the Resolution states.

Section 14 provides that even after midnight of June 4

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by the US, had been hunting Husna, 48, since early last year. That was when arrested suspects said he attended a meeting with Jemaah Islamiyah elders to discuss the outcome of several attacks on the eastern island of Sulawesi between 2004 and 2006, including the beheadings of three Christian schoolgirls.

According to the police reports, Husna admits to being a senior member of Jemaah Islamiyah and attending the meeting, meaning police may be able to charge him with conspiracy to commit terrorism or related offenses.

Jones and other experts had speculated Husna was an interim leader of the extremist network, but the reports show him taking orders from other militants, suggesting there are higher-ranking members of the group still on the run.

Most officials assume the group has just a handful of active members left at large.

Purwantoro, a 38-year-old doctor, is alleged by police to have led Jemaah Islamiyah operations on Sulawesi. The reports say he admits organizing militant training camps on the island and helping perpetrators of bombings, shootings and other attacks - including the beheadings of the schoolgirls - flee.

Training in RP

Both men admit traveling in 1999 to the southern Philippines, where they learned how to make bombs at training camps run by Jemaah Islamiyah, the reports say. Muslim insurgents have been active in that part of the Philippines for years.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, has been praised for its successful campaign against terrorism. The last major attack was in 2005, when suicide bombers targeted three restaurants on the resort island of Bali, killing 20 people.

But the apparent ease with which Husna and Purwantoro were able to leave the country highlights major weaknesses in its anti-terror defenses at a time when governments across Southeast Asia are trying to tighten their borders.

Both men said they used a middleman, known as a "calo," to channel money to officials at immigration offices in Jakarta to obtain passports with little scrutiny. They did not have to provide the full range of supporting documents, and those they did submit were fake, according to the reports.

They also employed a calo at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta airport so they could be whisked through passport control, the reports say.

"We went toward the immigration checkpoint, but before we arrived there, the calo directed us to an individual who would accompany us through the checkpoint... so we could go through to the departure hall with no problems," Purwantoro told investigators. He did not elaborate.

Calos are common in Indonesian government departments that provide public services for a fee. At airports, some travelers employ them to ensure they do not have to stand in lines, or to pay immigration officials to ignore penalties for overstaying visas or other violations.

Immigration department spokesman Dahlan Pasaribu

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the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland as an example.

"What the MILF wants to see is not posing the Constitutional issue as obstacles but letting go the negotiation, then after, you talk Constitutional because this is the way," Mastura stressed, again citing the Good Friday Agreement, and even Kosovo, among others.

The Constitution "should not be made a condition sine qua non" to the resumption of the talks, he said.

"Negotiate. If the product of the negotiations can be accommodated ... if it is reasonable.... and the only way is to change or amend the Constitution, then we will converge there..." Mastura said.

In the afternoon, a workshop on the impact of the pull-out of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) from Mindanao within one month from its departure to about a year later, yielded grim prospects ranging from fears of renewed hostilities to war, bombings and more mass evacuations.

The IMT's tour of duty ends August 31 this year. Already, 29 Malaysians, including the Head of Mission, are returning to Malaysia on May 10.

The workshop participants were a multisectoral group with a considerable number of soldiers and technical committee members of the MILF peace panel.

But hope still springs eternal for peace as the workshop also yielded suggestions on how to cope with the grim scenarios, among them, by strengthening local ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, reducing "dependency on foreign intervention," and coming up with our own peacekeeping force.

Brig. Gen. Rey Sealana, chair of the government peace panel in the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) earlier allayed fears of the vacuum that would be left behind by the departing Malaysian monitors, as he stressed the Joint CCCH with the MILF is working effectively on the ground to prevent clashes and to prevent clashes that had erupted, from escalating.

Fr. Roberto Layson asked "what is the guarantee" there will be no resurgence of hostilities between the government and the MILF and "who will guarantee?"

Atty. Camilo Montessa, Policy Adviser of the Institute of Autonomy and Governance, the which co-organized the forum with the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, said the pull-out of the IMT should be viewed not only as a security issue but "more than" a security issue.

Montessa pointed out four scenarios in relation to the talks. Scenario 1 is the present situation: talks stalled. Scenario 2 is impasse or "no war, no peace." Scenario 3 is still impasse: the President agrees to a new formula, MILF says no. Scenario 4 is breakthrough and this can happen if civil society groups - peace advocates, church, NGOs, etc.. help in bringing the two parties back to the negotiating table. (Carolyn O. Arguillas/MindaNews)

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said he was unable to comment on specific cases, but insisted corruption at passport offices and border points was being eradicated.

"Shortcuts are no longer allowed. It is an order from the top," he said.

Once in Malaysia, Husna and Purwantoro met again with Jafar and another Jemaah Islamiyah operative, this time at a KFC restaurant. The pair received new fake passports, airline tickets to Syria and the cell phone number of a contact there, the reports say.

Police have revealed no details about the men's plans in the Middle East or the identity of Jafar. Jones, the analyst, said the Algerian may be a member of al-Qaeda, but stressed it was too early to know.

Syria's location has led to speculation by former militants and analysts that the two men may have been heading to Iraq. US officials have long charged that Syrian authorities allow their country to be used as a staging ground by militants who sneak into Iraq to join insurgents. Syria denies that.

Nasir Abbas, a former Jemaah Islamiyah commander in Sulawesi who knew Purwantoro well, said he thought it likely the men were traveling to Iraq because they believed Indonesia was no longer a suitable venue for jihad, or holy war.

"They see Iraq as a more clear-cut case for jihad than Indonesia," said Abbas, who now works closely with police. "Even if they get arrested on the way, they believe that every step they take to that goal gets them reward in heaven." - AP

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consensus points that have already been agreed upon by the peace negotiators instead of calling the agreed meeting in the last week of March where they were supposed to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain.

Ambassadors of the United States and the European Union, on separate occasions, earlier visited Camp Darapanan, the known headquarters of the MILF Central Committee.

Prof. Punduma Sani, 63, part of the "Top 90" MNLF combatants trained in Malaysia, said, "We don't want the Balikatan forces who are wearing uniforms. But Americans are welcome here. When we see them in uniform, it always comes to our mind that we are fighting."

Guimba Piongan, a respected university professor here, had this as his message for America: "America has never been a good partner in the world. It has never been a compassionate colonizer. If only America could moderate its greed. How we wish the American people can receive our message that we don't like them anymore. How we wish that while we recognize its military supremacy in the world, it has to lessen its greed."

The civil society organizations here were, however, "thankful" with the Malaysian government's pull-out from the IMT "because it brought the issue back to the public and has opened up the discussion which we think is necessary." (MindaNews)

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capacities for enforcing community decisions.”

Malaysia's commitment to the Southern peace process in the Philippines, drawing attention to one of the longest conflicts in the region, is a great act of statesmanship and must be lauded.

It is thus imperative that foreign monitors stay to keep the peace. They ensure that any gains in the peace process can be complied with and even sustained with support from the donor community.

At a time of national crisis in dealing with the rice shortage, our communities are in urgent need of external support from our Malaysian brothers/sisters to maintain an atmosphere of security in the South. Civil society groups in the South are ONE WITH YOU in the quest for peace and stability. We believe that it is our MORAL and COLLECTIVE responsibility to address and even respond to the persistent call for social justice by our brethren in the South. Let our historic bonds of Malay solidarity and friendship strengthen our resolve to forge a community of peace in the ASEAN.

We thus appeal to the Malaysian Government to reconsider its decision to PULL-OUT the Malaysian troops in the IMT that have successfully maintained a stabilizing presence in the South.+

**A CALL TO Philippine President Gloria Arroyo,
KEEP THE MONITORS, HELP THE PEACE!**

We are members of civil society, government and academe from Mindanao, Luzon, Visayas and National Capital Region, with individuals working for global peace affiliates, who are SERIOUSLY concerned with the possible withdrawal of Malaysian international monitors in the Southern Philippines and the lack of progress in the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Peace talks.

These can have grave repercussions and dangerous implications to the peace process and to the lives of thousands of residents in communities who are still **reeling from from the impact of decades of sporadic violence while undergoing rehabilitation efforts** .

In the midst of challenges besetting Government compounded by the problem of rice supply, it is imperative that the country's peace and order especially in the South be SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED.

It is vital to maintain a policy of the **primacy of the peace process**, which President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself pronounced and issued as the Commander-in-Chief on 12 November 2003. Government must be held accountable in its acceptance of official development

assistance (ODA) that is geared towards development of the impoverished region in the South, where the conflict-affected areas are situated.

Since GRP-MILF peace talks started in 1997 and Malaysia led the IMT in early 2000, the number of armed incidents between the military and the MILF have dramatically decreased. Thus, foreign monitors must stay to help the peace. They ensure that any gains in the peace process can be complied with and even sustained with support from the donor community. Reneging on a peace process may bode negatively for development aid from the country's biggest donors, the United States, Japan and Canada, who are all closely monitoring the peace process. Further, peace in the Southern Philippines contributes to a stable Southeast Asian region.

We challenge the notion of subsuming the peace process under a national or internal security framework. We advocate for upholding international standards of human security which upholds the dignity of the individual.

We are concerned that resolving the agenda items in the peace negotiations has taken a backseat, leading the Malaysian monitors to doubt the sincerity of the peace process

We appeal to Government to exercise political will in resolving the substantive items in the peace talks on territorial delineation of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) and legal processes to recognize such. We urge the GRP to reinforce its commitment to “think out of the box” and IRON instead of skirting the thorny issues in the processes to recognize the BJE, whose resolution would affect more than 3 million lives in the Southern Philippines.

We also call on the GRP to encourage the Malaysian monitors to stay. We recall President Gloria Arroyo's recognition of the vital role of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in peacekeeping. In a March 2007 statement, PGMA said “The best course of action to ensure that the hostilities do not escalate and are not exploited by lawless elements is for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to work closely with the established mechanisms of the peace process - the joint ceasefire committees, the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group and the International Monitoring Team - to keep combatants in place; and increase vigilance against those intent at breaking the peace, at agitating the people, at pitting the Government against the MILF and communities against each other.”

We stand in solidarity with the Mindanawans, particularly the Bangsamoro in their quest for social justice.

We appeal to the Government, the Office of the President, the security and defense sector to pursue a

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decide which horse to favour; and by extension, which horse is to be whipped and made responsible for the mess in Mindanao.

Because of their blinkers, neither horse is in a position to engage in any serious protestations. Whenever one is being handsomely groomed by Malacanang to pull the carriage, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is very often found whipping the other to near death, a situation that reverses every so often. The most recent manifestation of this strategy was evidenced by the MNLF's silence during President Estrada's all-out war in 2000, and the MILF passive poise during various military encounters in Sulu between the MNLF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines since the arrest of long time, MNLF leader, Nur Misuari.

A review of the Mindanao peace process since the 1980s reveals the relative accuracy of this metaphor, even more so when juxtaposed against the impending pull out by the International Monitoring Team (IMT) from Mindanao next month. It is no wonder that the news of pull-out was simply received by a shrug-of-the-shoulders by the Philippine government, despite the likely negative consequences for the peace process and the imminent danger of another round of protracted conflict.

Apparently, the IMT, headed by Malaysia decided to withdraw after registering their impatience over the Philippine government's lackadaisical response to the peace process with the MILF. In the minds of the IMT, the latter should have been taken seriously as a peace process partner, especially since the fall out between the government and the MNLF was triggered by the failed rebellion of Nur Misuari in 2001.

After having been stationed in Mindanao for around four years, the IMT contingent must have observed how the Philippine government used the peace process to simply neutralise and tame the MILF, while propping up the Philippines' international image as a genuine peace partner. In reality, it was busier attracting economic assistance and investment to Mindanao from donor countries and international agencies, rather than inking the "Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain" with the MILF to herald a genuine partnership towards peace. While admitting difficulty in agreeing to the "19 Consensus Points on Ancestral Domain" already agreed upon with the MILF because of possible trigger for the Opposition to question its constitutionality, the overarching reality is that Malacanang has never displayed any sense of urgency to sign a substantive agreement with the MILF. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, there is not enough pressure from the MILF to allow the government to sign a peace agreement, even a less substantive one covering ancestral domain. Second, the government has no comprehensive peace framework to rationalise any agreement with the MILF. Third, it lacks political will to pursue the peace process and to back up any agreement attendant to it. Fourth, the government is continuously harassed with no let up by more urgent national

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genuine resolution to the impasse in the peace talks.

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International Alert

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ANAK Mindanao

Former Rep. Mario Aguja
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Former Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales
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Yasmin Busran-Lao, President
Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro

Guiamel Alim, Chairperson
Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society

Samira Gutoc, Chairperson
Young Moro Professionals Mindanao

Byron Bocar, AKBAYAN

Jolly Lais

ASSALAM Bangsamoro People's Association, Inc.
Al Fatihah Center for Cooperation & Community Devt, Inc.

issues such corruption and scandals, and most recently, the rice crisis.

After hitting a snag in December last year, the government-MILF peace talks have been put on hold despite the MILF's rallies, assemblies and other posturing towards peaceful resolution. This change of tact was not wholly unexpected - the government must have already seen the opportunity to place its bets on the MNLF horse after the relative success of the tripartite review of the 1996 Peace Agreement between the Philippine government, the MNLF and the Organisation of Islamic Conference in Jeddah last year, and Istanbul early this year. A third round is scheduled for in Manila in May this year. This gambit, defined by a back and forth process between the MILF and the MNLF can only point to a singular strategy in Manila - to delay with a view to deny any significant headway viz. the peace process.

As it is, it is not incidental that the granting by the government of the right to post bail to MNLF leader Nur Misuari comes at the heel of the impending IMT pull out from Mindanao - a sure sign the MNLF horse is ready to be taken for another joy ride. **(Julkipli Wadi)**

Julkipli Wadi is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of the Philippines.

LIBYA . . . from page 12

Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, has approved Malacañang's request to lead the IMT, whose peacekeeping mission in Mindanao was borne out of a bilateral security arrangement between the GRP and MILF peace panels.

The initial phase of Malaysia's pull out from the IMT started last Saturday with the return of 21 Malaysian ceasefire monitors from the cities of Davao, Gen. Santos and Zamboanga. The rest of Malaysia's 41 IMT members are to leave Mindanao by August.

The shaky GRP-MILF talks started January 7, 1997, but gained headway only in 2003 with the help of Malaysia as mediator.

"As always, Libya is ready to continue supporting the IMT. We are ready to lead the IMT now. The GICDF is willing to extend all the needed support for the GRP-MILF peace initiative to prosper," Adam said in his e-mail.

Malaysian Maj. Gen. Datuk Mat Yasin Bin Mat Daud, head of the IMT, said they have mixed feelings about leaving Mindanao, their home for the last eight months.

"We are happy because we are returning to our families, but we are also sad because we are leaving behind an unfinished dream. We are still hoping to see the government and the MILF sign a peace treaty soon," Mat Daud told reporters over the weekend.

The Malaysian general was apparently referring to the stalled peace process, made even more contentious by misunderstandings on the setting up of a Southern Muslim homeland to be covered by the front's proposed governing mechanism, the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE).

The MILF's proposed areas to be covered by the BJE include the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and about a thousand other parcels of land outside ARMM.

ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, a staunch supporter of the government's separate peace overtures with the MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), said he will support a Libyan-led IMT just the way his administration cooperated with Malaysia in its peacekeeping mission in the autonomous region.

Ampatuan's executive secretary, lawyer Oscar Sampulna, said the 40-year-old governor, who is seeking re-election in the coming August 11 ARMM regional polls, is ready to convene all the region's six provincial governors and more than a hundred mayors to openly express support for and commit to a Libyan-led IMT.

All the ARMM's six provincial governors, two city mayors and more than a hundred municipal mayors are loyal political supporters of Ampatuan, who is the regional chairman for the autonomous region of the administration's Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats party.

"We are thankful to Libya for its continuing assistance to the Bangsamoro people and the Mindanao peace process. If Libya leads the IMT, then we welcome this as a signal that the Mindanao search for peace is still strong. We will support as usual the IMT like before," Sampulna quoted Ampatuan as saying.

Undersecretary Rodolfo Garcia, chairman of the

government peace panel in the peace talks with the MILF, said even with the Malaysian IMT group leaving, there is only a remote possibility of a large-scale violence erupting.

"The Armed Forces has assured us it will continue to preserve the primacy of the peace process," said Garcia.

He added that legal study group formed by the government to go over the new draft proposal for ancestral domain is just about to finish its task.

"Soon we will submit to Malaysia our response to the MILF's latest proposal," said Garcia, a former general in the Armed Forces who fought Moro rebels in Mindanao.

For his part, Mohagher Iqbal, MILF peace panel chairman, said he did not see Libya assuming the IMT lead immediately.

"Acceptable to the MILF or not, the two peace panels have to meet and resume the talks. In the event of the resumption of the peace talks, it is the issue of the ancestral domain that must be discussed, not the IMT concerns," Iqbal told reporters in a text message, referring to Libya's expressed readiness to lead the IMT.

No war despite pullout

Meanwhile, Malacañang said that there would be no fresh fighting between the government and the MILF despite the pullout of the Malaysian IMT contingent.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, in separate interviews with The STAR, said Malaysia has committed to be the facilitator of the talks between the government and the MILF.

"There is no truth or basis to reports or fears that there would be an escalation of fighting as reported in the media because of the withdrawal (of Malaysian monitors)," Dureza said over the phone after meeting with local executives and military officials in Cotabato City to assess the implications of the reduced number of IMT members.

He said he would be visiting other areas to meet with local officials in connection with the precarious state of the peace talks.

He invited journalists to visit areas where violence is feared to erupt to see for themselves that "both sides are friendly with each other."

Dureza said the joint ceasefire committee of the government and the MILF will take up whatever slack will be left by the departure of the Malaysians.

When asked about reports that the MILF is already preparing for war, he said he doubts whether that would be the official position of the group.

"There are some apprehensions but we will not squander the gains of the peace process by these kinds of talk," Dureza said.

Peace talks are currently stalled on the stage of hammering out an agreement on ancestral domain or determining the boundaries of a new autonomous region.

The MILF accused the government of renegeing on agreed "consensus points" but Palace officials said the government cannot compromise the Constitution on any agreement on ancestral domain.

Dureza said there is no definite date yet on the resumption of the formal talks but informal discussions between the two sides are continuous. - *With Paolo Romero*

ARMM . . . from page 12

for nine years, first under Gov. Nur Misuari, from 1996 to 2001 and, subsequently, under Parouk Hussin, who was the region's chief executive from 2001 to 2005. It was during the MNLF's nine-year governance in the region where poverty in the area worsened, and the ranks of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front swelled by several folds as a consequence of its lackluster management of Moro communities in the autonomous region.

Despite the MNLF's bid to regain the regional leadership, one of its ranking leaders, ARMM Assemblyman Hatimil Hassan, is seeking reelection under the banner of Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, whose official candidate for the region's gubernatorial post is Ampatuan.

Nowhere in the government's Sept. 2, 1996 peace pact with the MNLF, or in any provision of the ARMM's charter, RA 9054, has the government granted an exclusive franchise for the leadership of the autonomous region to any revolutionary organization in the south.

Hundreds of Ampatuan's constituent-political and religious leaders from across the autonomous region filed for him his certificate of candidacy on Thursday at the regional office of the Commission on Elections in Zamboanga City, something never before seen in the 16-year political history of the ARMM.

Sulu's provincial governor, Hadji Sakur Tan, during a dialogue among Ampatuan's political supporters in Zamboanga after the filing of the ARMM governor's candidacy, said he has declined to support the ambition of a fellow Tausog and also an MNLF leader, Alvarez Isnaji, to be anointed by President Arroyo as Lakas-CMD's candidate for ARMM governor.

Members of the League of Municipalities in Sulu want Isnaji, an incumbent mayor of the hostile and so impoverished Indanan town in the same province, expelled from Lakas-CMD for aspiring to become ARMM governor despite President Arroyo's having anointed Ampatuan, through a written resolution, as her favored gubernatorial candidate.

Sayed El-Masry, special envoy to Mindanao of the Organization of Islamic Conference, announced in Manila last April, after a series of separate dialogues with feuding members of the MNLF, that the OIC, a pan-Islamic block of 57 Muslim states, will not interfere with Malacañang's selection of its official candidate for ARMM governor.

Leaders of different factions in the MNLF have earlier prodded the OIC, which helped broker the front's final peace pact with the Philippine government, to prod Malacanang to again entrust to them the ARMM leadership.

MILF . . . from page 1

Peace advocates in the South, among them Catholic missionaries involved in various peace-building activities in areas covered by the MILF-military ceasefire, have asked the government and MILF panels to resume the talks.

It was in July 1997 when the government and MILF panels forged the so-called General Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, restraining combatants from both sides from embarking on any tactical maneuvers in areas covered by the ceasefire without prior coordination.

Lawyer Oscar Sampulna, executive secretary of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, said ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan directed last week all of his constituent-mayors and provincial governors to help the joint ceasefire committee in its peacekeeping missions in the South to allay fears of renewed hostilities as a consequence of the pullout of Malaysian peace monitors in the south.

Twenty-eight Malaysian members of the International Monitoring Team, which has been helping enforce the ceasefire since 2004, returned to Malaysia last May 10 to start the gradual withdrawal from Mindanao of Malaysia's peacekeeping contingent in the multinational IMT.

The IMT is composed of police and military officers from Malaysia, Brunei, Libya, and a rehabilitation specialist from Japan.

MNLF . . . from page 5

but "not beyond June 22," if an official candidate of a registered political party dies, withdraws or is disqualified for any cause, "he may be substituted by a candidate belonging to, and nominated by, the same political party."

Dureza and the MNLF leaders were in Libya on invitation of Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, chair of the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation.

The committee is also tasked to "prepare a manifesto and a programme of action that shall focus on the political, socio-economic, and other concerns of the Bangsamoro people" and to "enter into dialogue with the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) with a view to cement the unity and solidarity of the two fronts as agreed in previous meetings with Gaddafi's son.

The Declaration also states that the committee "shall undertake discussions in order to consolidate the peace process between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF, including the issues of empowerment, both economic and political, particularly the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) governance."

The MNLF leaders also committed to "solely focus their attention on advancing the cause of unity and solidarity, and abide by the decisions of the transition committee."

The commitment includes refraining "from taking any actions, and making my announcement contrary to this declaration."

The 10 signatories are Mujahab Hashim, Hatimin Hassan (Hatimil Hassan), Muslimin Sema, Parouk Hussin, Yusop Jikiri, Thambeyapa Manjoorsa, Abdul Sahrin, Sharif Jain Jali, Alvarez Isnaji and Samsula Adju. (Carolyn O. Arguillas/MindaNews)

PACT . . . from page 1

Misuari's representative, Islamic theologian Zain Jali, and Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema, acknowledged that there is uncertainty in the front's leadership.

They agreed to the creation of a six-member Transition and Leadership Unification Committee that will resolve their internal squabbles.

Sources said Misuari refused to recognize the declaration, saying there is no need for such a unification committee since he has remained as MNLF chairman since the day it launched its secessionist uprising in Mindanao in the early 1970s.

"The Tripoli Declaration also gave the Philippine government enough reason to totally reject the MNLF's bid to regain leadership of the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) because there is uncertainty on who is its legitimate leader now," a political science professor in government-owned Mindanao State University in Marawi City told The STAR.

The professor, who asked not to be identified, said MSU student leaders involved in various peace-building activities are also ranting on why the Maranaws, Mindanao's largest Moro tribe, were not represented in the "unity meeting" in Tripoli, Libya.

Behind the meeting among rival MNLF groups was the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation chaired by Saif Al-Islam Al-Gaddafi, son of Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi.

A popular Maranaw human rights lawyer, Bayan Balt, said they have fellow Maranaws, mostly professionals, in the ranks of all MNLF factions who can be tapped to help the unification panel.

The committee, as agreed upon by the signatories to the Tripoli Declaration, will be composed of five Tausogs, among them Misuari and Sema, a Maguindanaon datu.

Sema was named MNLF chairman by some 300 leaders of the front during a gathering in Pagadian City last April 2.

MNLF forces loyal to Misuari, however, refused to recognize Sema as their new chief.

Ustadz Saratul Jipanul, a preacher, said President Arroyo would commit a big blunder if she would allow the MNLF to regain the ARMM leadership now that its leaders are squabbling over the front's leadership.

The best thing MNLF leaders can do now, according to Jipanul, is to join the regional chapter of the Lakas-Muslim Christian Democrats in the autonomous region for them to be in mainstream politics, and support Malacañang's favored ARMM gubernatorial candidate during the Aug. 11 polls.

"They should support the administration candidate for them not to become at a loss politically. In exchange, they can maybe ask for some concessions such as socio-economic projects needed to hasten the economic empowerment of their respective communities," Jipanul said.

WARNS . . . from page 1

the government and the MILF negotiate an extension of the monitors' mandate.

The mandate is renegotiated every August.

But Iqbal warned that the rebels will not agree to meet with their government counterparts if it is only to extend the monitors' mandate. He said any new talks must first tackle the contentious issue of territory, governance, control of natural resources and other points relating to a future Muslim homeland.

The rebels said earlier that the two sides had already covered most of the issues when the government announced it was re-examining its position, which Manila says must not violate the Philippine Constitution.

Iqbal has repeatedly warned it would be difficult to prevent occasional conflicts without the foreign peacekeepers.

Manila did not comment immediately, but has repeatedly allayed fears of a return to war. National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzalez said Tuesday the government has appealed for more peacekeepers from Muslim countries to help fill the vacuum after the Malaysians complete their withdrawal.

Libya and Brunei together have about 20 monitors left behind, and Japan has one civilian representative. Gonzalez said Libya and Brunei had both pledged to increase their numbers to 25 each, and that Indonesia was considering sending representatives.

US. and Philippine officials hope a peace pact can transform the southern Philippines into a booming economic hub instead of combat zones that are a breeding ground for terrorism (Associated Press, June 6, 2008)

MISUARI . . . from page 12

four states – including two in the Mindanao region.

He did not specify how this system would work or how it would affect the Muslim minority's demand for more control over parts of Mindanao which they consider their ancestral home.

Misuari also made no mention of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a breakaway group that is conducting its own peace negotiations with the government or other Muslim armed groups like the Abu Sayyaf which has been linked to the worst terror attacks in Philippine history.

Despite the peace accord, sporadic clashes between government troops and MNLF forces still take place. (Agence France-Presse)

Members of the Lakas-CMD's national directorate, chaired by President Arroyo, have signed a resolution naming ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan as administration candidate for governor in the Aug. 11 polls.

ARMM leaders nix support for MNLF bid to lead region

COTABATO CITY (Sunday, June 1, 2008)– The monolithic political community in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao has denied the Moro National Liberation Front any support in its bid for the leadership of ARMM, which is to hold its sixth electoral exercise on Aug. 11.

The autonomous region –covering the cities of Lamitan and Marawi, and the provinces of Shariff Kabunsuan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu , Basilan and Tawi-Tawi is a known common political bailiwick of President Arroyo and her protégé, ARMM's re-electionist governor, Datu Zaldy Ampatuan.

Leaders of different factions in the MNLF have been asserting that the government should concede to them the ARMM leadership in keeping with the Southern peace process.

The MNLF was at the helm of the ARMM government
[ARMM/p.10]

Libya agrees to lead monitoring team in Mindanao

COTABATO CITY -Libya has approved the government's request to lead the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in lieu of Malaysia, which has started its gradual pull out from the multi-national peacekeeping contingent overseeing the ceasefire in the troubled south.

The Malaysian-led IMT, composed of police and military personnel from Malaysia, Brunei, Libya, and a rehabilitation expert from Japan, has been monitoring the ceasefire between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since 2003.

Dr. Hadji Salem Adam, special envoy to Mindanao of the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation (GICDF), told The STAR in an email from Tripoli that they have accepted the proposal of the Philippine government to lead the IMT, whose total pull out from Mindanao might lead to renewed hostilities between the military and the MILF.

The GICDF, chaired by Saiful Al-Islam Al-Gaddafi, is Libya's conduit for humanitarian and peace-building projects in poor Muslim communities in foreign countries.

Adam, who was Libyan ambassador to the Philippines from 1999 to 2006, said Gaddafi, son of
[LIBYA/p.9]



RARE MEETING --- Moro National Liberation Front founding chairman Nur Misuari is warmly received by ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan (left) at his residence in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao during Misuari's visit there June 2, where they discussed an array of mutual concerns, including issues regarding the August 11 elections in the autonomous region.[]

Misuari: 'We're not after war. We are for peace.'

DAVAO CITY, Philippines - The former top Muslim insurgent in the Philippines, who is out of jail on bail, called on his followers on Saturday to work for peace in the troubled south of the country.

Nur Misuari made the appeal at a rally of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) here as he called for the creation of a federal government for the archipelago.

"We're not after war. We are for peace," said Misuari, who was guest of honor at the rally.

He said the MNLF, which once waged a bloody separatist war in the southern Mindanao region, would abide by a 1996 peace agreement with the national government, brokered by Islamic nations.

"We are known as the guardians of peace... we are against war," Misuari said as some 20,000 MNLF members, many clad in military camouflage uniforms, chanted "Allahu Akbar (God is Great)."

He said that if the government failed to give the full autonomy the group was seeking, then "we will march for peace."

Misuari said he would now work to have a federal form of government put in place in the Philippines with
[MISUARI/p.11]