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CONFERENCE
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Autonomy in "Muslim Mindanao"

at

LITTLE THEATER
XAVIER UNIVERSITY
CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY

March 11 - 13, 1988



Theme:

*"AUTONOMY
IN THE
SEARCH FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT
IN THE
SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES*

Sponsored By The
MINDANAO DEVELOPMENT STUDIES CENTER
(XAVIER PEACE CENTER)

*With Support From
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CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

- A. To bring together representatives from different sectors of Mindanao to have an exchange of views on the three distinct, but very much interrelated, concepts of Autonomy, Peace and Development for Mindanao.
- B. To bring together scholars and sectoral representatives for a consultation on the specifics of granting autonomy to the Muslims in Mindanao in a manner which will be just and acceptable to Muslims, Christians and Lumads in Mindanao.
- C. To identify research areas where professionals and/or social scientists may be able to help with their knowledge and skills to find ways of implementing autonomy, peace and development in Mindanao.
- D. To seek a consensus and, subsequently, a statement of concern regarding the urgency of the matter so that the Congress and other concerned ministries and agencies would be able to pay more attention to the problem of establishing stable peace and order condition as a prerequisite to development in Mindanao.
- E. To share findings and recommendations of the Conference throughout the entire Philippines.

P R O G R A M

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 1988

5:00-7:00 P.M. Registration and Orientation at the Little Theater

7:00 P.M. OPENING CEREMONIES

National Anthem by Mark Labuntog
Xavier University

Invocation by Rev. Francis C. Madigan, S.J.
Xavier University

Welcome Address: Rev. Francis C. Madigan, S.J.
Xavier University

Introduction of Keynote Speaker
by Emil Bolongaita, Jr.
Xavier University High School

Keynote Address
Dr. Edilberto C. de Jesus
Deputy Peace Commissioner

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 1988

- 8:00 A.M. Conference Announcements, Dr. Robert D. McAmis
MDSO Director
- 8:15-10 A.M. Mindanao Autonomy: A Historical and Constitutional Mandate
by Elnorita P. Tugung, Chairman, Autonomous Region IX
Discussants: Dr. Linda Burton, Xavier University
Prof. Rudy Rodil, MSU-IIT, Iligan City
Commissioner-at-large, RCC
Moderator: Prof. Magdalena C. Cabaraban, Xavier University
Open Forum
- 10:00 A.M. Break
- 10:15-12 Noon Perceptions on Autonomy of Opinion Leaders
by Dr. Datumanong A. Sarangani, MSU-Marawi City
Member, Mindanao Autonomy Study Team
Discussants: Abdul T. Sampulna, Director, Region XII, Cul-
tural Affairs Office; Commissioner-at-large, RCC
Prof. Evelyn Jamboy, MSU-IIT, Iligan City
Moderator: Dr. Heidi K. Gloria, Ateneo de Davao University
Open Forum
- 12 Noon-2 P.M. Lunch Break
- 2:00-3:30 P.M. Autonomy for Muslim Mindanao: Findings from a Survey Study
by Dr. Marilou Palabrica-Costello, Xavier University
Project Coordinator, Mindanao Autonomy Study Team
Discussants: Fr. Francis C. Madigan, S.J., Director, RIMCU,
Xavier University
Prof. Emily Marohombsar, Vice-president,
MSU-Marawi City
Moderator: Dean Ofelia Durante, Notre Dame University
Open Forum
- 3:30-3:45 P.M. Break
- 3:45-5:30 P.M. Various Views on Autonomy
Hon. Vicente T. Paterno, Senator
Hon. Carlos O. Fortich, ex-Congressman, ex-Governor
Hon. Santanina Rasul, Senator
Moderator: Prof. Eva K. Tan, Notre Dame University
Open Forum
- 6:30-8:30 P.M. Peace Banquet, XU Canteen
Banquet Speaker: Hon. Senator Aquilino G. Pimentel, Jr.

SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 1988

- 8-8:15 A.M. Plenary Session in Little Theater
Assignments for Group Discussions
- 8:15-12 Noon Group Discussions
- 12:00-2 P.M. Noon Break
- 2:00-5 P.M. Plenary Session
Adoption of Conference Recommendations and
Statement of Concern

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Dr. EDILBERTO C. de JESUS

(DEPUTY PEACE COMMISSIONER)

I would like first of all, to thank Xavier University and its Peace Center for the privilege of participating in this conference on Autonomy for Muslim Mindanao.

We had learned sometime ago about this research project on regional autonomy which a consortium of Mindanao Universities has been pursuing this past year, and we have been eagerly awaiting the results of the study. You can rest assured that your reports in this conference will receive careful consideration from the Peace Commission.

Let me also commend the scholars who have cooperated on this project for their hard work and congratulate them for their good fortune. It is not often that academics are able to apply their craft to issues of urgent national concerns in time to make a difference.

Academics are often accused, in fact, of isolating themselves in their ivory towers and wasting their time on abstractions of no practical relevance. But, of course, we know the danger of underestimating the power of ideas. The failure to appreciate the significance of such abstract concepts as "Nationalism" or "Communism" has frequently produced disastrous results. Both the Americans and the Russians can bear witness to this.

In the context of current developments in Mindanao, the idea of autonomy has potentially explosive impact. It is an idea whose time has come. But in our talks with community leaders from Mindanao, we have been struck by the wide range of meanings attached to the concept.

There are those, for instance, who believe that with autonomy, Nur Misuari will become the ruler of Mindanao. Some equate autonomy with secession or independence from the republic. Others interpret it to mean dole-outs from the central government.

The concept of autonomy can obviously have a positive or a pernicious effect on the government's efforts to preserve peace in Mindanao. The Peace Commission looks to this conference for help in clarifying the meaning of autonomy and communicating it to our people.

What I would like to do this evening is to provide you with additional inputs for your conference deliberations. An update on the initiatives taken by the government to address the autonomy issue in Mindanao may provide a useful framework for your analysis and recommendations.

This afternoon, the President signed into law the bill establishing the Regional Consultative Commission. We have thus taken another step towards fulfilling the constitutional mandate to extend meaningful autonomy to Muslim Mindanao.

The RCC, which shall assist Congress in formulating the organic act for the autonomous region, will have a total of 50 members. Each of the 27 congressional districts in the proposed autonomous region has one RCC representative selected by the President from a list proposed by multisectoral groups. In addition, the President selected 23 other commissioners from a list of candidates nominated at large to insure that all sectors were fairly represented.

The RCC members will hold office in their respective districts. This will enable them to perform more effectively their key function: Serving as a channel of communication between the Congress and their constituencies.

RCC sessions will be conducted for the most part in Zamboanga or Cotabato to allow the people of Mindanao easier access to their deliberations.

The Muslim community makes up about 20% of the population of Mindanao. Pursuing a policy of affirmative action, the President has composed the RCC with a 50% Muslim representation. The cultural minority groups also have a greater share of RCC seats than their numbers in the population, 16% as against 6%.

The establishment of the RCC meets a mandate of the constitution. It is also a step towards complying with our commitment to honor the terms of the Tripoli Agreement.

Permit me to emphasize this point. In approaching the issue of autonomy for Muslim Mindanao, the Philippine government takes as its guiding principle its obligation to execute the Philippine Constitution and to observe the Tripoli Agreement. Let us, therefore, put to rest any doubts about the willingness of this government to abide by the Tripoli Agreement.

But let us make sure we understand what the Tripoli Agreement is all about:

First, it addresses an internal, domestic issue;

Second, it involves, as the principal parties to the agreement, the Philippine government and a group of its subject citizens;

Third, it envisions regional autonomy for Muslim Mindanao within the framework of Philippine national sovereignty;

Fourth, it recognizes that the implementation of regional autonomy must be pursued in accordance with Philippine constitutional processes; and

Fifth, it remains an uncompleted agreement.

The final point bears repeating because it is often forgotten or conveniently ignored by those who insist on the "full" or "sincere" or "genuine" implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. The substantive portions of the agreement which would have defined the character of the autonomous region were never resolved. They were instead deferred for future discussions. Thus, the crucial question of how the military, educational, legal and fiscal institutions of the autonomous government would relate to the corresponding structures of the national government remains unanswered.

The only way to implement such provisions in the Tripoli Agreement would be to provide the venue for the discussion and settlement of the unresolved points. In constituting the RCC, the government has provided this venue.

It must also be pointed out that the government has tried other venues. The negotiations conducted by the Pelaez panel with the MNLF was only the latest effort to resolve the questions left hanging by the Tripoli Agreement. The talks, unfortunately, failed to produce a consensus. Negotiations collapsed, but not before it became quite clear that the MNLF wanted much more than the Tripoli Agreement could concede.

The MNLF first wanted the government to include the entire island of Mindanao as well as Basilan, Sulu, Taw-tawi and Palawan within the scope of the autonomous region. Failing in this demand, it subsequently pressed for the President to issue an executive order placing the thirteen provinces covered in the Tripoli Agreement under virtually complete control of the MNLF for a period of five years, until elections could be held.

The President had to reject this demand as well. The promise to extend autonomy to Muslim Mindanao and the mechanism by which this was to be accomplished had already been embodied in the constitution. Congress was preparing to convene. It would have been singularly inappropriate and unbeco-

ming for Mindanao to achieve autonomy through a midnight executive order. It would have cheapened a noble goal that, for so many years, so many had fought for. And the executive order itself would surely have been challenged by Congress.

But when the Peace Commission started the process of composing the RCC, one of its critical concerns was to maintain communication lines with the Muslim armed groups. The leadership of the three factions responded to the RCC in different ways.

The MNLF took the hardest line, repeatedly and publicly repudiating the constitution and rejecting the concept of the RCC. The other two groups periodically criticized the government's approach to peace, but largely maintained a discreet silence or occasionally offered lukewarm support. The Peace Commission maintained contact with all three factions.

While the public rhetoric of the MNLF top leadership remained intransigent, the reality on the ground had a different complexion. Field commanders, even of the MNLF, listened attentively to presentations of government policy and, on occasions, even initiated the contact with the Peace Commission. Those to whom we talked explained that while they could not seek RCC membership themselves, they could endorse people who could represent their cause.

When we are asked, therefore, whether the MNLF will participate in the RCC, we can quite honestly and quite simply say "yes." The longer answer would first go into the question of "Who is the MNLF?" Nur Misuari will not be participating in the RCC, although he could have done so if he had wanted to. But is Nur Misuari the MNLF? And even granting that Nur Misuari is the MNLF, is he the only one the government should deal with and listen to. Let us not forget that the government had, in fact, tried this approach. And it was severely criticized for ignoring other Muslim leaders. Moreover, the bilateral approach simply did not work.

The government had offered Misuari and the MNLF a leadership position in a provisional autonomous council and a strong hand in the organization of the RCC. The MNLF rejected this offer, and the negotiations with the Pelaez panel ground to a halt.

But even without the MNLF, the government had to comply with the constitutional mandate to extend autonomy to Muslim Mindanao, within the time frame established by the constitution.

With the RCC, the government has moved from bilateral negotiations with just one faction of the Muslim armed groups to multilateral consensus-building. The process followed in organizing the RCC recognized and respected the diversity of Mindanao. And it faithfully reflected two of the premises that guide the work of the Peace Commission: That the government should attend not only to the MNLF but to all Muslims and not only to the Muslims but to all of Mindanao.

But some quarters are now critical of the government because it abandoned a bilateral approach that had not worked. The move, they claim, deviates from the Tripoli Agreement which was bilateral in nature. They urge the government to bend every effort to bring Misuari back to the bargaining table, at long last to complete the Tripoli Agreement.

The criticism is rich in irony. The Aquino government had no hand in forging the Tripoli Agreement, if it had been in power then, it would perhaps not have concluded such an accord; according to Speaker Mitra, the agreement was "treasonous."

From all indications, the Marcos government had no intention of implementing the agreement to give genuine autonomy to Muslim Mindanao. The ploy of creating two structures, one for Region 9 and another for Region 12 betrayed the bad faith.

From all indications, the MNLF wanted the Tripoli Agreement only as a step towards the ultimate goal of secession. The extravagant demands for the whole of Mindanao during the negotiations with the Pelaez panel provided a clue to the real plan. But the leaders were really quite open about their aims. The Chief of the MNLF negotiating panel was quoted as saying:

"Actually, we don't want autonomy. The fact is, we were pressured thrice by the OIC to talk with the government. It will be our turn now to pressure the OIC." (The Manila Chronicle, 8 June 1987)

But as a gesture of good will, the Aquino government is trying its best to implement an agreement neither of the contracting parties had intended to honor. How can it be castigated then for failing to revive after over a decade a baby that was delivered congenitally defective, if not actually still-born?

The Tripoli Agreement was perhaps a useful instrument at one point in time. But time did not stand still. And neither did Mindanao. Times change, and an agreement mutually convenient for Marcos and Misuari may no longer be adequate now to address new political realities.

One reality is that the Filipino people have overwhelmingly ratified a constitution committed to autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. They have also placed in power a government genuinely prepared to honor this commitment. A second reality is the emergence of new Muslim leaders where before there was mainly Misuari.

Nonetheless, the Aquino government persists in saving what it can of the agreement, implementing what is implementable and what does not do violence to the basic rights of its citizens. It does so only on the understanding that the Tripoli Agreement only intends genuine autonomy for Muslim Mindanao and the welfare of the Muslim community. It cannot legitimately be invoked simply to perpetuate the dominance of one armed faction, a dominance that many Muslims themselves would reject.

The bottom line, then, for this government is the welfare and the development of the country's Muslim population. For this reason, it has refused to limit itself to political initiatives. Even as it addresses the political problem of autonomy through the RCC, it has started a program to improve and expand the access of Muslim communities to the basic services of government: electric power, potable water, roads and bridges, literacy classes, health facilities.

During her visit to Tawi-tawi and Zamboanga, the President formally announced the government's service and action program. She did not present a plan, she reported on performance.

Critics have denounced the service and action program as a gimmick to distract attention from the goals of the MNLF. But the service and action program is no political gimmick. The projects under the SAP require no special funding; they are part of the regular program of work of the line agencies. In launching the service and action program, the President has simply established a system for allocating priorities to the areas in most need of help and for stimulating the performance of the bureaucracy.

For focusing on the urgent survival needs of the most disadvantaged communities, the government has been loudly attacked. Muslim leaders, comfortably settled in Manila or overseas, belittle these efforts as diversionary and insist that the government first resolve the political issue before building roads or digging wells or providing electricity.

We have to wonder how closely those who preach this line listen to the people. Autonomy, to be sure, is an important issue. But the people out there in the farms and in the fishing grounds do not go to bed every night wondering about the structures of the future autonomous government. From what we can tell, people are concerned over more basic, rice and fish issues: jobs and income, peace and order and the services that the SAP seeks to deliver.

It takes two parties to conclude an agreement. But the government does not have to wait for anyone to deliver the basic services our people so badly need, and it will not wait. A third premise of its approach to peace in Mindanao recognizes the need to address not just the political but also the development agenda.

I have, I fear, taken too much of your time this evening, but I felt it was important to establish the rationale and the premises of the government's approach to the issues of autonomy, development and peace. Unfortunately, media has been much too pre-occupied of late with the sensational sabre-rattling stories to provide much analytical coverage of what the government is doing.

War obviously sells more papers than peace.

This fact of life, I think, is something that the participants in this conference must also confront. I know that you have much to contribute to our understanding of the issues that can bring war or peace to Mindanao.

Those who stay up is there in the ivory towers of academe may discern from their vantage point paths to peace which those who toil in the fields may be unable to detect. But they can not remain detached observers of the passing scene. Supremely indifferent as to who, if any, gathers the pearls of wisdom that they cast.

There will be many conflicting views on the issue of autonomy and how best it can be achieved. We will need your analytical skills and your creative insights. In addition to objective analysts, we will also require passionate advocates. Even the best ideas will not prosper unless their authors are also prepared to fight for them.

Thus, I think we will need more than just ideas from the academic community. We will also need their involvement, their willingness to express what they think and what they feel, their commitment to stand up and be counted for what they believe.

We are confident that we will discover in this community men and women who can craft that crucial combination of analysis and advocacy.

"Mindanao Autonomy: A Historical and Constitutional Mandate".
 Speech of LTP Chairman Elnorita P. Tugung in the Conference on Autonomy in
 "Muslim Mindanao", Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro City, March 11-13,
 1988.

. . . Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

Assalamu alaikum. Peace be with you.

Eighty-nine years ago, on May 18, 1899, Christian revolutionaries in Zamboanga City led by General Vicente Alvarez after a two-day siege overran the Spanish Garrison in Fort Pilar and captured the last Governor-General of the Philippines, Diego delos Rios. After hauling down the Spanish flag, the revolutionaries reportedly raised the banner of the Sultan of Sulu, not that of General Aguinaldo of Kawit, Cavite. Two United States warships anchored off the Zamboanga coastline but could not land troops to wrestle the city from the revolutionaries, and so they sailed on to Jolo and there signed a peace treaty with Sulu Sultan Jamal Kiram. They came back in November of the same year, or six months later, and after bribing a treacherous officer of the revolutionary troops to assassinate the commander on duty of the port, were finally able to occupy Zamboanga.

This episode in the modern history of Mindanao helps define our contemporary political problem in Southern Philippines. Our history is full of similar instances when Mindanao's inhabitants displayed their sense of isolation from the central government. As you know, the Muslims of Mindanao have consistently opposed the Spanish colonial government. Later, American administrators were able to pacify the Muslims by granting them political and financial concessions and by saturating Mindanao with Christian settlers. Even then, the Muslims voice for independence was never ever really silenced. During the Commonwealth regime, some Muslim leaders continued the quest for independence in the halls of the National Assembly.

This historical tradition erupted into a full-scale conflict only 25 years after the Philippine Archipelago became a republic immediately after the Second World War. The Muslims in Mindanao, armed with modern weapons, with highly-educated and well-trained leaders, organized into a liberation front, and inspired by the nineteenth century Islamic hegemony now sweeping the world, clashed with the newer realities in Philippine nationhood, principally with the political assimilation and domination of Mindanao by the central government. Latent conflicts in cultural and economic areas are also threatening to break out in the open.

Most of us would be familiar with the government's peace efforts since the MNLF went underground and pursued a war of attrition. The government, the front and non-combatant civilians sustained large casualties until the Tripoli Agreement was forged in 1976. A former member of the MNLF Central Committee said this agreement was the severest blow Misuari's struggle ever sustained. Understandably, Misuari charged that the government of former President Marcos failed to faithfully implement the provisions of the agreement, twisted it and established the existing two autonomous governments in central and western Mindanao. Nevertheless, some 78 MNLF commanders returned to the fold of the law and as many as 20,000 - the military estimate was 40,000 - other fighters layed down their arms. Political autonomy, social and economic rehabilitation of returnees, accelerated development of communities and war exhaustion forced these rebels to give up the fight, yet a substantial remainder of the Bangsamoro forces and leaders, who broke up into three main but separate groups, stayed underground or in self-exile. The standing forces of the MNLF, Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the MNLF-Reformist Group, with recent increase through recruitment, are capable of re-opening hostilities in many parts of Mindanao, though Misuari himself has admitted that the prospect of a military victory by the rebels is quite dim at the moment.

In September, 1986, President Corazon C. Aquino met with Misuari in Jolo, Sulu to sign a new ceasefire agreement and to express her sincere intention to find a compromise agreement with the MNLF for an honorable settlement of the Mindanao problem. But the peace negotiations which went on for

five months from January to May last year broke down over significant and major differences between the demands of the MNLF and concessions offered by the government. The gap consisted of matters in geographical area, scope of powers and implementation processes.

The MNLF later on refused as it continues to recognize the New Philippine Constitution in spite of its autonomy provisions. It recently opened up with a propaganda war which, it seems, is intended to sabotage the implementation of constitutional autonomy in Southern Philippines. I believe that, as with the effects of the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF leadership fears that a new form of autonomy in Mindanao will greatly erode its quest for independence.

It appears that there are now a number of factors that prevent the MNLF from coming into terms with the government, aside from the divergence of positions that were demonstrated during the peace negotiations last year.

I am usually cautious to pin labels on individuals or organizations, but Chairman Misuari has over the last twenty years acquired a set of alliances and sponsors from whom he cannot easily disassociate himself. Misuari as a political science professor in the University of the Philippines was closely associated with Jose Ma. Sison and Norberto Gonzales, the former a Marxist and the latter a Socialist. All three of them came to organize their own revolutionary associations, for which they continue to solicit international support. The powerful military-industrial complex in both East and West hemisphere always have a stake in revolutionary movements and will not let their clients off if they can help it. The standard fire-arm of the MNLF is the Russian-made AK-47.

Secondly, Islamic world hegemony which exploded with the discovery of oil in the Middle East in this century, has apparently imbued the Mujahideens with a sense of eternal struggle, if not invincibility. The opening lines of chapter one of the MNLF's fighter's manual, entitled "Objectives of Bangsamoro Mujahideen and the means to achieve them", reads: "Every individual Bangsamoro must realize that we are engaged in a life and death battle, a battle for survival, which poses formidable threats of extinction to our Islamic heritage and places our very existence at stake . . . all our endeavors and efforts to defend our religion, the dignity of the Bangsamoro people, and to regain our legitimate rights to self-determination fall squarely within the category of Jihad in the way of Allah deserving great rewards from Almighty God". The Bangsamoro war is not a lonely struggle along political and economic interest alone.

Thirdly, the inter-tribal dissension among Muslim Filipinos and the splintered Bangsamoro fighting groups prevent them from presenting a "Unified Front" to facilitate negotiations with the government. This was recognized by the New Government shortly prior to last year's peace talks. Anyone of these fighting fronts is inhibited from reaching an agreement with the government for fear of losing status and advantages in favor of rival groups.

Fourthly, the refusal of the MNLF to recognize the New Constitution or to submit any compromise settlement to constitutional processes eliminates a legal basis for negotiations. The government cannot be expected to exceed the mandate of the constitution on local autonomy.

Lastly, Christian and Muslim co-existence in Mindanao remains utopian proposition for as long as either group entertains a desire to dominate the other. This is not to say that such a co-existence is not possible in Mindanao. The point is that the very apparent distrust between Muslims and Christians in the area, as far as autonomy is concerned as evinced by the controversy over the phrase "Muslim Mindanao" in the constitution, and which stems from basic economic and political conflicts, is not lost to the MNLF leadership. This tends to prevent the front from displaying a greater degree of trust in the Christian dominated government of Manila.

We now look briefly at the experience of the existing autonomous government in Western Mindanao since it was established in 1979. In passing, let me state that the scope of powers of the autonomous government as vested in Presidential Decree 1618 amounts to almost the same thing as provided for

in the New Constitution, except that in the latter is added possible rights over the areas' natural resources.

In assessing the existing autonomous government, one's attention will always be drawn to the fact that the system's accomplishments have not done justice to the degree of authority invested in it by its charter. We trace this asymmetry to the fact that during most of the years of its existence, which is to say during the Marcos dictatorship, the autonomous government was not allowed to exert these powers. No tax measures, for example, ever prospered. Bills passed by the legislative branch, which is the Batasang Pampook, to stop destructive fishing operations in its seas, mostly committed by non-resident businessmen, were largely ignored by law enforcement agencies and ministries, all of whom were under the absolute control of the Manila government. Even mere regional development planning would turn into a farce when foreign-funded programs, which were all prepared in Manila, are dumped into the region.

If the Aquino government failed to correct this anomaly, it is, I believe, due to its overriding concern to first complete peace-making preparations, like writing a new law on autonomy, before letting political autonomy continue to flourish in the area.

What happened during its existence is that the autonomous government was confined to the implementation of what are called impact projects in the area, building mosques, schoolhouses, water systems and extending various forms of development and livelihood assistance to individuals, communities and local government units. A degree of political gain was achieved through the exercise of its administrative prerogatives over other government agencies and local government units, its contacts with Muslim countries and foreign embassies, and interventions with the national government and the military establishment over various local concerns.

What conclusions or prospects can we draw from the existing circumstances and conditions?

The national government is set to organize the Regional Consultative Commission as a first step in the implementation of the autonomy provisions of the constitution. I have always maintained that there can be no peace in Mindanao for as long as the MNLF exists and is not a party to any settlement of the Mindanao problem. It is quite imperative for the government to find a way to make the MNLF participate in the realization of its constitutional mandate, otherwise no real peace will be achieved. This is regardless of whether or not the MNLF shall be accepted as full member in the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Secondly, the envisioned self-rule through the constitution should be one which will be able to answer the sentiments and aspirations of Mindanao's peoples, Christians and Muslims alike. An organic law which will only cater to the Muslims will not only isolate the Muslims from the nation's mainstream. It will tend to create a state within a state and judging from the warlike character of the Muslim tribes, will in later generations be a cause for fighting between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In this respect, it is equally imperative that the RCC explore the true sentiments and aspirations of all communities in Mindanao and truthfully communicate their findings to the Congress, who will draft and enact the autonomy law. A naive dependence on existing data and information to assess Mindanao and its population can be very counter-productive, for some of these information are unreliable.

To ensure the success and integrity of the consultation process, it is necessary that the people be informed first about the concerns, issues and problems of autonomy. Hence, a massive and sustained information and education campaign should be undertaken not only by the government but other sectors as well, to raise the people's level of awareness, familiarity with the features and problems of political autonomy and related issues.

What I would, in closing, say most of all is that Mindanao today stands on the threshold of a new horizon in its political evolution and consequent socio-economic development, the going in the past decades has been rough, and it will continue to be that way for some time until a political system, tempered and perfected by our common trials, shall come into being, come into effect. Internal autonomy is the key, perhaps the only key, to Mindanao's survival and advancement without the loss of more lives, and most of all, of more of our fundamental rights.

I thank the Mindanao Development Studies Center, particularly Dr. Robert McAmis, for this opportunity to speak before the distinguished participants of this conference. I also convey the warm regards of the people of Autonomous Region 9 to their brothers and sisters in Cagayan de Oro City and other parts of Mindanao.

Thank you and may God bless us all.

Perceptions of Opinion Leaders on Autonomy
For Muslim Mindanao: A Preliminary Study*

by

Datumanong A. Sarangani**

* This paper is an abridged version of a report on the same topic, which is an integral part of a Mindanao-wide survey on autonomy. The study was conducted by a team of researchers representing five (5) institutions of higher learning in the region, namely: Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City, Ateneo de Davao in Davao City, Notre Dame University in Cotabato City, Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga City, and Mindanao State University at its main campus in Marawi City. The Asia and Ford Foundations provided the funding support for the study under the auspices of the Mindanao Development Studies Center and the Research Institute for Mindanao Cultures, all based at the Xavier University.

** Dr. Sarangani teaches courses at the Graduate School, Mindanao State University, Marawi City. He obtained an A.B. degree from MSU (1966) and an M.A. at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon (1971). He also attended the State University of New York at Albany (SUNYA), where he received a masters and a doctorate degree in policy studies.

Perceptions of Opinion Leaders on Autonomy
For Muslim Mindanao: A preliminary Study

by

Datumanong A. Sarangani

Introduction

This paper is primarily prepared for this conference to share with you the findings of a research study group that looked into the perceptions and opinion of peoples of Mindanao on the current issue of autonomy. The findings that will be presented here are those that pertain to the views held on the same issue by specific persons whom the study group arbitrarily, yet agreeable, termed as "opinion leaders." The data analysis and interpretation are solely confined to the marginal distribution of responses of three (3) ethno-religious/linguistic groups namely, Christian, Muslim, and Tribal to a structured survey questionnaire used in the study. The tribal group referred to in this study are those coming from the known "cultural communities" (sometimes called as national minorities) located in Mindanao.

As a major research purpose, the study group recognized the importance of knowing and understanding the views of certain persons who command influence and authority in some communities of Mindanao on the issue of autonomy. This group disposition is based on two (2) prime research considerations. The first consideration is drawn from a theoretical perspective which deals with the seemingly accepted view that "leaders" are prime movers of ideas and catalyzers of change (Gouldner, 1950; Stogdill, 1974). On whatever leadership basis (Weber, 1947) or authority patterns (Etzioni, 1964) they draw from to exert their influence, these persons command visible following in their respective organizations or communities. They tend to assume multiple roles as well as perform varied functions that are related to the well-being of their fellow constituents and in guiding their respective "spheres of influence" towards preferred directions. As such, it is not altogether surprising to find a person in a leadership position to be acting as the local chieftain and as chief priest at the same time. Or, one who is a PTA president and, simultaneously, as the head of a local farmers' cooperative association. And, in reflection to actual conditions to which some of us are currently experiencing, a person who is both the mayor and the reigning sultan of a certain Muslim community. The findings of this study along this research consideration may provide additional insights in analyzing some facets of leadership within the Philippine social context as they relate to the formation of opinion and consensus building. In a more specific context, the results of this study may also give further insights in understanding multiple leadership patterns that exist in most Muslim communities in Southern Philippines, particularly among the Maranaos of Lanao where modern-day leadership is still exercised by known traditional leaders (Benitez, 1968; Saber, 1979).

The second research consideration of this study touches on a seemingly immediate concern. Within the framework of the current autonomy issue, some sectors of the communities in Mindanao and Sulu expressed misgivings on the alleged meager and/or superficial involvement of certain "community leaders" in the various consultative assemblies and other similar fora held that deliberated on the grant and implementation of autonomy in two regions of Mindanao in 1979 in accordance with the provisions of the Tri-political Accord of 1976. The same group further expressed that the intended beneficiaries of autonomy, including their "real leaders" were not adequately consulted on the said issue and, therefore, did not derive worthy

benefits from autonomy. And for this reason, among others, it was claimed that the autonomy which was granted nearly a decade ago remained "more of form than substance" (Mastura, 1985).

The desire for a more meaningful and substantive autonomy gained added impetus from the recently ratified constitution of the Philippines by virtue of Article X, Sections 15 to 21, which provided for the setting up of "autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras." In view thereof, there are already tangible evidences that the search for autonomy is now set into motion as shown by the sustained efforts of the Peace Commission in the holding of "multi-sectoral" assemblies throughout the envisioned areas of autonomy as well in the conduct of "shuttle diplomacy" by the national government to some foreign countries that have expressed strong interest on the same issue. As to whether or not these foregoing efforts being exerted in the pursuance of the constitutional mandate for autonomy are achieving the intended results, it is somewhat premature at this point in time to make any conclusive judgment. At best, it can be wished that the said efforts are on the right track. The recent formation of the Regional Consultative Commission (RCC) to assist the Philippine Congress in drafting the organic act for autonomy should reinforce the foregoing optimism.

On the basis of the two research considerations mentioned, it is hoped that the data findings of this particular inquiry on opinion leaders' perceptions of autonomy will be a positive contribution to the insights of the architects of autonomy in their search for development, stability, and peace in Mindanao.

The Sample

A total number of 220 respondents were determined for the study as was opinion leaders subjects through the use of "purposive" or "interactive" sampling (Lin, 1977). This number was arrived at by barangay unit for all sampled barangays in the overall autonomy study (Costello, 1983). For every barangay sample, regular respondents to the overall study were asked toward the end of their interviews to name at least three (3) persons whom they normally consult on vital matters that highly concern them and their respective communities. The top two (2) persons identified by regular respondents were considered as the "opinion" leaders of the barangay. Of the 220 identified opinion leaders, 102 came from the Christian respondent group, 98 from the Muslims, and 20 from the Tribals.

Opinion leaders respondents were given the same questions asked of regular respondents. To make a distinction between the two respondent groups, opinion leaders were asked additional questions which require open-ended answers. This procedure made it possible to probe deeper into the beliefs and opinions held by respondents on the autonomy issue.

Opinions about Autonomy

The concept of autonomy seems to be rapidly developing as a household by-word in some places nationwide, but mostly in Mindanao and the Cordilleras (Sarangani, 1982). The popularity of autonomy, however, and as it currently appears, is not totally indicative of its common understanding in terms of a mutually agreed idea or phenomenon. This impression makes it instructive to suggest that before it is finally tried in the Philippine context, particularly in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras, autonomy might yet come to a rigorous debate on the issues of definition, implementation, and consequences.

In addressing the foregoing concern, respondents were asked a set of questions concerning their perceptions and opinions about "autonomy" and "autonomy for Muslim Mindanao." The results of this inquiry are presented in Table 1. Respondents who declared to be knowledgeable about the constitutional provision that "it especially with Mindanao" were asked of their understanding of the said provision. As shown by the data on Table 1, more than 80 percent of Christian and Muslim respondents share the view with nearly 60 percent tribals that such constitutional provision refers

to autonomy for Muslims and Mindanao. Less than 35 percent of tribals suggested that the same provision meant "independence of the Muslims and Mindanao."

When asked about their understanding of autonomy, more than 70 percent of Christian and Muslim respondents equated the concept to "self government/self rule, but short of independence." Among tribal respondents, slightly half of them perceived autonomy as "independence." Less than 10 percent of all respondents were unable to define autonomy. On the more definitive issue of "autonomy for Muslim Mindanao", just over half of Christians and tribals share with majority of Muslim respondents the view that the same statement refers to "self-rule, but short of independence." Close to 15 percent of all respondents did not seem to have any idea of what "autonomy for Muslim Mindanao" means.

The ambivalent feelings of respondents towards the whole autonomy proposal, but particularly on the constitutional provision to grant autonomy seemed evident, as suggested by the data shown in Table 2. Almost 90 percent of Muslims consider the constitutional provision as a good idea, while Christians and tribals seemed rather indecisive about the matter. Nearly 60 percent of Christians consider the constitutional provision as at least a bad idea, while 46.7 percent among tribals held the same view. In a separate data analysis (forthcoming), the opinions of respondents on the same item were further investigated to determine the reasons given as to why such a provision is either good or bad. For most Muslim respondents, their endorsement of such provision is based on their belief that, as a prelude to the grant of autonomy, it will "augur well for the achievement of peace", "stability", and "unity" in the region. Furthermore, they add it will lead to the "realization of Muslim needs", with emphasis on the "true practice of Islamic life." On the other hand, Christian and tribal respondents who considered the constitutional provision as a bad idea viewed the latter as pointing to "Christian discrimination" and an added factor towards the "deterioration of peace and order conditions" in Mindanao. Some Christian and tribal respondents consider that the constitutional provision on autonomy are unclear and might result to "irrelevant autonomy."

The foregoing contrasting sentiments on the constitutional provision on autonomy are repeated by respondents with a high degree of definitiveness on their opinions about the proposal for the "establishment of a Muslim Autonomous Region (MAR)" as well as in their reactions if "their respective areas be included in the MAR." This general observation is discerned from the data shown in Table 2 (Items B and C) up to Table 5. Evidently, majority of Christians (77.6%) disagree on the setting up of a MAR, while tribals are nearly split on the issue. On the other hand, 82 percent of Muslim respondents subscribed to the establishment of a MAR. Obviously, Muslims favor the inclusion of their areas within the MAR, while Christians (94.0%) and tribals (77.3%) hold the opposite view.

The reasons given by respondents on why they either agree or disagree with both proposals are basically similar. On the apparent dissenting side, Christians and, to some extent, tribals oppose the two proposals because they believe that these will only "cause more trouble" and that "Christians will be dominated and discriminated by Muslims." As shown in Table 4, the data indicate that nearly half of Christians (43.88%) do not approved of being within MAR because they claim themselves to be the majority and there are "few Muslims" in their respective communities. Muslims, on the other hand, expressed the view that a MAR will bring "peace and stability", and their "demands will be granted" or "life aspirations be realized." And finally, on the issue of a MAR, the data appearing in Table 5 show that nearly all Christian and tribal respondents disapprove of the idea of a MAR constituting all of Mindanao and Sulu. The Muslims are not unanimous on this issue.

Additional perceptions about autonomy and the setting up of a MAR were also solicited from respondents. They were asked to identify both "good" and "bad" effects of a MAR should it be established. The data findings on this subject, as presented in Table 6, indicate that slightly over 50 percent of Christian and tribal respondents perceived no good effects

of a MAR. Only 20 percent of tribals and barely 15 percent of Christians share with just over one-fourth of Muslim respondents the impression that the "attainment of peace" is one of the good effects of a MAR. Surprisingly, Muslims appear not to have a high regard on "Muslims benefiting" or Islam being strengthened", much less the achievement of "Muslim unity" as probable good effects of a MAR.

On the other hand, probable bad effects of a MAR are shared views by more than half of all respondent groups. Almost half of the Muslim respondents tend to agree with the same feelings of at least 80 percent of Christians and tribals that should a MAR be implemented, it is most likely that "more trouble will ensue between Muslims and Christians", "corruption will prevail", and "Christians will suffer", among others.

Geographical Parameters of a MAR

In so far as the grant of autonomy remains a constitutional mandate, it advocates and the national government will have to exert mutually beneficial efforts to get autonomy implemented. This task seemed gigantic enough, as several issues touching on personal pride to the fate of the nation need to be addressed. But central to this task is to determine the geographical limits or territorial boundary of the proposed MAR as well as its powers-to-be, since it is the declared uncompromising view of the government that the issue of granting autonomy must always be viewed within the scope of national sovereignty and integrity.

In addressing the foregoing issues, respondents were asked to give their opinions on the possible territorial coverage of the proposed MAR. As shown in Table 7, a listing of all provinces and some cities of Mindanao and Sulu were presented to respondents (with the aid of a map) with the primary purpose of getting their views as to which of these places ought to be included in or excluded from the proposed MAR. The results of this inquiry also appear in Table 7 and the data indicate a replication of earlier observations about contrasting perceptions of respondent groups over the whole autonomy proposal. Most, if not all, of Muslim respondents (seemingly guided by a historical argument that Mindanao was and should always be theirs) are of the opinion that the entire Mindanao-Sulu region should constitute the MAR. On the other hand, and very clearly, the data also show that Christians and tribals, to some extent, appeared somewhat modest to openly declare that a MAR should not be set-up anywhere in Mindanao and Sulu. Only about half of both Christian and tribals are inclined to consider predominantly-Muslim provinces, but not necessarily cities therein, to be included in the proposed MAR. These are the provinces of Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-tawi. With some apparent hesitance, the tribals together with the Christians seemed not inclined to include the province of Lanao del Sur and its capital city of Marawi, a Maranao-Muslim dominated area, to be a part of the MAR.

Power and Authority of the MAR

If and when a MAR is finally established, it is expected to be vested by the national government with some powers. These powers, however, are expected not to be above, nor even at par, much less in contradiction to the powers of the national government. The range of power and level of authority envisioned for the proposed MAR are stipulated, although in broad terms, in the constitutional provision on autonomy (Section 20, Article X Philippine Constitution). It is not certain, however, whether the future beneficiaries of autonomy will concur with these powers. By determining their perceptions of these powers-to-be of the MAR, additional insights may be derived on the respondents' overall disposition towards the autonomy issue. Furthermore, findings on this particular topic may likely lead respondents to possibly suggest other powers that the national government might not have earlier considered for the proposed MAR, or is constrained to give even if such powers will not necessarily undermine the premises for autonomy or that of the nation's integrity.

The above inquiry was addressed by asking respondents to give their opinions on fourteen (14) statements that broadly reflect the possible set of powers for the MAR. These powers ranged from those ideally "autonomous" in essence such as "to appoint regional directors," "enforcing the observance of Muslim holidays," "regulating the use of the region's natural resources," among others, to powers that seem to effect a semblance of independence such as to "make its own flag and seal," "to determine foreign policy," and "to prepare for independence." The results of this inquiry appear on Table 8 showing the percentage distribution of "agreeing" responses on the fourteen statements, by respondent groups.

Again, true to preceding observations on respondent group opinions about autonomy, Muslims show strong endorsement of an autonomous region than either the Christians or the tribals. Of the fourteen statements, at least a low of 50 percent to a high of 90 percent among Muslims agree with twelve of these powers to be exercised by the M.A.R. On the other hand, a great majority of Christians and tribals do not approve of these powers which, in the general, appear inimical to their own group interests. This observed over all disagreement over these proposed powers could not be construed for anything less than a strong testimony among Christians and tribal peoples for their opposition to the establishment of a Muslim autonomous region.

For purposes of discussion, it is rather interesting to note that majority of Muslims do not agree with two proposed powers of the MAR. They appear not to favor the idea "that only Muslims can hold high positions in the government" and that the MAR "will forbid further Christian settlements in the area." In a forthcoming separate data analysis on the same subject, Muslim respondents explained their disagreements on the latter two powers to be exercised by the MAR. On the former power, Muslims were of the opinion that there are others (obviously referring to some Christians and tribals) who are as qualified as the Muslims to occupy top government positions in the MAR. Owing probably to their level of education and awareness, which appear a little bit above than those of the regular Muslim respondents to the study, Muslim opinion leaders also consider that the MAR should not prevent further Christian settling in the area because they, just like themselves, have the "right to free abode." The foregoing impressions on these two powers tend to suggest that not all Muslims are that overly irreverent or inconsiderate on the civil liberties of other peoples as what some Christians, and even tribals, would seemingly have it believed.

The idea of land ownership based on ancestral rights is probably one of the most sensitive issues to be resolved within the framework of establishing a MAR. As a possible power-to-be of the MAR, about half of Muslims tend to agree with the majority Christians and tribals that the MAR should not employ "ancestral rights as the basis of land ownership." Notwithstanding the long and widely-held claim by Muslims that Mindanao is theirs by the twin reasons of history and ancestry, but which most Christians and tribals highly dispute, some Muslims are apparently re-considering their position on the issue. When further asked why they feel this way, they believed that land titles are the most convincing proofs of land ownership, besides legal and fair. Bringing this issue into further focus with the MAR, Muslims are likely to believe that land ownership based on ancestral rights is not likely to resolve, but instead further escalate land ownership disputes.

On the issue of the M.A.R. and its creation as a "prelude to independence," the data in Table 8 clearly indicate a general disagreement with such a possibility by majority of Christians and tribals. As in the case of land ownership, half of the Muslims share the same sentiment that the MAR cannot be allowed to have independence since it is very much a part of the Philippines.

Perceived Impact of M.A.R.

The impression that respondents to this study, as separate groups, show mixed and contrasting perceptions about the grant of autonomy and the setting up of a MAR seemed to pervade in this report. In general, Muslims support the idea and grant of autonomy, while Christians and tribals do otherwise. Notwithstanding this general observation, existing trends of events point to the direction of gradually pursuing the grant of autonomy as constitutionally mandated. The creation of the Regional Consultative Commission by Congress and the near appointment of its members should notably reinforce this view. In this regard, some relevant questions may be asked if and when autonomy is finally granted. One will be whether or not a significant shift will occur on the observed perceptions of respondents on autonomy as a proposal. The second is if Christian and tribal respondents will change or soften their vaunted opposition to the autonomy issue, or will it remain as currently observed? And, thirdly, will Muslims have a change of heart and probably opt for something else that could ably respond to their needs in the most efficacious manner possible, apart from or in addition to autonomy arrangement? These questions may appear rather rhetorical, but answers elicited on them may provide conclusive predictions about the future of autonomy and the proposed M.A.R.

To address the foregoing subject of inquiry, a series of eleven (11) statements dealing with possible outcomes of a MAR, if and when established, were asked of respondents as to whether or not each outcome will occur. The data findings on this topic are shown in Table 9.

Generally speaking, the data indicate that Muslims are enthusiastic about a MAR getting implemented, while Christians and tribals view it the other way. On almost all "positive outcomes" statements, whose benefits will not only accrue to them but others as well, more than half of Muslim respondents perceived of their likely occurrence. Furthermore, at least 90 percent of Muslim respondents hold the view that a MAR could "attract foreign aid" (particularly from Arab-Islamic nations), "help in their economic development," "bring peace," and "stop Muslim rebels from fighting the government." This general sentiment, however, is hardly shared by Christian and tribal respondents. On the contrary as well, majority of them perceived that a MAR will not augur well for the Christians as they "will be discriminated" or "should be forced to move away," considering the latter's agreement with both Muslims and Tribals that they may have to be forcibly "governed by Islamic laws."

It is understandable for Christians and tribals to agree and be sympathetic to Muslims about the idea of a MAR "getting more foreign aid" and, therefore, "hasten Muslim economic development." However, they appear hardly convinced to go along with Muslim expectations that a MAR will likely "bring peace and stability," "make rebels lay down their arms," "improved economic investments," and even "upgrade educational standards." And to make the MAR scenario more dim, they can only expect "more corruption" instead of decreasing it. Without necessary referring to the foregoing ambivalence of opinions about the MAR as a likely basis, but on other issues that may probably share commonalities with Muslims, Christians and tribals tend to be apprehensive as the Muslims that a MAR may eventually "lead to independence" and a possible territorial dismemberment of the Philippines.

When further asked about other possible consequences of a MAR, once established, the sensitive issue of inter-group relations based on ethno-religious orientations and some other group distinguishing features becomes prominently visible. As shown by the data presented in Table 10, Christians and tribals are likely to see "increased Muslim-Christian confrontations," which Muslims would find hard to subscribe.

Finally, respondents were asked of their respective future dispositions as to what they will do if their own areas of current and or permanent residence are either included or excluded from a prospective MAR. The results of this inquiry appear in Table 11. For those respondents whose areas will be included in the MAR, the data indicate that Muslims "will stay" and support the autonomous region," while Christians and tribals appear somewhat undecided on what they will do. About half of each group (Christians and tribals) feel that they "should stay," while the other half opted to "move away" or "go home." For those who responded otherwise to both choices of either staying or moving away, only 9.2 percent of Christians considered "studying the situation" first before making a final decision. Slightly over 10 percent of the tribals thought of "joining the rebels" obviously to fight as a sign of protest over the inclusion of their place to the MAR.

The probable actions of respondents if their places are not included in the MAR is as obvious as it is a foregone conclusion. Definitely, as the data suggest, nearly all Christians (92%) and all tribals would have the exuberance to say that they will "stay put" in their areas. As for the Muslims, 83.3 percent indicate that they "will stay" and "do nothing." Of this number, 32.7 percent insist on autonomy by "joining the rebels and fight the government." Less than 10 percent favor "listening first to their leaders's decision" on the issue before making any decision. Altogether though, Muslims are not bent on moving away from their present communities even if excluded from the coverage of the MAR. In summarizing this particular topic of inquiry, a tenable generalization can be made to the effect that Christians, Muslims, and tribals will remain in their current areas of abode, whether or not these be covered by the territorial limits of the proposed MAR. This apparent reality presents itself as probably the most controversial factor within the whole autonomy concern since it succinctly places into proper perspective alleged Christian territorial gains and perceived land losses among Muslims and tribal peoples.

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

The preceding discussion dealt with a presentation and analysis of data findings on the perceptions of autonomy by 220 respondents, as opinion leaders. The analysis was limited to marginal data distribution representing the responses of Christian, Muslim and tribal opinion leaders.

The general findings of the study show contrasting opinions of respondents about autonomy and its proposed implementation in Muslim Mindanao. Muslim opinion leaders highly endorsed the autonomy proposal, while Christians and tribals expressed heavy opposition to it. The same observation was found in the perceptions of respondents on other autonomy-related issues such as the setting-up of a Muslim Autonomous Region (MAR), its territorial coverage, its envisioned powers, and its perceived impact or consequences. Respondents, however, are unanimous in defining autonomy as "self-rule/self-government, but short of independence." When given a geographical reference, autonomy was perceived by respondents to mean for the Muslims and Mindanao.

Based on the foregoing findings, it appears that the road to autonomy is a long and arduous one. Whither autonomy? This concluding question seemingly requires profound thinking and study. Advocates and architects of autonomy should find it a deep challenge in their individual and group commitments to assist in finally putting the so-called Mindanao Problem to its definite resolution and ultimate rest. With such commitment, it can only be further wished that Mindanao should now be delivered from its fabled character as the "land of promise and opportunity" to a "land of progress, development, and peace."

Table 1 - Percentage Distribution, Perceptions Concerning Autonomy, by Ethno-Religious Group

A. Understanding of Constitutional Provision which "dealt especial with Mindanao."			
	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Autonomy for Muslims/ Mindanao	89.5	85.4	58.4
Independence for Muslims/ Mindanao	7.5	7.3	33.3
No opinion/don't know	3.0	7.3	8.3
Total	100.0 (N=67)	100.0 (N=55)	100.0 (N=12)
B. Understanding of the word "Autonomy"			
	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Self-government/rule (short of independence)	72.41	77.91	35.90
Independence	19.54	11.62	58.8
Peace/Equality	1.15	8.14	-
Unable to define	6.90	2.33	5.9
Total	100.00 (N=87)	100.00 (N=86)	100.00 (N=17)
C. Understanding of "Autonomy for Muslim Mindanao" as provided for the Constitution			
	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Self-rule, but falling short of independence	53.73	71.1	53.8
Complete independence	31.34	6.8	30.8
Peace	1.50	8.5	-
Cannot define	13.43	13.6	15.4
Total	100.00 (N=67)	100.00 (N=59)	100.00 (N=13)

Table 2 - Percentage Distributions, Attitudes Toward Autonomy,
by Ethno-Religious Group

A. "How do you feel about this Constitutional Provision (to give autonomy to Muslim Mindanao)?"

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Very good idea	23.2	61.0	20.0
Good idea	17.4	28.6	33.3
Bad idea	20.3	9.1	26.7
Very bad idea	39.1	1.3	20.0
Total	100.0 (N=69)	100.0 (N=77)	100.0 (N=15)

B. Opinion about Muslim Autonomous Region

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Agree strongly	6.1	61.8	9.1
Agree a little	16.3	20.2	40.9
Disagree a little	9.2	11.2	13.6
Disagree strongly	68.4	6.7	36.4
Total	100.0 (N=98)	100.0 (N=89)	100.0 (N=22)

C. Would you like your municipality to be a part of the proposed MAR?

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Yes	6.0	90.4	22.7
No	94.0	9.6	77.3
Total	100.0 (N=100)	100.0 (N=94)	100.0 (N=22)

D. Do you think it would be a good idea to set up autonomous governments in other areas of the Philippines?

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Yes	12.5	37.2	14.3
No	74.0	31.9	76.2
Not sure	13.5	30.9	9.5
Total	100.0 (N=104)	100.0 (N=94)	100.0 (N=21)

Table 3 - Percentage Distribution, Reasons for Agreeing or Disagreeing with Proposal for MAR, by Ethno-Religious Groups

A. Why do you feel this way? (About Constitutional provision which would "give autonomy to Muslim Mindanao.")

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
1. Approve because:			
MAR will bring peace/ stability	6.0	27.6	28.7
MAR will give special privileges to Muslims ^a	9.0	26.3	14.3
MAR will provide Islamic gov't	3.0	13.2	-
MAR will hasten economic dev't	11.9	7.9	-
Others ^a	1.5	4.1	14.3

^aIncludes self-rule, political rights, and returns of ancestral lands.

^bIncludes "aid in decision making," "good idea if government is sincere," and "if approved by majority."

2. Disapprove because:

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Christians will be dominated	25.4	2.6	14.3
Muslims will discriminate	12.0	-	7.1
Peace and order situation will deteriorate	7.5	-	7.1
Autonomy provisions unclear/irrelevant	8.7	6.5	7.1
autonomy	15.0	11.8	7.1
Others ^c			
Total	100.0 (N=67)	100.0 (N=76)	100.0 (N=14)

^cIncludes "not realistic," "Muslim needs not understood," "leaders lack knowledge," "good for Christians 'only'," and MAR part of RP and irrelevant answers.

Table 3 (Cont'd)

B. Why do you feel this way (about MAR)?

1. Agree because:	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
MAR will bring peace/stability/ Muslim-Christian unity	5.15	19.31	13.64
Self-government/new powers for Muslims	6.19	32.95	18.17
Implementation of Islamic law	-	11.36	4.55
Economic development/ Regional dev't	1.03	3.41	-
Others ^a	5.15	7.95	-

^aIncludes "problems will be solved locally," and "provided it is recognized."

2. Disagree because:

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Christians will be discriminated	18.56	-	18.17
MAR will bring more trouble/ conflict	13.4	1.14	4.55
Do not like Islamic government	7.21	-	4.55
Negative Characteristics of Muslims	1.03	1.14	-
Mindanao will be separated	9.28	-	4.55
Others ^b	33.00	22.74	31.82
Total	100.00 (N=97)	100.00 (N=88)	100.00 (N=22)

^bIncludes "no improvements in Mindanao," "unrealistic," irrelevant, "status quo-" "fake autonomy," and only in Muslim' areas."

Table 4 - Percentage Distribution, Why Respondent Agree/Disagree on the Inclusion of His Area with MAR

Agree (because):	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
MAR will bring peace/ development	2.04	33.71	15.0
Muslim majority/MAR Muslim area	-	37.08	-
Good to try	1.02	1.12	-
No choice	-	3.37	5.0
Conditional responses	1.02	5.62	-
Disagree (because)	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
More trouble will occur	11.22	3.37	5.0
Muslims will control/ dominate MAR	10.20	1.12	25.0
Muslim laws/ways different/ from Christians	18.37	1.12	30.0
Few Muslims in my place	43.88	-	10.0
My place not part of 13 provinces (T.A.)	4.08	1.12	-
Separation of Mindanao	1.02	-	5.0
Don't like MAR	4.08	1.12	-
Irrelevant answers	3.07	11.25	5.0
Total	100.00 (N=98)	100.00 (N=89)	100.00 (N=20)

Table 5 - Percentage Distribution, Should MAR Include All Mindanao-Sulu

	Yes	No	
Christians	2.0	98.0	(N=101)
Muslims	52.7	47.3	(N=93)
Tribal	5.0	95.0	(N=19)

Table 6 - Percentage Distribution, Perceived Good and Bad Effects of MAR, by Ethno-Linguistic Group

A. Good Effects (First Good Effect Mentioned)			
	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
MAR will bring peace	15.56	32.72	20.00
Muslims will benefit	5.56	11.63	6.67
Islam will be strengthened	1.11	5.81	-
Will bring economic development	4.44	20.93	-
Muslims will unite	1.11	-	-
Conditional approval ^a	1.11	2.33	6.67
Other "good things" ^b	5.56	15.12	6.66
Respondents can perceive no good effects of MAR ^c	65.55	10.46	60.00
Total	100.00 (N=90)	100.00 (N=86)	100.00 (N=15)

^aRespondents agree with MAR if "for Muslim areas only," and "if well-managed."

^bIncludes "social problems minimized" and "change of government."

^cIncludes "negative views on Muslims and MAR, and irrelevant responses."

B. Bad Effects (First Bad Things Mentioned)			
	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
MAR will bring more trouble between Muslims and Christians ^a	67.68	29.33	76.19
Christians will be discriminated	5.05	2.67	4.76
Corruption in the MAR	3.03	13.33	-
Other bad effects ^b	13.13	4.00	14.29
Respondent can perceive no bad effects of MAR	7.07	36.00	-
Conditional responses ^c	4.04	14.67	4.76
Total	100.00 (N=95)	100.00 (N=75)	100.00 (N=21)

^aIncludes "political rivalry," "civil war," "disunity," "cultural conflict."

^bOther "bad effects" includes "problem of employment," "Muslim proportion will increase," "problem in Christian adjustment," "Mindanao will be divided," "land confiscation," travel difficulty, "(MAR) financially incapable," and "oppressions of tribals."

^cIncludes irrelevant answers.

Table 7 - Opinions about Incorporating Various Locations of Mindanao-Sulu into the Proposed MAR, Percentage Agreeing, by Ethno-Linguistic Group

	Christian (N=103)	Muslim (N=97)	Tribal (N=22)
A. Provinces			
Sulu	64.1	95.7	63.6
Tawi-Tawi	65.0	94.6	63.6
Basilan	54.4	93.5	59.1
Zamboanga del Sur	15.5	89.2	22.7
Zamboanga del Norte	12.6	88.2	19.0
Misamis Occidental	2.9	59.8	4.5
Lanao del Norte	28.2	95.7	54.5
Lanao del Sur	46.6	95.7	59.1
North Cotabato	17.5	92.5	36.4
Davao del Sur	5.8	81.7	9.1
Davao del Norte	2.9	73.1	9.1
Davao Oriental	2.9	69.9	9.1
Misamis Oriental	1.9	54.8	4.5
Bukidnon	2.9	61.3	13.6
Agusan del Norte	1.0	54.8	4.5
Agusan del Sur	1.0	55.9	4.5
Surigao del Norte	1.0	54.8	4.5
Surigao del Sur	1.0	54.8	4.5
Comiguin	1.9	51.1	9.1
Sultan Kudarat	32.0	93.5	40.9
South Cotabato	11.7	90.3	31.8
Maguindanao	40.8	93.5	54.5
B. Cities			
Zamboanga City	7.8	93.5	22.7
Cotabato City	11.7	93.5	36.4
Gen. Santos City	6.8	90.3	18.2
Marawi City	48.5	95.7	61.9
Davao City	1.9	86.0	9.5
Iligan City	3.9	90.9	14.3

Table 8 - Opinions About the Various Powers of MAR (Percent Agreeing Each Power Should Be Delegated), by Ethno-Religious Group

Power	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Make its own seal and flag	20.2	72.8	13.6
Enforce Muslim holidays (Observance)	44.2	90.3	5.8
Set up "Shariah" courts	25.2	92.4	22.7
Special textbooks teaching Islam values	18.4	91.4	13.6
Levy taxes	26.5	80.2	22.7
Put up regional security force	9.7	71.4	9.1
Arabic as medium of instruction	17.5	59.1	9.1
Muslims only can hold high positions	7.8	37.0	9.1
Forbid further Christian settlements	17.5	34.8	36.4
Land ownership by ancestral rights	5.8	54.3	13.6
Prepare for independence	7.7	50.0	9.1
Regulate use of natural resources	19.2	90.2	22.7
Appoint regional directors	12.5	71.0	31.8
Determine foreign policies	11.5	66.7	79.5

Table 9 - Perceived Impact of the MAR (Percent Agreeing that Each of Various Possible Outcome Will Occur), by Ethno-Religious Group

Outcome	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
1. MAR will bring peace	21.2	93.6	33.3
2. MAR will suffer corruption	89.9	16.3	85.7
3. MAR will help Muslim develop economically	86.3	94.5	85.7
4. MAR will discriminate Christians	88.0	29.0	85.7
5. Muslim rebels will stop fighting	29.0	92.3	38.1
6. Education standards will decline	76.3	25.8	81.0
7. MAR will eventually become independent	65.6	56.3	76.1
8. There will be fewer investments	81.2	24.5	76.2
9. There will be more foreign aid	92.8	96.8	76.2
10. Christians will move away from MAR	76.3	44.6	71.4
11. Christians will be governed by Islamic laws	65.1	66.0	61.9

Table 10 - Percent Distribution, Perceived Additional Consequences of Establishing MAR, by Ethno-Religious Group

Consequence	Christian (N=66)	Muslim (N=42)	Tribal (N=13)
Increased Muslim-Christian conflict	75.8	9.5	69.2
Increased conflict between Muslim groups	1.5	4.8	7.7
Christians will suffer	7.7	-	-
Muslims will try to take the adjoining areas/handle our affairs	3.0	2.4	7.7
Other bad effects ^a	3.0	2.4	7.7
Peace/unity/good government	4.5	31.0	-
Economic development for MAR	-	21.4	--
Other effects ^b	1.5	4.8	-
Irrelevant answers	3.0	23.7	7.7

^aIncludes "less income," "Philippine government will lose control over MAR."

^bOther effects include "immigration of people to MAR," MAR will have its own set of constitution.

Table 11 - Percentage Distribution, Responses If Place Be or Not Be Part of MAR

A. If Place Included in MAR:

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Will stay	26.5	18.5	27.8
Will support MAR	16.3	69.6	11.1
Move away	22.4	1.1	44.4
Go home	17.3	1.1	-
Study situation	9.2	3.3	-
Join rebels	6.1	-	11.1
Irrelevant responses	2.2	6.6	5.6
Total	100.0 (N=98)	100.0 (N=92)	100.0 (N=18)

B. If Place Not Included in MAR

	Christian	Muslim	Tribal
Move away	-	1.1	-
Will join rebels/fight government	-	15.8	-
Demand for autonomy	2.0	16.9	-
Wait leaders's decision	-	9.0	-
Will stay	92.0	30.3	100.0
Do nothing	1.0	21.3	-
Irrelevant answers	5.0	5.6	-
Total	100.0 (N=100)	100.0 (N=89)	100.0 (N=19)

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AUTONOMY FOR MUSLIM MINDANAO: FINDINGS FROM
A SURVEY STUDY

Dr. Marilou Palabrica-Costello

Introduction and Methodology

The 1987 Philippine Constitution provides, not only that "there shall be created an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao" but also that this process shall be undertaken in an orderly and democratic fashion. Whatever law will be enacted by Congress to this effect should be taken "with the assistance and participation of the regional consultative commission" and ought to be implemented only in those "provinces, cities, and geographic areas" which approve of the proposed autonomous region in a region-wide plebiscite.

It was in this spirit of democratic consultation that the Mindanao Autonomy Study was originally conceived. Members of the study team, which included Mrs. Magdalena C. Cabaraban, Dean Ofelia Durante, Dr. Heidi K. Gloria, Dr. Grace Rebollos, Dr. Datumanong A. Sarangani, and myself felt that it was important that the people of Mindanao--Christians, Muslims, and Tribals alike--be heard on this vital national issue which holds so much importance for their future and the future of their children.

The study surveyed opinions on the autonomy issue from a randomly drawn sample of over 2,000 residents of Mindanao-Sulu. Findings from that portion of this sample which consisted of local-level spokesmen (or "opinion leaders") will be summarized in Dr. Sarangani's paper, whereas my task this afternoon will be to report on the perceptions held by the "man (or woman) in the street."

The survey's sampling design called for interview with 891 Christians, 891 Muslims, and 198 tribal members, for a grand total of 1,980 respondents.¹ This means that Muslims and tribals were deliberately oversampled, to ensure that a sufficient number of respondents from these groups would be interviewed so as to allow for detailed statistical analysis. (According to the 1980 Philippine Census, approximately 77 percent of the population of Mindanao-Sulu is Christian, along with 17 percent Muslims and 6 percent tribal peoples).²

In selecting the study's respondents, a two-stage design was utilized. In the first stage each municipality and city in Mindanao was placed in one of three strata: majority Christian, majority Muslim, or majority Tribal. Statistics on ethnicity from the 1980 Census were used in assigning municipalities to one of these strata. A list of all barangays in each stratum was then compiled and an equal number of majority Christian and majority Muslim barangays were selected into the sample.

¹ Actual sample sizes produced by the study were 885 Christians, 893 Muslims and 202 Tribals.

² Cf. Republic of the Philippines, National Census and Statistics Office, 1983, Table 7.

In all, 50 Muslim, 49 Christian and 11 tribal barangays were selected into the sample. In a few cases replacements were made for selected barangays when it was decided by the regional study team that the barangay selected originally was either extremely inaccessible or potentially unsafe.

Project supervisors visited the barangay captain in each chosen barangay, requesting from him a copy of the official list of all households under his jurisdiction. The barangay captain was also asked to identify whether each household on this list was Muslim, Christian or tribal. Copies of these lists were then made, brought back to regional headquarters, and pooled to form separate master lists of Muslim, Christian, and tribal respondents. The proper number of respondents for each region, along with a number of replacements, were then chosen randomly from these lists.³

Once a household had been drawn into the study's sample, it was visited by a member of the survey team who was to then select one adult member (age 18 and over) for interview. This selection process was based upon an equal probability of selection for four respondent categories: head of the household, spouse, oldest male in the household (other than the head) and oldest female (other than the spouse). Rules were provided for the selection of replacements in cases where no person was available in the designated category. This approach helped to ensure that both males and females and married and unmarried persons would be interviewed.

Interviews were conducted during May and June, 1987. Despite the potentially controversial nature of the study, no major problems were encountered in the field.

The purpose of this paper is to present simple descriptive statistics (percentage distributions) from the study, as broken down by the three major ethno-religious grouping--i.e. Christians, Muslims and tribals. Because no additional statistical weights have been given in this case to the Christian respondents (to compensate for the oversampling of Muslims and Tribals) it is important to emphasize that the results for these three groupings should not be simply added together uncritically to arrive at some estimate of the opinions about autonomy which are held in Mindanao-Sulu as a whole. The weighting problem, however, does not affect our estimates of opinions toward autonomy for each ethno-religious group taken individually.

Study Findings

Social and Economic Characteristics. The larger report upon which this paper has been based (Palabrica-Costello, 1988) gives a detailed description of the differences in socioeconomic characteristics which exist among the study's Christian, Muslim and Tribal subsample. For now I will simply point to two somewhat unexpected findings, the first of which concerns the commonly-held perception that Mindanao's Christian residents are largely in-migrants from the Visayan or Luzon regions. In contrast to this stereotype, however, the present study found that more than two-thirds (69.7 percent) of its Christian respondents were born in Mindanao-Sulu. Indeed, on one measure of migrant status Muslim respondents were found to be slightly more mobile than Christians.⁴

³For further details on the sampling procedure, cf. Palabrica-Costello, 1988, pp. 4-6

⁴Among Christian respondents, 18.8 percent had lived in their present municipality for less than 10 years. Comparative estimate for Muslims and tribals were, respectively, 20.4 percent and 10.5 percent.

Another noteworthy finding was obtained with regard to socioeconomic status. As we expected, Christian respondents were somewhat better educated than Muslims and tribals. The difference between Muslims and Christians in this regard, however, was not large (e.g. 35.2 percent of the Muslim respondents had earned a high school degree, as compared to 45.5 percent of the Christians). More significantly, perhaps, is the finding that the levels of living experienced by Christians and Muslims are nearly identical, with neither group being particularly well off. The major contrast in this dimension is with the tribals, where poverty levels are truly acute and living standards clearly lower than those found among either Christian or Muslims.⁵ This finding would seem to give little support to the simplistic assertion that Muslim-Christian hostilities in Mindanao are due solely to economic differences between the two groups.

Opinions and Awareness about Life in Mindanao. Before analyzing our respondents' views on the autonomy question, it may be of interest to see how they rate the Mindanao situation as a whole. Our data appear to show that Muslims are more dissatisfied in this regard than are either Christians or Tribals. Only 45.2 percent of the study's Islamic respondents said that they were satisfied "with life in Mindanao," as compared to 80.7 percent of the Christians and 83.4 percent of the tribals.

This is not to say that Christians and tribals view life in Mindanao as completely trouble-free. They, like their brother and sister Muslims, had no trouble citing one or more problems which they feel are now confronting Mindanao-Sulu. As shown in Table 1, members of all three groups tend to be most concerned about political and economic problems. Leading the list of issues in this regard are "peace and order problems," which are mentioned by over half of Christians and tribals and about a third of the Muslims. A large proportion (23.5 percent) of Muslims also cite an additional political problem, namely, their underrepresentation in the government or their belief that a real system of autonomy has not yet been implemented in the region.

About a third of the respondents mentioned some type of economic problem as being the most important factor now facing Mindanao. These issues include complaints about their daily struggle with poverty and the high cost of living as well as references to the underdeveloped nature of the region's economy. Clearly, the type of government that is eventually implemented in the region must be one which is well equipped to face the dual issues of political instability and economic underdevelopment.

Respondents were also asked to nominate the course of action which they felt would be the best solution to their first-ranked problem. It is interesting to note that oft-discussed solutions as land reform, increased support for the military, and more frequent appointments of Muslims to government positions (within a nonautonomous framework) are mentioned quite infrequently by our respondents. Instead, the most frequent response to this question--as made by Christians, Muslims and tribals alike--is a call for increased dialogue between conflicting groups. In that sense we can say that today's conference is very much in keeping with the wishes of the people of Mindanao-Sulu. Another approach given considerable support is the call for various forms of government-sponsored economic assistance programs. Indeed, some other

⁵In terms of income, 52 percent of the Christians said that they were earning 1,000 or more pesos per month, as compared to 45 percent of the Muslims and 23 percent of the tribals. On a twelve-item scale of consumer goods ownership, however, Muslim respondents were found to own 2.9 items, as compared to 2.8 for Christians and only 1.2 tribals. Muslims were also found to be proportionately overrepresented in white collar occupations when compared to Christians.

data from the study indicate that there is a relatively strong feeling among the people of Mindanao that their region has been neglected in that regard for too long now by the national government.⁶

As we shall soon see, Christians and Muslims hold strongly divergent opinions about the autonomy issue. The fact that these two groups agree on the two main solutions to Mindanao's problems (at least as defined in a very general sense) is therefore a source of some encouragement.

In general, Christians were found to be more politically knowledgeable than either Muslims or tribals.⁷ This is perhaps due to their higher levels of educational attainment and greater exposure to the mass media. An important exception to this general pattern, however, was noted for the case of political leaders, groups or issues which relate directly to the status of Mindanao's Muslim groups. In all such cases the Muslim respondents were far more knowledgeable than either Christians or tribals. Particularly salient in this regard are the lower levels of awareness shown by Christians and tribals regarding the proposal to grant autonomy to Muslim Mindanao. Overall, 39 percent of the Christians and 58 percent of the tribals had never been informed about this proposal. Even larger percentages (over three quarters) of the members of these two groups could not define what the phrase "autonomy for Muslim Mindanao" meant, while another 10 percent mistakenly assumed that this concept to mean that Philippine Muslim were to be granted political independence.

Muslim respondents were considerably more well-informed on these issues although even here a considerable segment were confused about or ignorant of the autonomy proposal. It is therefore evident that additional information campaigns about the topic are needed.

Attitudes Toward Autonomy and the Muslim Autonomous Region. Table 2 provides data on the crucial question of attitudes toward the proposed Muslim Autonomous Region (hereafter referred to as the "M.A.R."). What is clear from these figures is that opinions on this issue are very sharply divided between Muslims and Christians and likely to remain so for quite some time.

Three questions were asked about the M.A.R., each one of which made the whole issue progressively more salient to the respondent. Parallel to this growing immediacy was a pattern of increasing polarization between Muslims and Christians.

The first question asked the respondent to state his or her feelings about the Constitutional provision for Muslim autonomy. As we have seen, not all respondents really understood precisely what this meant, but a fairly clear pattern of Christian dislike for and Muslim support of the proposal does emerge in this case (see panel "A" of Table 2).

⁶Clear majorities (from 55 to 80 percent) of our respondents agreed to these three statements: "The provinces of Mindanao have been neglected in terms of development projects like roads and irrigation projects;" "The people in Manila don't really understand our problems here in Mindanao and Sulu;" and "People in Mindanao-Sulu should have more benefits from revenues from industries located in Mindanao." In general, Muslims were more likely to feel this way than Christians, but even among the latter group there was widespread support for these perceptions.

⁷For example, more Christians had heard of such political military leaders as Fidel Ramos, Nene Pimentel and Emmanuel Pelaez, as well as about such groups as the CHDF, the NPA, and the Mindanao Leader's Forum.

The second question was prefaced with a brief explanation of the M.A.R. proposal.⁸ Even though this explanation was posed in relatively favorable terms,⁸ it is interesting to see that Christian antipathy for the proposal actually increased in this instance (see panel Table 2). At the same time, Muslim agreement with the autonomy proposal appears to have become somewhat stronger, once it was properly explained. As a result, the cleavage between the two groups has now become more acute.

In the third question respondents were asked if they would like their own municipality to be incorporated into proposed M.A.R. This, of course, raises the personal relevance of the issue considerably, insofar as the person being interviewed is no longer able to define the question as one which only affects other residents of Mindanao and not himself/herself. As a result, we get yet another shifting of opinion so that there is now a virtually perfect relationship between ethno-religious grouping and attitudes toward the M.A.R.⁹ In all, over 98 percent of our Christian respondents said that they did not want to live within the M.A.R., whereas 96 percent of the Muslims said that they did want to enjoy that privilege.

At least three important implications of these findings may now be noted. First, Filipino Muslims do support the M.A.R. proposal and would very much like to see it implemented. Secondly, Christians hold exactly the opposite opinion. Third, while information campaigns to explain the proposal are sorely needed in Mindanao-Sulu (see above) it should be understood clearly that such efforts will not, in and of themselves, be able to build a region-wide consensus on the issue. Indeed, Christian resistance to the proposal might ever increase in direct proportion to efforts to publicize it throughout the island.

Limitations of time and space do not allow me to discuss in detail the specific reasons why Muslims agree with and Christians reject the M.A.R. proposal. Briefly, though, Muslims tend to see in this proposal an opportunity to solve the two major problems (intergroup conflict and economic underdevelopment) mentioned earlier. Christians, on the other hand, tend to feel that Mindanao's peace and order problems would actually intensify once the M.A.R. was implemented or that they would be discriminated against under the new government.

Table 3 presents data on two hypothetical situations; namely, the interviewers' personal response in cases where (a) their municipality of residence became part of the M.A.R. and (b) their municipality did not do so. At least two negative reactions might be made in such cases: an increase in armed conflict between Muslims and Christians or an increase in refugee-like movements into or out of the M.A.R. It appears that a very large number (30 to 40 percent) of our Christian respondents would exercise the second of these two options if their home community were to become part of the M.A.R. Whether the Visayan-Northeastern Mindanao settings (which would undoubtedly receive most such refugees) are now prepared to cope with such a massive outmovement--which could involve

⁸The explanation read as follows:

"Many Filipinos are concerned about the conflicts between Muslims and Christians here in Mindanao. The New Constitution has tried to solve this problem by saying that there should be a 'Muslim Autonomous Region' in some places of Mindanao and Sulu. These areas would still be part of the Republic of the Philippines, but the Muslim people there would be allowed to have their own government for local matters."

(This explanation, as was the case for all questions, was presented to the respondent in his own dialect and not in English.)

⁹After combining all Christian and tribal respondents into a single category, the Yule's Q coefficient is an extremely high 998.

more than a million persons--is a question which must therefore be posed to those who are advocating this type of political change.

It is also disturbing to note that a fairly substantial minority of the Christians (7.4 percent of all respondents, or about 15 percent of all male Christians if we assume that no females give this response) say that they would join an armed resistance movement to the M.A.R. if it were to be implemented in their home community. This finding provides support for the prediction of increased violence as one possible consequence of the M.A.R.

This need not mean, however, that complete safety lies in a "do-nothing" stance on the autonomy question. For, while relatively few Muslims say that they would move away from their present residence if it were not to be incorporated into the M.A.R., a substantial minority of 17 percent say that they would "become a rebel" in the event of such an outcome. This would seem to imply that the proposal should definitely be implemented in the heavily Muslim areas and just definitely avoided in the overwhelmingly Christian provinces. It is in the ethnically mixed areas such as Zamboanga, Cotabato and Lanao del Norte that our real problem would appear to lie.

Implementing the M.A.R.: Delegation of Powers and Boundary Setting.
We have seen that Muslims and Christians hold diametrically opposed opinions about the proposal to grant autonomy to Muslim Mindanao. This, however, is a reaction to the M.A.R. in general, without resort to any of the specific decisions that would be involved in setting it up. It might be possible that agreement exists between the two groups on at least a few such questions, such as could represent a first step towards an acceptable compromise. For example, would there be some powers which Christians would be willing to grant to the M.A.R., or some which the Muslims would be willing to forego?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question appears to be "no." As shown in Table 4, very heavy majorities of our Christian respondents voice a negative reaction to the granting of each one of thirteen different powers to the proposed autonomous region. For example, more than 4 out of 5 Christians do not want the M.A.R. to enforce the public observance of Muslim holidays, while 90 percent would not want it to have its own flag and seal. It is therefore not surprising to see that even stronger opposition is voiced on the part of Christians to such controversial issues as ancestral land rights, the use of Arabic in the public schools, or the setting up of a regional security force.

For their part, clear majorities of the Muslim respondents do desire the M.A.R. to have all of these powers and more. Particularly popular among members of this group are the region's own flag and seal, public observance of Muslim holidays, the Shariah court system, special textbooks in the public schools, taxation, and regulation of natural resources.

A similar pattern prevails for the matter of just where the M.A.R. should be located. Approximately two out of every three Muslims feel that the M.A.R. should comprise all of Mindanao-Sulu, even including such heavily Christian locales as Surigao, Agusan and Comiguin (see Table 5). Conversely, the typical Christian respondent is willing only to allow the M.A.R. to be located in three small provinces: Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan, with another 40 to 50 percent expressing a willingness to include Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur in this category. After that, the percentage of Christians willing to cede other territories to the M.A.R. drops off sharply. Among the provinces covered originally by the Tripoli Agreement, the strongest resistance is shown (on the part of Christians) to the inclusion of the two Zamboangas, South Cotabato and, in particular, Davao Sur.

Conclusion

A number of implications would appear to stem from the survey data discussed above. As a first recommendation, there is an apparent need for an accelerated information campaign, especially among Mindanao's Christian majority, concerning the meaning of autonomy and of the proposed Muslim Autonomous Region. As things now stand, most of Mindanao's inhabitants are very poorly informed about these concepts. It should not be anticipated, however, that the effects of such a campaign will necessarily be to build a uniform level of support for the proposal among Muslims and Christians alike. If anything, the polarization between these two groups on the issue may even increase as a result of such a campaign.

It is also important to emphasize that both Muslims and Christians have genuine desire that peace and political stability will be established in the region. They want increased dialogue and understanding, not increased militarization. Clearly, though, these processes will have to be accompanied by a willingness on the part of the Christian majority to accept at least some new ideas about political processes in heavily Muslim areas. Muslim Filipinos do want autonomy and they do want this to exhibit some clearly Islamic traits, such as publicly observed Islamic holidays, ancestral land rights, changes in public education, and the Shariah court system.

On the other hand, the strongly negative reaction to the M.A.R. proposal which has been manifested by the Christian residents of Mindanao-Sulu should also not be ignored. Imposition of a "Muslim" Autonomous Region upon such areas as Zamboanga or the Cotabato provinces will undoubtedly lead to a large-scale out-migration of Christians from these areas, along with the potential formation of armed Christian resistance groups designed expressly to fight against the M.A.R.

These considerations suggest that three types of governing bodies might be formed within Mindanao, based largely upon the current geographic distribution of Christian and Muslim groups. The first of these would be a truly Islamic autonomous region, set up in areas with large Muslim majorities. The second would comprise those provinces (e.g. the two Surigaos or the two Agusan) which are overwhelmingly Christian in composition. Relations between these provinces and the national government could remain unchanged or could be superseded by the formation of some type of autonomous governing body which is not based specifically upon ethno-religious consideration.

A third area could comprise those provinces in which a majority of residents are Christian, but in which there are substantial Muslim minority populations. While it would be difficult if not impossible to get the Christians from those areas to agree to such Islamic institutions as the Shariah court system, special provisions could be taken in these areas to protect the rights and cultural traits of Muslim living therein and to ensure that Muslims are represented in all major regional policy-making bodies.

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GOVERNMENT DECENTRALIZATION FOR COUNTRYWIDE DEVELOPMENT*
(Privilege Speech, Sen. Vicente T. Paterno, 11 March 1988)

As we marked on February 25th the second anniversary of the EDSA revolution, it was universally noted that the major elements of the framework of a democratic government are now installed - a new Constitution, two functioning houses of the legislature, elected officials of local governments in place. At the same time, we admit much has yet to be done to build the effective, responsive democratic government envisioned in the Constitution.

It is time for the Senate to address how to improve the decision making and implementing structure of our government so that it may be more responsive to the people's needs. To redesign it well enough to solve effectively the problems of underdevelopment and poverty, and to provide the basic services to all Filipinos throughout the nation.

The basic policy of local autonomy, in sec. 25, Article 11 and the mandate for a system of decentralization contained in Article X of the Constitution are based on several factors:

- That our population has become too large, and the nation's problems too complex, for easy administration by a centralized government, no matter how competent.
- That direction from Manila which does not harness initiatives of local governments and populations, can not successfully bring about economic development with equity.
- That a democratic government can not fully serve the people with the present highly centralized structure much of which was crafted by the authoritarian regime for its own ends.

In the first week of January, as this year began, your Committee on Economic Affairs inaugurated a series of hearings on regional economic planning for development, in Zamboanga, Davao, Cebu and Cagayan de Oro. We elicited comments and suggestions on how to make plans, policies and programs of government to hasten economic development in their areas.

At these hearings many complaints were voiced about government's slowness in responding to the needs of Mindanao, about the central government's perceived neglect of the national budget's perceived bias for Metro Manila and the developed provinces of Luzon, to the detriment and disadvantage of the more remote areas of the country. We were constantly reminded that Manila is not the Philippines and that the Philippines is not Manila.

We know these are not the President's intentions. Just two weeks ago, the President directed step up of development activities in Mindanao. Last Monday she pledged to a national assembly of governors and mayors to increase local autonomy.

This Chamber has approved SB 162 for a Regional Consultative Commission. We anticipate that at its consultations, the over centralization of the government will be an oft heard plaint in all districts, no matter the prevailing ethnic group or religion. This complaint is not confined to Mindanao. Similar complaints are heard from other regions.

And so, we urge that the Senate accord high priority to legislation for decentralizing government. We need not wait for the RCC to advise us of what we already know we should begin to do. Perhaps if the people of Mindanao see Congress already tackling one of their major sources of discontent with government, they will perceive the underlying issues of regional autonomy more clearly, and distinguish these issues from the question of greater autonomy for local governments.

*Senator Paterno spoke at the Conference on Autonomy on Saturday afternoon, March 12, 1988, and explained his views on decentralization with their implications for finding a peaceful implementation of autonomy in "Muslim Mindanao."

How do we bring government closer to the people, how make it respond more quickly and sensitively to the needs in each and all provinces? Let me essay an approach.

May I suggest three principal areas for the government's decentralization - in FUNCTIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND BUDGETS.

DECENTRALIZING FUNCTIONS:

Many functions exercised by national government agencies would be performed more rationally and effectively by provincial or even municipal governments. Our provincial brethren can not understand why they have to wait decisions from Manila on so many matters.

Let us look at just a few examples:

- Why should Land Transportation Commission decide franchises for buses and jeepneys plying within the same provinces?
- Why must expansion of bed capacity in a provincial hospital need approval of the Health Secretary? Need every city hospital be supervised by the Department of Health?
- Why require signature of the Secretary of National Resources to develop even small parcels 2-3 hectares of foreshore into fishpond?
- Why should it need the Secretary of Education to allow any private high school to open?
- Why must Burnham Park in Baguio be operated by the Department of Tourism and not by the city government?

These are but a few of the matters unnecessarily reserved for decision by the national government that can and should be done at the local level. If it should be desired that these decisions follow certain norms nationwide, the guidelines could be provided to the local governments, and their personnel trained to make these decisions as well or better and certainly much faster than the bureaucrats in Manila.

Decentralization from national to local governments of these and similar other functions would hasten action by government on more matters of local concern.

DECENTRALIZING AUTHORITIES:

Action of national agencies on local problems is also slowed by the limited authority of regional and provincial officers of these national agencies to decide and act on many matters.

Here again, the central bureaucracy's tendency to reserve decisions for itself slows, at times even prevents, development. The provinces have to wait months, sometimes years, for the decisions of Manila officials who have little if any knowledge of local conditions and needs. With the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the true situation, in those decisions, too often, form prevails over substance, procedures are valued more than results, statistics are more important than people. And time is lost. Papers are lost. Without follow up, decisions take forever. And time, money, and effort have to be spent by the provincial folk to come to Manila to move the swivel chairred bureaucrat to do what is in the common sense view so patently necessary to solve a problem, to avoid a disaster, to push development.

What are the consequences of long delays in government actions? We are familiar with the story about the lack of a nail leading to the loss of a kingdom. Similarly,

- The antibiotic that could have nipped an infection arrives too late to prevent a death.
- The license that took a year to get prevents fifty people from being employed by a new business in the province.
- The loan for the fertiliser needed at planting time to increase crop fields is released only after harvest.

The leaking schoolhouse roof deteriorates into uninhabitable school building.

The ₱1,000 spare part that comes late idles the half million peso truck for six months.

The small breach in the dike which looks so harmless in the dry season enlarges when the river rises with the rains, and brings on floods destroying thousands of cavans of rice crop, millions of pesos of private and public property.

The wastes caused, the blocks to progress brought about by over centralization of national government pile up into a massive barrier to progress and growth. We can well understand the resentment of our brothers in the provinces at the seeming unconcern and slowness to act of the mandarins of the bureaucracy.

At one of the Committee's hearings, one participant observed that if government were to be really decentralized, passenger traffic of Philippine Airlines would be reduced by at least 50%, because more than half of PAL's passengers go to Manila for one reason only - to follow up papers. That participant was not joking. Neither was the audience who enthusiastically applauded his remark.

DECENTRALIZING THE BUDGET:

From the onset of martial law in 1972 until the end of 1985, the past regime steadily eroded the local governments' share in taxes collected in their jurisdictions. The central bureaucracy justified the erosion by claiming that they knew better how and on what projects the money was more effectively spent. But we suspect the Malacanang of martial law had other reasons. Control of the purse is real power. Greater control meant greater power. Absolute control led to absolute power.

But this present government is different. It is pledge to devolve power back to the people. In addition, Secs. 6 and 7 of Article X of the Constitution mandate Congress to legislate a just share of local government units in the national taxes which shall be automatically released to them, as well as an equitable share in the proceeds of the utilization and development of the national wealth in their respective areas.

We urge that such legislation to increase revenue share of local governments be given priority. With more funds, the local governments can respond better to the felt needs of their constituencies, provided the increments are devoted to capital projects. The people then will not have to look to Manila for most of their needs. They will not have to wait for the national government to understand their requirements, and to supply those needs in Manila's own time.

Perhaps not all local governments may be ready to exercise the power of a greater purse with full competence and responsibility. But that is not an argument not to increase their revenue share. It is probably to do so gradually, say over a five year period, while at the same time taking steps to train mayors and governors and their staffs in planning, programming, controlling and monitoring projects. We may also well decide that people's organizations should at the same time be strengthened in the provinces to monitor and fiscalize local government expenditures.

I would not be as confident advancing these arguments if the local officials were still OIC's. But as a result of the local elections on January 18th, they are elected by their constituencies; they have their mandates; they are now fully responsible to the electorate.

It is time for us in this chamber to act with all deliberate speed on the decentralization of government. Not only is it a long standing need. Not only will it answer the outcry of our people. Decentralization is devolution of power that will characterize the democratization of our nation.

One may well ask, Why us and not the executive branch? Why the Senate to lead the way to decentralization? Because with all the best intentions, the President will find it very difficult to compel her cabinet members and their central staffs to give up some of their powers. It is unrealistic for us to expect that the central bureaucracy will give up power on its own initiative. The human being is not built that way.

And so, legislation is needed for true decentralization. The task is enormous. The task is so widespread that decentralization can not be accomplished by one single piece of legislation, nor by a single Committee of this Chamber.

The functions that are effectively performed by the local governments will be identified in each Committee as it goes about its work, and should be notified to the Committee on Local Governments, for incorporation in the Local Government Code.

The Agency authorities that should be decentralized will surface as each Committee inquires into the functions and authority structure of government departments and agencies. The Committee on Civil Service and Government Reorganization should perhaps be the action locus of their findings.

Budget decentralization, while it may be the concern mainly of the Finance Committee, will require the support of Ways and Means as it examines national taxation, of Economic Affairs as it studies and structures the process of economic planning particularly in the regions, of Public Works and other Committees as they review project implementation of various agencies.

The task of decentralization thus requires first the conviction of the Chamber that it is every member's job and obligation to perform. I hope that we will all join to carry it out, so that when our people look at the accomplishments of this Senate when we adjourn the last session in 1992, they will say that we truly were their instrument for rebuilding the structure of a full working democracy and a truly responsive government.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Report on Speech
of
The Hon. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr.

In his speech at the "Peace Banquet" on Saturday evening, March 12, 1988, Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. stressed that the people of Mindanao must be allowed to resolve not only the autonomy issue, but all other matters related to the economic, political and social development of Mindanao. He emphasized that all the people of Mindanao must share in the rich natural resources and economic production. Muslims and Lumads must be given special attention and consideration to make up for past neglect and exploitation.

Senator Pimentel shared with the Conference participants the "Joint Statement of the MNLF and the Philippine Government" which he signed as Chairman of the Philippine Government Panel in January 1987. He also gave copies of Senate Resolution No. 5 dated August, 1987, providing for equal opportunity and fair employment practices for Lumads and Muslims. Copies of these documents follow.

Republic of the Philippines
Congress of the Philippines

S E N A T E

Metro Manila

First Regular Session

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Resolution No. 5

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE TO REQUEST HER EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT, TO APPOINT QUALIFIED PEOPLE FROM MINDANAO, INCLUDING MUSLIMS AND OTHER TRIBAL FILIPINOS, TO VARIOUS POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT AND IN GOVERNMENT-OWNED OR CONTROLLED CORPORATIONS, TO INCLUDE IN APPROVED COURSES ON HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES AND THE APPROVED TEXTBOOKS THEREFOR, THE HISTORY, CULTURE AND TRADITIONS OF OUR MUSLIM BROTHERS AND OTHER TRIBAL FILIPINOS AND TO TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO AVOID DISCRIMINATORY INFORMATION AGAINST MUSLIMS AND OTHER TRIBAL FILIPINOS IN THE APPROVED TEXTBOOKS, BUT UNDERScore THEIR HISTORICAL ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Whereas, Mindanao has been plagued by a violent conflict involving the Moro National Liberation Front and the Government since 1969;

Whereas, thousands of lives have been lost as a result thereof;

Whereas, the Aquino government has attempted to seek a negotiated settlement of the conflict immediately after the Marcos regime was toppled;

Whereas, for one reason or another, the negotiations have been deadlocked;

Whereas, as a result of the breakdown of the negotiations between the Moro National Liberation Front and the Government, the situation in Mindanao is rather volatile;

Whereas, one of the issues constantly being harped upon by the MNLF and other rebel groups in Mindanao is centered on their perception that Mindanao and its adjoining islands have not been adequately represented in the various circles of Government including the Cabinet;

Whereas, the people of Mindanao, particularly Muslims and members of tribal communities who are also found in other parts of the Philippines, are unrepresented or under-represented in the Court of Appeals, in the top echelons of the Armed Forces, in the Boards of Directors of the Philippine National Bank, the Development Bank of the Philippines, the Philippine National Oil Company, the National Power Corporation, the National Steel Corporation, the Philippine

Airlines, the Philippine National Railways, the National Irrigation Administration, the National Electrification Administration, the Local Waterworks Utilities Administration, among others, and even in the boards of the Professional Regulatory Commission;

Whereas, the situation of benign neglect which has characterized the relationship of the National Government with Mindanao for so many years can only be allowed to continue at our peril;

Whereas, one vehicle which can be tapped to bridge the gap of misunderstanding that divides the Muslims and other tribal Filipinos from the rest of our people is our educational system;

Whereas, the growing disenchantment and disaffection of the people from Mindanao arising from their virtual exclusion from the various government offices and from active participation in the management and in the directorship of government-owned or controlled corporations already alluded to may be defused by Her Excellency's seasonably appointing qualified citizen-residents of Mindanao, including Muslims and other tribal Filipinos to high government positions and to the boards of directors of government-owned or controlled corporations: Now, therefor, be it

Resolved by the Senate, To express, as it hereby expresses, the sense of Senate to request Her Excellency, the President:

(1) To appoint qualified citizen-residents and natives of Mindanao, including Muslims and tribal Filipinos to the Cabinet, to the various government offices, to the top echelons of the military, and to the boards of directors of government-owned or controlled corporations or enterprises, particularly those with activities in Mindanao, and to the subsidiaries of the foregoing entities, and

(2) To instruct the Department of Education, Culture and Sports to include in the approved courses in history and social studies and the approved textbooks therefor of all general and comprehensive schools in all levels in the country, the history, culture and traditions of our Muslim brethren and other tribal Filipinos and to take the necessary measures to avoid discriminatory information against Muslims and other tribal Filipinos in the approved school textbooks.

(3) To instruct the Secretary of Education, Culture and Sports to include representatives of the Muslims and cultural communities in the Instructional Materials Council (Textbook Council) to insure that derogatory remarks about Muslims and other tribal Filipinos will not be included in our textbooks.

Resolved, further, That copies of this Resolution be distributed to:

(1) The Honorable Speaker of the House of Representatives for the information of the House;

(2) The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for the information of the Court;

(3) The Honorable Secretary of Education, Culture and Sports.

Adopted,

(Sgd.) JOVITO R. SALONGA
President of the Senate

This Resolution was adopted by the Senate on August 5, 1987.

(Sgd.) ERIBERTO M. BERNAL
Secretary of the Senate

JOINT STATEMENT

OF THE

MNLF AND THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT PANELS

The two panels agreed to continue discussion of the proposal for the grant of full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-tawi and Palawan subject to democratic processes.

In the meantime, the MNLF panel proposes that President Corazon C. Aquino will issue an executive order suspending pertinent provisions of the draft constitution on the grant of autonomy to Muslim Mindanao in the scheduled plebiscite on February 2, 1987, to allow the MNLF to undertake democratic consultations with the people of Mindanao and its islands, and that the Philippine Government panel shall present this proposal to President Aquino for her approval.

MNLF PANEL:

(Sgd.)NUR MISUARI
Chairman.

PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT PANEL:

(Sgd.)AQUILINO PIMENTEL, JR.
Chairman.

Witnessed by:

(Sgd.)(S. S. PIRZADA)
Secretary General of the
Organization of the Islamic Conference.

OIC Headquarters,
Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,
January 3, 1987.

Summary of the Reaction to the paper of Mrs. Elnorita Tugung
by Rudy B. Rodil*

I submit the thesis that it is the government, colonial or otherwise which must be held chiefly responsible for the present realities we are facing in Mindanao. It was the Americans, for instance who established the rules on land disposition in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan and initiated, encouraged and organized the massive migration of Luzon & Visayas settlers to Mindanao which eventually led to the displacement of both Moro and Lumad inhabitants from their ancestral domain. Let us go back in history for a while to see things in perspective.

The Treaty of Paris signed between Spain and the United States on December 10, 1898, was for all practical purposes, a deed of sale by which the former colonizer sold to a victorious newcomer the present Philippine territory.

The present Philippine claim to its territory is largely premised on the validity of this transfer of ownership, euphemistically called cession or the transfer of political sovereignty.

On July 4, 1946, another transfer of sovereignty took place when the United States purportedly granted independence to the Republic of the Philippines. This transaction was accepted by the Philippine government without question, specifically on the item of one Filipino nation and one integral territory. The present complications in this issue of autonomy is hinged on this twin reality.

But for us Filipinos, how valid was the Paris transaction in the first place? Six months before, on June 12, 1898, the Republic of the Philippines was born which signalled the formal birth of a nation and the recovery of a lost territory. The Moro peoples of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan have never been conquered: so were the various indigenous tribes of the interior or those we now call cultural communities. And so we must ask: What did Spain own and sell on December 10, 1898 in the first place? NOTHING! In like manner, we ask: What did the United States buy with \$20 million? NOTHING! This was why the U.S. troops had to unleash armed might against resisting Filipinos and Moros. We all lost, unfortunately.

And so, it was, therefore, through American colonial imposition that we became one Filipino people in one integral national territory - despite our own histories, against the desires of the Moro leaders.

The Moro leaders were not remiss in protesting against their assimilation but to no avail. The American government had decided that it was best for them to be one.

From 1946 to the previous regime, the Philippine government must partly answer for the extension of colonialism in this country. The public land laws and migration policies started by the Americans remained in effect resulting in very little ancestral domain left to both Lumads (cultural communities) and Moros, thus making the realization of meaningful autonomy a very complicated issue.

It is now incumbent upon the present administration to undo the sins of the past. Yet, it seems, that there is very little room within which to move.

The 1987 Constitution provides for the establishment of a regional autonomy in Muslim Mindanao. And in this direction the Peace Commission, through the Mindanao Consensus Building Panel, has taken steps to form the Regional Consultative Commission - apparently on the basis of the Tripoli Agreement. The 27 district nominees correspond to the 13 provinces. There is a likelihood that 13 provinces will constitute

the territory of the regional autonomy. But the Constitution has a catch - the plebiscite - the last stage in the establishment of regional autonomy. It provides that areas which will decide NO to autonomy will be excluded, and those areas alone which will say YES will be included.

Now, which parts of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan are likely to say YES to autonomy? Only the five provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi which are predominantly populated by Muslims, and eleven (11) towns, besides (one in North Cotabato, seven in Lanao Sur, two in Zamboanga del Norte and one in Palawan. And please note that two of the five provinces are open to dismemberment: three municipalities and Cotabato City in Maguindanao are not predominantly Muslim; so is Isabela in Basilan, and are, therefore, likely to lose to NO. The exclusion alone of Isabela from Basilan and Cotabato City from Maguindanao can render autonomy for these two provinces a senseless proposition. How then can the present government correct the iniquities of the past?

2) I do not know. I have studied the problem for some time now and I must admit to arriving at more questions than answers.

Professor, Department of History, MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology,
Iligan City
Member, Regional Consultative Commission

THE MINDANAO-SULU SITUATION: HOPE AND REALISM

Francis C. Madigan, S.J.*
Xavier University

We have familiar, although only occasional, experience of a chord sounding a warning deep in our consciousness and felt in the present although rising dimly out the subconscious past. This chord arouses dark presentiments that at first we apprehend only vaguely but which take clearer shape as we think more penetratingly of the significance of what we have begun to apprehend for the future. Most of us with World War II memories experienced such forebodings, I take it, during the grim days of November and December of 1985, and January and February of 1986.

When I first read Dr. Palabrica-Costello's Report on her survey study of the population of Mindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, and of the outlooks of the various segments of this population, and then again when I heard her paper this afternoon, such a chord throbbed again in the silence of my heart.

Five points particularly impress me.

First, of Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and the other islands commonly grouped with them, the Christian population accounts for 77 per cent of the total population, the Muslim population accounts for 17 per cent, and the non-Christian, non-Muslim population accounts for the remainder. These approximate figures are based upon the 1980 Census data.

Secondly, the percentage of the Christian population wanting an autonomous Muslim region in their own municipality is estimated by the survey to be less than 2 per cent, while the percentage of the Muslim population wanting such a region in their municipality is estimated to be greater than 95 per cent. It is hard to imagine a more sharply contrasting difference of viewpoint.

Thirdly, the percentage of Christians favoring a Muslim autonomous Region in Mindanao is estimated to be less than 14 per cent, while the percentage of Muslims favoring such a region is estimated at more than 90 per cent. Again, a very sharp difference of opinion.

Fourth, Table 15 shows that almost 95 per cent of the Christian inhabitants of the region are estimated to think that institution in Mindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi of an autonomous Muslim region will incite renewed conflict among Muslims and Christians. And more than 38 per cent of the Muslim inhabitants are estimated to agree with this apprehension. On the other hand, almost 57 per cent of all Muslim inhabitants are estimated to fore-see no ill effects flowing from establishment of such a region, while less than 2 per cent of all Christian inhabitants are estimated to share such a view.

Fifth, if their own community (city or municipality) is included in the Muslim autonomous region, it is estimated that more than 7 per cent of the Christian men will take up arms in resistance to such an establishment, almost 20 per cent will remain in the region to oppose the establishment of this autonomous region (hopefully by peaceful means), 33 per cent, it is estimated, will outmigrate, many perhaps returning to the home province of their parents which may find it hard to accommodate them), while only about 31 per cent will remain and go on much as before. On the other hand, about 96 per cent of the Muslims, it is estimated, would stay, if an autonomous region were set up, and their municipality or city was included in it.

*Director, Research Institute for Mindanao Culture, Xavier University. This is Fr. Madigan's response to the report presented by Dr. Marilou Palabrica-Costello.

I have lived now continuously in Mindanao for 31 years. During these years, I was witness to the Ilaga-Blackshirt struggles and the large-scale population dislocations that they caused. I witnessed the student activist movements of 1969-1971. I saw the NPA and the CPP movements begin like a little cloud on the horizon no bigger than a man's hand which has now developed into immense thunder storms enveloping whole segments of the country. I am inclined to take very seriously the potentials for future trouble which the autonomy issue has raised. The same types of leaders as directed the Ilaga and the Blackshirt groups are at hand. The same kinds of sentiments are being re-enchanted. People who have lived one or two generations in an area not likely to give up their homes without a fight. What has taken place in Beirut which I witnessed in 1965 as a most peaceful city when I visited during that summer could happen here if the fires are re-lit. What I have seen in three visits to Israel where Jew and Arab confront each other as enemies, can become our own fate.

Is the Mindanao situation beyond peaceful solution then? In view of the real situation, which Dr. Palabrica-Costello has revealed to us in the data which she and her colleagues have so usefully gathered for us, is it still realistic to hope for a peaceful solution that will bear malice towards none and be just and equitable toward all?

My own feeling is that the only realistic solution that will bear fruit in eventual development and prosperity is a peaceful, non-violent solution that is fair and equitable to all.

So much for the facts and for realism. Is there any basis then for the hope that such a just and equitable solution to the autonomy issue can actually take place? I believe and I hope that such a basis does exist. I find it both in prayer to the same Lord of all who helped us when we humbly asked Him on EDSA in February 1986, and I find it in men and women of understanding and good will who stand on both sides of this question. I find it particularly in the spirit that has brought this Workshop together, and such meetings held in the past and planned at least in germ for the future. As long as such men and women are willing to sit down and discuss and to pray about their mutual problems to find fair and equitable solutions for all, I will continue to hope.

We can help advance such a dialogue if we can formulate the basic questions which a just and equitable solution to the Muslim Autonomous Region issue must answer. Perhaps none of us singly can respond adequately to such a task. However, each of us can raise the questions that we perceive as basic from our own standpoints. If we involve enough persons and relevant viewpoints in this exercise, and if we all participate with charity and humility, perhaps we can synthesize something approaching a first formulation of such an adequate response.

I would raise the following basic questions:

For my own part, I would raise the following basic questions:

1. Is it truly necessary, before any municipality or province is included in such a region, that a majority of residents of the unit in question vote "Yes" in a plebiscite on the question of such inclusion?
2. In a democracy, can membership in a particular religious sect or denomination be required of a person otherwise capable of holding public office, especially the highest public offices, in order to be validly elected to such an office?
3. Is the distinction between a Muslim state and an Islamic state or political unit a valid and useful distinction for the purposes of our discussion? By a Muslim state I understand one set up on the model of Egypt, where the religion of the majority is Islam but where the state government and courts are mainly staffed by people who are de facto Muslims but who administer a law that is similar to that in Greece, Italy, Algeria, England, and India.

By an Islamic state, I mean one like Iran or Saudi Arabia, where the great severity of the shariah courts and other features of Islamic history and tradition hold away, and where political and legal decisions come under traditions based upon the Koran and Islamic clerical interpretations?

4. Where the majority of the population is not Muslim, will it be equitable to submit a majority population to a system of laws and government based upon the Korean and Islamic tradition?
5. What is the degree of priority that should be accorded to Muslims in certain regions of Mindanao on the basis of their presence here before the coming of the Christians? Can it be established from Saleeby and other sources that the Muslims arrived in Mindanao as early as 1450? Are the Recoleta histories which assert settlements in eastern Mindanao of Christians as early as 1607 to be taken as reliable? Are the accounts of the conversion of the Butuanos by the Jesuits in 1596 and later to be accepted as historically accurate? What is the relation of the priorities of both these peoples to the priority of the native or indigenous peoples who have lived in Mindanao since time immemorial?
6. In the case of Christians who have lived one or two generations in Mindanao, is their presence here validated by their lifelong residence, and perhaps that of their parents? What is their right to continued residence and to a system where they can elect their own representatives? Let us ask the same questions with regard to the Muslims, and to the indigenous peoples.
7. Would some kind of a federation of units in a larger Mindanao autonomous region be a help to achieve greater justice and equity for all? In such a case, how could the rights of those belonging to other religions or ethnic groups than the majority population of the particular political unit be best protected?

In closing, I reiterate the seriousness of the rifts in viewpoint of the populations of Mindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi which the surveys directed by Dr. Palabrica-Costello have uncovered for us. I thank her for the service she has done for our people in all the hard work I know she has waged herself in to be able to ascertain these facts and bring them to our attention. It is now up to us to digest them, hopefully without civil and political indigestion. As a small step in this direction I have raised several questions whose solution, I believe would help us come closer to an insight illuminating how our basic problem of a Mindanao autonomy might be solved. These questions related to:

1. The necessity of a plebiscite
2. A religious membership requirement in a democracy
3. The distinction between a Muslim state and an Islamic state
4. The equity of submitting a non-Moslem majority to laws and government based upon the Koran and Islamic tradition
5. The priority as residents of the land of Muslims, Christians, and "natives"
6. Whether lifelong residence in an area validates a right to live there
7. The possibility that a federation of units would provide greater equity for the various populations of our southern islands.

A Reaction to Chairman Tugung's Paper

Chairman Tugung's paper has traced the history of the Muslim Filipinos and their claim to the island of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. It is on this fact that the Muslims had ardently clamored for autonomy; while the more radical groups (MNLF, MILF, & Reformist MNLF) are vying for a complete cessation from the Philippine sovereignty. As the Filipino Muslims claim for autonomy is near realization, a segment of Mindanao's populace, represented by the indigenous communities, commonly called the Lumads has been totally ignored by the negotiators from both sides--the government and Muslim advocates. It is ironical, however, that these indigenes whose ancestors were the early settlers of Mindanao, have now become strangers in their own land.

If historical right is to be used as a basis to lay claim over Mindanao, the Lumads have as much right and even stronger claim to the island. In the first place, the Lumads have preserved their culture and traditions and have remained animists, the religion of their ancestors. The other ethnic groups, on the other hand, had accepted a foreign religion, Islam, and with it come along the customs and beliefs of the Arabic culture. Secondly, like the Muslim Filipinos, the Lumads were not totally conquered by neither the Spaniards nor the Americans. Thus, in view of the above, the Lumads could similarly claim for the right to self-determination.

Comparatively, of the present inhabitants of Mindanao, the Lumads are the most neglected and deprived not only economically, but in terms of social services such as education, health, and welfare. Moreover, they have been the object of discrimination of both the Muslims and lowland Christians; their ancestral lands surreptitiously grabbed by more enterprising migrants. However, the biggest anomaly committed against them is the violation of their right to be consulted and heard in this rivalry between the government and the group concerned.

If peace is to be achieved in Mindanao, the right of every inhabitant, entity, or group must be recognized and upheld. The words of that great Mexican statesman, Benito Juarez, "respect for the rights of others is peace," is most appropriate at this time.

CONFERENCE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report contains the recommendations of three discussion groups formed right after the varied views on the autonomy for Muslim Mindanao were presented. The three groups were organized in such a way that each group, included equal representation from the Christians, Lumads, and Muslims.

Freedom to select was extended to certain participants, like the chairman Tugong party, the Peace Commission staff and the like, to place their members in all three groups. The members of the Mindanao Autonomy Study Team were dispersed among the groups.

All groups were guided by the Conference Objectives and were requested to make recommendations for all concerned with finding an equitable, nonviolent solution to the autonomy issue.

Facilitators were assigned to insure that the discussions were appropriate and that all group members were given the chance to speak.

In the closing session, the participants agreed to endorse all proposals made by the three groups to the appropriate authorities of the government. It must therefore be stressed here that no votation took place during the plenary session rather a consensus was reached to indicate that certain participants may agree or disagree on certain proposals and all sincerely wanted to find a peaceful solution to autonomy.

Summary of Group Recommendations

What is Autonomy for Muslim Mindanao?

An autonomous region in Mindanao, according to group one, must be self governing and self ruled but within the Philippine Territorial integrity or one nation.

Group two agreed that autonomy of whatever people in the country should be people oriented, not geographically oriented. Along with this suggestion, the group emphasized the need to recognize and to accept the reality that the people in the Philippines are no longer operating within one-nation concept. For instance, the existence of the Bangsamoro Nationality cannot be denied. The group also raised the possibility of the recognition of other nationalities like the Lumad or the Cordillera Nationalities. It is therefore the conclusion of group two that the existence of these nations/or several nations in the Philippines calls for the recognition and implementation of a new status of one state made up of several nations.

Group two concluded that autonomy should primarily be designed for the Muslims and the Lumads. Safeguard must, however, be provided by law for the established Christian settler population in Mindanao. The area of autonomy according to this group should include places which have been traditionally inhabited by the Muslims or the Lumads. For clarification of the term, traditional inhabited places, was meant to refer to areas where Muslims and Lumads have enjoyed prior and uninterrupted occupancy up to the present.

Group three proposed a democratic Mindanao-wide autonomy by region. The group members were in favor of an autonomy for all of Mindanao plus Palawan which shall be established by regions as they are presently constituted. In their deliberation concerning Palawan, the group decided to place it under Region IX by virtue of historical facts.

Four regional autonomous governments shall be formed democratically in the Mindanao-wide regional autonomy. Obviously, each region shall be under a Regional Autonomous Government in this kind of Autonomy. The regional legislative power shall cover the matters stipulated in Section 20 of Article X of the constitution. And each regional autonomous government shall adopt measures to include representatives of tribal Filipinos in each unit of government.

2. The Regional Control of Finances

Group three recommended an automatic retention of the regional share of the taxes collected by the government. To generate more capital for its development, each regional autonomous government must be allowed to devise their own taxation schemes and to revise them whenever necessary. The exploitation and control of natural resources shall also be the exclusive domain of each autonomous region.

Several points were raised in favor of the regional control of the finances. Among these points are:

- a. Without control over the capital and resources, autonomy is not real or possible;
- b. The primary reason of the past and present Muslim's clamor for autonomy is neglect. The same reason seemed to be the key of the complaints of the rest of the Mindanao population. Hence autonomy, should it be granted to the Mindanao people, must provide for them the freedom to run and finance their own government; and
- c. If Mindanao is autonomous, there is no more need for the national government to chart and finance its development plans for the area. Put simply, the national government will not, anymore, need as much revenue as when autonomy is not granted to Mindanao.

3. Curricular Offerings of the Histories of the Muslims and the Lumads and Other Educational Policy

It was recommended by groups one and two that the histories of the Muslims and the Lumads must be included in the curricula of academic institution within the regions of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. Group one felt the need for the assistance and supervision of Department of Education, Culture and Sports as well as for the accreditation of the Madrasah system of education.

4. Interfaith People's Organizations and Conferences

It was also recommended by group two that interfaith people's organizations dialog and conferences must be promoted to pave the way for a peaceful co-existence of the Muslims, the Lumads and the Christian settlers in Mindanao.

5. Socio-Cultural Change

A cultural change was deemed necessary in terms of values, respect and acceptance so that a better Muslim-Christian relationship will result. Along with this, the same group two recommended the replacement of institutions and structures which serve as obstacles to autonomy.

6. The Moro National Liberation Front Participation

Group one indicated that the Moro National Liberation Front should be allowed to participate in the establishment/operation of autonomy. However with, or without, the participation of the Moro National Liberation Front, the same group urged the government to go on with its promise to establish Muslim autonomy.

7. Peaceful and Constitutional Solution

The conference participants expressed that they are committed to a peaceful solution to the Mindanao problem. They also felt the need to approach the Mindanao problem constitutionally. However they felt that the provisions of Article X, Section 20 in the constitution must be studied carefully to facilitate creation of autonomy.

CONFERENCE
on
Autonomy in "Muslim Mindanao"
Xavier University
Cagayan de Oro City
March 11-13, 1988

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MINDANAO DEVELOPMENT STUDIES CENTER



Mindanao Development Studies Center (MDSC) began in 1986 as "Xavier Peace Center" (XPC). The name was changed in 1987 to reflect a broader scope of the Center. All will agree that "without development there is no peace and without peace there is no development". Or, as Pope Paul VI said, "Development is the new word for peace."

In order to reflect peace as the goal of development, MDSC retains the logo of XPC. This logo was designed by Xavier University artist PENNESSENCIO "Nonoy" ESTARTE. Nonoy explains:

The traditional, universal symbol of peace, the dove, is picking up the "PAX" (the latin term for "PEACE"), instead of the traditional olive twig. The PAX symbol also contains the letters XPC which stand for XAVIER PEACE CENTER..

In the letters are also the Greek letters Chi Rho (XP) which is the symbol for "CHRIST" throughout the Christian Church. Christ is the source of divine peace for all Christians. This includes peace with God, and peace with all the people of the world.

The wings of the dove expand to the fullest encircling and bringing the message of peace to the entire world.

Thus, the logo symbolizes the hope and goal of the MDSC to explore and implement new, creative approaches to development and peace on the local level in Northern Mindanao and to share its finding with the entire world. In this way the logo also symbolizes the motto, "*Think globally, act locally.*"

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