

'Disciplinary problem' in the MILF

(August 15-21)

Every organization, group, or even state has disciplinary problem in its ranks. The MILF is not an exception. But in the MILF, this infighting among few commanders is not actually organizational-borne but rather the result of a very low ideological, political, and organizational consciousness. Another cause is the purist tendencies or attitudes of few others who feel uncomfortable for the other's point of view. This is coupled with long-running conflict over landownership. The conflict between the Torrens system of titling of land and those who did not register or title theirs is now exacting a heavy toll on the people themselves. Conflict of this nature is very hard to settle, because both claimants have seemingly valid claims to the land in controversy.

Those MILF military commanders who are involved in these feuds are very few, and they are mainly concentrated in Central Maguindanao, where traditionalism, egocentrism, and militarism are strong. If one studies the history of traditional politics among Maguindanaos, the one here is replete with strong-arm tactics starting from Datu Anwar Utto or Datu Sa Sapakan during the later part of the Moro-Spanish War to the incarcerated former Governor Datu Andal Ampatuan in current times. Datu Utto used to extract the knee-caps of those who refused to join the fight against the Spaniards. Under present standard of right or wrong, this is savagery but during those time, it was the practice of some local rulers including some in Indonesia.

Some commanders (because they have a number of armed followers) joined the MILF not knowing who the real enemy is. They have a very simplistic view. They considered those who insulted them, took or deprived them of their belongings, and those who are in government as their enemy. And most often, they used "antagonistic means", meaning, use of arms or brute force, to seek justice or to correct injustice.

A revolution (much more if it is jihad) the enemy is "oppression". It is a cleansing process; it starts with oneself, to immediate family members, to the community, and to the society as a whole. It is a process of change from bad to good; it involves change of values, attitudes, outlook, and direction. In the case of jihad, a mujahid (striver) has to wage struggle even to himself by striving to cleanse himself of the filth in his heart, before he can cleanse others' filths.

In a strict sense, we do not even consider the Philippine government as our enemy; it is their oppressive and exploitative systems that are considered our enemy. When these systems are applied to our people in our homeland, they result to depriving them not only of their lands, but their collective security, survival, and future. This is the reason why the MILF is waging a jihadic struggle to restore back to our people their right to govern themselves on the basis of the

United Nations' recognized principle of right to self-determination. But if the government agrees to let our people run their lives and determine their destiny even in an asymmetrical state-substate arrangement, this armed struggle would become irrelevant.

For the MILF, suspension or even severe punishment is just a remedial course of action. Except for offenses criminal in character, the long-range solution is to educate the rank-and-file of the MILF, military commanders not excluded, in order to raise their ideological, political, organizational consciousness. This is the real and lasting antidote to indiscipline. And the MILF is doing this approach.

Who's after Gov. Sakur Tan's neck?



(August 8-14)

Two persons were killed in a bombing incident at the Zamboanga International Airport early Thursday night, August 6, reportedly aimed at Sulu Governor Abdulsakur Tan. Twenty four others were wounded, including the governor.

This incident highlighted long running Police, military, and Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat's biases, prejudices, and unjust practices, reflective of the collective inner thoughts of many if not most of the national leadership that shapes national policies. Take cues from the following particulars of this incident.

Because the suicide bomber clearly is not a Muslim or Moro, Lobregat is so slow in calling it a "terrorist" act. The Police and military also parrot the same line. Is it because only Muslim or Moro is capable of doing terrorism or is a terrorist? Instead of looking for scapegoats, why are the police and military not digging deep into the real person of the bomber and his connection? Why are they not asking, nay investigating, those who issued the IDs?

The bomber was indentified as Reynaldo Apilado (or Atilano?), whose identification cards (IDs) issued by the Social Security System (SSS) and Zamboanga City Electric Cooperative (Zamcelco), were recovered near his shattered body. He was a resident of Kalambuan Homeowners Association, an urban poor group, at Sitio Caragasan, Barangay Maasin, 13 kilometers west of this city. He also worked as a carpenter.

In his characteristic ways, Lobregat already concluded that those behind the incident were "politicians" of nearby provinces. "Don't bring your conflict to my city," referring to these politicians.

What an arrogant attitude? The bomber already identified and still he had the gut

to accuse Moro politicians from nearby provinces as masterminds? Does he mean these politicians have already achieved finesse and sophistication in recruiting people including Christians to undertake suicide mission?

The Police and military have similar attitude. If the bomber bore Muslim name, they will certainly conduct immediate operations and effect arrests and made them confess to the crime. This time they are not doing this, otherwise they will conduct raids and arrests where Apelado was residing.

We are not saying the owners of the subdivision or neighbors are guilty of conspiracy, but we are just showing the discriminations suffered by the Moros from the hands of state.

.By the way, who has the motive in this assassination attempt on Tan, a politician? Of course, many politicians are capable of killing their political enemies, not only among Moros, but also elsewhere in the Philippines, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, Isabela, Mindoro. Remember the Plaza Miranda bombing during a political campaign rally of the Liberal Party at Plaza Miranda in Quiapo, Manila on August 21, 1971? It caused nine deaths and injured 95 others including prominent politicians like Sen. Jovito Salonga.

How about the MNLF, MILF, and the Abu Sayyaf, as theorized by the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence, and Terrorism Research in its August 6 paper?

We can be absolutely sure the MNLF and MILF have no motive to kill Tan; besides, the latter has no policy to kill politicians even the worst of them.

For the Abu Sayyaf, we dare not make our view. It is extremely difficult to fathom their thinking and behavior.

How about the military? Well, Tan is one Moro politician who says what he wants straight to the eyes of military men including former Major General Juancho Sabban, whom he verbally clashed over the custody of the released kidnapped ICRC volunteers last year. Moreover, airport is one place in every country where security check is very stringent. Why did Apelado manage to sneak in without being noticed by airport security, military and police agents or tipsters? This is a big question that, we are sure, will not be sufficiently answered at all.

A Pandora's Box



(August 1-7)

No matter how states' apologists would argue, the decision of the United Nations' International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo that it is not illegal under international law will affect the turn of events where sovereignty-based insurgencies are taking place around the globe. So far known it is only now that this kind of decision has ever been made by the ICJ, thus effectively shattering the gridlock of right to self-determination (RSD) of peoples versus territorial integrity of sovereignty of states. This time it clearly favored RSD to the great dismay of states which are still glued to the fading theory of the inviolability of state sovereignty. Even among Southeast Asian states, the consequence of this ruling put them in disconcerted positions. Only Malaysia immediately recognized Kosovo's independence. Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, deferred recognition of an independent Kosovo, while the Philippines declared it will not oppose, but nor will it support Kosovo's independence. Both countries face pressures from Muslim sovereignty-based movements within their borders, notably Aceh and Mindanao, respectively. Vietnam expressed opposition, while Singapore is still studying the situation.

The major question now is what effect the decision will have on those inclined to secessionism around the world. Certainly, there are many and seriously far-reaching. First, as a result of that decision, the United Nations is in a bind. Similar situation might crop in the future, and if the ICJ decides otherwise, its moral authority to settle world conflicts will be put in question if not utterly undermined.

Second, it opens the Pandora's Box for those seeking to secede from the states whose borders are usually the artificial construct by power-grabbers, colonialists, or imperialists. It gives non-state actors, minorities, and nationalities the high moral ground to argue their cases for secession or declaration of independence. It also emboldens even those seeking independence by force of arms as impliedly endorsed in the ICJ's decision. Supported by massive firepower including aerial from the European Union and the United States, Kosovo had defended its borders from Serbian invasion. And third, it further puts those who supported Kosovo's independence on the basis of "exception" and "not a precedent" not only in an embarrassing situation but also would come face-to-face with hostile international public opinion. They will be accused --- and certainly will be guilty --- of upholding a double-standard of justice.

However, the truth is that the favorable ICJ's decision does not guarantee automatic self-rule. The case of Kosovo shows how good luck works favorably. It was superpower brawn and not the force of international law that turned a rebel commander into a prime minister. Rebels without similarly strong friends will have less luck, whatever the judges in The Hague say. This is not to say, however, that the decision is useless. As stressed, it has serious repercussions. The case of the MILF-led sovereignty-based struggle in Mindanao is not one that

is not fascinated by the turn of event in Kosovo. It is enriching, as it is widening the theatre of the debate. Armed with diminishing valid arguments on the basis of international law and current diplomatic practices, the Manila government would likely dig deep into its domestic laws, in addition to brute force, to expunge or suppress valid political aspirations of peoples such as those of the Moros and indigenous people in Mindanao. But in the long run, such approach will have more negative side effects than what it can achieve for the proponent.

Disquieting 'signals'



(July 23-31)

There are no clear indicators yet what the new government of President Noynoy Aquino really intends to do in relation to the GRP-MILF Peace Talks. At present, they are reviewing all the previous peace policies of his predecessors, from President Fidel Ramos, President Joseph Estrada, to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. We do not know what kind of peace policy he intends to formulate and pursue during his term of office: for problem-solving or just managing the conflict.

So far, the only concrete signs beyond doubt are the declaration to continue the peace process, and for which he appointed former Secretary of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Teresita "Deng" Deles, to the same post, and the naming of Lawyer Marvic Leonen as the new chairperson of the GRP Peace Panel. Aside from these, everything is not clear, including some disquieting but largely blurred signals:

- The new government is sending the signal, without being very blunt, that they want to start the peace talks from ground zero. This will be a source of problem, because the MILF's position is to start from where the two Parties stopped. The MILF believes that the peace process is a continuing exercise, not a back and forth movement; and it also stands up to the principle of "constancy and irreversibility" of prior signed agreements.
- The new government is hinting to domesticize the negotiations. They want to review the role of the foreign players. This is another bone of contention, because the Moro Question has always been an international issue since the exit of the Spaniards in 1898. Lawyer Antonio La Viña, a member of the Seguis-led government peace panel, said the internationalization of the issue has started long time ago in 1975 when President Ferdinand Marcos sent Imelda Marcos to Libyan President Muammar Khaddafi to ask him for help in the resolution of the conflict in Mindanao.

· The new government is floating the idea of replacing Malaysia with Indonesia as facilitator of the GRP-MILF Peace Talks. The choice of a facilitator is not the exclusive domain of one party. Furthermore, institutional memory is indispensable to make the process succeed.

Too much or prolonged preliminaries, short of falling into the category of “obstacles”, are not healthy signs. They can create uncertainties, which can feed into the appetite of the hardliners or radicals. Worse, they can be interpreted, correctly or wrongly, as the start of another paikot or fooling around scheme. (We believe Noynoy is not of this type).

We are not saying we resume the talks now; or we are raring to do it like a raging bull. That is not our point. All what we want to say is that tardiness is not a good way to start a huge responsibility. So much precious time had been wasted by the previous Arroyo administration. Imagine more than nine years in power without concluding the talks with the MILF? In the end, it reasoned out the comprehensive compact cannot be signed for lack of time. What a silly argument!

Malaysia, Indonesia are big brothers



(July 15-22)

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) does not make any distinction between Malaysia and Indonesia; both are big brothers to the Moros. We owed them many things; through Malaysia, Islam, an advance political system, and the Jawi script came to us. Jawi was and still is used in conservative Malay-populated areas like Kelantan and Pattani. Sulu and Maguindanao used this script before. Similarly, Indonesia helped the Moros quelled the Spaniards by sending warriors in the 16th and 17th centuries and funneled most of our bronze cannons (lantakas) which the Moro warriors used during the Moro-Spanish War. Like Malaysia, we also had extensive maritime commerce with Indonesia for centuries.

To cap it all, Malays and most Indonesians are Muslims. We are not only brothers in race but also in religion. We also shared with them a history of anti-colonial wars against the Dutch, Portuguese, British, and Spaniards, which Filipinos had never had in their history. Luzon and Visayas succumbed to Spain for just 11 years. Only the Moro kingdoms of Manila and Tondo put up a fierce fight that ended with their defeat.

Be this as it may, but the issue of facilitation of the GRP-MILF Peace Talks is a different story. The issue is not whether we prefer Malaysia over Indonesia; both, as stressed above, are our big brothers. But the issue is which country is the

most fitting for the job. Because of years of facilitation, which proved excellent, and rendered more fitting by their institutional memory, Malaysia must stay as facilitator. Indonesia has no such institutional memory with the MILF track, plus their deep involvement in the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. This makes their job not only complicated, but would also put them in an extremely difficult balancing act. They will be torn between two extremes: the MILF track which is basically the creation of a state and substate arrangement and the MNLF track which is for integration and through legislative process. More importantly, Indonesia has similar insurgencies in their own soils, in Irian Jaya, Sulawesi, and the Moluccas. The bid for independence is very strong in these areas, which are heavily populated by non-Muslims. If it inclines to accept the validity of the MILF aspiration, there is backlash on home-grown insurgencies; if it identifies itself closely with the Manila government's refusal to substantially empower the Moros, then it can be accused of siding with a non-Muslim state. It is a case of "damn if you do and damn if you don't."

Knowing Indonesia especially its leaders, who are men of integrity and principle, we doubt very much whether they see any wisdom in Aquino's proposition. In the hindsight, it is not a very healthy idea injected amongst good neighboring countries. If it cannot be explained well, the nuances are not very wholesome.

We cannot understand why President Aquino has to make this announcement in such a hasty manner, and ambivalent at that. We try to read his mind, but the conclusion we can draw is that he is putting up unnecessary but perhaps calculated stumbling blocks to the early resumption of the peace talks under his administration. This is a dangerous proposition that can reverberate to the ground. As early as July 8, his military chief of staff had already announced that he would crush the New People's Army and the MILF by 2013. The military also accused the MILF of training 700 bombers (presented in PowerPoint during the Kusog Mindanao forum at the Waterfront Hotel in Davao City on July 8-11). Almost immediately, a bomb had exploded in Datu Piang, Maguindanao last July 12 midnight killing one person and wounding several others. The suspect was a military man reportedly belonging to the Army's 29th Infantry Battalion.

We do not want to sound alarmist; but there is an equation among experts on conflict resolutions that tells us that if the peace process is moving up, the violence moves down. We are at a situation where the status of the peace talks is hanging in the balance. This creates so many uncertainties.

Need for new politics in Maguindanao



(July 8-14)

Both the newly-elected governor and vice governor of Maguindanao, Datu Esmael Mangudadatu and Datu Esmail Mastura, respectively, belong to traditional families, but their being such does not mean they are the breed who

subscribe to tradition blindly. The duo exhibit not only religiosity but also progressive attitude and outlook that are truly wanting in this 21st century.

It is not bad to be traditional, per se. But traditionalism, in order to be beneficial, must not defy logic and reason and, for Muslims, not contradicting the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon).

The MILF is not against traditionalism; it is pro-traditionalism but on certain conditions: We do not believe that all traditions must always be followed. We can preserve them but not to revive those outpaced by modernism and Islam.

Rejecting tradition is like a novice rejecting the advice of a master. It might be a good idea, and on occasion it might even be necessary, but it's not something to be done lightly, especially in important matters. Traditionalism is rational when we are dealing with things that cannot be demonstrated and reduced to clear rules. Those include basic things like the attitudes, practices and ideals that define our way of life. A way of life is too close to us and too comprehensive to be reduced to rule or judged wholly by external standards. You have to live it to understand it. As a result, every way of life is traditional, and you'll do better if you accept that.

There are many challenges facing the two young men in Maguindanao politics. We will set aside disunity of politicians, because they cannot solve this; it is in the nature of this so-called democratic practice that politicians and parties are divided and partisan. But they can do a lot to inject professionalism and morality in the style of politics in this province; win or lose, the antagonism should end the moment election is over.

What are these urgent challenges? They will have to deal with the attitudes of some, perhaps few or many if not most, mayors in the province, who considered their internal revenue allocations (IRA) as their own money, which they spent left and right without restrictions. They must also pay attention to the consistent absenteeism of many if not most mayors in their towns; not a few make Manila, Cebu or Davao City their real homes, enjoying in all sorts of worldly pleasures while their people can hardly eat twice a day.

It is true that the main culprits why the Moros are suffering to this day are colonialism and the neo-colonialism of Manila. But to blame them solely for our suffering is to be out of touch with reality and untruthful to ourselves. During the American period in Mindanao, Tacurong City was a mere sitio of Buluan, but look, Tacurong is already a city but Buluan hardly had improvements that can envy outsiders. Much of this retrogression is due to lack of level playing field in business and commerce, which can only thrive well when there is security from undue harassments, if not extortions. This is sadly lacking in areas where the rule of law or civility is hardly felt or promoted.

With their education, foresight, and morally-driven crusade for good governance,

the two young leaders can make a difference in the life of the people in Maguindanao. They can do this, we are sure.

However, this expectation is less expected in other Moro provinces, simply, because those who won during the last elections were the incumbents who have shown little to their people and outsiders. But they can improve or show more if they want it, which we also hope sincerely.

Disturbing view



(June 22-30)

During the presentation of the result of the Konsult Mindanaw at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) in Makati City on June 21, one prominent priest from Davao City lambasted the lack of transparency in the conduct of the GRP-MILF Peace Talks. While we do not question his motive, but we do not know how far he wants transparency is required of the parties to the talks. If he meant disclosing to the public all details of the process, especially the most sensitive ones, then he wants the talks to fail. No negotiation in the world ever bared all the essentials of the issues at stake until the proper time and proper audience. Perhaps, he confused negotiation with public hearing conducted by legislators.

How we hope that he was invited to the International Negotiators' Forum in Manila on 27-28 May 2010 where all the experts from Palestine, Sudan, Indonesia, and Northern Ireland stressed the need for secrecy and confidentiality.

Among the negotiation experts invited to this forum were Gerry Kelley of Northern Ireland; Omar Dajani, a US-based Palestinian lawyer who participated in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation; and Yusof Kalla, former vice president of Indonesia and who was deeply involved in the negotiation in Aceh, Indonesia.

For an honest-to-goodness negotiation, both confidentiality and "good faith" are required. The assurance of confidentiality helps create an atmosphere in which the parties feel comfortable to exchange information, and "good faith" requirements encourage participation and fair bargaining. However, the parties will have to sacrifice some confidentiality in order to inform or consult the parties' respective constituencies.

Negotiation is basically a give-and-take engagement. To be able to do his or her job effectively, a mediator or facilitator should be able to use the guarantee of confidentiality in order to encourage a party to make concessions or to admit "bad facts" in their case. Similarly, mediators can utilize the guarantee of confidentiality in conjunction with the ability to caucus to make the parties feel sufficiently at ease to speak. The primary goal of a mediator is to facilitate discussion, and reminding the parties of the guarantee of confidentiality. This creates a favorable environment in which the participants can speak candidly.

When the parties realize that confidentiality applies equally to all parties—including the mediator—they should feel that the process treats all of the participants in a fair and equal manner. Similarly, the parties should feel confident in the mediation knowing that the mediator is prohibited from revealing the mediation communications.

While the priest's view may be an honest one, but the consequence to the peace-making in Mindanao is inconsequential. It is as if he wants all of the so-called stake-holders members of the government peace panel, which results not in focus discussion but an anarchy of views. The MILF cannot and will not negotiate with everybody, including spoilers whose only interest in the negotiation is to let it fail. No matter how you consult them, they will always disagree and oppose the peace process. Pres. Charles de Gaulle did not consult everybody when he negotiated peace with the Algerians; British Prime Minister Tony Blair with the Irish Catholics and Protestants, and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA).

It is time that everybody should listen to experts on negotiation or learn the art of successful negotiation. Like any other human endeavors, negotiation also has its dos and don'ts.

Global warming



(June 15-21)

Global warming is not a theory anymore; it is hitting us hard nowadays. Temperature is soaring high especially those in the Torrid Zone that drives many into frenzy. Man must act now or he will suffer forever.

What is global warming?

It is the rise in temperature brought about by the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The green house gases like carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide are playing hazards in the present times. These green house gases trap heat in earth's atmosphere and thus result in increasing of its temperature. The excessive emission of these gases is one of the major causes of global warming. The major source of carbon dioxide is the power plants. These power plants emit large amounts of carbon dioxide produced from burning of fossil fuels for the purpose of electricity generation.

The industrialized states are the main culprits. Obsessed with profits, they don't care who suffer or die as results of heat, floods, hurricanes, or typhoons, which are the direct consequences of an abnormal or imbalanced atmospheric

conditions. But the poor states are not really blameless either. Many don't care about how they dispose off their green houses or wastes properly. The individuals are not guiltless either, the rich ones especially.

In the Philippines, the rich or what others call "capitalists", in collaboration with transnational investors, put their money into business especially in logging, mining, plantation economy, in factories, etc. which dump their wastes into the environment. Loggers cut down trees in vast areas that do not only bring down the level and volume of water to critical level but also destroy watershed areas. Miners especially those in gold mining, pollute the environment. They use mercury which is toxic even to human beings and animals. Plantation owners especially those in pineapple and banana use pesticide that kills animals or plants including food crops and ornamental plants, Pesticide acts by interfering with the target species' normal metabolism .

If the earth is becoming more and more hostile today, we blame no one but ourselves. God hath forewarned man "not to corrupt the world" or he will suffer the dire consequences. It is man's foolishness that creates for him a hostile world to live in. Almighty's creation is such an awe and perfect that He did not only provide man everything he needs but also ensured that the ecosystem of complex living organisms, their physical environment, and all their interrelationships in a particular unit of space acts in perfect harmony.

However, the ironies are: 1) the states which are mainly responsible for the most emissions of green houses especially the United States and China are the ones lukewarm to the global efforts to contain these emissions; and 2) those who sow the most seeds of this monster are the ones least affected by the ill-effects of global warming; although they are not exempted by killer typhoons and hurricanes, and tornadoes. It is the poor and poor countries which suffer most because they cannot afford to equip themselves with anti-heat technology, appliances, etc.

Man is not the owner of the earth; it was only ordained for his use and stewardship. There are millions and millions of organisms, both seen and unseen. If man continues to corrupt the earth, he is not only putting himself in harms' way but more seriously committed a big sin because of the destruction of vast numbers of flora and fauna and other creatures of God.

MILF-MNLF unity: 24 years in waiting



(June 1-7)

In 1986 the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) came close to establishing a high council that would have coordinated their major activities including putting up a common peace panel that would talk to the Philippine government's peace panel. This did not materialize,

because then President Corazon Aquino went to Jolo, Sulu on September 5, 1986 and talked to MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari which paved the way for the re-strengthening of the ceasefire and ignited the dormant GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. Without the MILF on board, the MNLF hastily proceeded to deal with the government and signed the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of September 2, 1996.

This effort to unite the two Fronts was sponsored jointly by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Muslim World League (MWL). From 1986 the OIC has been urging the two Fronts to put up a coordinating committee, instead of merging into one monolithic organization, because that is not practical. But Misuari was and still is not very receptive to the idea. To him, a unity can only be possible if the MILF disbands and all its leaders and members return to the fold of the MNLF.

Twenty four long years in waiting until the unexpected happened in Dushanbe in Tajikistan on May 18. In a two-page document, MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari affixed their signatures on what is considered a historic document. The ambiance surrounding the closed-door meeting, though, was not wholesome. The OIC has to exert enough goodwill and perhaps a little brotherly prodding, if not a pressure, before the agreement was sealed. Much of the hesitancy was not from the MILF.

The question: will this be the beginning of closer and fraternal relations between the two Fronts? That is our wish! But documents are mere piece of paper; they will not implement themselves. It requires the intervention of man, in this case, men and women of the MILF and MNLF to really work together for the interests of our people.

For the MILF, there is no substitute for unity. If unity cannot be achieved by having one organization, the resort to unity in diversity is the second best option. The primordial thing that matters is the need to marshal all efforts and resources towards confronting the common enemy. Unity of ideas and efforts --- and all weapons towards the enemy --- is the mark of a real sacred struggle.

But the effort is not without foreseen and unforeseen stumbling blocks. It is not an easy undertaking. First, those working for it must have one in mind: the highest interest of our people. Second, they must believe that victory can only be attained when there is unity, a real and genuine one. And third, in fact the foremost, is to earn the pleasure of Allah which will lead us to Paradise.

On the other hand, the worst enemy of unity are: a) misdirected esteem or egos of those in the highest level of organization, especially those who are used to be the boss ever since; b) those in the lower and medium level leaders of both Fronts are not as ideologically and politically conscious as their comrades in the upper echelon; and therefore, not as responsive as their advanced comrades;

and c) the continuous prodding and intrigue of the enemy (all those who forever want the Moros to be weak, marginalized, and ruled) will always factor in this unity effort. They are not expected to just sit idly around the corner and allow the Bangsamoro people to consolidate their strength.

Murad and Misuari must act not only as leaders but as real statesmen. They must see to it that what they signed must be pursued vigorously and without reservation. If anyone of them or both waver, then the anger of our people will surely come. The OIC is also watching very closely – and certainly, the least that would fall on the guilty is the withdrawal of recognition. In such a case, the greater losers would be the MNLF and Misuari, because they have been recognized by the 57-member Pan-Islamic body since 1975. And the OIC is their only steady backer. But this recognition or support is not cast in stone; it can be cut or suspended. For the MILF, while it values and works for the support and recognition of the OIC, it has nothing to lose but everything to gain, because it has not had the official recognition like the MNLF. Only during the recent OIC conference in Tajikistan that the MILF was invited officially and separate from the MNLF.

UN report on child soldiers in the Philippines



(May 22-31)

The United Nations can be commended for speaking the truth about child soldiering in the Philippines. It had identified the New People's Army (NPA), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as "persistent users" of child soldiers in armed conflict.

We do not dispute this report. It is factual and documented. We confess that even to this day, the MILF is not totally immune from child soldiers in its ranks for various compelling reasons. We have explained this to Madame Radhika Coomaraswamy, the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, during a meeting more than a year ago. However, since we signed with the UNICEF an agreement to protect children's rights and to delist the MILF as users of child soldiers last year, progress has been made in this regard. The annual report sent to the UN Security by the same group attested to this and it said that progress has been made with some groups which have recently signed action plans in which they aim to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. This included the MILF, alongside the SPLA and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. All three insurgent groups have signed such plans with the UNICEF.

But what is not very wholesome in said annual UN Report is the light sentence obviously accorded to the Philippine government, which in previous report identified it as the main violators of children's right. Of the 100% violations recorded, 50% were committed by the state, the remaining 50% by the NPA,

ASG, and MILF in that order. However, only 1% of these were committed by the MILF.

We are not trying to taint the personality of the UN; that we will never do. We just want to be clarified, because in said report, it merely “expressed serious concern about national armed forces using children for military intelligence and interrogation purposes”. It does not come to our mind that governments are exempted from provisions of the UN Resolution on children’s rights particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Philippines is a member of the UN and therefore must abide by every UN Convention.

Consider the following open and blatant instances of government’s violations of child rights:

- The recruiting, training, and arming of minors -- including sending them to combat – as members of the Civilian Volunteers; Organizations (CVOs) and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs);
 - The continued recruitment of children as military assets or informers, spies, or as laborers, etc.;
 - The continued recruitment and admission of persons below 18 years old into the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) and the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM); and
 - In the field of sports, boxing especially, young people are continuously recruited. Boxing is almost a sport of death.
- In the three citations above, it is very clear that the government is a violator of child rights. To be absolutely clear on this, let us have a mathematical computation. A child enrolls in grade I at age 7; finish the primary school at age 11; elementary school at 13; and high school at age 17. The moment he qualifies to the PMA or NAPOLCOM, he is below 18 years old. The UN says, a child soldier “is a person under the age of 18 who directly or indirectly participates in an armed conflict as part of an armed force or group.”

We appeal to the UN to ensure that the rights of children are safeguarded by all and sundry especially governments. The right to protect the people including children is a responsibility of governments. They must be told to comply and be held accountable when they renege. On the part of the MILF, we would like to see the 1% violation on our part becomes zero. After all, it is not to our liking and interests that children are in our ranks. We want them sent to schools and other child-friendly activities not just soon but if possible right now.

Congratulations Noynoy Aquino!



(May 15-21)

The MILF may not have participated in the May 10 national elections, but there are enough good reasons this early to congratulate Senator Noynoy Aquino for heading towards winning the presidency of this country. We cannot see any intervening reason why his dream will not come true.

Virtually unknown as presidential timber before he filed his candidacy, Noynoy has proven the skeptics wrong and accomplished what most people said was near to impossible. His recent achievements will be discussed for a long time to come. He deserves the admiration of all!

As president, what can we expect from him?

Judging from the examples by his parents, especially the late Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., the son can be as close to the Moros as his father. It was his father who almost single-handedly exposed the Jabidah Massacre in Corregidor Island in 1968 where scores of Moro trainees were mowed down in cold-blood by government soldiers, for refusing to obey orders "to invade Sabah" from the Malaysian. Her mother, President Corazon Aquino, was not anti-Muslim either. She was the one who offered ten provinces instead of 23 provinces to MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari for the coverage of the future Moro autonomy in Mindanao, but the offer was rejected. She also caused the inclusion of the provision on regional autonomy for the Moros and Cordillera in the 1987 Constitution.

As a person, Noynoy is surely a good man, but as president, it remains to be seen. A president has to make hard decisions; and to do that requires foresight, resoluteness, and political will. Also one has to weather the pressures of those vested interest groups which solely seek to maintain or control an existing system or activity from which they derive private benefit. Considering all these factors, it takes not just being good to be able to be a successful leader.

Once elected president, Noynoy will be surrounded by the big business groups, the Catholic Church, the Chinese super-rich elites, the multinational companies, and such political bigwigs like Senator Franklin Drilon and Senator Mar Roxas. All will be jockeying up for favors. In addition, foreign countries' interests especially of the United States will certainly factor in positively or negatively.

If Roxas gets elected as vice president, the Roxas' factor will be felt more in case Noynoy embarks on a serious peace talks with the MILF to solve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. During the controversy over the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in July-August 2008, he "fanatically" identified himself with those opposing the deal. He never had shown an iota of concern for Moro interests

Source: Luwaran

http://www.luwaran.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=17&Itemid=274