



The ARMM Roundtable Series brings together academics and leaders in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to a discussion and analysis of critical issues in the autonomous region. This paper builds on the output of the discussions. Views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of Notre Dame University and the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung.

This series on the "ARMM and the GRP MILF Peace Process" addresses the following issues: What are the options for the GRP and the MILF in the ongoing GRP-MILF Peace negotiations? How will these options affect the present autonomy in Southern Philippines? Is there a place for the MILF in the present ARMM? How may possible structures created under a GRP-MILF peace agreement play out with the ARMM structures?

Resource Persons are Assemblyman Hatimil L. Hassan, MNLF Interim Chairman, and Atty. Suharto M. Ambolodto, Director, Institute for Strategic Initiatives. This paper is written by Benedicto R. Bacani, Dean, NDU College of Law and Director, Center for Autonomy and Governance. Layout by Grace S. delos Reyes.

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Benedicto R. Bacani

ARMM AND THE GRP-MILF PEACE PROCESS

ABSTRACT

- Compared with the previous talks, the ongoing GRP-MILF negotiations boast of the right ingredients for a successful outcome - a credible mediator in the Malaysian government, the support to the peace process of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the promised aid windfall from the United States and the international community once an agreement is reached, and the expression of support from no less than the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
- While the talks with the MNLF in 1996 had to hurdle mostly constitutional constraints, the ongoing talks with the MILF will also have to contend with the Organic Law of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF and existing political structures of autonomy.
- Enhanced autonomy, which is emerging as the foundation of the GRP-MILF accord, may not adequately respond to the root causes of the armed conflict in Mindanao. The negotiations should not be confined to the ARMM framework that has miserably failed to address the problem of poverty in the autonomous region.
- A peace agreement that accommodates personal interests in exchange for co-optation is a tool that legitimizes oppression and injustice. It will bring peace but only temporary as the roots of the problem have not been addressed.
- The search for a fresh, bold and creative roadmap to peace for Mindanao requires serious introspection and self-criticism on the part of all concerned including the GRP, the MILF and the MNLF. It is high time that as we take another shot at peace in the GRP-MILF peace process, we should all look inwards and discover what we have done and what we have failed to do for peace and development in Mindanao.

INTRODUCTION

The global war against terrorism has put immense pressure on revolutionary groups like the MILF to end their armed struggle and to forge negotiated settlements with governments.

The resumption of the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has renewed fresh hopes for peace in Southern Philippines. At no other time in the history of the peace process between the MILF and the GRP that the prospect of a negotiated settlement is brightest than in the ongoing peace talks. In comparison to previous talks, the ongoing GRP-MILF negotiations boast of the right ingredients for a successful outcome - a credible mediator in the Malaysian government, the support to the peace process of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC); the promised aid windfall from the United States and other aid agencies in the event of the forging of an agreement; and lately the expression of support from no less than the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The present environment also lends ripeness to the resolution of the decades-old armed conflict. The global war against terrorism has put immense pressure on revolutionary groups like the MILF to end their armed struggle and to forge negotiated settlements with governments. On the part of the GRP, it is likewise under pressure to resolve the armed conflict in Mindanao to boost the national economy and to match with action its rhetoric as a major ally of the United States in the fight against terrorism.

While the prospect for a negotiated settlement with the MILF is high, the talks will definitely be difficult and tedious. The stumbling blocks in these negotiations are formidable. While the talks with the MNLF in 1996 had to hurdle mostly constitutional constraints, the ongoing talks with the MILF will also have to contend with the Organic Law of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF and existing political structures of autonomy. The talks will have to consider that the subject of the talks, Mindanao and Sulu, are territories already covered by the 1996 peace agreement. Any discussion on autonomy will have to consider the MNLF, which holds the “franchise” on autonomy in Southern Philippines. Under these circumstances, what options are left for the MILF and the GRP in the negotiations? How will these options affect the present autonomy in Southern Philippines? Is there a place for the MILF in the present ARMM? How may possible bureaucracies and structures that may result from any GRP-MILF peace agreement play out with the present ARMM structures?

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These questions were the subject of a roundtable discussion on October 6, 2003 at the College of Law, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City. Resource persons at the roundtable session were Assemblyman Hatimil Hassan, Interim Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and member of the Regional Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and Atty. Suharto M. Ambolodto, law professor at the NDU College of Law and Director of the Institute for Strategic Initiatives. The Center for Autonomy and Governance is grateful to the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung for the grant in the conduct of the roundtable session and for the research and writing of this paper. It is hoped that this paper can contribute in a constructive way to the ongoing peace negotiations between the GRP and the MILF.

OPTIONS FOR PEACE

Atty. Ambolodto identifies the following possible options for the GRP and the MILF in the talks:

- The formation of a Federal State for the Bangsamoro;
- The formation of an Islamic Autonomous Region or state;
- Grant of independence to Mindanao and Sulu
- The enhancement of existing autonomy by amending the ARMM Organic Law
- Demobilization of MILF combatants and their mainstreaming through livelihood programs
- The rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas
- Participation of the MILF in socio-economic programs in Southern Philippines

These options are not exclusive and an accord may be forged containing elements that may cut across all or some of these options. However, the GRP will have limited options as it has to contend with constitutional and statutory limitations as well as its peace agreement with the MNLF. The GRP's best offer in the talks is most likely an enhanced autonomy where the Organic Law is amended for the expansion of the ARMM and for the grant of more powers to the autonomous region.

THE BANGSAMORO STATE UNDER A FEDERAL SYSTEM

The establishment of a Bangsamoro state under a federal system of government is one of the proposed solutions to the Bangsamoro problem. Dr. Jose V. Abueva, leading advocate for a Federalist Philippines makes the case for federalism as a solution to the Moro problem thus:

“Under our unitary system where we emphasize national integration and assimilation, rather than unity and diversity and pluralism, we have alienated the Moros- our Muslim brothers and sisters in the South- and other ethnic and cultural minorities. The result has been the Moro rebellion of the MNLF and the MILF seeking separation and independence from the Republic of the Philippines. Our other cultural minorities also feel neglected and discriminated by the national government which usually responds mainly to the lowland, Christian majority. Under the proposed federal system, the Moros, like all other major ethno-linguistic communities, will enjoy substantial regional autonomy-political, economic, cultural, religious autonomy.” (Towards a Federal Republic of the Philippines with a Parliamentary Government by 2010: A Draft Constitution, pg. 25-26)

Atty. Ambolodto calls for caution in considering federalism as an instant solution to the armed conflict in Mindanao. Dr. Abueva likewise warns against overstating the case for federalism saying that it is no panacea for solving our problems of governance. Thus, the proposal espoused by Dr. Abueva's group calls for a shift to a federal system in stages that extends for a ten-year period. According to Atty. Ambolodto, a federal system is a feasible option only when it can provide an enhanced political package for the autonomous region and advance the right of the Moro people to self-determination. He raises insightful questions: Will federalism make the inhabitants of the ARMM less poor? Will it give more powers

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to the federal state than those already granted under the Constitution and the Organic Law? Will it advance the Moro's right to self-determination better than the present autonomy that they enjoy?

The problem does not lie in the structures of autonomy but in the Malacañang-anointed regional leadership that is unwilling to exercise in full the powers already granted by the Organic Law to the autonomous region.

Atty. Ambolodto claims that Muslim Mindanao is already politically autonomous. Autonomy in the sense of the Organic Law involves an abdication of political power in favor of the autonomous region. In this sense, the autonomous government is free to chart its own destiny and shape its future with minimum intervention from central authorities. The problem does not lie in the structures of autonomy but in the Malacañang-anointed regional leadership that is unwilling to exercise in full the powers already granted by the Organic Law to the autonomous region. According to Atty. Ambolodto, elections in the ARMM are simply a process of legitimizing the choice of the national government. With or without federalism, the enhancement of autonomy and regional leadership is a legitimate concern.

Assemblyman Hassan agrees that while federalism is an option, it will not solve the Bangsamoro problem unless real autonomy is granted to the federal state. He points to a good feature of the proposed federal system where Muslim-dominated political subdivisions, although not located contiguously, can be made part of a Bangsamoro Federal State. This is not possible under the Organic Law.

The establishment of a Bangsamoro Federal Republic or state may be discussed in the negotiations. But there are serious doubts whether an agreement on the matter can be reached. The shift to a federal system of government is possible only through an amendment to the Constitution either by Congress as a constituent assembly or by an elected constitutional convention. In either case, the people must ratify the amendments in a plebiscite. The difficulty lies in the fact that the shift to a federal system of government is not solely the call of the executive branch of government that is negotiating with the MILF. The GRP, therefore, cannot make a firm commitment for the shift to a federal system as it cannot bind in the negotiations the framers of the constitution and the people. The best offer of the GRP in this regard is a commitment to push for the shift to a federal system. This best offer may not be good enough for the MILF.

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ISLAMIC AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OR REGION

There are two possible modes in this proposal namely, the Islamic state under a federal set-up or an Islamic autonomous region that builds on the present autonomous region. As discussed above, the first mode necessitates an amendment to the Constitution. The second mode is part of the enhanced autonomy proposal where only the Organic Law is amended and provisions on cultural autonomy such as the Shariah and the Madaris system are particularly strengthened. In accordance with Art. 1, Sec. 1, of R.A. 9054 or the ARMM Organic Law, the Regional Legislative Assembly of the ARMM can enact a law for the renaming of the ARMM to an Islamic Autonomous Region.

Atty. Ambolodto observes that the proposal for a Islamic state under a federal set-up or as a system that builds from present autonomy has not been crystallized even by the MILF. It might turn out to be a Taliban Afghanistan or a government based on the Shariah. A Shariah-based regional government needs to be clarified considering that the Shariah is of different models. The

constitutionality of the establishment of a political system founded on a particular religion like Islam is also questionable. The non-establishment clause and the provision on separation of Church and state in the Constitution prohibit the establishment of a state or regional religion in the Philippines.

INDEPENDENT ISLAMIC STATE

The MILF may choose to go back to its roots and assert its original demand for an independent Islamic state. The establishment of the MILF in 1984 is founded on its religious and nationalist agenda. In sharp contrast to the MNLF, the MILF has projected itself as a movement motivated and inspired by their religious conviction and believing that religion and politics are not separate but complementary realms. (Gutierrez: Rebels, Warlords and Ulama, 1999). This vision can be attained only through the establishment of an independent Islamic state that will totally set apart Mindanao from secular Philippines. Atty. Ambolodto notes that during the negotiations, the MILF can articulate the Bangsamoro problem as a national liberation struggle. In this case, the MILF shall make the GRP and the Filipino people understand that unless and until the Bangsamoro people regain their freedom, the hostilities will not stop. The armed conflict may de-escalate temporarily and will break loose again unless this demand for an independent Islamic state is given serious consideration.

The demand for independence for Mindanao has long been rejected by the GRP. There appears to be no compelling reason for the GRP to change its stand on the matter. In fact, its rejection of independence and offer of autonomy has the support of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The global trend in resolving ethnic and nationalist conflicts is towards autonomy and federalism not independence. In the realpolitik, the right to self-determination takes a backseat in favor of the state's right to sovereignty and territorial integrity.

ENHANCED AUTONOMY

The GRP may offer an enhanced autonomy with the MILF. The acceptance by the MILF of enhanced autonomy as a talking point in the negotiations will be an implied acceptance of the Organic Law and the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement as a working framework of the talks. To date, the MILF considers the 1996 Peace Agreement and the Organic law as mere reference and not a framework for the talks. This enhanced autonomy proposal may take the form of any or all of the following:

- Expansion of the present ARMM in a plebiscite where the inhabitants of provinces and cities under the Tripoli agreement will be asked again whether they opt to be part of the autonomous region;
- Amendment of the Organic Law to cleanse it from "impurities" that negate the letter and spirit of the 1996 peace agreement;
- Amendments to grant more powers to the autonomous region.

ARMM EXPANSION

If held at all, it will be the third time that a plebiscite will be conducted for the expansion of the ARMM. The first plebiscite was held on November 19, 1989 where only four provinces, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-

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Tawi opted to join the autonomous region. The second was in August 14, 2001, where the province of Basilan and Marawi City opted to join the four provinces in the ARMM. Based on the results of the first two plebiscites, only Muslim-dominated areas opted to join the autonomous region. In the event of a third plebiscite, it will probably be only Cotabato City that may agree to join the autonomous region owing to the increasing number of its Muslim inhabitants vis-à-vis Christian residents. With the general perception of poor governance in the ARMM, it is most likely that no Christian-dominated area will choose to be part of the autonomous region. Will the possible inclusion of only one city advance the MILF's cause? If the MILF believes so, it will raise the issue of the expansion of the ARMM in the talks.

AMENDMENTS TO THE ORGANIC LAW

The amendment of R.A. 9054 or the ARMM Organic Law could be one of the talking points in the negotiations. The amendments may either be to grant more powers to the ARMM or to rectify provisions that are considered contrary to the letter and spirit of the 1996 Peace Agreement or both.

The Organic Law dilutes the fiscal autonomy of the ARMM that was strengthened in the Peace Agreement. The Organic Law may be amended to provide for a bigger share of the autonomous region in the national budget.

According to the MNLF, among the provisions of the Organic Law that violate the Peace Agreement are:

- The formulation of a Shariah legal system that is only directory in the Organic Law while mandatory in the Peace Agreement.
- The appointment of at least one cabinet secretary from the autonomous region in the national government which according to the Organic Law is made only when practicable and in consultation with concerned sectors while the Peace Agreement makes it mandatory for the national government to do so. The same objection is raised on the appointment of an inhabitant of the autonomous region to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.
- The Organic Law dilutes the fiscal autonomy of the ARMM that was strengthened in the Peace Agreement. The Organic Law may be amended to provide for a bigger share of the autonomous region in the national budget.
- The Organic Law identifies what are to be considered strategic mineral resources that fall under the control of the National government whereas the GRP and the MNLF agreed during the negotiations that the identification should be made only after consultations with the MNLF and with the participation of technical experts from the OIC.
- The provision that allows the deployment outside the autonomous region of MNLF members who have been integrated in the Regional Police Force. This violates the spirit of the Peace Agreement that calls for the establishment of the Regional Security Force that will be responsible for maintaining law and order in the autonomous region.
- The provision that compels the ARMM to sell its property located outside the area of autonomy. The MNLF considers this provision confiscatory and violates the rights of the ARMM as a property owner.

Any agreement for an enhanced autonomy is feasible only with the concurrence of the MNLF, which holds the "franchise" for autonomy in Southern Philippines. Interim MNLF Chairman Hassan believes that it is difficult to find a place for the MILF in the ARMM because autonomy has already been granted to the MNLF.

ENHANCED AUTONOMY AND THE MNLF/ARMM

Any agreement for an enhanced autonomy is feasible only with the concurrence of the MNLF, which holds the “franchise” for autonomy in Southern Philippines. Interim MNLF Chairman Hassan believes that it is difficult to find a place for the MILF in the ARMM because autonomy has already been granted to the MNLF. However, the Interim Chairman expresses the willingness of the MNLF to help in finding a solution acceptable to all parties- the MNLF, the MILF, the Philippine government and other sectors. In fact, the MNLF has forged with the MILF an agreement for a partnership in exploring a just solution to the Mindanao problem. The August 2001 agreement in Kuala Lumpur is significant as it establishes the Bangsamoro Solidarity Council to explore possibilities for cooperation between the MNLF and the MILF in advancing the peace process in Southern Philippines. Interim Chairman Hassan says that in the event the GRP and the MILF agree on autonomy, the MNLF leadership is willing to share power with the MILF in the ARMM.

The MNLF-MILF solidarity accord is significant as it opens the possibility for the MNLF and the MILF to work together to make the ARMM a real instrument of peace and development in Southern Philippines. However, the accord is long on words and ideals but short on details. In case the parties will agree on an enhanced autonomy to be shared by the MNLF and the MILF, the most difficult part is to operationalize a power-sharing scheme in the context of a bloated ARMM bureaucracy that at present has no room left to spare even for unemployed MNLF members. To what extent the MNLF would be willing to accommodate the MILF in the ARMM is not clear at this time. What is certain is that any discussion on enhanced autonomy in the GRP-MILF talks is bound to fail without the participation of the MNLF. Whether or not the GRP and the MILF can reach an accord on enhanced autonomy will depend largely on the statesmanship of the MNLF and its capacity and willingness to make sacrifices for peace and development in Southern Philippines.

The participants in the discussions are wary of a negotiated settlement founded on the sharing of power by the MNLF and the MILF in the ARMM. Interim Chairman Hassan warns against making the GRP-MILF peace talks a forum to find solutions to problems of individual members and leaders of the MILF. He says that this was the same tactic employed by former President Marcos to MNLF fighters who were given choice political positions and financial assistance in exchange for their loyalty to the republic. He adds that a policy of co-opting leaders and members of the MILF will only be a temporary solution that will not address the root causes of the conflict. Atty. Ambolodto observes that the history of peace processes in the Philippines is replete with political accommodations more than the search for just and lasting solutions to the root causes of the armed rebellion. He asks: How can lasting peace and development be realized when the so-called dividends of peace benefit only a few? Does the peace process only mean being accommodated in the current Philippine political landscape?

In another paper, this writer notes:

“The peace process is not a one-way street where the MILF simply reacts to proposals from government. More than a statement renouncing terrorism, the MILF must clearly articulate the causes they are fighting for and how these causes can be addressed without resort to violence

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through the joint effort of the MILF and government. The MILF must prove that in talking peace with government, its primordial consideration is the improvement of the quality of life of the Muslim masses and not the so-called peace dividends to be enjoyed by its leaders and members. A peace agreement that accommodates personal interests in exchange for co-optation is a tool that legitimizes oppression and injustice. It will bring peace but only temporary as the roots of the problem have not been addressed.” (Bacani, “Don’t Bet the Bank on the GRP-MILF Peace Process”, 2003)

The GRP and the MILF must heed the lessons of the SPCPD in establishing another development coordinating body. They must especially define the relations between this development body to the ARMM and its local government units.

SPCPD MILF-STYLE

Realizing the complexity of the ARMM framework in the talks, the GRP and the MILF may just agree on the formation of a MILF-led parallel structure outside the ARMM that will oversee and coordinate development programs either in the whole Southern Philippines or within the autonomous region or in a smaller scale, the areas where MILF camps are located. This super-body will be reminiscent of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), a body created by then President Fidel Ramos to implement the 1996 Peace Agreement. The mandate of the SPCPD was to coordinate, promote and accelerate the peace and development efforts in the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD). The SPCPD experiment was a total failure in terms of bringing in development to the SZOPAD areas. Fr. Eliseo R. Mercado, Floor Leader of the Consultative Assembly that provided policy directions to the SPCPD identified the following causes for the failure of the SPCPD:

- Ambiguous and unclear powers of the SPCPD and its relations to existing governmental structures including local government units;
- Lack of enthusiasm of local government units to participate in the SPCPD and the CA;
- Lack of logistical and administrative support to the operations of the SPCPD. (Mercado, *Peace and Development: The MNLF and SPCPD Experience, 1999*).

The participants in the discussions are not convinced that enhanced autonomy, which seems to be emerging as the foundation of the GRP-MILF accord, will be able to address the root causes of the armed conflict in Mindanao. The participants believe that the negotiations should not be confined to the ARMM framework that has miserably failed to address the problem of poverty in the autonomous region.

The GRP and the MILF must heed the lessons of the SPCPD in establishing another development coordinating body. They must especially define the relations between this development body to the ARMM and its local government units.

WANTED: A NEW, BOLD AND CREATIVE ROADMAP FOR PEACE IN MINDANAO

The participants in the discussions are not convinced that enhanced autonomy, which seems to be emerging as the foundation of the GRP-MILF accord, will be able to address the root causes of the armed conflict in Mindanao. The participants believe that the negotiations should not be confined to the ARMM framework that has miserably failed to address the problem of poverty in the autonomous region. By almost any measure, the ARMM has the poorest human development (HD) outcomes among the 16 regions in the Philippines. Poverty incidence (66.0%) in the ARMM is twice that for the nation as a whole. Guiamel Alim, Executive Director of Kadtuntaya Foundation, a Moro NGO, says that the ARMM framework should not be seen as limiting but rather as providing an opportunity for the GRP and the MILF to think beyond a mechanism

that has failed. He calls for exploring creative and innovative solution to the complex problems of the Bangsamoro.

Prof. Moner Bajunaid, who headed the technical panel of the MILF in past talks with the GRP, notes that the root cause of the problems of Mindanao is identity. He calls for a peace process that unites than divides the Mindanaoans as Muslims, Christians and Lumads. Atty. Ambolodto notes that it is high time that we set aside the hegemony concept imposed by people outside of Mindanao in resolving the Mindanao problem. The essence of an independent Mindanao and Sulu is not a Bangsamoro state but an independent state for the undivided people of Mindanao and Sulu. He asserts that the constitution should not be an impediment to peace. He claims that if the only solution to the armed conflict is the independence of the people of Mindanao and Sulu, this possibility must be explored by all means.

The representatives of the Lumad women's group in the discussions urged the GRP and the MILF to recognize and include the Lumad women agenda for peace and development particularly their rights to their ancestral domain, self-determination and self-governance. Dr. Esther Sevilla of the NDU Peace Education Center calls for grassroots participation in the peace process.

A consensus clearly emerged in the discussions that the GRP-MILF talks should be considered a golden opportunity to arrive at a comprehensive solution to the Mindanao problem. This means finding solutions to the problems not only of the Moro people but also of all the Mindanaoans particularly the Lumads. This also means finding solutions not only to the problems of the MILF but also and more importantly to the root causes of the armed conflict. In the early part of 1997, the MILF submitted a position paper to the GRP containing a proposed agenda for the peace talks. In this paper, the MILF had one agenda - to find a solution to the Bangsamoro problem. It then proposed that nine (9) dimensions of the Bangsamoro problem be considered as talking points in the negotiations to wit:

- Ancestral domain claims of Muslims and highlanders in Mindanao
- Displaced and landless Bangsamoro peoples
- Destruction of properties and war victims
- Human rights violations
- Social and cultural discrimination
- Corruption
- Economic inequity
- Exploitation of natural resources
- Agrarian reform

The issues raised by the MILF cuts across the myriad of concerns of the peoples of Mindanao that stunted development in the region. Embedded in these issues are unjust structures, practices and policies that caused the Bangsamoro to rise in armed rebellion. If the GRP and the MILF are serious in these negotiations, it will take the difficult path of exploring possibilities to address these issues. The problems are deep-seated that require radical and creative solutions.

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It is high time that as we take another shot at peace in the GRP-MILF peace process, we should all look inwards and discover what we have done and what we have failed to do for peace and development in Mindanao.

CALL FOR SELF-CRITICISM AND INTROSPECTION

The search for a fresh, bold and creative roadmap to peace for Mindanao requires serious introspection and self-criticism on the part of all concerned including the GRP, the MILF and the MNLF. The armed conflict in Mindanao has gone too long and has already claimed the lives of many, the destruction of countless homes and the displacement of thousands. It is high time that as we take another shot at peace in the GRP-MILF peace process, we should all look inwards and discover what we have done and what we have failed to do for peace and development in Mindanao. A call is made thus:

The MNLF and MILF must explore and articulate the details and the extent of their partnership for peace and development.

- For the GRP, to institute real devolution of its powers to the autonomous region in order for genuine autonomy and self-rule to take root and grow in the region.
- For the MILF, to articulate and explore all avenues for peace including working with the MNLF in the search for lasting peace and development;
- For the MNLF, to match with action its public pronouncements to welcome the MILF as a partner in the pursuit of peace and development;
- For leaders of the ARMM and the local government units, to examine their roles for the failure of the autonomous region and the LGU's to alleviate grinding poverty in the region;
- For the Christian leaders and peoples of Mindanao, to recognize that they are as much a part of the problem and should therefore take responsibility in finding a lasting solution to the Mindanao problem.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The GRP and the MILF must insure that the dividends of peace benefit the people they represent and not just those who hold the reins of power.

- The MNLF and MILF must explore and articulate the details and the extent of their partnership for peace and development. The MNLF should not only be a bystander, observer or adviser in the talks. It must participate in the process and should take the first step to reach-out to the MILF and pursue albeit informally common grounds that will advance the cause for peace in Mindanao.
- The conduct and the substance of the talks must be comprehensive. It is recommended that the nine (9) talking points raised by the MILF in 1997 be discussed in the talks.
- Any development body that will be created out of the talks should be vested with real powers and authority to mobilize resources, agencies and local government units toward common goals.
- A negotiated settlement within the framework of the present autonomy must include radical and bold measures for true and effective devolution of powers, grant of fiscal autonomy and measures that will evolve an effective and efficient ARMM bureaucracy.
- The GRP and the MILF must insure that the dividends of peace benefit the people they represent and not just those who hold the reins of power.
- That the Lumad agenda for peace and development be seriously considered in the peace talks.
- That the GRP and the MILF must seek grassroots participation in the peace process through consultations and public meetings.

CONCLUSION

There are many paths leading to a GRP-MILF peace pact. The challenge for negotiators from both sides is to keep all paths open and to keep discovering the different points where their interests not just their positions meet and intersect. While we all long for the GRP and the MILF to reach an agreement the soonest time possible, speed must not take precedence over the need for the agreement to embody measures that will truly address the causes of the armed rebellion. The parties and the mediators owe it to the hundreds of thousands of people who were killed, injured and lost their property and homes in this armed conflict to insure at the very least that the peace talks be a real problem-solving forum than an occasion for advancing one's personal or group interests.

They should consult grassroots communities and organizations and enlist the support of Mindanaoan leaders to insure the durability of any negotiated agreement. They should take a hard look at the GRP-MNLF peace process, learn from its failures and build on its gains. They must strive to forge an agreement that can promote and sustain development in Mindanao especially in the conflict-affected areas.

The promised aid from the international community and the resources of the nation are not bottomless. Any agreement must insure that resources are wisely allocated and judiciously spent. Finally, more than the need to silence the guns and the forging of an agreement is the greater need for true leaders for peace and development. The call of the times is for a brand of leadership from the GRP, the MILF, the MNLF and the ARMM that inspires and unites the people of Mindanao to share and sacrifice for lasting peace and prosperity in the region.

The Center for Autonomy and Governance acknowledges the participation of the following in the roundtable discussions.

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ROUNDTABLE SERIES SCHEDULE

- **“ARMM and the GRP-MILF Peace Process”**, October 6, 2003, 8:00-12:00 noon, NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Democratization in the ARMM”**, October 29, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Evolving an Effective ARMM Bureaucracy”**, November 13, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Corruption, Culture and Conflict”**, November 18, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M. NDU College of Law, Cotabato City.
- **“ARMM Development Framework: Issues and Concerns”**, November 27, 2003, 1:30-5:00 PM, NDU College of Law, Cotabato City.
- **“Federalism vs. Autonomy: Roadmaps to Peace”**, December 10, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City