

Peacebuilding in Mindanao Conversations: A Synthesis

The program started at 9:05 a.m. with the Invocation (prayers in the Lumad, Muslim and Christian traditions) and the singing of the Philippine National Anthem.

The Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Matias Regis, introduced the Welcome and Rationale speakers.

Bishop Angelito Lampon, OMI, D.D. (CBCP-ECID Chair and Bishop of Jolo) in his welcome remarks described the activity as an event of peacebuilders coming together while Archbishop Romulo Valles, D.D. (Archbishop of Davao) reminded everyone that “Happy the peacemakers, they are children of God” and that, in peacebuilding, the small victories are treasured.

Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, S.J., D.D. (Archbishop of Cagayan de Oro) reviewed the objectives of the program which are as follows: 1) to understand the concept of peace in Mindanao; 2) to present an overview of the Comprehensive Framework on the Bangsamoro (CAB); 3) to discuss various perspectives and ways to pursue reconciled diversity and 4) to consider available options for peacebuilding, wealth-sharing, etc. The message of peace is not about a negotiated surrender but a conviction of unity

Prof. Rudy Rodil presented a historical context of the Bangsamoro by using the analogy of the *husay* (Ilonggo word for “comb”) as an instrument to fix messy hair (referring to the ensuing chaos in Mindanao). He also invited everyone to look at Mindanao as a whole but also to considering three (3) aspects: 1) that Moros want their own state; 2) that the CPP-NPA want the same and 3) the Lumads want to be included. According to Prof. Rodil, Moros became part of the Philippines without their consent, became a minority in their own lands, lost their voice in their own governance and consequently also saw the disappearance of their culture before their own eyes. Due to its loss in the war, the Philippines became a colony of the United States and people were encouraged to occupy “uninhabited” lands in Mindanao. Within 50 years, the population was reversed, and the Moros became the minority. The Americans only recognized two kinds of people in Mindanao – the Christians (civilized) and the non-Christians (Moros and wild tribes), thus paving the way for faster marginalization.

A 15-minute video presentation gave the participants an idea of what to expect next, including the plebiscites that would occur in the identified areas, the procedures leading to an established Bangsamoro government in 2016, including how the justice system will retain the Sharia for Moros and customary laws for the Lumads and how normalization becomes a vital concern with human security as the primary objective.

Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (Chair, GPH Peace Panel) updated everyone on the CAB, reporting that the Annexes have been accomplished including those on fiscal autonomy, power sharing and normalization. A 3rd party monitoring team will also be instituted to journey with the team until the exit document is done. Furthermore, issues on ancestral domain will need to be addressed. Prof. Ferrer stressed, however, that the goal is not to replace one hegemonic synthesis with another hegemonic synthesis but that this new synthesis will take into account the varied identities of

different peoples in Mindanao. The support of the people is the only guarantee for the success of the peace process, with continued dialogues and conversations

Datu Antonio Kinoc (MILF, Peace Panel) quoted MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad when he declared that the two sides, the MILF and the government, now cease to be adversarial but work for a united Bangsamoro. The CAB will ensure respect for traditional leaders but will not re-activate them and both sides are now working together to answer questions, i.e. questions on sovereignty, wherein he stressed that Bangsamoro will NOT separate from the Philippine government but will still be covered by it and that corruption cannot be solved only by the government but by people both in and out of the government.

Mr. Harun Meling (Peace Panel) shared that problems would surface that would need to be dealt with. Mr. Meling also expressed his appreciation to Cardinal Quevedo for voicing out the reality that the Moro problem can be summarized using only one word: injustice.

An open forum then commenced with several issues being addressed.

On the constitutionality of the CAB i.e. sub-state, Prof. Ferrer clarified that the Constitution has no legal definition of a sub-state and that the Bangsamoro entity will be a political arrangement within the Philippine state so there is no talk of a separation.

On the inter-faith leadership of Muslims and Christians and how emotional blocks in MNLF-dominated Sulu and Tawi Tawi would be overcome, the members of the peace panel recalled that both former Chair Salamat and current Chair Murad extended their support to Gov. Nur Misuari in the beginning, that the MILF never sabotaged the peace process between the Philippine government and the MNLF and that Moros understand one another in ways that may not be comprehensible to non-Moros, especially in areas of religion or faith. All were reminded of the important role of universities as well as the value in having a common history.

The question was then raised as to who is a Bangsamoro and whether or not self-ascribed Bangsamoros will be the only ones allowed to run for political office. The peace panel opined that there is no need to put the Bangsamoro identity into the Agreement and that self-ascribed Bangsamoros will not be the only ones who can run for office, as this would be discriminatory and unconstitutional, since the constitution assures everyone of equal opportunity.

Would the Bangsamoro Basic Law only have one definition for ancestral domain? Ancestral domain will be defined and operationalized in the framework of national law. There must, however, be a shared identity to prevent problems in sustainability and development, where development occurs differently with each different identity.

Why must the ARMM be replaced? Why can't it simply be developed or improved? The CAB addresses the weaknesses of the ARMM, especially in the area of fiscal autonomy. Real autonomy will be exercised by the Bangsamoro entity. The peace panel also shared with everyone that the Islamic Council refused to support the MNLF's (through Mr. Misuari) call to go back to rebellion against the government. All are enjoined not to put their belief in documents that are not properly

signed and authorized as there are some who seek to propagate misconceptions to derail the peace process.

In the area of revenue generation and wealth sharing, could the Bangsamoro still enjoy infrastructure projects from national government? Yes, as devolution will still be practiced as the Bangsamoro entity will still need help for a long time.

How would the CAB address the issues of rido, possession of firearms of individuals and families and warlordism? The peace panel replied that Rido is due to the failure of the justice system and the proliferation of firearms is due to insecurity. The new Bangsamoro government, once entrenched, will establish the belief that it will solve crimes, thus acting as a deterrent to criminals.

Will the Bangsamoro claim ownership of ancestral domain? The term “ownership” is confusing; ancestral domain, through delineation, will be practiced, while protecting the rights of IPs. The CAB will have a transitional justice mechanism that will look into the legitimacy of ownership of ancestral domains, with emphasis on justice.

What would happen to unpaid projects under the ARMM administration when it (ARMM) ceases to exist? The CAB will honor contracts and obligations of the old government including the backpay of employees (except for “ghost” employees).

Can the MILF be more generous than the state in going beyond the IPRA? IPs under the IPRA were only given 1%; Bangsamoro can enact a law increasing the percentage.

Ateneo de Davao University President Fr. Joel Tabora, S.J. asked the peace panel what can the Catholic Church do, in the next 6-12 months, amidst issues on rido, unpaid debts and historical injustices committed against the Moro and Indigenous peoples? The peace panel advised the Church to **propagate a spirit of dialogue in churches and in schools, to focus on the morality of people, remind everyone to help in the creation of this new government and to increase inter-faith dialogues, especially those led by civil society in the universities and peace centers.**

The morning session ended on this note and all were invited to lunch.

The afternoon session began at 1:45 with the convening of discussants Datu Musoulini Lidasan (ADDU- Al Qalam Institute), Mucha Shim-Quiling (Lumah ma Dilaut), Prof. Roque Yusuf Morales (National Commission for Muslim Filipinos), Timuay Labi Alim Bandara (Timuay Justice and Governance), Fr. Albert Alejo SJ. (ADZU), Fr. Jun Mercado (Notre Dame University of Cotabato) and Bishop Angelito Lampon, OMI (Vicar Apostolic of Jolo). Atty. Meong Cabarde, AdDU’s University Community Engagement and Advocacy Council (UCEAC) Chair, served as Moderator.

Datu Lidasan shared his belief in the existence of the Bangsamoro Nation when he was still growing up, that “there was never a Muslim Nationalism Struggle”. He also envisioned a new narrative, adapting to the new changes. He posed the question on how we would be able to preserve our culture given the new influences from the west and other externalities such as the media. Thus, the one is faced with the dilemma to preserve one’s identity.

Prof. Shim-Quiling stated that peace cannot be built on a linear view of history as such would be an exclusive history. History and knowledge belongs to different contexts operating simultaneously. She pointed out that we will have a few peaceful moments of peace with the signing of the CAB. We have to be able to cater to communities who don't have a sense of history. Prof. Shim-Quiling enjoined everyone to work in the moment "here and now" to be truly free; that public trust to shatter prejudices.

Prof. Morales quoted the late rapper Tupac (Shakur) when he said that "conflicts and war may come and go but those who struggle remain eternal. . . those who seek peace remain eternal". Prof. Morales observed that when he talked to people from other agencies, they barely understand what is happening. When asked on the benefits, they answer "*wala pa nanaog sa amo ang order*" ("We have not yet received the order"). Thus, unless the voices of the unheard will be heard, there would be no peace.

Mr. Bandara pointed out the inclusion of the 4 bundles of rights that were stipulated in the IPRA (ancestral domain, self governance and empowerment, social justice and cultural integrity). IPs ask for assistance because they have limited sources in understanding it. There are some provisions that they wanted to include in the Bangsamoro basic law and they want to be part of this agreement, which is exactly the reason why they wanted these rights for the IPs to be included.

Fr. Alejo stressed the use of knowledge in interpreting reality. He also pointed out 5 points: 1) how do we use history?; 2) what can we learn from reviewing the MILF and NDF peace talks?; 3) the IPRA itself should be viewed as a peace agreement and not just a law; 4) there is a need for intra-faith processing accompanying interfaith dialogue and there should be an inclusive peace communication.

Fr. Mercado described the Bangsamoro as a watershed. It is already a reality even though it is not yet born. He pointed out Prof. Ferrer's assertion that "a hegemonic synthesis must not be replaced by another hegemonic synthesis". This is a process and we must negotiate certain ideas forming the basic law. It is also a question of trust, especially on the issues of identity, prejudices and representation. Fr. Mercado closed his statement by asking if there would be an expansion of the Bangsamoro territory.

Bishop Lampon, OMI, shared his experience of having a duty to "stay alive" in Jolo. He shared the incidents of kidnappings and other crimes especially in Jolo and stated that, even if we are different, we should learn how to be united. He also pointed out the existence of 4 different group leaders who can unite, having only one voice. Bishop Lampon then concluded by stating that, after hearing so many things that are valid, there is a need for us to "open our eyes to the horizon to the complexity of this matter." He also posed the question on whether or not there is a realistic alternative for this, possibly a continuous war for more years to come.

The floor was then opened up for questions.

Are we limited by the Bangsamoro identity? Focus is not on Bangsamoro identity but on the Bangsamoro narratives to prevent focus on one hegemonic paradigm.

If the Bangsamoro is only a watershed, is the government ready to make another peace program? The Bangsamoro is a watershed because it marks the reality that the ARMM has been declared as a failed experiment (dead) and that the CAB is now set to become a reality.

Fr. Mercado shared that there is still time to ensure that we create a good Basic Law to also ensure the success of the CAB.

There was, however, a belief expressed that the CAB misrepresents the desires of the original crafters of the Bangsamoro ideology. The MNLF represents the old vision of Bangsamoro. The idea that Tausugs are lawless and cannot tolerate order was debunked with the update that there is now respect for the police in Jolo. The Tausugs are only remnants of a damaged culture where religion has been the law that has been ruling the lives of the people. There is a need to address the old questions with genuine solution, without imposing identities. The best solution would be for Sulu to turn back to mainland Mindanao, reconstruct its bridge with Sabah and Indonesia, thus resorting to socio-economic rather than political measures.

Is there a need for another negotiation for the Lumad? Mr. Bandara clarified that this is the negotiation already but also asked why the positions that Lumads submitted were not included in the list?

Fr. Mercado posed the question as to what narrative discourse can embrace the whole Bangsamoro without it becoming simply a religious or nationalist discourse? Prof. Lidasan stressed that there is a need to transcend beyond the Bangsamoro identity, to focus on the Philippine identity.

On the divisiveness within the Muslim community, Prof. Lidasan concurred that this divisiveness has its roots in history. Fr. Alejo recalled that the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC) played a major role during the Arroyo administration but also observed that the current Aquino administration does not have a clear program on how to engage with religious leaders. Religious leaders need to openly condemn kidnappings and other crimes in their areas. Christians are to be blamed also for a lot of infighting among Christian denominations but this has become lesser due to frequent dialogues. This problem will not be solved overnight but we need to consistently deal with it.

Why not a discourse of the poor? Discourse of the poor means food on the table, health care. The challenge for the people is to become a conscience for the government. **We need to start peacebuilding with the children, at Kindergarten level.** Government must provide the basic needs of the people so that conflict might be prevented.

A new President is expected by 2016, but will he have a heart for Mindanao? Vice President Binay is currently at the forefront of potential presidentiables yet he was not around during the CAB signing. Is this an indication of things to come? It is imperative that the national government funds the Bangsamoro government as a sign of sincerity

Participants were then invited to share their own peacebuilding initiatives in their own institutions.

There are educational programs for the Badjaos of Oroquieta although housing and livelihood projects did not quite succeed. Residents in Lanao and Bukidnon asked a military camp and their

parish priest for help in re-building their mosque and later on their community; Christians gradually became accepted into the community and feeding programs and medical help were also initiated.

The Mindanao Institute for Peace initiated **story-telling sessions as a way of healing community, energizing spirituality.**

The Ateneo de Davao, via its Al Qalam Institute, conducts a series of **Peace Camps** engaging students (senior high school and early college) in peace education. The University is also about to start an A.B. in Islamic Studies academic program where students upon completion may become practitioners in Sharia law, among other things.

Notre Dame as a Catholic University accommodates Muslim students by providing prayer rooms, conducting meetings and fighting against discrimination. Kidapawan College **provides alternative venues for non-Catholics to practice their faith and to engage in inter-faith dialogues, as a way to eliminate biases.** The Lumah Ma Dilaut school sought to empower communities by giving them tools to reclaim their own strengths in their indigenous tradition

Fr. Mercado shared the concern that time might be running short before the Basic Law is signed; thus, these **initiatives should be bridged together in an attempt to help shape the Basic Law, with the relevant institutions facilitating access to the relevant authorities.**

When asked for their closing remarks, the discussants advised everyone present to **learn to appreciate Moro diversity, for parishes and universities to provide space for inter-faith dialogues** and basically for all to be patient with their Muslim brothers and sisters as they are still transcending centuries of differences.

If diversity cannot be reconciled, accept it. Reconciliation is a continuing work that must not be stopped. Differences in opinions should not be considered a cause for conflict. We must always ask our leaders to work for peace, be they public servants or otherwise.

Worldly authorities naturally corrupt; sovereignty belongs only to Allah; governmentality in statelessness is possible. We must embrace the moment of the here and now.

To be an effective part of the process, we must admit how we were part of the conflict. Whatever it is we can accomplish now must be passed on to the Congress at the soonest possible time.

The discussants collectively asked for an opportunity, for a new beginning where people will not be afraid to discuss differences.