

## The Maladeg Peace Zone and the Dungos Peace Pact

B. R. Rodil

**D**esigned by the people themselves, the Maladeg Peace Zone stands out as the most unique all over the country. It sprang forth in Maladeg, a coastal barangay of Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur, a province whose population is more than 93 percent Maranao Muslim.

In Barangay Maladeg itself, the population is 90 percent Maranao and 10 percent Christian, compared to the town of Sultan Gumander which is nearly 98 percent Maranao. Maladeg is made up of 876 houses in all. When the peace zone started, there were only more than ten Christian houses, now there are more than a hundred.

Many of the Maranaos do not come from Maladeg. A good number of them came from the nearby towns of Nunungan, Calanugas, Malabang, Ganassi, Karomatan and Balabagan. They either came as evacuees during Martial Law days or simply sought shelter on account of unstable conditions in their places of origin. The Muslim residents are clustered on the north side of the coast, the Christian residents on the south side. The leading families, the Antons, stay in the middle.

The Muslims and the Christians used to be mixed in the early days but because of differences in culture, which were built-in irritants among them, it was decided to separate them. The Christians allow the sale and drinking of liquor and the raising of hogs, while Islam prohibits them. There has been no trouble since the separation of the two communities.

Elected leader of peace zone is 60-year old Manuel Anton – more popularly known as Bob, half Maranao, who is a Catholic Christian. Youngest in a brood of eight, his father was Miguel, half Spanish, one-fourth Maranao, one-fourth Maguindanao, former Chief of Police and four-term mayor of Malabang, Lanao del Sur. His mother is Mareg Limano of the respected Ibrahim clan of Pualas, Lanao del Sur. Her own father was the former Sultan Dalumangkob of Pualas.

Married to Trinidad Carpio, a charming Zamboangueña, Bob is referred to endearingly by the Maranao residents as the Ama-Ina (Father-Mother) of the zone. One reason he is called Ina-Ama, said Maanyag Ampuan, one of the original authors of the Peace Zone, is that "he protects his family, meaning not only his blood relatives but all the people who believe in him in the peace zone. When his family is in distress, he forgets himself and he will take maximum measure to save the lives of his family."

All the signatories of the Covenant of Peace and Development – the original of this document is in Maranao – used to be Bob's mortal enemies, *ridu-ai* in Maranao, with whom his family was at war for more than two decades. They were sworn to eliminate his family from Maladeg; his family fought them to survive. In the process he lost some members of his family. He himself is a veteran of countless armed encounters with them. Now, they are allies, sworn to protect each other in the peace zone.

When they arrived in Maladeg, said Sangcupan Kilab, one of the authors of the peace zone, there were about ten houses there. They conferred with the Antons. They decided to create a committee whose task was to fix all kinds of *rido* (family feuds), and also to prevent the escalation of trouble particularly inside the zone. There were so many *rido* all around them at the time. Now, the committee has more than 30 members and the houses have increased to more than 800.

They also decided to create a Peace Zone which would be bounded by areas inside Turayas to the east, boundary of Liangan-Subuan to the west and then, going up to the north, Kalumpang or Kaludan and then going up to Mamaanan and back of Turayas. The area is about seven kilometers in width and about 15 kilometers in length.

The members of the peace zone represent clans; they also have Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commanders among them, all sworn to uphold the eight rules and regulations of the zone. The Zone did not have a name in the beginning, just a Committee made up of 13 leaders, and the covenant was not written either (it was put on paper later). From the original 13 in 1978, the Zone covenant's signatories have now increased to 41. Four of the signatories are MNLF commanders, one is a Chief Inspector of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and another is a Colonel of the Philippine Army. The incumbent mayor of Sultan Gumander is so pleased with the peace and order situation in Maladeg he decided to relocate his office there.

A Council of Elders sees to it that these rules are implemented. To ensure proper implementation the rules are disseminated to all the families

in the zone. Where a family or clan is unable to implement the rules, the signatories – datus and leaders – of the covenant will take over the implementation. They have a community jail for violators. The first tenant was the son of Bob himself for a minor infraction, proof that he favored no one. The community respected him for that. Many others have been imprisoned there, including soldiers and members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs). There are no exceptions as long as they violate the rules.

Armed conflict, gambling, the use of prohibited drugs, any form of criminality, in fact, anything considered bad, are prohibited inside the Zone of Peace. Good deeds are encouraged.

Outsiders who wish to reside inside the Zone are required to seek the permission of the Council of Elders and commit themselves to a strict compliance of the rules and regulations prior to approval.

Any outsider of the Zone who has *rido* but does not wish to be part of the *rido*, can avail of sanctuary inside the Zone, provided he will promise to renounce violence and cut off his support for his relatives involved in the *rido*. This also means that he may not use the Zone as his base of operations to participate in *rido*. The Zone leaders, in return, will provide him protection and assistance from any troublemaker.

They also have a committee whose members are constantly alert for any outbreak of actual conflict or potential conflict. If they feel that a conflict is about to break out, they would immediately visit the involved parties and talk them out of it. Where armed conflict has already broken out, they will visit the contending parties and persuade them to a cease-fire. As soon as the parties agree, the next move is to get them to negotiate for a peaceful resolution. In cases of murder or attempted murder, Zone rules require that the weapon used in the crime must be turned over to the Committee before resolution.

The committee has not only confined its services to the people of Maladeg, it has also extended assistance to those in need in nearby Maganding, Malabang, Nunungan and Karomatan.

Women violators, married or unmarried, may not be subjected to interrogation without the presence of male relatives of the first degree.

The Committee's success record in settling conflicts has been spectacularly high. Also, contrary to the practice of mediation common among Maranaos of requiring a fee of 30 percent of the settlement sum, they as mediators do not charge a single centavo for their services. Neither are they compensated for their work. They have also built a reputation for fairness, regardless of social rank.

### Feedback from the People

Some feedback from the signatories will reveal the extent to which the Peace Zone has been successful in creating a new way of life in Lanao del Sur. In the interviews with the Maranao leaders, they were asked to respond especially to two questions: (a) Describe life with rido and life without rido, and (b) Why did he choose to live in Maladeg?

Originally from Nunungan, Mauyag "Mawi" Ampuan has lived 40 years in Maladeg. He is one of the authors of the Peace Zone and is also one of the signatories of the Covenant of Peace and Development. Asked about his opinion on life with or without rido, he said: "A person without rido can go anywhere. A person with rido is like a carabao tethered to a tree. He can only move around as far as the rope will allow."

To Ustadz Ampaso, originally from Uyaan, leader of more than 50 families from the same place and one of the original signatories of the covenant, life with rido is being a "prisoner inside your own household." What attracted him to Maladeg was that the place is "peaceful and I decided to stay here because this is where I found peace of mind."

Kadi Abbas who hails from Nunungan heads more than 200 families. He has lived in Maladeg for the last 20 years. He commented: "When you have rido, you are never stable, you are like a prisoner. You cannot work, you cannot go out of your house, you cannot extend assistance to anybody because you are afraid to go out. Your enemy might be somewhere else and might take any a chance on you. He can kill you."

He chose to stay in Maladeg because of the work of Bob and his brothers. He told Bob Anton: "We have identified you as people who are concerned about helping other people especially when they are oppressed, when they are hard up. Your family is always there to extend assistance to these oppressed people, to these people who are financially hard up. And most of all, your place is identified with peaceful coexistence among the inhabitants. We find this place very ideal for future plans. This is the place where we can rest with peace of mind. This is a place where we can feel safe even if we have enemies. We believe you will not leave us unprotected."

Said Datu Bra who has lived in Maladeg for 40 years, "The bad thing about rido is that our livelihood is really paralyzed. The advantage of having no rido is you are free to move wherever place you like to go, no problem." As to why he chose to stay in Maladeg, Datu Bra said this is where he discovered that he can make a living in peace.

Alim Abu Jabir, originally known as Khilaid Rajah Muda Ali, is from Nunungan. He studied Arabic in Matampay, Marawi City and went to

Kuwait University on a scholarship. He graduated in 1991. He came home when Iraq attacked Kuwait. As an Islamic teacher, he moves around a lot. Even if he does not concern himself with the rido of his clan, he still takes precautionary measures. He plans his movements. He is aware that rido is prohibited in Islam. One of the things he does in his travels is to tell people the efforts being made by the people of Maladeg.

But how does one sustain the peace zone? Makaorao Sarif, Sultan sa Liangan and regular emissary during settlement processes, believes that to maintain the integrity of the peace zone, the datus must first of all agree. Every leader must discipline his followers and his subjects. When the datus agree among themselves, it means that they have one motive, which is to find peace for themselves and their followers. Leadership is very important. The participation of leaders and datus is very important to achieve this aim.

### The Dungos Peace Pact

In August 1999 a group of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) soldiers arrived in Dungos, Tulunan, North Cotabato to inform the people that they were going to establish an armed detachment there, Dungos being part of the MILF Camp Rajamuda.

The Christian and Muslim residents of the place met with them to inform them that they have this peace pact in Dungos not to allow any armed men inside the area. And this included the military and police as well.

They recalled that this Peace Pact was signed on 20 March 1995 by representatives of the Christian and Muslim inhabitants of the Barangay. Among the signatories were Dungos Barangay Chairman Mario M. Baloniebro, Jr., Mayor Rodolfo Peñafiel of Tulunan, and the parish priest, Father Buenaflor. The witnesses included no less than Governor Rosario Diaz of Cotabato, Congressman Gregorio Andolana of Cotabato, Mayor Ibrahim Paglas III of Datu Paglas, Mayor Saidona Pendatun of SK Pendatun, the Provincial Director of the PNP, the Battalion Commander of 40IB, 6ID, and Boy Hasim, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Brigade Commander of the Upper Kutawatu Revolutionary Command.

Sometime after the signing, a delegation led by Mayor Peñafiel traveled to Camp Abubakar where they informed Hadji Murad, MILF Vice Chairman for Military Affairs about the peace pact. The response of the MILF leader was encouraging. As a result of the August attempt of the MILF to establish a detachment in Dungos, the people again conferred

with the MILF leadership. The latter decided to respect the agreement of the people.

The Dungos peace pact was born out of the turbulence of the early 70s and the insecurities resulting from the raging war between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MNLF. It was also inspired by the successful creation of the Peace Zones of Sitios Miatub and New Alimodian, and Barangays Bituan, Banayal and Tuburan in the same municipality of Tulunan that became one of the Ten (10) Outstanding Awardees for development programs throughout the country. Declared as Special Development Area (SDA), the Peace Zones gained the support of the national government and were extended financial support for the people's livelihood program.

Among the agreements of Dungos were the settlement of internal conflicts by peaceful means and the disallowance of armed groups, including the military, to enter the area unless requested by the members of the Ad Hoc Committee.

### **Lessons from the Peace Zones**

What the peace zone of Maladeg and the peace pact of Dungos teach us is that the people need not wait for results in the top level negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and MNLF or the GRP and the MILF. They know what kind of peace they want and they can agree among themselves within the community. Self-regulation is an important ingredient here because it illustrates that establishing a peace zone or the creation of a peace pact area and maintaining the same requires vigilance and a constant demonstration of the stakeholders' political will. There is nothing better than peace that flows and is nurtured from within.