

## Historical Evolution of the Tulunan Peace Zones

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Peace Zones do not just crop up like mushrooms that grow out of spores scattered by the wind. A peace zone grows out of a historical process. It evolves out of a conflict situation. It grows out from the crying hope of a people mired in the midst of man-made calamities. It presents itself as a human right demanded by the historical necessity in an extraordinary predicament of a people in the pursuit of a dignified existence.

Peace is a constant desire of individuals as well as a collective aspiration of a community of humans in any social milieu. It is, like any other attribute of human existence, relative, varying in degree of necessity according to the particularity of the community's or a people's history. But its relative necessity becomes absolutely intense in a human settlement caught in the midst of conflicting forces. It is the ultimate cry of a people enmeshed in the crossfire between warring forces that make them veritable victims of the brutal consequences of armed conflict.

The Tulunan Peace Zone is one such historical outgrowth of an armed conflict situation. As such, it has its roots in the particularity of its history within the larger peculiar history of Mindanao where it is situated. To better appreciate, therefore, the evolution of the Tulunan Peace Zone is to know and understand the specific features of Mindanao history.

Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippine archipelago, is endowed with very rich natural resources (Montiel & Briones 1997). If only because of that, it is an important part of the country's politico-economic map. It has been called the "Land of Promise" (Turner, May & Turner 1992).

In early times, purely tribal communities inhabited Mindanao. When Islam was introduced into the island, a considerable portion of the tribes became Muslims. This religious-cultural phenomenon resulted in the development of the Sultanate as the socio-political organization that dominated Mindanao. The Spanish conquest and the colonization of the Philippine Islands in the sixteenth century ushered in Christianity and its

attendant medieval European culture. As a feudal ideology, it could not subjugate a parallel feudal ideology, which at the time had reached a certain level of social and political consolidation in Muslim Mindanao. The Spaniards pursued the "sword and cross" style of aggressions against the people of Mindanao, causing the implantation of deeply ingrained mutual hatred and prejudices in the collective psyche of Christians and Muslims through the centuries (Montiel & Briones 1997).

Indeed, the diverse religious beliefs, cultural disparities and traditions in the island have created a gaping chasm between two peoples, inflicting deep wounds that would not heal through time. This was complicated by the massive migrations of Christian settlers from the northern provinces to Mindanao during the early twentieth century. As early as 1900, the Manila government encouraged migration of Christians to the island, thus finding them scattered throughout the "Promised Land."

Later, multinational corporations made their entry into Mindanao as part of government policy under the guise of development agenda (Montiel & Briones 1997). These initiatives would in time prove detrimental to the local inhabitants, Muslims and Christians alike.

In the 1960s, the worsening political situation of the country, the mal-administration of resources, and rampant corruption in the government bureaucracy exacerbated the Muslim-Christian conflict. Warlordism became a militarist prop for corrupt power politics. Private armies emerged. And in Mindanao, the infamous Muslim "Blackshirts" and "Barracudas" were organized as part of local Muslim politicians' drive for power. These private armies were widely known as "Moro bandits."

In response to this, the late 1960s saw the emergence of cultist groups called *Ilaga* (literally means rat) and the *Tadtad* (chop-chop) whose primary purpose was to fight the Muslim bandits. The period that followed witnessed the atrocities and massacres perpetrated alternately by Muslim armed bands and Christian cultists against civilians of both peoples (Montiel & Briones 1997).

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was a historical child born out of the escalating internecine violence that gripped the entire island. It was a separatist political movement that aimed to establish an independent Moro nation-state in Mindanao. It embodied the ideals and captured the sentiment of the entire Muslim population, uniting them in a veritable declaration of war against the Philippine government. At the same time, as part of a growing national phenomenon, the New People's Army (NPA) showed its presence in Mindanao (Montiel & Briones 1997).

These two politico-military forces, albeit adopting diverse political ideals, were both fighting the national government and aimed to seize political power. The NPA had its beginning in Central Luzon and soon spread throughout the whole archipelago, including Mindanao. The MNLF wanted to establish its own "Moro Bangsa" nation state in Mindanao, distinct and separate from the Republic of the Philippines. Objectively, they were in alliance against a common enemy, the Philippine Government. The Ilaga was known to have been used by the government armed forces as a para-military unit in its campaigns against the NPA rebels and the Moro separatists.

### **Tulunán Municipality**

Tulunán is a fifth class municipality located at the southern tip of Cotabato province. It consists of twenty nine (29) barangays. Two of these barangays and two sitios of two other barangays have been declared and given national recognition as PEACE ZONES.

Tulunán is basically Ilonggo territory whose populace is composed of migrants from Iloilo province. It became the natural home ground for Ilaga cult members. At the height of the Christian-Muslim conflicts in the late 1960s and well toward the 1970s, the residents of Barangays Banayal, Bituan, Nabundasan and Miatub and other neighboring barangays of Tulunán experienced sporadic disturbances from Moro armed attacks. Often their houses were subjected to strafing and other forms of violent harassments.

Tulunán was not spared from NPA groundwork objectives, making it one of the areas within the ambit of its guerilla activities. This made Tulunán a hotbed area where government military operations against rebel forces were conducted.

Under these deplorable conditions, it was always the civilian population who suffered. They were not only inflicted with physical pain and injuries and deprived of the lives of their loved ones, but they were also subjected to psychological wounds where a "culture of fear" was implanted in their individual and community life. Fear became a constant ingredient of their day-to-day existence.

Outbreaks of violence not only destroyed the peace in Tulunán but also resulted in rampant stealing of livestock, farm implements and agricultural produce. Massive evacuation of the residents from the affected barangays ensued. In the 1960s, when the conflict was between the Ilaga/

Tadtad and the Moro bandits, the La Fortuna barangay school building was used as the evacuation center. Some private houses in Barangay Perez and Barangay Nabundasan were also utilized for refuge. After a while, people started to go back to their respective farms to work. But it was an "off and on" situation at the evacuation center because Muslim armed bands kept on coming back to attack other nearby barangays.

In the 1980s, at the height of government counter-insurgency program, massive evacuation also happened. This time the Banayal Elementary School and high school buildings became the evacuation center. At the evacuation center, there was a marked rise in the incidence of sickness particularly among children due to malnutrition. Schools were temporarily closed, causing many students to drop out. The menfolk were recruited to join the para-military units such as the "Barangay Self-Defense Unit" (BSDU) which was later renamed "Civilian Home Defense Force" (CHDF). This was purportedly to defend their lives against the NPA whose presence in Tulunan was very evident (interview with Felecita Acosta-Barrredo).

### **Life at the Evacuation Center**

The refugees in the Banayal evacuation center knew misery in all its adverse consequences. Here they learned to live daily with fear, unfreedom, hunger, undernourishment, and illnesses, and the emotional and psychological effects of deprivations, indignities and injuries.

All in all, the evacuees numbered as follows: 45 families from Bituan; 78 families from Sitio New Alimodian; 32 families from Lampagang; seven families from Tuburan and seven families from Bacong. They constituted a total of 159 families or 784 individuals, including children.

The people sought help from government and non-government organizations. In response, food was delivered and free clinics were conducted. An expression of active hope and resilience was evident as they began to organize themselves by forming the Barangay Disaster Committee. Other committees were identified and formed, namely: health, finance, education, negotiating panel, accommodation, and research and documentation.

In September 1989, the Barangay Disaster Committee was changed into Inter-Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council, representing 70 families from New Alimodian, 50 families from Bituan and 20 families from Lampagang.

### **The Birth of the Tulunan Peace Zones**

In the face of the harsh realities, the residents of Tulunan organized their ranks as a liberative process of people empowerment. Their action at the evacuation center caught the attention of concerned authorities, non-government organizations, the media and other concerned sectors and individuals.

Every dialogue and meeting with these concerned agencies and groups was centerlighted with that one single desire of the people: to live permanently in a place free from armed conflicts and other violent hostilities. This desire gave birth to the concept of a "peace zone".

One Church leader mentioned the experience of the people of Hunduan, who managed to get the NPA to withdraw from the locality, and made a determined stand to bar the military from installing a detachment outpost in their place. This was promptly picked up by the evacuees and they started to hold caucuses on the possibility of establishing a "zone of peace" in their area in Tulunan.

### **The Bituan Peace Zone**

With this notion clear in everyone's mind, the people at the evacuation center decided to establish a place free from militarization and armed conflicts. The place to become the first peace zone was to be Barangay Bituan.

### **A Brief Background of Bituan**

In the 1950s, a group of Ilonggo from Iloilo in Panay came to settle in a place that was occupied by tribal peoples called T'bolis and B'laans. These tribal peoples called the Ilonggo settlers "Batiwan", which the Christians interpreted as Bituan and so the place was named Bituan. Bituan was declared a barangay of Tulunan in 1958 (Bituan PZ file). As Visayan Christians, the Ilonggo settlers brought along with them the traditional practice of celebrating fiesta every year, highlighted by ball games, horse fights, and even wrestling bouts.

The place was really a promised land for these Ilonggos. They lived peacefully and harmoniously until the 1970s when, with the declaration of martial law in 1972, the peacefulness in the area was disturbed by sporadic armed encounters between Muslims and Christians. These armed engagements resulted in off-and-on evacuations from one place to another.

By 1978, the Bituan residents were back and settled peacefully in their place. But it was only for a brief period of time. The following years saw the NPA frequenting the area. They started giving "teach-ins" to the residents. As a result, government military troops were deployed in Barangays Banayal, Bituan and Tuburan in order to establish detachment outposts.

In the 1980s, which was the height of the government counter-insurgency program, massive military operations were conducted in the area. These caused untold difficulties to the residents who suffered from the mortar shellings, bombings, killings, and tortures, and other brutalities. The victims included Church leaders and Church workers who were "salvaged" together with farmers. Houses of residents suspected to be NPA members were demolished and burned down.

There seemed to be no end to the inhumanities and indignities committed against innocent civilians. Tired of this situation, some young adults were forced to join either the NPA or the paramilitary units called Citizens Armed Forces of a Geographical Unit (CAFGU). Meanwhile the families who lived within the affected areas such as Barangays Bituan, Lampagang, and Sitio New Alimodian evacuated to Barangay Banayal and occupied the school buildings.

But as told above, life at the evacuation center provided the stimulus for the people to search for ways by which they could obtain peace for themselves and their children. The harsh realities at the evacuation center taught them to hope and dream, organize and harness their human resources and capacities, and above all, to decide for themselves their own courses of action vis-à-vis the prevailing situation. And so, in December 1989, the people at the evacuation center signed a resolution declaring their intention and decision to establish a place free from military activities and armed hostilities by and between conflicting/warring forces. Bituan became the first peace zone in Mindanao (*Manila Chronicle*, 2 March 1990).

Some of the salient provisions of the Peace Zone Resolution were:

1. The place covered by the peace zone is the whole of Barangay Bituan.
2. No one enters the peace zone without the knowledge and consent of the screening and admission committee of the people who live in the area.
3. The carrying of firearms (by military/CAFGU and NPA) is prohibited in the peace zone.

4. No detachment is to be established in the whole area of the peace zone.
5. No armed group is allowed to enter the peace zone.
6. No firing of arms is allowed within the peace zone.
7. No organization of the CAFGU or the Civilian Volunteer Organization (CVO) is allowed in the said place.
8. There shall be no threats on and harassments of civilians and transportation.
9. There shall be no selling or drinking of alcoholic drinks within the peace zone.
10. Public buildings (chapel, schools) cannot be used without the permission of concerned authorities.
11. An Ad Hoc Committee will be organized to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire.
12. The same Ad Hoc Committee shall convey the violations of the agreement and the recommendation for a more exact and smoother implementation to the Municipal Peace and Order Council (MOPC)/ Provincial Peace and Order Council (PPOC) and Peace Commission.
13. This resolution shall be respected by the two warring forces and witnessed by the Ad Hoc Committee before the appellants.

This resolution was submitted to the local government and copies furnished the provincial, national government and the Church. Then a series of dialogues was conducted.

Some of the major dialogues were:

On 17 January 1990, a consultative meeting was held which was attended by Fr. Ronilo Villamor, Congressman Gregorio Andolana, the Municipal Councilors of Tulunan and a military officer assigned in the area. The proposal of a peace zone was presented. The military representative agreed to the idea but said that the final decision would come from higher authorities.

On 25 January 1990, the evacuees called for a general assembly to validate their resolution. Congressman Gregorio Andolana, the Sangguniang Bayan members of Tulunan and representatives from various government agencies attended this assembly.

On 5 February 1990, the leaders of the communities, with Bishop Juan de Dios Pueblos, Fr. Ronilo Villamor, and Congressman Gregorio Andolana met with Brig. Gen. Orlando Soriano, commanding officer of the 6th Infantry Brigade and other high ranking officials. The agenda included: military recognition of the peace initiative, the suspension of

the restriction on the delivery of the relief supplies including food and the release of confiscated goods for the peace zone residents. General Soriano responded positively by assuring them of the immediate pullout of troops in the area on the condition that NPA would also withdraw. Fr. Villamor relayed this through the radio station DXND and the rebels agreed.

### The Return

The people were so determined that while the negotiation was still going on, they started to clear the peace zone area, which is Bituan. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1990, they were all prepared for the return. It started with a mass celebration officiated by Fr. Ronilo Villamor. Immediately after the Liturgy of the Word, the people started to pack up their belongings, got hold of their livestock and started to move out. The military stopped them for a picture-taking. According to the military, the photo would serve as survey record for an effective monitoring of the people residing in the peace zone. After the picture-taking, the procession continued. Upon reaching the big mango tree at the entrance of the proposed area, the caravan stopped and the celebration of the mass continued. Just before the final blessing was made, the presider sounded a reminder, "Now that you have declared the Peace Zone, be faithful to its provisions. No to power of the guns and let Yahweh God be your chief security guard, no longer the NPA nor the military!" After the mass, a child was baptized, then everyone sat down to a thanksgiving meal.

A series of dialogue was still conducted even after the return to Bituan. Representatives from the Church, the local government, the military, and non-government organizations attended these dialogues. The military consented to the peace zone concept but allowed only a one-kilometer radius. That meant that beyond the one-kilometer radius, military operations may take place.

Because of the strong determination of the people, the local government also adopted and approved the request of the evacuees to recognize Bituan as a zone of peace. One major dialogue that really ensured the success of the Bituan experiment was the one held with Commissioner Haydee Yorac of the Commission on Elections and Senator Rodolfo Biazon in Miatub. Senator Biazon drafted and sponsored a resolution in the Congress of the Philippines urging the Executive Department to declare Bituan with other areas in Tulunan a zone of peace. Eventually,

on June 23, 1993 Bituan and the other peace zones in Tulunan were declared a special development area by the national government (interview with Maximo Casulocan).

### Sitio New Alimodian

New Alimodian is the lone sitio of Barangay Banayal. All of the pioneers of this place came from Alimodian, in Iloilo, thus the name New Alimodian. It became a sitio in 1955, its population being big enough to warrant the status of a sitio.

As a Catholic community, New Alimodianons also held a yearly fiesta celebration as a form of thanksgiving for the abundance they received in the past year. This was particularly displayed in the way they welcomed and treated their fiesta guests. All of the households offered sumptuous food to anybody who came into the house, a practice that gave them favorable reputation among other barangays.

Peace reigned among the sitio populace until the 1970s, when after the declaration of martial law in the country, the people began to live again in constant fear. Their livelihood was greatly disrupted. As a matter of fact, they experienced displacements from their homes and farms every time the Moro armed band attacked.

In later part of the 1970s peace was restored in New Alimodian. People went back to their farms. But they realized the need to forge stronger unity and to work harder for the rehabilitation of their place. This led to the establishment of a farmers' organization called Hiniusang Mag-uuma sa New Alimodian (United Farmers of the New Alimodian) in 1982. They also formed a sectoral council, called the Babaye Barug Alang sa Kalingkawasan in 1986. These organizations were affiliated with the Kilusang Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (KMP), a militant national movement of farmers and rural workers. Because of this, the people of New Alimodian were suspected as members of the NPA. And so, a series of military operations was conducted in the area. Military detachments were also established in Barangay Banayal and Barangay Tuburan.

The poor civilians were caught in the middle of these armed forces. They suffered salvaging and tortures committed by the military. An unforgettable incident occurred on 19 July 1989. New Alimodian was subjected to intense mortar shellings at four thirty in the afternoon. The perpetrator of the grave abuse of authority was the Alpha Company of the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army under the command of

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Espiritu, and based in Barangay Tuburan. The New Alimodian residents promptly abandoned their homes and evacuated to Banayal Elementary School. Residents of other barangays such as Bituan and Lampagang joined them.

### **Birth of the New Alimodian Peace Zone**

The New Alimodian peace zone is a child of the Bituan peace zone. Actually, the residents of New Alimodian were part of the Bituan experiment, which created the Bituan peace zone. While at the Bituan peace zone, the residents of New Alimodian were experiencing an economic crisis on account of the scarcity of farmland to till. But they realized that they had their own place and properties.

On 5 February 1992, the Alimodianons called a meeting and decided to leave Bituan and go back to New Alimodian. They drafted a resolution and worked for the declaration of New Alimodian as a zone of peace. They negotiated with local, provincial and national government authorities. The proposal contained the following provisions:

1. The area to be declared as a peace zone is the whole of sitio New Alimodian.
2. No armed group shall dictate to the community in times of war or peace.
3. Members of the NPA and AFP who want to live peacefully are welcome in the peace zone.
4. Government line agencies, NGOs and religious sectors or groups are welcome to help in the total development of the community.
5. Violations of the provisions by the NPA will be reported to the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

### **Return Part Two**

On 15 February 1992, a second movement of people took place from Bituan to New Alimodian. Representatives from the local and national governments, the Church, the nongovernment organizations and the media witnessed it. Just like the first exodus, it started with the celebration of the mass by Fr. Ronilo Villamor as the presider. The journey started after the homily. When they reached the area, the mass continued and ended up with the baptism of two children and a thanksgiving meal.

Immediately thereafter the residents of New Alimodian Peace Zone organized themselves by coming up with what was called the Sitio New

Alimodian Development Council. They put up a cooperative. They established linkage with the Bituan Peace Zone and other concerned agencies for the speedy declaration of their place as a peace zone. They joined in dialogues with the military and other government agencies until finally, they received national recognition as a peace zone on 23 June 1993 (interview with Francisco Abihon, Jr.).

### **Barangay Nabundasan**

The story of the people of the Barangay Nabundasan is no different from that of the other barangays. It followed a storyline similar to the other peace zones in the neighboring barangays. They lived peacefully and in relative economic abundance from the time the place was established as a barangay up to the 1960s. All of the residents therein were likewise Ilonggos, which means their place of origin is Iloilo.

The secret underlying the peacefulness and abundance of the place was really the farmers' organizing efforts, which gave rise to what was called the Banayal-Tuburan-Nabundasan Foundation or BATUNA. Essentially, it arose from the collaborative efforts of three barangays with the assistance of the Catholic Church parish of Tulunan. It had for its objectives the spiritual and economic upliftment of the residents. Ironically, this socio-economic development program aroused the suspicion of the military establishment. The local folks were suspected to be organized by the NPA. Undeniably, the presence of the NPA in the area was evident.

And so, military operations started to be launched by government forces in the 1970s, especially after martial law was declared. Many armed confrontations between two opposing forces took place in the barangay, causing disastrous economic dislocations among the residents. Oftentimes they were forced to vacate their homes, leaving their valuable belongings and livestock behind. Whenever the government military moved out of the area, they returned to their houses and took whatever useful things they needed in their places of refuge, including their goats, pigs, chickens and other livestock. There were times when the military burned down their houses, thus rendering them homeless when they emerged from their hiding places.

During military operations, the people experienced grave harassments and intimidations. Some people were tortured; others received threats of summary execution or salvaging. Certain cases left indelible marks in the memory of the people. Alfonso Fajardo, a teen-ager, was mercilessly

tortured and killed; Ramon Panibayo and Felomino Nobleza were both tortured and salvaged; and Diosdado Tacalan suffered unbearable tortures that rendered him disabled and therefore unable to work in his farm for two years; and the most gruesome of all was what happened to Custodio Nim, a farmer leader, who was chopped to death.

Another experience that paralyzed the livelihood activities of the people was the so-called "hamletting" whereby all the villagers were herded by the military and made to stay in two chapels as hamlet centers for weeks or months on end, purportedly to monitor their daily activities. In the hamlet centers children got sick. An old man died.

As a military strategy to counteract insurgency and ostensibly for the protection of the local people, the village menfolk were recruited to become members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). But this was resented by the people because of the risks involved, aside from the fact that their livelihood would be affected with less time for farm work once they joined the para-military unit. In one instance, a group of village men was forcibly brought by the military to their detachment outpost in New Panay for the para-military training. But their wives went with them and refused to leave the outpost until their husbands were sent home together with them.

### **The Birth of the Nabundasan Peace Zone**

Having gone through a series of militarization, the residents of Barangay Nabundasan decided to declare their area as a zone of peace. They drafted a resolution and submitted it to the Peace Commissioners, the Governor, Bishop Juan de Dios Pueblos, and Col. Cresencio Villanueva, to mention a few. Some provisions of the resolution were:

1. That we shall not allow arms to be brought within our barangay especially those borne by the military troops; neither shall we allow detachments within the barangay.
2. That we shall not allow the recruitment of civilians into the CAFGU or CVO.
3. That no armed groups shall be allowed to enter our barangay especially the military, the NPA and other armed groups.
4. We are united in declaring our Barangay Nabundasan as a zone of peace.

They also established linkages with other peace zone areas and joined the dialogues held in relation to peace zones. Finally, Barangay Nabundasan

won national recognition as a peace zone, along with those of Bituan, New Alimodian and Miatub on 23 June 1993 (Interview with Jerry Nim).

### **Sitio Miatub**

Miatub was created as a sitio of Barangay Tuburan only when some of the residents from Barangay Tuburan opted to live in a peace zone. Residents of this sitio came from Miag-ao and Tubungan of Iloilo, thus the name "Miatub" from the first syllables of both places.

Life in Barangay Tuburan was peaceful until the 1970s, when the NPA entered the place and started conducting teach-ins among the local residents. This was coupled with organizing. Some joined the NPA, but many refused to go with them. At any rate, the organization brought in some positive effects, as some of the vices in the community, like drunkenness, were eliminated.

In the 1970s, the barangay was one of the areas that figured in the counter-insurgency program of the government. A detachment outpost was put up in Barangay Tuburan, and the special operations team began to conduct counter-insurgency activities in the area. Armed engagements between the military and the NPA caused civilian casualties caught in the crossfire. Some people received harassments and intimidations from the military. What the people resented most was the violation of their dwellings. The military just entered their houses at night to see if there were NPAs around. Again, purportedly for the protection of the people, the military recruited men to join the CAFGU, but again the people resented this.

The Barangay Tuburan villagers likewise experienced evacuation runs even if only within the barangay. If the armed encounter between the military forces and the NPA was in the southern part of the village, they moved to the north and vice versa. Just the same, these movements were physically and emotionally exhausting.

### **The Birth of the Miatub Peace Zone**

Having heard of the Bituan Peace zone, some of the barangay officials of Tuburan visited Bituan for an exposure. They were inspired by what they saw and observed so that they started to work for the establishment of a peace zone in their own barangay.

An assembly among the barangay residents was called to present the idea of a peace zone. A survey soon followed to determine how many

wished to have their village become a peace zone. The result of the survey showed that eighty percent (80%) of the residents were in favor of a peace zone to be put up in the barangay.

### **Alternate Exodus**

Immediately after the barangay council designated an area to be the peace zone, the people prepared a resolution requesting Sitio Miatub to be recognized and declared as a peace zone. In the drafting of the resolution, some individuals from Barangay Nabundasan were involved because many Miatub and Nabundasan residents were blood relatives, coming as they were from the same place in Iloilo. Consequently, the provisions proposed in the Miatub peace zone were a virtual replica of the Nabundasan peace zone.

It was unfortunate that in the process of negotiation for the declaration of the Miatub peace zone, one of the active members was tortured and summarily executed. However, it did not deter nor discouraged the people. They became even more intent and courageous to pursue the undertaking.

One day, the people called for a *bayanihan*. Men were gathered to help transfer the houses from the barangay proper to the designated peace zone site. The womenfolk helped with other tasks, such as cooking and fixing the houses. The bayanihan of carrying the houses lasted for a day. At the day's end, everybody was already in the designated Miatub Peace Zone.

The people recounted that at night some unidentified men were sometimes observed to be moving in the vicinity of the peace zone. To protect themselves, the people organized a group of six to seven men to do a round-the-clock night watch activity. An alert system was devised. The night watch was to beat a piece of bamboo in case unidentified persons were noticed or an untoward happening occurred. Every house would then respond by beating a similar instrument. This simultaneous sound alarm would rouse the entire community to be vigilant and be ready for whatever may happen.

The Miatub residents soon established linkage with other peace zones. They earnestly joined dialogues called to discuss matters related to the peace zone negotiations. They hosted the big dialogue that was participated in by the four peace zones and graced by the presence of Senator Rodolfo Biazon. Miatub, with the other areas, was declared a zone of peace on 23 June 1993 (Interview with Crispino Fajurano).

### **Structure of the Peace Zone**

Each peace zone has its political structure. It has a Peace Zone Council composed of three representatives from the Church sector, three from the farmers' group, and three from the barangay government. For a sound working relationship, the four peace zones decided to form the Inter-Peace Zone Development Council (IPZDC) composed of three representatives from each peace zone. Among themselves, they elect the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer and auditor. The IPZDC has the power to decide and transact business in behalf of the peace zones. But after some reflection, the IPZDC was changed into Inter-Peace Zone Coordination Committee to emphasize the idea that the power to decide was with the people's assembly and not with the council members.

### **Features of the Peace Zone**

#### *Principle*

The assembly believes that we, the people, are the foundation of life, peace and progress based on the principle of divine providence and nationalism. We believe in the safeguard of our rights in harnessing our initiatives without reservation and free from the dictates of any armed group in times of war or peace; and we recognize, respect and uphold civilian authority at all times and in any situation.

#### *Program*

The assembly follows its own method of implementing and monitoring its programs. Our organization exercises no reservations in helping its member areas, especially when requested by the people.

#### *Goal*

The empowerment of the people is based on full participation in the decision-making and implementation of the undertakings for the upliftment of their economic, political and cultural life.

#### *Mission*

Solidarity of the people through education and organization in order to strengthen themselves towards sustainable peace and prosperity.

**Objective**

Seek and attain full security, justice, and development through people empowerment.

**Method/Strategy**

The assembly follows the democratic process of educating and organizing consultations, dialogues among the people, and forging alliances with groups having the same orientation and objectives as ours.

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