

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This Report covers the results of a study done on developing a Culture of Peace program for the Province of Sulu. This was commissioned by Pagtabangan BaSulTa, a coalition of Manila-based NGOs concerned about the human security situation in the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

The study aimed to identify the factors contributing to the situation of unpeace currently prevailing in the province of Sulu and come up with recommendations which could address these factors, reintroducing a situation of peace and social justice in the Province.

Sulu was chosen as the focus of this study because of the turmoil which has wracked the province over the last few years. In the last 19 months alone three major “wars” have been fought in Sulu, pitting thousands of soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines against native Suluanos. In February 2005 operations were launched against Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) forces loyal to Chairman Nur Misuari which resulted in the displacement of approximately 70,000 civilians in the municipalities of Panamao and Indanan, on the main island of Jolo. In November 2005, the military launched offensive operations ostensibly against Abu Sayyaf forces in Indanan municipality but ended up in a violent confrontation with the Misuari MNLF forces there. In August 2006 nine battalions of AFP soldiers, approximately 4,500 men, again launched attacks against Abu Sayyaf forces, estimated at around 200-300 fighters, again in Indanan. Civilian displacements were however contained to around 500 families or around 3,000 persons as the area of operations was restricted to two barangays in the municipality.

Aside from these major offensives, four clan conflicts erupted within the first seven months of 2006 and killings of soldiers, policemen and civilians as well as kidnappings in the Metro Jolo area have been a weekly – and during some periods, daily – event.

The basic questions addressed by the study are: why is the situation as it is, and what can be done about it?

Study Process

The study based itself principally on consultations that were conducted in Metro Manila, Zamboanga City and Sulu with Suluanos and persons knowledgeable about the situation in Sulu. In February and March 2006 a survey was undertaken in the 18 municipalities of the province to elicit people’s views regarding their current personal situation, their perceptions regarding the situation of the province, factors contributing to



the current state of affairs and views regarding what should be done to bring peace back to Sulu.

Ten respondents in each municipality were interviewed, two representatives each from the religious sector, traditional leaders, economic sector, women and youth. The interviews were undertaken in an informal setting, usually over a cup of coffee and native pastries, in order to elicit the inner feelings of the respondents.

Initial study finds were presented to various groups in Sulu, to include the multi-sectoral Task Force on Peace and Unity, representatives of the MNLF, some local government officials and a gathering of representatives from the AFP, the Philippine National Police, representatives of Local Government Units, the MNLF and Civil Society for the purpose of gathering feedback and reactions.

Basic Findings and Recommendations

Province-Wide Survey. **The majority of respondents (82%) in the survey consider themselves to be personally worse off today than they were ten or twenty years ago.** When asked why their situation is such, the majority cited the lack of income-earning opportunities as being the major factor.

The majority of respondents (72%) consider the situation in the province today to be chaotic, citing security concerns – mainly the peace and order situation – as being a major factor contributing to this, but also pointing to poor governance and economic difficulties as being secondary factors.

The majority of respondents (83%) state outright that the province is not peaceful and believe that to address this, improvements in governance and in the security situation are equally needed to bringing peace back to the province.

Security. **The security situation in Sulu is complex and has to be understood in its complexity if any headway is to be made in addressing it.** Factors contributing to the complexity of the security situation are rooted in history and the warrior culture of the Tausugs who comprise the majority of the population in the province; the phenomenon of clan conflicts; unresolved issues between the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front; the existence of so-called Abu Sayyaf forces; the entry of U.S. military forces in the province; and the introduction of the phenomenon of terrorism.

There is a palpable gap in trust and credibility between the civilian population and the military and police authorities in Sulu. To address this gap it is proposed that a number of security policies be addressed by the concerned military authorities. These include the basic orientation of the military with regard to Sulu, viewing Sulu as a terrorist base; changing what in effect is an undeclared state of war in the province of Sulu; the practice of continuing military operations; the approach towards



the phenomenon of loose firearms; sharing of information with the civilian population; and the approach towards addressing the so-called Abu Sayyaf Group.

Moreover, there should be a deliberate effort on the part of the military and police authorities to reach out to the civilian population.

It is also necessary to strengthen the leadership of the Philippine National Police in the province.

A quick resolution of outstanding issues between the Philippine Government and the MNLF is also desirable. It is noted that this is currently being addressed.

Clan conflicts should be addressed by setting up a unit within the Provincial Government that can monitor and take action to resolve existing conflicts and prevent new ones from breaking out.

Civil Society Organizations should take a proactive role in addressing the security situation in Sulu, serving as a bridge between the civilian population and the authorities. Within the CSO sector the religious leaders in the province play a very important role.

It is noted that the issue of accountability for past actions on the part of all sectors needs to be addressed if the process of healing the injustices that have accumulated over the centuries is to be started.

Governance. There is generally a low regard on the part of Suluanos for their political leaders. However people believe that good governance is necessary if a regime of peace is to be re-established.

Challenges in the area of governance can be traced to many factors, among which would be the historical experience with the Sultanate that existed in Sulu, the corruption of the electoral system rendering the electorate irrelevant in the process of choosing their leadership, the corruption of the Internal Revenue Allotment system and the continuing vestiges of practices instituted during the martial law period.

To address these challenges, a number of actions are proposed to be taken. To begin with, reform must be initiated by the top leadership in the province, specifically by the Governor. A process of periodically evaluating the performance of LGUs should be instituted, with the development approach toward each unit being adjusted depending on the outcome of this evaluation. Participation of the CSO sector in governance, particularly in the LGU special bodies, should be strengthened. Again, within the CSO sector the religious leadership of the province should be encouraged to provide guidance to the populace in choosing their political leadership properly while at the same time exhorting the leadership to abide by Islamic principles. Appropriate training programs, to include the practice of twinning with other LGUs elsewhere, should be explored. An effort to develop a new breed of leaders in the province, particularly focused on the younger generation, should be undertaken.



Economy. The clamor of people for livelihood opportunities is noted. The high levels of poverty in the province clearly demand it. It is therefore recommended that **a clear, organized and sustained focus on developing income opportunities in the province be given priority.**

A twofold approach is recommended: the development of local industries, focusing on products which the people traditionally produce – such as coconuts, coffee, abaca, fruits, seaweeds, fish and others – as well as developing opportunities and capabilities to exploit the overseas market for skilled labor.

In both approaches it is recommended that efforts start at exploring **market tie-ups**. This would not only ensure the disposal of products at prices that would provide producers a fair return on their efforts and investments but would also guide quality considerations as well as facilitate obtaining needed financial resources. In the case of deployment of skills in overseas markets, tie-ups with employers, placement agencies and embassies will ensure that the types and quality of skills required will be developed by the training institutions in Sulu.

Religion. **The critical role of the religious sector in guiding people in the search for peace is emphasized.** Given the predominance of the Islamic faith in the province, it is noted that this effort is consistent with the character of Islam as a religion of peace.

In this connection, specific examples of actions that could be undertaken by organizations like the Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development, the *Jama'a Tabligh* and the leadership of the Catholic Church in the province are noted.

Peace Education. The recommendations of **a study undertaken on Peace Education in Sulu** are reviewed. It is noted that efforts are underway to review these recommendations and begin piloting modules in selected schools in Sulu hopefully by the second semester of schoolyear 2006-2007.

Capacity Building. It is noted that there are currently two bodies that address the issue of coordinating peace building efforts in Sulu, the Task Force on Peace and Unity and the Area Coordinating Center. It is necessary to define clearly the roles that each of these bodies can play.

Moreover, **the strengthening of the Civil Society sector has to be focused on.** This can be done by, first, undertaking efforts to assist existing organizations in Sulu focused on peace building undertake an internal re-examination and identify areas for strengthening. Once this is done, efforts should be expended at mobilizing these existing CSOs to help build non-governmental organizations and people's organizations in areas outside the Metro Jolo area, where the existing CSOs are generally found.



Guiding Principles

In all of this it is noted that a number of principles should be kept in mind.

First, **the people of Sulu must express the desire to bring peace to their province.**

Second, the realization must be reached that **peace will need to start within each and every person concerned.** It is not a matter of structures or policies instituted but of internal change.

Third, the people of Sulu have to focus on the fact that in the ultimate analysis **they have to depend on their own efforts,** rather than those of external agencies or individuals, to bring peace to the province.

Fourth, it must be realized that **whatever gains are made in this effort to bring peace back to Sulu must be jealously guarded,** as these could disappear if not nurtured and protected.



INTRODUCTION

“It’s like a joke of history...when you think that once-upon-a-time the ancient Kingdom of Cathay, the Court of St. James of England, the Americans and other great nations used to send Ambassadors to my ancestors’ Astanah (Palace) in Maimbung, then the shipbuilding center and capital of the Ancient Islamic Empire of Sulu – but now, it is nothing but a depressed rural area which badly needs rehabilitation” (HRH Paduka Mahashari Maulana Al-Marohom Sultan Hadji Mohammad Punjungan Kiram Al-Sultan Shariful Hashim)

The Culture of Peace (COP) program for the province of Sulu started as an initiative of the Pagtabangan BaSulTa (PB), a consortium of initially ten Manila-based civil society organizations concerned about conditions in the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. These three provinces consistently ranked within the bottom rungs of the Human Development Index (HDI) ever since these ratings were started in 1993. And among the three provinces, Sulu has consistently ranked at the bottom of the heap, the last among the country’s 77 provinces.

A Glorious but Troubled History

While Sulu has had a glorious history – having been the center of trade in the region and at the crossroads of trade between China and Europe through India up until the mid-19th century – this history has also been a troubled one. Ever since the entry of Spain into the region in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the Muslim areas within what subsequently came to be known as the Philippines, and particularly the Sultanate of Sulu, suffered from incessant attacks from the Spanish colonizers in what was essentially a reprise of the Crusades launched by Europe at the end of the 11th century. These attacks against the Moro homelands continued until the 20th century with the arrival of the colonial forces of the United States and, in the eyes of many Muslim Filipinos, even during the period of the Philippine Republic.

Thus, Suluanos are no strangers to violence. In fact, one could claim that the constant experience of conflict, whether in defense of one’s homeland or in support of allied kingdoms (as in the case of the Sultan of Brunei who sought help from the Sultan of Sulu in quashing a rebellion among his followers in the early 18th century) or even in pursuit of trading objectives, has in fact helped shape the warrior-like character of the dominant Tausug tribe in Sulu.

This troubled history persists to this day. Sulu was the nerve-center of the Moro secessionist fighting that broke out in the early 1970s. Only after the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed the Final Peace Agreement with the Philippine Government in 1996 did the center of gravity of the secessionist struggle shift to mainland Mindanao, where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued the struggle.



But in Sulu, to this day, there are MNLF forces still actively confronting the Government, demanding that the provisions of the Peace Agreement signed be complied with fully and that Chairman Nur Misuari, who was imprisoned after fighting broke out in late 2001 between MNLF forces loyal to him and Government forces in Zamboanga City and Sulu, be freed from detention.

A Peaceful Sulu

But life has not always been violent in Sulu. Old-timers still speak of “peacetime”, referring to the American colonial period, when life was peaceful in the province, when people could travel from place to place without fear of being waylaid or caught in encounters between different groups and, most importantly, when one could expect the law to be imposed swiftly and justice imposed on wrong-doers.

Focusing on more recent periods, people still talk about the late evenings during the 1950s and 1960s spent walking around the capital town of Jolo, sipping native coffee (*kahawa Sug*) and having native pastries (*bangbang*). Others speak of walking the five or six kilometers back to Indanan after the late night movies in Jolo. People recount how they could leave sacks of newly harvested crops by the side of the road without fear of these being appropriated by someone else.

But things changed with the advent of martial law.

Pagtabangan BaSulTa Initiative

Pagtabangan BaSulTa (PB) started exploring its involvement in the Basilan-Sulu-Tawi-Tawi area in mid-2004. Certain program and project initiatives were already underway by late 2004 in Sulu, particularly a water resources mapping and systems development program that had been launched by Tabang Mindanaw, one of the consortium members. However, in early 2005, things began unravelling in Sulu.

In the early morning of February 1, 2005, a firefight broke out in Sitio Baunu Ice, Barangay Kappuk Punggul, Maimbung Municipality. When the shooting ended, two soldiers lay dead on the side of the Government forces, PFC Abrenica and PFC Dalipos of Bravo Company of the Philippine Army’s 53rd Infantry Battalion, while inside a wooden and bamboo house belonging to the Padiwan family three adults lay dead: Tal Padiwan, an Imam and Councilor of Barangay Kapuk Punggul; his wife Nurshida who was six months pregnant at that time; and Salip Faisal Salim, a guest who had spent the night there with the Padiwans. Wounded were two of the Padiwan children, Aldasir, 13 years of age who later died on the way to the hospital, and Almujoyal, 7 years old who was hit on the right hand.

What actually happened and why the shooting broke out has never been clearly established. However, in retaliation for what was considered to be a “massacre” of an innocent family, MNLF forces under Ustadz Habier Malik launched attacks on Government troops in the Panamao area starting February 6, which led to ten days of



intense fighting. At its peak, some 70,000 persons were displaced and moved into hastily set-up evacuation camps or with relatives in other municipalities.

The Government took a hard stance as a result of this incident with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo turning down appeals for a ceasefire and ordering the military to hunt down the group of Ustadz Habier.

Faced with this and realizing how volatile the situation in Sulu was, the PB consortium decided to give special focus to the peace and order situation in the province of Sulu. It was therefore agreed that an in-depth look would be undertaken into what needed to be done to attempt to bring peace back to the province. The effort undertaken was termed the Culture of Peace Program for the Province of Sulu.

Why a Culture of Peace?

It is clear that addressing the situation in Sulu is not simple. It is the result of centuries of conflict; the influence of the Islamic faith; traditional folk beliefs; foreign influences brought by traders from within the region as well as from places like China, India as well as Europe; the vestiges of the Spanish and American colonial regimes; as well as the current secular Western-oriented systems of governance, education and ways of life introduced by the Philippine Republic. Thus it is not enough to focus on only one aspect of the situation in Sulu: one has to address the totality of life of the people of Sulu and the challenges facing Suluanos.

The United Nations defines a Culture of Peace as “a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations” (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13 and A/RES/53/243).

This definition highlights a number of critical elements for a culture of peace to take root. First, peace starts from within. For peace to prevail within a society, the values and attitudes of the members of that society must be oriented towards peace so that their modes of behaviour and ways of life reflect this inner state.

Second, peace is not reactionary but is proactive. It aims at preventing conflict, it rejects violence as a solution to problems and instead focuses on dialogue and negotiation to resolve conflict situations.

Third, for peace to prevail and last in a society, attention must be given to the root causes of conflict in that society, not just its surface manifestations. The factors underlying the state of unpeace in a society must be analyzed and understood.

With this as a guideline, the COP Study Team began its analysis of the situation in Sulu.



Research Approach

The Study Team was fielded by Assisi Development Foundation for *Tabang Mindanaw* in August 2005. The Team consisted of a Senior Advisor and a Researcher. The Researcher was a Tausug while the Senior Advisor, while being Manila-based, had close to forty years' experience working on Sulu matters.

The research initially consisted of interviews mainly with Suluanos based in Manila and Zamboanga in order to obtain initial suggestions on approaches to the analysis, and subsequently with people in Sulu from all walks of life in order to identify the following: perceptions regarding the peace and order situation in the province and factors contributing to this situation.

Meetings were also held with Civil Society organizations engaged in peace building efforts as well as police and military officers and local government officials. Throughout this period the Team worked closely with the Task Force on Peace and Unity organized in consonance with the Provincial Government's Executive-Legislative Agenda (ELA), and one of the Task Forces organized by the Pagtabangan Sulu engagement process.

The Team also initiated certain activities based on priorities identified in the course of its initial consultations. Thus, for example, it was clear from the outset that the involvement of the religious sector was going to be a critical element in the COP program. The Team therefore coordinated closely with the Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development and particularly with its Chairman, Ustadz Ibrahim Gadzhali who was also the Mufti in Sulu. Upon the advice of Ustadz Ibrahim, arrangements were made by the Team for a radio program to be aired once a week over one of the local radio stations during which representatives of the Sulu Ulama Council would speak on various aspects of peace from the Islamic perspective. This radio program was called *Ulanig sin Kasajahitraan*, or Echoes of Peace. The Team also arranged for a newspaper column to come out twice a week in the local newspaper, the Sulu Peninsula Journal, one column a week to be written by a representative of the Sulu Ulama Council, the other column to be written by a member of the Task Force on Peace and Unity. This column was called *Suwara sin Kahanungan*, or Word of Peace. Examples of these columns are attached to this report (Annex A).

Another aspect that had been identified as a priority based on the early consultations was the matter of education. It was therefore recommended to the Assisi Development Foundation that research on peace education modules appropriate for Sulu be undertaken. Several educational organizations in Sulu and Zamboanga were invited to submit proposals to undertake this research and the study was subsequently contracted out to the Ateneo Research Center under the Ateneo de Zamboanga University. This is discussed in greater detail later in this report.

From February to March 2006, interviews were held in the 18 municipalities of the province, targeting two respondents each from the following sectors: religious



leaders, traditional leaders, women, youth and the economic sector. Because of overlaps in some municipalities, the province-wide interviews ended up with 195 respondents. A full discussion of the structure and results of the province-wide survey is found in a separate section of this report.

The report was then put together and initial presentations were made to various audiences: officials of Assisi Development Foundation / Tabang Mindanaw and AIM-Mirant (members of the Pagtabangan BaSulTa consortium), the Task Force on Peace and Unity, representatives of the Moro National Liberation Front, two Mayors of different municipalities in Sulu, the Deputy Commander of the Southern Command, one Battalion Commander and subsequently members of the Sulu Bridging Leadership group consisting of representatives of the Local Government Units in Sulu, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, the Moro National Liberation Front and Civil Society organizations. Feedback and reactions from these various audiences have been incorporated into the report where deemed appropriate.

An Unfortunate Diversion

Unfortunately, in November 2005 the Team's attention was diverted to addressing another "war" that had broken out between Government troops and the MNLF forces loyal to Chairman Nur Misuari. On November 11, despite the pleadings of the Barangay Buansa Chairman that they were walking into a major camp of the MNLF, a company of Marines continued onwards ostensibly in pursuit of Abu Sayyaf bandits. The result was an encounter with MNLF forces which continued for two weeks, culminating on November 24, ironically the first day of the Mindanao Week of Peace, which was being celebrated all throughout Mindanao, with aerial bombings and rocket attacks on the MNLF camp.

The Study Team focused its efforts on the urgent task of attempting to prevent an escalation of the fighting. A meeting was held in Manila with the Acting Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Rene Sarmiento along with representatives of the AFP Southern Command, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Mindanao Economic Development Council in order to find ways to put a stop to the fighting. Unfortunately, the military was adamant in pursuing the war which, as stated earlier, resulted in aerial bomb and rocket attacks, just three days after the discussions were held in Manila.

Nevertheless the Team continued to pursue ways to prevent a continuation of the conflict. The Southern Command demanded that the MNLF hierarchy issue a public statement condemning acts of violence being perpetrated by the Abu Sayyaf, and when the Study Team showed the SouthCom a statement along these lines which had in fact been issued a few months back by the Chairman of the Lupah Sug State Revolutionary Committee of the MNLF, the SouthCom demanded yet another statement. A timetable was even provided by the SouthCom for the issuance of such a statement, failing which the threat of resumption of hostilities was made. The Team therefore focused on bridging



the gap between the MNLF and the military, holding several meetings with both sides for this purpose.

Fortunately, while the demanded second statement was never issued by the MNLF, the Government decided to abandon further hostile action and relative peace followed.

Structure of the Report

The Report attempts to draw together the information gathered by the Team from its various meetings, private consultations and the survey undertaken in the 18 municipalities. This information provides, first of all, the views of the people of Sulu regarding the current situation of the province and the factors that have contributed to the present state of affairs. The Team also drew on its own understanding of the Sulu situation to supplement information drawn from respondents.

People were also asked what measures they believed to be necessary to address the current situation in Sulu and bring peace back to the province. Again, this information was supplemented by suggestions from individuals consulted on specific issues as well as the Team's own assessment of what could be effective in the Sulu setting.

The Report starts with a review of the results of the province-wide survey and then tackles the various areas of concern that arose from that survey as well as from the individual consultations/interviews undertaken: security, governance, livelihood, religion and peace education.

Dynamic Nature of the Situation

It should be pointed out that things are moving rapidly in Sulu – whether for the better or for the worse remains to be seen. There have been certain initiatives undertaken which, if sustained, can correct many of the problems of the past. But there are as well as many, if not more, continuing negative influences which can overwhelm whatever positive actions have been initiated. For one thing, local elections will be coming in less than a year and already alignments and realignments have been noted among the traditional political powers. In Sulu, as in the rest of the country, electoral exercises have often had more negative than positive impacts.

Then there has been a continuing spate of violent incidents which have been unabated despite efforts of the police and military authorities to control them.

Thus, several of the observations and recommendations of this Report may be overtaken by developments, but it is believed that the basic views will probably still hold for some time to come.



Starting Point

As often emphasized in meetings that the Team had with various individuals and groups, peace will come to Sulu only if the following conditions and realizations are achieved:

First, **the people of Sulu must want peace to reign in their homeland**. If other pursuits are given priority – wealth, power, prestige, political advancement, etc. – then peace will never come. It must be foremost in the hierarchy of desires of the people, to which all else must be subordinated.

Second, **true peace starts from within**, when the individual makes peace with his God, with himself and with his fellowman. The advantage that the majority of Suluanos have is that they embrace a religion of peace, Islam.

Third, given the above, **Suluanos must depend only on themselves and the strength that God gives them** to achieve peace for themselves, their children and their homeland. They should not look beyond their shores, to the national government, foreign development agencies, well-meaning non-governmental organizations and others to bring peace to Sulu. Only Suluanos can achieve this for themselves and they must therefore take the lead in laying the foundations for a stable and long-lasting regime of peace in Sulu.

Fourth, the people of Sulu must realize, however, that **peace is a jealous taskmaster**. Even when achieved, it can vanish in an instant. We can lose sight of our priorities, of what should be important to us; or others may undermine, for reasons of their own, the achievements we may have attained. **Peace, once achieved, needs to be guarded vigilantly**, and we need to be sensitive to the currents swirling around us which may erode the foundations of peace we had carefully built.



ANNEX A

SAMPLES OF SUWARA SIN KAHANUNGAN



zambopenjournal@yahoo.com Friday, November 04, 2005

SUWARA SIN KAHANUNGAN

By Hannibal H. Bara

Self-rule and peace

Two years ago, Dr. Adijili N. Isduri; Imam Al-Rashid C. Kulani and I, all from the Department of Islamic Studies, were invited as guests by the Philippine Political Science Society during its annual general assembly in Davao City. We arrived by land to the city after four hours trip from Cotabato. It was a good day when we reached and afterwards we strolled the city to enjoy its fine roads, cleaned park and

fine buildings. There at Davao City, smoking is banned in all public places and transports. We saw no garbage; no vendor blocking the sidewalks. There were no soldiers armed to the teeth like those we have here in Jolo. The need of the City's poor population is properly addressed. They have the access to basic services such as water, health, education, electricity, and so-

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Self...

cial amenities. The city residence enjoys peace and security. We too also were safe and happy during our three-day at Davao. It was there where I learned by experience what self-rule or government and peace are all about.

The following day, we woke up early for the dawn prayer and later braced ourselves for the start of the conference. We knew that it would be a battle of intellectuals. We already thought since we left Jolo to engage with the Manila political scientists on any national issue affecting the Bangsamoro people. We expected to meet our former professors in UP and former friends whom we used to debate during our final days at the University of the Philippines. As usual, we could not fail to recall our memories, such as our several protest rallies we staged at Mendiola to shout - give peace a change.

In this conference, all speakers touched the issue of shaky peace and the political crisis engulfing the na-

tion. On our part, we rebutted their bias opinions on the Mindanao problem we insisted and maintained our firm stand regarding the issue of the Bangsamoro's quest for peace in our war torn Muslim region. Like in war, I battled in the conference advancing our thesis that the root cause of the conflict in Muslim Mindanao is not poverty as the speakers perceived. I told the participants that my people are not fighting for land and food. They fight only for Islam and their birth right to self-determination.

I expounded that not unless this thesis, which the Bangsamoro people have fought for is not recognized and accepted, peace is impossible to proceed. We cannot build peace without the capacity of the people to chart their own destiny and direction. When breaktime came, my former professor whispered to me, "I agreed with your thesis." But she asked me: Will you not consider the ARMM an expression of the right to self-determination? I told her: No! Self-determination is not

self-rule based on the people's national aspirations and political ideology as what our people used to do during the heyday of their great Sultanates.

Peace can hardly take off in a situation where the people are terrorized, under widespread corruption and being underdog position. Real self-rule for the Bangsamoro people must be allowed to evolve according to their own political tradition, which is far advanced than democracy. Chairman Nur Misuari was correct right from the beginning of the peace talk when he pressed for the establishment of the provisional government in Muslim Mindanao as transition period before regular government will rise.

Unfortunately, he was misunderstood. I know what the chairman wanted. He wanted to organize new political set up free from warlord politics, elite democracy and misguided politics.

I remember the experience of Indonesia. When Sukarno discovered that democracy is irrelevant to

Indonesia's desired self-rule, he at once introduced a new doctrine, which he called it guided democracy. Sukarno wanted a government to be guided by the country national culture and the wisdom of the enlightened leaders. Similarly, Pakistan in the 1960s, was forced to shift to the so-called basic democracy in order to save the country from ideological crisis. The concept of basic democracy, calls for the return to the principles of Islamic State. Today, both Indonesia and Pakistan enjoy a sense of peace and security. Both countries are considered regional powers and vanguards of Islam and the Muslim Ummah in Asia.

SULU

Peninsula Journal

BRIDGING THE REGION THRU INFORMATION

zambopenjournal@yahoo.com Tuesday, November 08, 2005

The impact of Fitna

Power, wealth and children are sources of Fitna or trial according to the Qur'an. Almost all of us can witness how dreadful the impact of power and wealth upon the lives of the people. This is if we do not know how to utilize them properly. The Fitna of power is if it is used for self-glory, oppression, plunder, embezzlement, and to destroy the dignity of the people. The Fitna of wealth is to use not in the cause of Islam. If wealth is not used for charity, public welfare or for productive investment it will bring misery upon the society. It is said that all sins arise out of these three matters: acquiring wealth unjustly, spending money in improper places, and becoming miser in places where expenditure is needed.

Children will also cause Fitna if they are reared in accordance with Islamic education. Spoiled children have always the tendency to behave arrogantly and spread corruption on earth. Most children of the powerful families are abusive and unruly. They are used to arrogate the law unto their hands.

Naturally, the powerful people and the wealthy incline to spread false doctrine and false information as they see it as their way to hold on to their power and wealth. As you know, once Fitna spreads it cannot be easily stamped

SUWARA SIN KAHANUNGAN

By Hannibal H. Bara

out; it will multiply like contagious disease. Thus, Islam condemns Fitna in the strongest term. The Qur'an describes Fitna as worst than killing.

But, what is really the greatest Fitna that undermines the progress of the Bangsamoro society. Is it rampant sale of shabu and the showing of pornographic material? Actually, these are only symptoms of the existence of the mother of Fitna in our society. I believed the rise of the pseudo leaders in the midst of bureaucratic and political institutions, is the greatest of all the Fitna. The pseudo leaders control the planning and decision-making. Their actions are only good for themselves and their supporters. Their decisions only complicate the order of the day. These people concentrate on politicking. They continue to perpetuate divide and rule tactic, and treat top positions in the government as war booty. The pseudo leaders favor turbulent situation for their strategies to prosper. They do not care on the general progress of the nation. They cling only to their vested interest. They have no in mind to work for a better and peaceful community.

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The Impact...

Pseudo leaders are the products of power play. These are the people who understand nothing about Islam. They occupy key positions in the government institutions not by virtue of merit but by manipulation and collaboration with the top leadership. Pseudo leaders also include people who claim to be intellectuals but advocating ideology other than Islam. Such persons are more dangerous than the opened enemy of Islam. Their actions could destroy the Muslim community from within.

We have also around us impostors or pseudo scholars whose actions will only create Fitna in the Islamic way of life. Any learned person who hides his true credential and his professed school of thought, is considered a pseudo scholar. This is an act of hypocrisy. His fatwa or his preaching is always colored with hidden agenda behind. Some of these impostors have the capacity to work in disguise as a staunch advocate of the Ahlus Sunnah path. And yet, they are not. They work under cover in order to hide their real identities.

PROVINCE-WIDE SURVEY

A survey was undertaken in all 18 municipalities of the province to determine people's perceptions regarding their current situation as well as the situation of the province as a whole. Had things improved or deteriorated relative to 5, 10 or 20 years ago?

They were then asked to cite what factors they believed were responsible for the present state of affairs as far as their personal situation was concerned as well as the situation of the province as a whole.

As a rule 10 respondents from each municipality were interviewed: 2 religious leaders, 2 traditional leaders, 2 persons engaged in earning a living, 2 women and 2 young people. In some municipalities more than the targeted 10 respondents were interviewed so that as a result a total of 195 respondents were interviewed.

Annex B lists the questions asked in the interview (English version) while Annex C provides the Tausug translation of the questionnaire, which was the official questionnaire utilized.

The survey provides the perspective of people from throughout the province to the questions raised. During the early months of the study, discussions were limited to the town of Jolo. It was really the intention from the beginning of the engagement to initially sound out the views of people in the town of Jolo – which aside from being the capital of the province is at the same time a melting pot of people from various municipalities. Nevertheless, it was intended to actually interview people from the different municipalities in order to get a good spread of points of view regarding the peace and order situation in the province.

The interviews were undertaken in an informal setting, usually over a cup of coffee and native cakes, in order to try and obtain the true feelings of the respondents, rather than in a formal structured setting.

The survey was undertaken throughout the month of February 2006 and spilled into the first half of March.

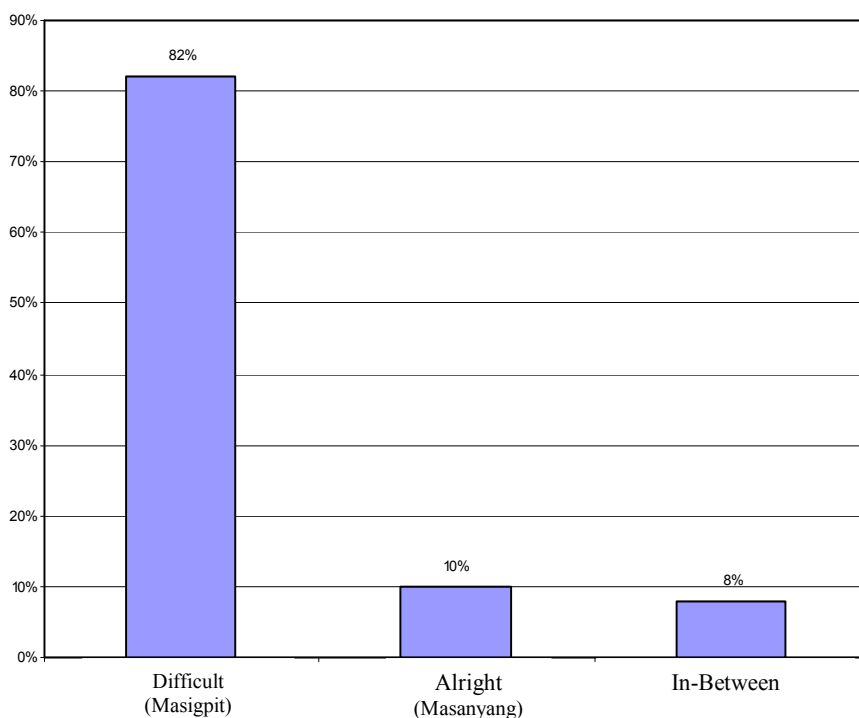
Summary of Survey Results

Personal Situation. Eighty-two per cent (82%) of all respondents felt that things were more difficult for them personally today (*masigpit*) as compared to the past while 9.8% believed they were better off today (*masanyang*). The rest were in-between, i.e., sometimes things were good, sometimes they were bad.



PERSONAL SITUATION

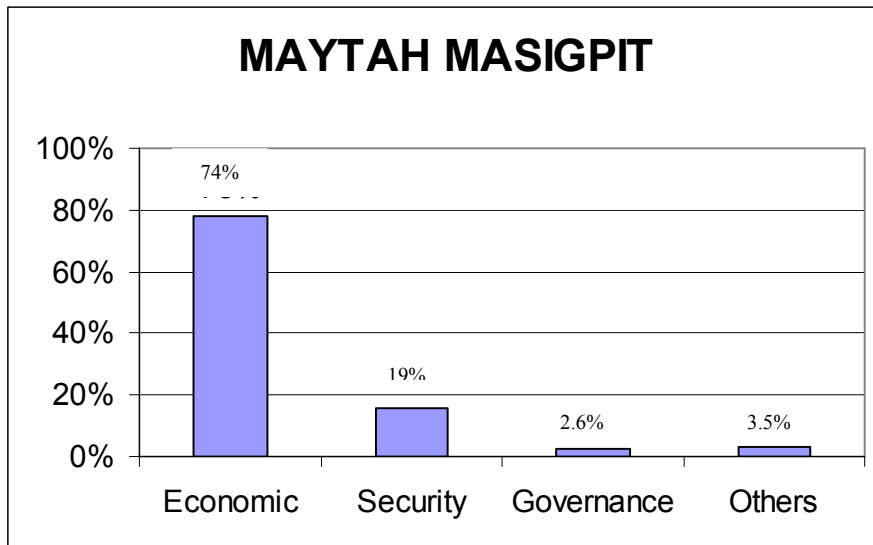
KAHALAN SIN GINHAWA BARAN



Of the reasons given for things being difficult, 74% were economic in nature, of which the majority (68%) were due to the lack of livelihood or earnings as well as the higher cost of living (24.8%).

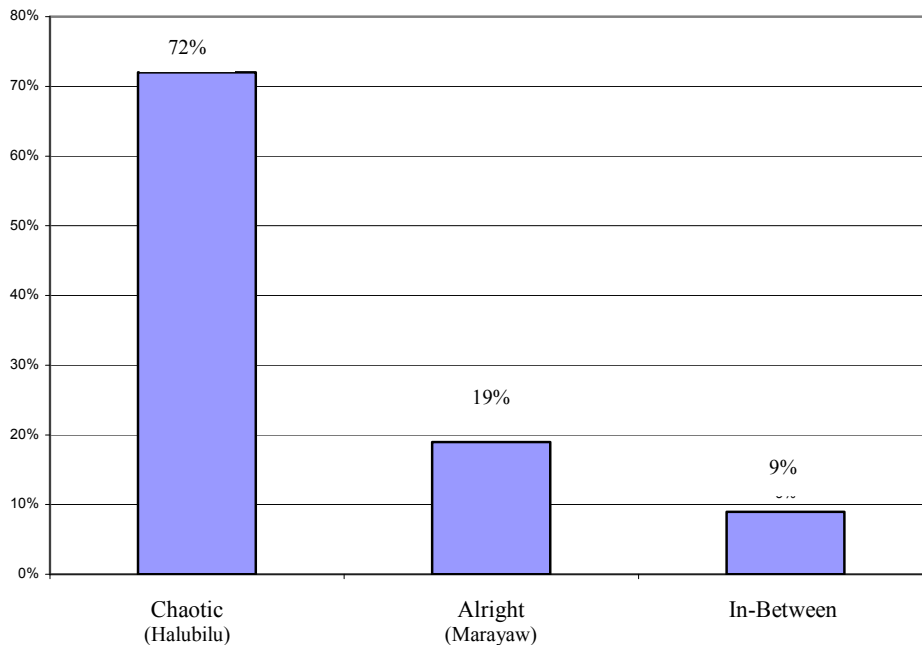
Other reasons given for their personal situation being more difficult today were security concerns (19.35%), problems related to governance (2.6%) and other assorted reasons (3.5%). Of the security concerns 75% related to the unstable peace and order situation (*kalingugan sin hulah, operasyon sin kasundaluhan, hiluhalah in kawman*, etc.).

WHY DIFFICULT



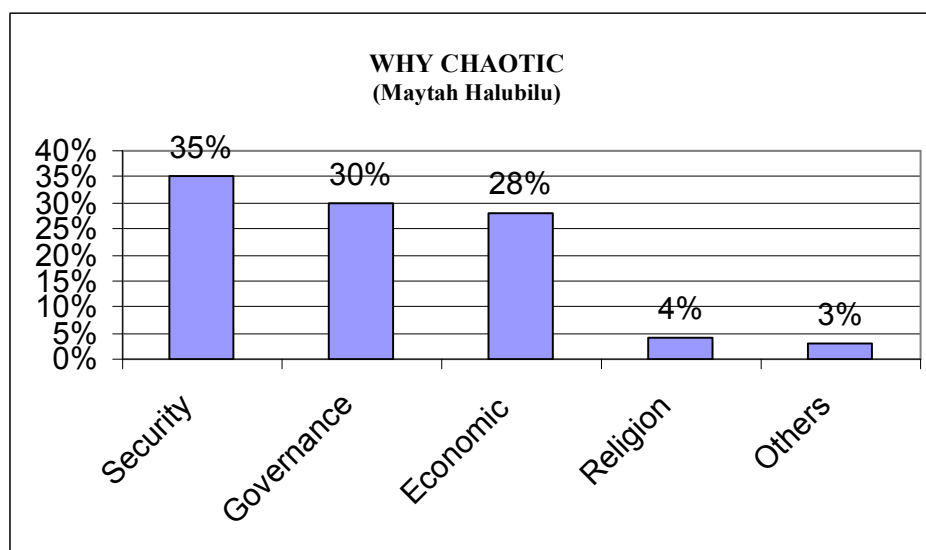
Situation of the Province. With regard to the situation of the province as a whole, 72% believed that things were chaotic, disturbed, confused (*halubilu*), while 18.65% believed things were alright (*marayaw*). The rest were in-between.

SITUATION OF THE PROVINCE (Kahalan sin Lupah Sug)



Of the reasons given for the situation in the province being chaotic, 35% related to security concerns, 30% were due to concerns related to governance, 27.8% were economic in nature, 4.25% were religious in nature while the balance (2.75%) were an assortment of other factors identified.

Of the security concerns, 64% related to the unstable peace and order situation while 17% of the responses referred to abuses by the military forces – *mabugah kami ha mga sundalu, etc.*



Economic concerns focused mainly on inadequate livelihood or earning opportunities (71.2%) – *way kabuhianan, wayroon pag-usaha, etc.* -- and the need for external economic assistance (22.5%).

Governance issues centered on poor governance by elected leaders (79.2%) – *bukun marayaw in pamarinta, piyaruli sin mga nakurah in baran nila, bukun mabuntul in pamarinta, etc.* – political rivalry (11.7%) and graft and corruption (8.3%).

Peace in Communities. Interestingly, while generally people had a negative view of their personal condition and the situation in the province, the majority (61.86%) felt that their communities were nevertheless peaceful. Thirty-two per cent (32.47%) however believed that there was no peace in their areas.

Among the factors cited for contributing to the peaceful condition of communities, security was identified 50% of the time. People claimed that there was no violence in their areas, peace and order prevailed and clan conflicts had been settled.

Other contributory factors to peace in communities were positive governance (18.98%), good economic conditions (9.49%), religious elements (3.65%) and a host of other factors (17.52%).

Good governance (*marayaw in pamarinta sin Mayor, Barangay Captain iban Konsihal*) was cited 50% of the time among positive governance factors.

The availability of livelihood was cited overwhelmingly as the major economic factor (84.6%) contributing to peace in communities.

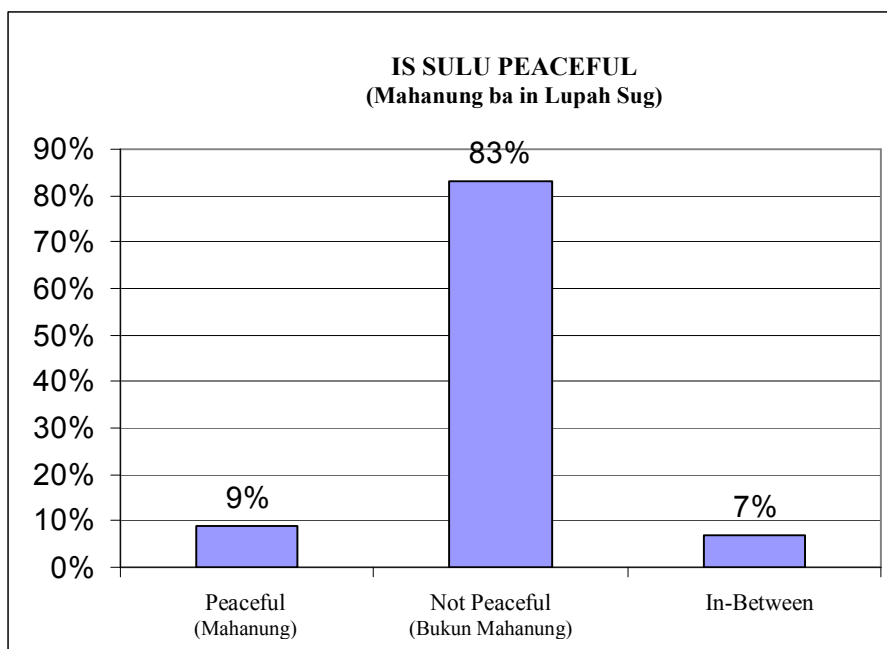
Awareness of and compliance with one's religious obligations, to include the worship of God, were the religious factors cited as bringing about peace in communities.

Among other factors cited, unity among people in a community was believed to be a major element in bringing about peace.

Among those who felt that there was no peace in their communities, security (or the lack of it) was the major factor cited (89%) while negative governance elements were cited 9% of the time.

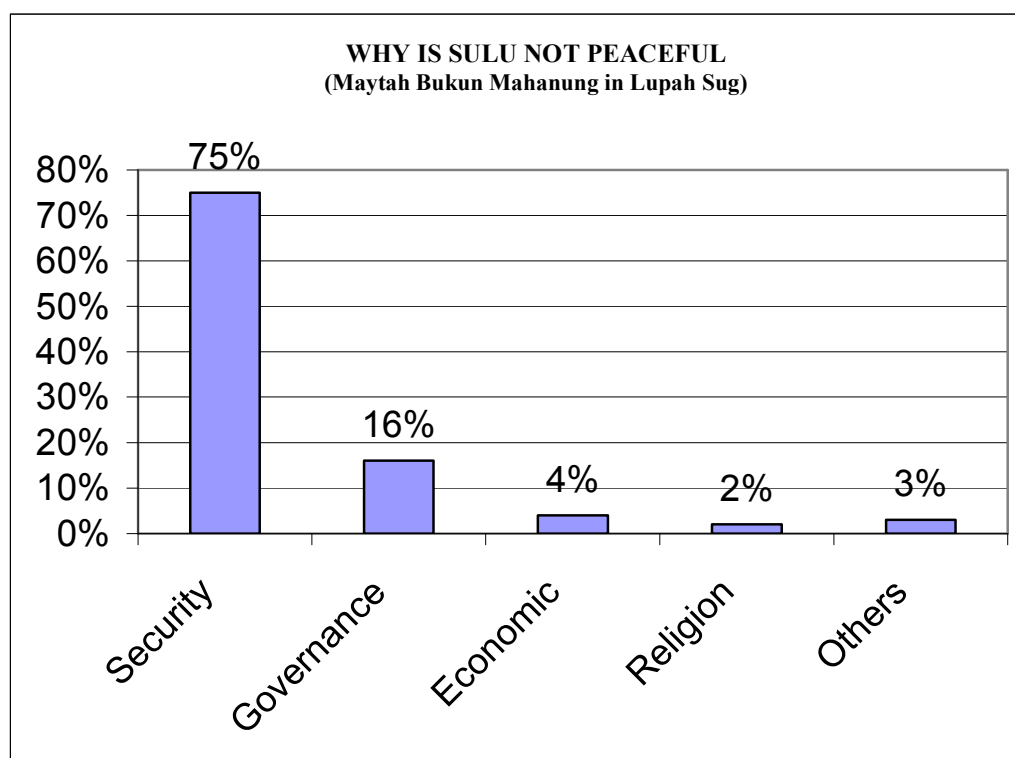
To strengthen peace in communities, improved security and governance were felt to be of equal weight (24.89% and 23.18% respectively), while economic assistance (18.45%) and religious factors (12.88%) were secondary elements.

Peace in the Province. While 62% of respondents felt that their respective communities were peaceful, a much greater majority (83.33%) believed that the province of Sulu as a whole is wracked by turmoil. The main factor contributing to the state of peacelessness is the security situation (74.88%) followed by governance issues (15.76%).



Security factors cited were the unstable peace and order situation (27.63%), frequent killings (13.16%), clan conflicts (7.89%), armed conflicts specifically between the AFP and the MNLF (7.24%), other armed conflicts (6.58%), military abuses (6.58%), the presence of bad elements like the Abu Sayyaf (6.58%) and a number of other incidents or activities that destroy the peace in the province.

Governance issues cited were poor governance (53.13%), political struggles and rivalry (9.38%), graft and corruption (9.38%) and governments that act in an unjust manner - *bukun adil in pamarinta* - (9.38%).



Interestingly, when asked what was needed to bring peace to the province, respondents gave equal weight to governance issues as well as improved security (28.8%), followed by religious elements (13.2%), economic factors (12.4%) and a host of other elements, the bulk of which can be lumped under the category of unity among people.

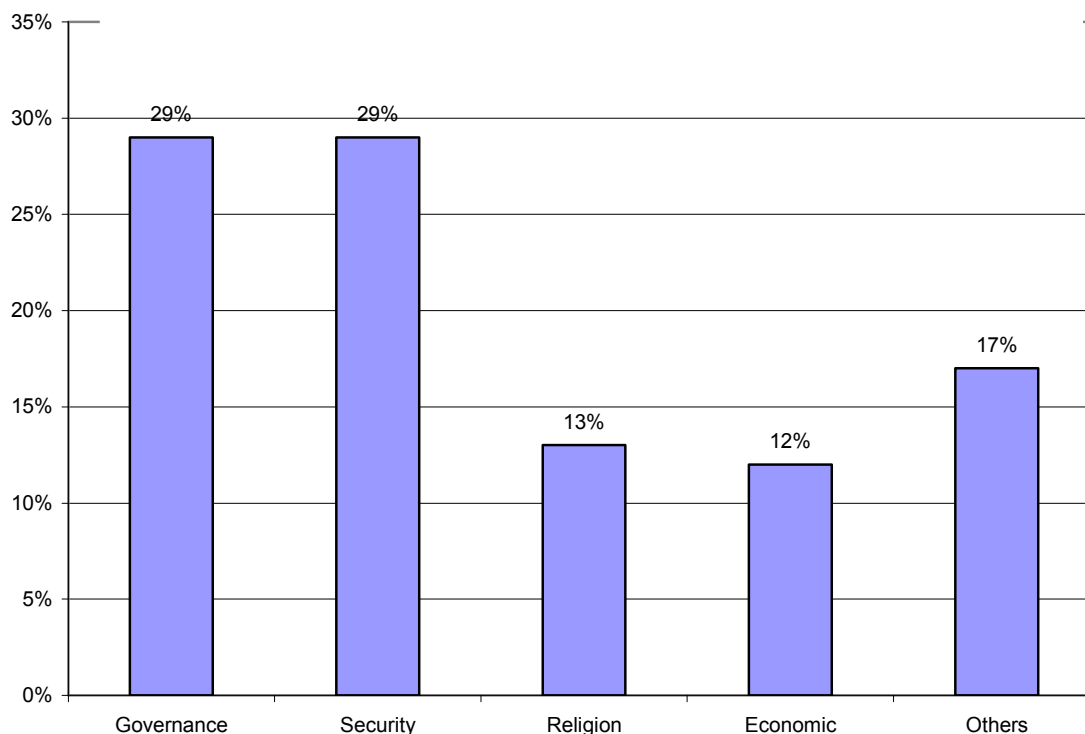
Among governance issues, the institution of good governance practices was cited as a major factor (62.5%) – *parinta mabuntul, kaadilan iban kasabunnalan ha pamarinta, subay awn timindug nakura adil, etc.* Full and strict implementation of laws was also a major element cited (16.7%).

With regard to security, 31% of the responses focused on bringing about stable and lasting peace in the province. Various ways of bringing this about included the resolution of armed conflicts (18%), the elimination of the military from the province (11%), the continuation of peace talks between the military and the MNLF (11%), a ban on the carrying of firearms (9.72%) and the resolution of clan conflicts (7%).

With regard to religion, strengthening faith in God was cited 60% of the time, while the adoption of Islamic laws to govern Sulu and the strict application of these laws was deemed desirable (27%).

The need for economic assistance to be extended to the province was considered important (71%) by those who believed that development of the economy was needed to bring about peace in the province.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO BRING PEACE TO SULU
(Unu in Kagunahan Supaya Ma-awn in Kahanungan ha Lupah Sug)



Discussion

Current Situation. An overwhelming majority of people in Sulu believe that there is no peace in the province (83%) and that the situation in the province has deteriorated compared to previous times (72%). As a result, 82% of the respondents believe that their personal situations (*kahalan sin ginhawa baran*) are more difficult today compared to the past.

Interestingly, though, while the outlook is bleak, 62% of respondents feel that their communities are relatively peaceful. This latter point of view is reinforced by the observation of 61% of the respondents that there is no danger in their communities, that they consider themselves to be safe there.

Contributory Factors. The security situation ranks as the factor most considered to be contributory to the lack of peace in the province. Even for those who believe that they are safe in their communities, they attribute this sense of security to the absence of



violence, the relative peace and order that prevails in their communities, the fact that clan conflicts have been settled and other similar factors.

However, people attribute their difficult personal conditions to economic factors, primarily the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities and their inability to keep up with the rising cost of living. Poor security conditions rank a far second in the consideration of factors impacting on the personal situation of people.

Poor governance and the lack of economic opportunities are considered secondary factors contributing to the present condition of unpeace in the province. With regard to governance, people speak of the absence of honesty and justice on the part of their elected officials, of the fact that they are more concerned with their personal interests rather than the welfare of their constituents. On the economic side people speak of the need for employment and livelihood opportunities and the fact that assistance from outside the province is needed to improve conditions.

Factors for Improvement. Interestingly, people believe that improvement in governance practices as well as security issues contribute equally to bringing about peace in the province and arresting the deterioration of conditions in the province.

With regard to peace in their communities, people consider improvement in security and governance conditions to likewise be necessary in order to strengthen the currently peaceful situation which they believe already prevails in their respective communities.

However, when people reflect on their personal condition, they look to economic interventions (51%) – more livelihood opportunities – as being the key to improving their lot and religion (18%) – strengthening their faith in God – as a secondary element.

This then would seem to indicate the directions that a long-term program geared towards bringing about peace in Sulu should take: improve local governance, improve security conditions, introduce more livelihood opportunities and strengthen the practice of religion among the people.



ANNEX B

English Version of Province-Wide Survey Questionnaire

A. Assessment of Present Situation

1. How do you view your present personal situation? Are you better off or worse off than you were 10, 20 or 30 years ago?

Please describe in what ways you are better off or worse off today.

2. What about the province of Sulu: how do you view its present situation? Is it better off or worse off than the way things were 10, 20 or 30 years ago?

In what specific ways are things in the province better or worse off? (Explore: peace and order; provision of health services; educational facilities; infrastructure; livelihood; the level of poverty in the province; etc.)

B. Causes/Factors Leading to the Present Situation

1. To what causes or factors would you attribute your present personal situation? What has brought this about?
2. To what causes or factors would you attribute the situation in the province today? (Try to get respondent to elaborate on how a factor identified actually contributed to bringing about the present situation.)

C. Improvement of the Current Situation

1. What in your view can bring about an improvement of your personal situation?

Who do you think can help bring about an improvement in your personal situation? Are there things that you can do or will you need the help of third parties like the government, your relatives, your colleagues at work or other individuals or organizations?

2. What in your view is needed to bring about an improvement in the situation of the province?

Who should be responsible for the various elements you mention – should it be government, religious leaders, the community, yourself, or other individuals or organizations?



3. What, if anything, is being done now to improve the situation of the province? Who specifically is undertaking these measures?
4. What, if anything, is being done now or is happening which is worsening conditions in the province? Who is responsible for these?

D. Perceptions of Security

1. Do you feel safe in your community? Why or why not?

If you do not feel safe in your community, identify the threats or dangers in your community.

2. Do you feel safe when you travel outside your community? Why or why not?

If you do not feel safe traveling, identify the threats or dangers present when you travel.

3. Do you think that your children have a good future ahead of them? Why or why not?

If you do not think your children have a good future, what factors will prevent them from having a good future?

4. What, if anything, needs to be done to increase the level of security in your community, first, and in the province as a whole?

E. Peace

1. Would you consider your community to be peaceful?

(If Yes) Why would you consider it to be peaceful? How would you describe its state of being peaceful?

(If No) Why would you consider your community not to be peaceful? How would you describe the situation in your community?

What needs to be done to make your community peaceful?

2. Would you consider the province of Sulu to be peaceful?

(If Yes) Why do you consider the province to be peaceful? How would you describe its state of peacefulness?

(If No) Why do you consider the province not to be peaceful? How would you describe the situation in the province?

What needs to be done to make the province of Sulu peaceful?



ANNEX C

Tausug Version of Province-Wide Survey Questionnaire

A. Pag-banding/Pag-hati sin hal hiu-wal bihayaon

1. Biyadiin in panding atawa pangatud mo sin kahalan/hal-hiuwal ginhawa-baran mo bihayaon? Masanyang baha in hal mo atawa halubilu/masigpit dain sin wakto nakalabay?

Hika-pahantang mo bang biyadiin in kasanyangan atawa kahalubiluhan/kasigpitan mo ha wakto bihayaon?

2. Uno in pangatud/pamanding mo sin hal hiuwal sin Lupah Sug bihayaon? Marayaw baha atawa halubilu dain sin kahalan niya ha wakto yadto hangpuh (10), kau-waan (20) atawa katluan (30) tahun na limabay?

Biyadiin in sapanton sin kahalan sin hulah (Lupah Sug) masanyang atawa ha kasigpitan/kaha-lubiluhan? (Lawagon ha mga ini: kahanungan iban kasajahitraan (*peace and order*), papa-aunan tatabangan pasal karayawan ginhawa baran (*health service*), mga kagunahan pag-panuntot ilmuh dunya iban ahirat (*educational facilities*), karan-danan iban pamaybay (*infrastructure*), kabuhi-anan (*livelihood*), dagbus/darajat sin kamiskinan ha kalingkal hulah Lupah Sug (*the level of poverty in the province*); iban na sin unu-unu na.)

B. Mga Pasal (hal hiu-wal) nanunjuki pa Kahalan Na-a-aun Biyahaon

1. Unu in mga hangkan na biyahah ini in ginhawa baran mo bihayaon? Unu in nangdahi sin kahalan ini?
2. Unu in mga hangkan ng biyahah ini in Lupah Sug bihayaon? (*Bang manjari papasungan in daawa bang maita in siyabbut niya naka-dihil sin pag-pasong sin hal hiu-wal ha bihayaon.*)

C. Pag-hidjaton/Pag-parayaw sin hal hiu-wal bihayaon

1. Unu ha kirahan/pamanding mo maka-dawhat sin pag-parayaw sin kahalan ginhawa-baran mo?

Hisiyu ha pikil mo in makatabang ha pagpa-dawhat sin pag-parayaw sin kahalan ginhawa-baran mo? Awn ba mahinang mo atawa magkalagi ba kaw tabang dain ha



mga duga-dugain tumpukan biyah sin parinta, mga kau-kampong mo, mga iban mo ha piyaghihinangan mo, etc.?

2. Unu ha kirahan/pamanding mo kalagihan sin pag-pasong sin pag-parayaw/pag-hidjatul sin hal hiu-wal di ha hulah (Lupah Sug)? Hisiyu in harus manang-gungi pasal sin hal nasab-bot mo – parinta (*national, local, specific agencies*), religious leaders, kau-man (*community*), ginhawa-baran mo, iban aun pa ka dugaing?
3. Unu in kiyasaksi-an niyo hinang ha bihayaon kiyapag-parayaw sin hal sin hulah (Lupah Sug)? Bang aun, hisiyu in himinang sin aturan yan?
4. Unu isab in kiyasaksi-an niyo hinang ha bihayaon naka-dihil kahalubiluhan pa hulah? Bang aun, hisiyu in harus pagsusunan atawa unu hangkan na sun in kahalalan bihadto?

D. Pang-hati pasal sin Ka-ayad dain ha Maka-binsanah (Security)

1. Ha pananaman mo aun kapiligruhan sin baran mo halaum sin kawman mo? Maitah atawa maitah way?

Bang ha pananaman mo bukun kaw mahayang, baita-an in mga kia-bubuga-an atawa maka-piligro kaimo halaum sin kawman niyo.

2. Ha pananaman mo mahayang kaw mag-panaw pa guwah sin kauman mo? Maitah atawa maitah bukun?

Bang ha pananaman mo bukun kaw mahayang mag-panaw-panaw, baita-an in mga kia-bubuga-an atawa maka-piligro ha wakto sa-bu kaw mia-manaw.

3. Ha pikilan mo aun pa karayawan sin mga ka-anakan mo ha wakto tahon susungun? Maitah aun pa atawa maitah wai na?

Bang wai na ha pamikil mo kadayawan nila ha wakto tahon susungun, unu in mga hal mamupuh-ih kanila dumawhat sin kadayawan nila ha susungun wakto?

4. Ha pikilan mo, unu in kagunahan atawa subay hinangun supaya ma-ig in bugah sin tau atawa mapakusug in pag-ayad dain ha kapeligruhan di ha Lupah Sug?

E. Kahanungan/Kasajahitra-an

1. Ha kira/pamanding mo, mahanung/mahatol in kauman mo?

(*Bang Huon*) Maitah baha ha kira mo mahanung? Biyadiin in pagpahantang mo sin kahanungan sin kawman mo?



(Bang Bukon) Maitah ha kira mo bukon mahanung/mahatol? Biyadiin in pagpahantang mo sin hal-hiu-wal ha kawman mo?

Adapon, unu kalagihan subai hinangon bat in kawman mo humanung/humatol?

2. Ha kira/pamanding mo, mahanung/mahatol in hulah Lupah Sug?

(Bang Huon) Maitah baha ha kira mo mahanung? Biyadiin in pagpahantang mo ha hal sin Lupah Sug mahanong/mahatol ka?

(Bang Bukon) Maitah ha kira mo bukon mahanung/mahatol? Biyadiin in pagpahantang mo sin hal hiu-wal ha Lupah Sug?

Unu adapon kalagihan subai hinangon bat in Luaph Sug humanung/humatol?



SECURITY CONDITIONS

“You have created a desolation and you have called it peace” (from an ancient text)

The Context of Security

The Province of Sulu has had a reputation throughout history of being an area where violence was viewed as being endemic. Throughout the Spanish colonial period Sulu was viewed as the base of the infidel Muslims who repeatedly launched acts of piracy against Christian Filipinos. It therefore became the target of incessant attempts at conquest which, for the most part, failed.

During the American colonial period Sulu was also viewed as an area that had to be handled with particular care because of the fierceness of its people. For this reason, the American colonial regime initially employed a tactic of deception by entering into an agreement, known as the Bates Treaty of 1899, wherein mutual respect between the U.S. Government and the Sultanate of Sulu was to be upheld in return for the Sultan allowing the U.S. to occupy the islands and monthly payments being made by the U.S. Government to the Sultanate. In reality, the U.S. Government resorted to this approach because of its inability to deploy sufficient numbers of troops to Sulu because of the resistance it was encountering from Filipino forces in Luzon and the Visayas. Once the U.S. had established its control over the north, the Bates Treaty was unilaterally abrogated by the U.S. Government in 1904.

Even during the Philippine Republic, Sulu has been viewed with concern by the central Government in Manila, and even by ordinary Filipinos. One need only cite the Philippine military’s campaign against Kamlon in the 1950s, the MNLF struggle for independence which, while it encompassed much of Mindanao, was centered on the province of Sulu, the continuing campaign against the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu which has involved not just the Philippine military but even military forces of the United States, to conclude that Sulu is still an area of concern for the Philippine Government and, interestingly today, even the U.S. Government.

The fact that the security situation has remained unresolved in Sulu despite centuries of efforts should highlight the obvious: the situation is not a simple one and does not lend itself to simplistic solutions. One has to understand its complex facets which include the following:

History of Colonial Resistance

First is the history of the province. By the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in what is now the Philippines in the 16th century, Islam had already spread from Sulu to Luzon. In fact when Miguel Lopez de Legazpi landed in what is now Manila in 1571, he found a Muslim settlement under the leadership of Rajah Sulayman. The Muslims were



over time pushed back from Luzon and the Visayas to Mindanao, where at least two Sultanates existed, the Sultanate of Sulu being the older one, dating back to 1450.

The history of this struggle resulted in two phenomena which have had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Philippines and of Sulu. For one, it embedded in the consciousness of people over the centuries the traditional enmity that had built up between Christianity and Islam since the time of the Crusades (starting in the late 11th century). Thus the Spanish-Moro wars which took place over 300 years in the Philippines were seen as a religious war.

In addition, the Spanish-Moro wars – and the subsequent wars against the American colonial regime – pitted the Moros against Filipinos. For the most part, the soldiers whom Suluanos faced on the battlefields were Filipinos from Luzon and the Visayas, commanded by a handful of colonial officers whether they were Spaniards or Americans. Hence, Filipinos over the centuries acquired the character of the enemy to Muslims in general, Suluanos in particular, in the same way that Moros have been viewed as enemies by Christian Filipinos.

Perceptions and prejudices that have been built up over 400 years of violent struggle are deeply embedded and are difficult to overcome and change. In fact, in a survey conducted in 2005 for the Philippine Human Development Report, it was discovered that 55% of respondents believed that Muslims are prone to run amok (*maghuramentado*) while 47% considered Muslims to be terrorists or extremists. Among the respondents, though, only 14% admitted to have had any first-hand contact with Muslims, thus highlighting how the prejudice against Muslims is embedded in Philippine society.

Manila as a Colonial Power

The experience with colonialism of Suluanos, however, did not end with the Spaniards and the Americans. From the perspective of many Muslims even today, the Philippine Republic continues to act like a colonial power in dealing with the Muslims in Mindanao.

For example, the land settlement policies started during the American colonial regime which led to the migration of Christians from Luzon and the Visayas to Mindanao, resulting in the minoritization of Muslims and Lumads in areas which they used to cultivate and control, were continued during the Philippine Republic.

For example, in 1949, the Rice and Corn Production Administration was established to develop areas like Buluan in Cotabato and Maramag and Wao in the Bukidnon-Lanao border area. In 1950, the Land Settlement Development Administration (LASEDECO) was set up to develop Tacurong, Isulan, Bagumbayan, part of Buluan, Sultan sa Barongis and Ampatuan, all in Cotabato. In 1954, the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) took over from the LASEDECO and administered 23 resettlement areas, nine of which were in Mindanao, one of which was in



Tawi-Tawi which then was still part of the Province of Sulu. During this period as well, then Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay conceived of the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), to offer resettlement areas for surrendered or captured Huks. Some of these areas were in Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato and Maguindanao. In 1963, the Land Authority took over from the NARRA as part of the Land Reform Code, making resettlement part of the land reform program. In 1971, the Department of Agrarian Reform was created with a Bureau of Resettlement under it whose function was to implement the program of resettlement which continued the process of migration of Christians to Mindanao.

Another manner in which the Philippine Republic is seen as perpetuating the policies of past colonial powers relates to the exploitation of natural resources and the system of taxation. Resources of Mindanao have been exploited by large corporations with head offices in Manila, where taxes are paid rather than in the areas where they obtained their revenues. In Sulu this is evident for example in the large fishing vessels which obtain their catch in the Sulu Sea. While technically they may be operating outside the territorial waters of the province – although many do manage to sneak in and harvest their catch from within provincial or municipal waters -- people still view them as obtaining resources which belong to the people of Sulu and for which some benefit should be derived by the province. Thus, in the same manner that colonial powers in the past siphoned off the resources of their colonies for the benefit of the motherland, so too do many Muslims view Manila as siphoning off resources from their areas with insufficient benefits returning to them in exchange.

A Warrior Culture

Then, there is the matter of culture. The Tausugs, the dominant tribe in Sulu, have a reputation for being warriors. This is one reason why, when the Sultan of Brunei was facing an uprising from among his subjects in 1704, he sought help from the Sultan of Sulu, who then sent a band of warriors who successfully defended the Sultan of Brunei's throne. This led to the cession of North Borneo by the Sultan of Brunei to the Sultan of Sulu.

In later times, even the American colonialists recognized the ferocity of Tausug warriors. On the occasion of the battle of Bud Bagsak on the island of Jolo, Gen. John "Black Jack" Pershing is quoted to have said regarding the Tausugs, "They are absolutely fearless, and once committed to combat they count death as a mere incident."

It has been pointed out that the training which Tausug males receive as children contributes to this characteristic of the Tausug personality. While being taught to respect the feelings of others, young Tausugs are also taught that *sipug* or *kasipugan* (shame) is a condition that must be avoided at all costs because it not only brings shame to the individual concerned, it brings dishonor to his family as well. If, however, shame is brought upon him and his family, the family honor (*martabat*) must be redeemed, if necessary through an act of revenge (*mamauli*). Dying in the act of erasing this shame (*magpapas kasipugan*) is considered an honorable act.



This attitude is reflected in a common Tausug proverb which goes as follows: *“Marayaw pa mutih in bukug ayaw sin tikud-tikud”* (It is better to see the white [color] of one’s bones [from a wound] than that of one’s heels).

A traditional practice in Sulu involves the firing of guns to announce the birth of a child. If the newborn is a boy, the firing of guns is for a longer period of time, on the belief that this will condition the child to the sound of firearms.

It has even been observed that it is not unusual for widows whose husbands were killed in violent confrontations to sing lullabies to their young male children reminding them of the death of their father and the need to uphold the family honor. Thus, from a very early age, male Tausugs are raised with the frame of mind that family honor must be defended at all costs, even at the cost of one’s life.

This upbringing is obviously one factor which contributes to the formation of what has been noted to be the warrior-like personality of Tausugs and which often leads to confrontations within Tausug society.

Clan Wars

This is one of the reasons that clan wars are frequent in Sulu. Research undertaken recently by Dr. Jamail Kamlian of the Iligan Institute of Technology shows that Sulu ranks second in terms of the number of clan wars among the various provinces in Mindanao – a total number of 145 having occurred over the 65-year period from 1940 to 2005 as compared to 154 in Lanao del Norte over the 75-year period since 1930. Half of these clan conflicts in Sulu remain unresolved up to this day.

Sulu however ranks first in terms of casualties: 1,440 killed and 1,235 wounded as a result of these clan conflicts. However, Dr. Kamlian admits that the number of clan conflicts he recorded in the course of his research are those that were cited to him by the respondents to the survey he undertook in the nine provinces covered by his study. It is likely, Dr. Kamlian believes, that these numbers are understated and that there have been more clan wars that actually took place than have been recorded.

Major causes of clan conflicts in Sulu are political rivalries, land disputes, gender-related offenses (abduction of women for marriage, acts of lasciviousness, etc.) and acts violating one’s pride and dignity (oral defamation, slander, spreading of malicious rumors against someone, etc.).

The other reason that clan wars are frequent is because of the failure of the formal justice system to address the need to redress wrongs committed against individuals. When individuals feel that the formal justice system cannot address their grievances in an equitable and timely manner, the tendency is to take justice into one’s own hands.



The clan wars, and the intricate system of shifting alliances which result from these, are a major complicating element in the security situation in Sulu.

Weapons

Another element is the fascination of Tausugs with weapons, traditionally the *kalis*, which today has been replaced by the M-16, M-14 and other high-powered weaponry. It has been pointed out (Alber A. Husin, "Kalis & Armalite: Symbols of Weapons and Meanings of Violence in Tausug Society", 2005) that the *kalis* "was an important indicator of a man's standing and authority, [it] served as the guardian of his culture and manhood and was his protective talisman. It was considered part of his very identity" (pp. 78-79). Thus the *kalis* served as an indicator of one's social rank in Sulu society. It was also the main weapon used by the Tausugs in their war of resistance against the incursions of the Spaniards and therefore became a symbol of their struggle to maintain their freedom.

Over time, the *kalis* and other bladed weapons were replaced by firearms which today are best represented by the M-16, M-14 and other high-powered weapons. Aside from being a weapon of defense and offense, the M-16 also retains much of the symbolism that the *kalis* bore for Tausugs. It is a sign of one's bravery, one's manhood.

In addition, firearms today serve many social functions. During the birth of a child, guns are fired, and the number of shots fired indicates if it is a boy or a girl. During wedding ceremonies, the firing of guns indicates the completion of different phases of the traditional wedding ritual. The borrowing or exchange of guns, particularly during times of clan conflicts, reflects the intricate web of relationships and alliances at play among the contending clans and their respective supporters.

There is a popular story in Sulu about a man who goes to a wedding celebration without his gun and is ignored by the hosts and other guests. Offended, he goes home and returns to the wedding party, this time armed. He is immediately recognized by the hosts and guests and is invited to have a cup of coffee and native pastries. He takes the cup of coffee and puts the barrel of his gun in it, exclaiming to his gun, "Go ahead and drink this coffee! After all it is you that these people recognize and respect!"

There is also the view that, in a society like Sulu today where modern norms of law and order are virtually non-existent, guns play a critical role in maintaining the peace. Guns serve as a deterrent against aggression when an equilibrium of power is maintained among parties in conflict. If a condition of disequilibrium exists, if one party perceives itself to be in a position of superiority relative to an enemy, then one can expect open conflict to break out.

All this has resulted in what many perceive to be the problem of the proliferation of firearms in the province. One estimate is that there could be as many as 30,000 unlicensed firearms in the province. Some observers note that even that number is understated as it is generally believed that most households in the province would have at



least one firearm, often more than one. Whatever the numbers are, it is acknowledged by police, military and civilian authorities that the proliferation of unlicensed firearms is a major contributory factor to the state of unpeace in Sulu.

But, as pointed out in the discussion above, the solution is not as simple as just collecting “loose” firearms. One has to be aware of the many ramifications that firearms reflect in a society like Sulu.

Parang Sabil

Another cultural element that impacts on the security situation in Sulu is the tradition of the *parang sabil* or, as the Spaniards termed it, *juramentado*. This is more than just “running amuck” as it is often described in the popular press.

The *parang sabil* was in fact a practice of religious import to the Tausugs, one which reflected the individual’s commitment to defend his religion and his State. This was resorted to when it was felt that the government in power, as in the case of the Sultanate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was no longer able to defend the Islamic State, and that therefore this obligation now fell on the individual.

The actual practice of the *parang sabil* was preceded by an elaborate religious ritual which has been described by Vic Hurley in his book “The Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros” as follows:

“In deep silence of early morning, fanatical youths gathered in the mosques to hear the Imams, or priests, tell of the old days. The stories inflamed these ambitious recruits for martyrdom, and custom then necessitated a solemn conference with their parents. After a family council, which usually granted permission for youth to run *juramentado*, the youths were banded together with the Sultan’s permission to engage in a holy war.

“The candidates were then turned over to the Imam for organization and instruction. Prayers were offered and each candidate placed his hand upon the *Koran* and repeated the following: “Jumanji kami hatuhan ing kami ini magsabil karna sing tuhan”.

“The body was then carefully washed, the teeth were cleaned and the nails cut and trimmed. The family of the candidate shaved his eyebrows so that they would look like the moon two days old, while the hair cut short. A tight band for strengthening effect supported the waist. A man so bound could remain on his feet long after an ordinary man would succumb to wounds.

“A candidate was then clothed in a white robe called the jubba and was crowned with a white turban. To the waist was attached an anting-anting, or charm, to ward off blows of the enemy. The genitals were bound tightly with chords. Finally, after beautifying and polishing his weapons, the candidate was ready to go forth to the holy war” (Ibid.1936:127-9).



The use of the term *juramentado* by the Spaniards reflected this understanding because it revealed that the Spaniards understood that the Tausugs took an oath before launching their attacks on the infidels.

It needs to be understood that this practice has not died out, and that some of the individual attacks on soldiers in Sulu could be seen in this light.

Moro National Liberation Front

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was the outgrowth of centuries of resentment of Muslims against central control by the Manila Government, whether under the Spaniards, Americans or Christian Filipinos. Aside from the history of resistance against the colonialism of the Spanish and American regimes, as noted earlier, many Muslims viewed the Philippine Republic as being yet another colonial power as evidenced by the continuing influx of migrants from Luzon and the Visayas into Mindanao, a program started by the American colonial regime and continued by succeeding administrations of Presidents of the Philippine Republic. Muslims became minorities in lands which they had formerly tilled and which they deemed belonged to them.

More immediate precursors to the establishment of the MNLF in 1969 were the Mindanao Independence Movement established by Datu Udtug Matalam and the Jabidah Massacre. The actual launching of the MNLF started with the recruitment and training of the “Top 90”, the first group of MNLF commanders, who were trained in Peninsular Malaysia. While the MNLF started out as the unifying force for all Muslim and even non-Muslim groups in Palawan and Mindanao wanting to separate from the control of the Philippine Government, it eventually became clear that the Tausug group within the organization wielded control, and old tribal rivalries surfaced. This subsequently led to internal divisions resulting in the breakaway and establishment of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) under Ustadz Hashim Salamat in 1977, and later on the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) which in turn gave way to the MNLF Reformist Movement under Dimasampo Pundato.

While MNLF forces still exist in various areas of Mindanao, the concentration is still in Sulu, centered around Lupah Sug State Revolutionary Committee Chairman Khaid Ajibon, based in Indanan, Sulu, and Ustadz Habier Malik, based in Panamao, Sulu. Their forces were among those that responded to the call of the Fifth Bangsamoro People’s National Congress to “revert back to our original objective of struggling, peacefully and democratically, for our fundamental right to self-determination, decolonization and independence of the Bangsamoro Republik of Mindanao”.

These forces, referred to by the Philippine military as the “Misuari Breakaway Group” or “Misuari Renegade Group”, have warrants of arrest outstanding for their participation in the November 2001 attacks on military camps as well as their



participation in the February 2005 and November 2005 encounters with Philippine military forces.

Abu Sayyaf Group

The Abu Sayyaf (“Father or Bearer of the Sword”) Group (ASG), formally known as Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiya (“Islamic Movement”) has its roots in a small group of Muslim fundamentalists organized in Basilan in the mid-80s by then Ustadz (now current Governor) Wahab Akbar. Schooled in Egypt, Akbar aimed at creating a pure Islamic state in Basilan. A member of the MNLF, Akbar spent his time during this period preaching, teaching religion to young people in Basilan and setting up ventures like a bakery cooperative run on Islamic principles.

However, like many other MNLF members, Akbar was disillusioned by what was perceived as the abandonment by MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari of the original vision and goals of the movement when he began negotiating with the Philippine Government, first under then President Corazon Aquino and subsequently President Fidel Ramos.

Around this time, Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani had completed studies in Islamic jurisprudence and theology and military science in Saudi Arabia and Libya and spent a year or two in the late ‘80s as a mujahideen in Afghanistan fighting the Russians as part of a guerilla unit operating under Prof. Abdul Rasul Abu Sayyaf. With the Afghan-Russian war ending in 1989, Janjalani returned to Basilan and began preaching a pure form of Islam.

It was during this period, the early ‘90s, that Akbar and some other disillusioned MNLF cadres linked up with Janjalani and formed Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiya which originally had some 20 members. Its goal was the establishment of a pure Islamic state in Basilan. Akbar later separated from the group when he had to flee to Sabah following an attack in 1991 on a military checkpoint in Sumagdang on the outskirts of Isabelia wherein some soldiers were killed

Around 1993/94, following military operations in Basilan against the group after the kidnapping of five-year old Luis “Ton-Ton” Biel and his grandfather, Janjalani and his followers fled to Sulu where they met Radulan Sahiron, Jumdail Gumbahali (Doctor Abu), Nadzmi Saabdula (Global), Ghalib Andang (Robot), Mujib Susukan and others. An alliance was established around the vision of a pure Islamic state and the continuance of the struggle started under the MNLF, of which the Sulu-based fighters were members.

It needs to be pointed out, though, that the Sulu-based allies of the Abu Sayyaf are very different from the Basilan-based group. Whereas in Basilan the ASG had more or less organized themselves – Janjalani as Chairman or Head, Abdul Ashmad as Intelligence Chief, Edwin Angeles (aka Ibrahim Yacob) and later on Juvenal Bruno as Operations Chief – the Sulu-based group did not have any such organization. The Sulu allies operated on their own, with their own forces and, more importantly, with different motivations. While Radulan Sahiron and Dr. Abu were intent on pursuing the vision of a



pure Islamic state, others like Ghalib Andang and Mujib Susukan used the ASG label as an excuse for banditry.

Thus, the ASG in Sulu is a more complex phenomenon in the sense that it does not lend itself to the straightforward assessments made by government and military authorities regarding the group and its members. The ASG in Sulu is, first, different from the ASG in Basilan, and, second, is not organized in the manner that the Basilan ASG was. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, individuals associated with the ASG in Sulu are motivated by different objectives which need to be understood if the appropriate and effective approaches are to be taken.

The Entry of the Americans

Suluanos were surprised last year when they woke up to find U.S. military forces within their midst. There were efforts early during the year to try to hide their presence but in a small place like Jolo there is little one can hide.

Their quiet entry last year (some say even as early as 2004) represented a departure from the U.S. military's attempt to undertake Balikatan 03-1 in 2003. In 2003, the U.S. went through the motions of consulting the people of Sulu regarding their desire to undertake humanitarian projects in Sulu, similar to what had been done in Basilan in 2002 at the same time that the hunt for the Abu Sayyaf was undertaken. This attempt to establish a foothold in Sulu was met with resistance from Suluanos, and with good reason, as the following excerpt from a report to the U.S. Congress shows:

“In February 2003, Pentagon officials described a plan under which the United States would commit 350 Special Operations Forces (SOF) to Jolo to operate with AFP Army and Marine units down to the platoon level of 20-30 troops. Another 400 U.S. support troops would be at Zamboanga on the Mindanao mainland. Positioned offshore of Jolo would be a navy task force of 1,000 U.S. Marines and 1,300 Navy personnel equipped with Cobra attack helicopters and Harrier jets.

“According to the Pentagon description of the plan, U.S. troops would be in a combat role. This and subsequent statements indicated that the SOF on Jolo would participate in AFP offensive operations against Abu Sayyaf and that the SOF would not be limited to using their weapons for self-defense. The U.S. Marines were described as a “quick reaction” force, undoubtedly meaning that they could be sent on to Jolo to reinforce AFP units. The Cobra helicopters and Harrier jets would give AFP commanders the option of requesting U.S. air strikes in support of AFP operations.

“These rules of engagement went beyond the U.S. role on Basilan in 2002. There was no comparable Marine and naval air capability off Basilan. The plan for SOF to go on patrol with AFP units restricted U.S.



troops to use their weapons only for self-defense. That plan never was implemented on Basilan. Moreover, the Basilan operation contained a deadline of July 1, 2002, whereas Pentagon officials asserted that the Jolo operation would have no time limit.

“President Arroyo and AFP commanders reportedly had agreed to the plan in a meeting of February 4, 2003.” (Larry Niksch, Specialist in Asian Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, Report For Congress: Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation [Updated April 8, 2003].)

Thankfully, due to intense opposition from the people of Sulu, as well as protests from members of the Philippine Senate, the plans did not materialize. But that did not deter the Americans from pursuing their objective of destroying the Abu Sayyaf. Contrary to 2003 where the U.S. Government had the decency to consult the people of Sulu relative to their desire to conduct Balikatan exercises in the province – without of course revealing the form and extent of involvement that was being planned – the Americans decided to do away with consultations and instead positioned themselves in the province gradually starting in early 2005 (some say even as early as 2004). Before Suluanos realized it, there were hundreds of U.S. military troops in their midst.

At the same time a mysterious plane was found flying incessantly over Jolo for over a year leading people to speculate that it was mapping the island for whatever purposes the Americans had. This was most likely one of the EP (electronic reconnaissance) versions built from the Lockheed P-3 Orion aircraft, used to map terrain, population centers and movements and gather electronic signals from communications systems.

All sorts of speculations have arisen regarding the motivations of the Americans. They are there looking for treasure, tons of which, Suluanos believe, lie hidden throughout the island and in sunken ships offshore. The Americans are there looking for oil, which should be plentiful given the proximity to Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia which are major oil producers. And, of course, the Americans are there tracking down the Abu Sayyaf, which is included in the U.S. State Department’s Office of Counterterrorism list of “designated” terrorist organizations.

The latter is the most likely reason, knowing how persistent the U.S. is in pursuing its perceived enemies. The latest example of this persistence was Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi whom the U.S. finally eliminated in early June after years of pursuit.

In late January and early February 2006, more than a year after they had started positioning themselves in the province, the U.S. military with the cooperation of the Sulu Provincial Government and the Armed Forces of the Philippines went through an elaborate exercise of informing the public regarding the forthcoming Balikatan exercises. These were supposed to take place over a period of one month – from February 17 to March 16 – and were to consist principally of “MEDCAP” (medical civic action projects,



basically medical and dental missions) and “ENCAP” (engineering civic action projects, construction of school buildings, installation of water systems, etc.) projects. Public fora were held where these were discussed and lists of schedules and locations of projects were distributed.

However, mysteriously, two weeks before the scheduled end of the one-month Balikatan exercise, on March 3, the program was preterminated. No explanations were given for this although the usual closing ceremonies were held as if everything was normal.

Nevertheless, the presence of the U.S. military forces continues in Sulu under a program which has been vaguely called “Bayanihan”. Unfortunately, beyond saying that Bayanihan will continue the humanitarian projects started under Balikatan, little if anything else has been said about this program. No public fora were held, similar to Balikatan, discussing the various projects and their locations.

What appears to be the case, in fact, is that Bayanihan is a cover program for counter-terrorism activities of the U.S. military. The picture that seems to be emerging is that the U.S. has been frustrated by what they perceive as the inability of the AFP to track down and capture or kill key ASG personalities. True, Aldam Tilao (Abu Sabaya), Hamsiraji Sali, Alhamser Manatad Limbong (Kosovo), Ghalib Andang (Robot) and Nadzmi Sabdulla (Global) have been neutralized (the latter three under questionable circumstances, while they were under detention) but you still have key people like Khadaffy Janjalani, Jainal Antel Sali (Abu Solaiman), Isnilon Hapilon from the Basilan ASG and Radulan Sahiron and Dr. Abu from Sulu who have yet to be accounted for. Janjalani is a particularly prized target as he is the nominal head of the Abu Sayyaf Group.

Thus Bayanihan was launched as a multi-track program, one track of which covers the humanitarian projects – which is the face of the program which is shown to the public, “winning the hearts and minds of the people”, to use an old Vietnam war phrase -- while the bulk of the program covers upgrading counter-terrorism capabilities of AFP units such as the Light Reaction Company, the Light Infantry Battalion, as well as providing night vision goggle flight training to Philippine Air Force pilots and other skills.

A key element of Bayanihan – one which is hardly, if ever, spoken about -- involves what is known as intelligence fusion or “intel fusion”. This theoretically covers the exchange of intelligence information between U.S. military and AFP units, particularly in pursuit of ASG targets, but has the Americans operating independently of their Philippine counterparts with their sophisticated gadgetry. The partnership has not always been harmonious, and reports have been received of AFP officers complaining about the high-handed manner in which the Americans undertake their tasks. There have been complaints about U.S. military officers appearing in Philippine military units without any clear authorization. There have also been reports about intelligence provided by the Americans to AFP units which have turned out to be incorrect and which resulted



in failed operations by the AFP. This was the case, for example, in Datu Piang, Maguindanao and Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, in 2003/2004 where the AFP attacked areas where the Americans claimed that Janjalani was present but which turned out to be false.

Given what appear to be the real motivations of the U.S. military forces in Sulu, and keeping in mind the kind of planning that had gone into the original Balikatan exercise intended to be launched in 2003, the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Sulu further complicates the security situation in the province.

The Spectre of Terrorism

The security landscape of Sulu has been complicated further by the focus given by the national government to the issue of terrorism. Violence has not been uncommon in Sulu as its history has shown. But the various acts of violence it has experienced have rarely, if ever, been viewed in the light of “terrorism”. The kidnapping of the Sipadan hostages perpetrated by Commander Robot and Mujib Susukan were seen by Suluanos not as a terrorist act but as a daring feat of banditry. Extortion attempts which resulted in grenades being thrown into uncooperative shops were viewed for what they were, extortion attempts by ruthless gangsters. People even know who were behind these extortion attempts. Killings were seen for whatever they were, the result of a clan conflict, political rivalry or just plain hatred/resentment building up after years of perceived oppression. Banditry and criminality have today, however, been given the new label of terrorism.

While a universally accepted definition of terrorism has yet to be established, it is generally agreed that terroristic acts are aimed at achieving a political or ideological objective by eliciting a reaction from the target of those acts: generally to compel a government or some other organization to do or abstain from doing some action. Obvious examples would be the bombings of civilian targets in London and Madrid in 2004 and 2005 which were aimed at forcing the British and Spanish governments into abandoning their support of the U.S. war in Iraq. The acts have to be seen within the context of their intentions.

Kidnappings undertaken in Sulu have generally been driven by commercial motives: ransom. Even the celebrated Sipadan hostage-taking turned out to be principally a kidnap-for-ransom get-rich quick scheme. Stories were even carried in the newspapers at the time as to how Commander Robot was thinking of investing his share of the ransom proceeds in a citrus farm in Talipao. The recent kidnapping of the Vergara mother and son (April 2006) was also carried out for the ransom, which was eventually paid.

The recent (March 27, 2006) bombing of the Sulu Coop store, which resulted in the death of five persons and wounding of 19 others was, from all indications, an attempt to intimidate a nearby Botica (drugstore) to pay up a demanded extortion amount or



suffer the same fate as the Coop store. Similar extortion attempts occurred in the past in Jolo, with uncooperative store owners suffering similar fates.

In all these instances, these actions appear to have been just plain banditry, aimed at raising money from the targeted victims, although in the case of the Coop store bombing, the military in Sulu have explained that it represented an attempt by the Abu Sayaff to raise funds because of difficulties they were now facing given pressure being applied on them by the AFP.

The massacre of poor Christian families in Palar, Liang, Patikul, a stone's throw from the headquarters of the 3rd Marine Brigade, in February of this year was however attributed by the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Marine Brigade to an urban terrorist group operating in the town of Jolo. What motivation would terrorists have in undertaking such killings, Jolo residents asked themselves. And if there was an urban terrorist group operating in the town of Jolo, people would know about it, Jolo being such a small place, where everybody knows practically everyone else.

People are even aware of the actions of the Sailani brothers, Iting and Omar, who are supposed to be guns-for-hire. These two are supposed to be originally from the Basilan-based ASG, were supposed to have been captured and detained but managed to escape and now are hiding in Jolo, from where they undertake their trade of assassination. Their whereabouts are generally known – they move between the Bus-bus, Tulay, Chinese Pier and Takut-Takut areas -- but people are surprised why they have not been captured by the authorities.

The recent killings (May 21 and 22) of four Marines in the town of Jolo however give a different complexion to the problem. More recently (July 1), two integrees belonging to the 35th Infantry Battalion were shot and killed as they were traveling late at night along the boundary of Indanan and Patikul municipalities.

These killings of military personnel have been attributed by the AFP to a cell within the alleged urban terrorist group operating in Jolo. This particular cell, given the name Abu Sofian, is supposedly tasked with assassinating AFP and PNP personnel. One other version given by the military is that these killings were “test missions” for new recruits of this terrorist group.

There is the view among some Suluanos that the “terrorist” scenario is being fabricated or manipulated by unseen hands. The motivations can be many. If it is the U.S. military that is behind the scenes, it is in order to justify and prolong its presence in Sulu. There is the view among some Suluanos that a long-term presence in Sulu would be strategic for the U.S. military in relation to monitoring and taking action on regional terrorist organizations like the Jemaah Islamiya based in Indonesia.

If the Philippine military is the one manipulating the scenario, there is the cynical view among Suluanos that this is being done for advancement of one's military career.



As many Suluanos state it, “Sulu is the place where a military officer can get his stars quickly”.

Moreover, the issue of terrorism provides a convenient rationale for police and military authorities undertaking extraordinary measures in the name of national security. And, of course, the intelligence reports on planned or completed terroristic activities can never be scrutinized, much less questioned, by the civilian population whose security it is that these authorities are supposed to protect.

If the national government is pulling the strings, it is to justify requests for additional aid from the United States and to enhance the Philippine position vis-à-vis the United States as a partner in the fight against international terrorism.

There are other possibilities, though. It has been noted that many young Tausugs have exhibited a deep resentment of the military. In meetings and in private conversations this has been expressed. Many of these young men believe that the military is abusive, acts like an outside conquering force and should be made to leave the province. It is not unimaginable that some of these young men, given the *parang sabil* tradition in Sulu, have recklessly decided to take matters into their own hands.

There is also the possibility that, as claimed by the military, there is in fact an outside group bent on sowing chaos in Sulu. Again, its motivations would need to be understood. Is Sulu just a testing ground for new recruits as has been expressed in interviews with some military officers? Or is this part of some larger plot being orchestrated by a broader network from within the region? Recently the AFP has reported that key personalities of the Jemaah Islamiyah are supposed to be hiding in Sulu and using it as a base of operations to strike at targets elsewhere within the Philippines and even within the region.

Whatever the true picture is – and in this game it is possible that one may never find out what the true picture is – it sorely complicates the security situation in Sulu.

The Drug Trade

In the course of one of the presentations of this report, it was pointed out that attention should also be given to the trade in illegal drugs, considered to be a major security problem in Sulu as well.

Inquiries into the subject brought out the following facts:

1. As with the rest of the country, the number one problem drug in Sulu is what is known as “shabu”, also known as methamphetamine hydrochloride and other names, followed by marijuana.
2. Supplies to Sulu come from Manila, passing sometimes through Cebu, although often going directly to Zamboanga, and then on to Jolo.



3. Between 2002 and 2004, some 50% to 60% of the supplies reaching Jolo were shipped on to Sabah, but starting 2005 the Malaysian authorities began imposing strict controls on the entry of this illegal drug, and the trade to Sabah has accordingly decreased.
4. Because of the reduction of the trade to Malaysia coupled with the activities of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) headed by Inspector Bagadi and the unrelenting campaign waged by SPO4 Basier Isad (known to people as Datu Bas) with sixteen operatives, the drug trade in Sulu has been gradually curtailed. It is estimated that between 2002 to 2004, some 20 kilos a week of shabu were coming into the town of Jolo from Manila. Starting 2005, this was reduced to something like one kilo a week.
5. Areas in Sulu which are supposed to be infiltrated by the trade in illegal drugs are Jolo, Talipao, Parang, Maimbung, Luuk and Siasi. In Luuk it is said that shabu is sold openly by a pusher who is close to a high-ranking politician in that municipality.
6. The identities of some of the big traders are known. They include some policemen, relatives of prominent politicians and even some military personnel. The difficulty is coming up with the evidence to pin down these individuals, not to mention the influence, pressure and even violence they can bring to bear on anyone who attempts to disrupt their lucrative trade.
7. Unfortunately, on August 12, Datu Bas was killed as he led a team of Army and police personnel who rescued a woman who had been kidnapped two weeks earlier. The death of Datu Bas was mourned by the people of Sulu because he symbolized the unrelenting force of justice in an environment where justice has been practically non-existent.

Recommendations

With this as a background which, one must add, is by no means exhaustive, one can see why it has been difficult to address the security situation in Sulu. It is not sufficient to consider only one aspect. One has to have an appreciation of the complexity that surrounds the Sulu condition.

It is therefore suggested, that if any headway is to be made, consideration should be given to addressing a number of objectives:

- 1. Bridging the gap between the AFP and the PNP on the one hand and the civilian populace in Sulu on the other hand;**
- 2. Resolving outstanding issues between the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front;**



3. **Reviewing the Government's policy and strategy with regard to the Abu Sayyaf Group;**
4. **Addressing the issue of clan conflicts;**
5. **Addressing the issue of terrorism; and**
6. **Strengthening the role of Civil Society in proactively promoting, building and defending peace in Sulu.**

Bridging the Gap between the Military/Police and the Populace

There is a tremendous trust and credibility gap between the military and police forces, on the one hand, and the general populace, on the other hand. The gap is less with the police than with the military, and is for different reasons.

The gap exists for the reasons cited earlier: the legacy of centuries of conflict which have created prejudiced perceptions on both sides, misplaced policies that have been imposed by the government and the military authorities based on these misperceptions, as well as the resultant behavior manifested by all parties based on these prejudiced perceptions.

It must be understood that this trust and credibility gap is based on **perceptions**, perceptions that people have with regard to the military and the police, and vice-versa. These perceptions may deviate from the truth, but what is important is that these perceptions exist and influence the way people behave. They cannot therefore just be dismissed on the grounds that they are based on wrong information. To be overcome they need to be confronted and addressed not in a defensive manner but with an open mind.

To address this gap, it is proposed that a number of steps be taken.

1. There must be an understanding of the factors that have contributed to the security situation in Sulu, the history of the people and their homeland and their culture. Only with a proper understanding will one be able to devise appropriate policies and approaches.

This requires that a **continuous orientation of military and police officers and men** be undertaken to ensure that a proper understanding of the context within which they are operating is prevalent in their minds. This orientation can be of at least two kinds and can be undertaken at several levels:

- a. Introduction to Sulu history and culture provided to officers and men who will be assigned in Sulu, and



- b. Periodic follow-up orientations to provide a deeper understanding of Sulu history and culture.

The basic orientations, which could focus not just on Sulu but on the situation of Muslims in the Philippines in general, can be undertaken as part of the curriculum of the Philippine Military Academy, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Command and General Staff College, the Command and Staff Training School of the Philippine Army, the Philippine National Police Academy and other appropriate training institutions of the military and the police. **These should be offered not just to officers but enlisted personnel as well.**

The in-depth orientations, focused on specific areas and groups, like Sulu, for example, can be undertaken as part of the orientation given by Division Training Units in preparation for deployment of specific units to particular areas. They can also be made part of the Troop Information and Education sessions held by operating units in the field in order to reach enlisted men as well.

The periodic orientations – quarterly, for example – can be built into the operating procedures of units in the fields while at the same time requiring these units – for example, battalion-level -- to interact on a regular basis with the civilian population within their areas of operation and responsibility.

These orientations need to be institutionalised so that regardless of the officer and troop movements in the field, military and police personnel are given the proper perspective to take relative to the people and areas within which they are operating.

2. The military and police authorities must review their security policies in Sulu. What are some of these policies?

First, is the **basic orientation of the military with regard to Sulu.** From the viewpoint of many Suluanos, the military views everyone in Sulu as the enemy rather than the *raison d'être* for the police and military forces having been created in the first place, to provide protection for the people.

In a place like Sulu, this is much truer for the military forces, which are physically separate and distinct from the people. The police personnel are, for the most part, Tausug Muslims, who live and interact on a daily basis with the populace. The military forces on the other hand are mostly made up of Christian officers and men who come from other provinces, who are housed in camps of their own, away from the general population, with walls and razor-sharp concertina wire fences and guards to keep the people – the very ones they are supposed to be protecting -- out. When these soldiers leave their camps they do so in a state of heightened alert, firearms pointed outwards at the civilian populace, fingers on the trigger or, at the very least, the trigger guard.



This antagonistic posture of the military forces in Sulu -- and particularly the Philippine Marine contingents – has been noted in public fora in the town of Jolo, to which the military have responded that their state of heightened alert when they move around in centers of population is triggered by attacks that some of their men have encountered while performing simple tasks like doing their daily marketing.

This concern on the part of the military was demonstrated very recently by the killing of four marine soldiers in the town of Jolo on May 21 and 22, 2006. While there are various stories regarding the background to these killings, the concern of the military would appear to be justified.

This is a vicious cycle which feeds on itself: each side viewing the other as an enemy – not without reason, it should be pointed out – reinforcing the enmity and suspicion existing between the two and deepening the hatred that has built up over centuries.

Second, is the **undeclared policy of war that effectively exists in Sulu.**

The recent Suspension of Offensive Military Operations (SOMO) in Sulu, initially announced as taking effect from May 17-23, 2006 in view of the visit of a delegation from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), brought out clearly the basic security posture of the AFP in Sulu: a continuing state of military operations or, in short, a state of war. As stated in a press release from General Headquarters of the AFP, “AFP units in Sulu shall refrain from initiating offensive military operations with the exception of the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Jemaah Islamiyah.” This clearly implies that without the SOMO in place, offensive military operations could be launched at any time and that, even with the SOMO, offensive military operations against the ASG and the JI will continue to be undertaken.

This is one of the reasons that whole barangays have been abandoned for several years now, such as Barangays Pansul, Panglayahan, Kabbontakas, Bakung and Maligay in Patikul municipality, and Sitio Talibang in Bwansa, Indanan because people are afraid of being mistaken as Abu Sayyaf personalities or caught in the crossfire in the continuing military patrols and operations in these areas. The existence of continuing military operations – as admitted in the SOMO – translates in effect to a continuing state of war in the province.

Fortunately, this is now being addressed by the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP) in its discussions with the MNLF on the cessation of hostilities which, if implemented, is expected to end the *de facto* state of war in the province.

However, since the cessation of hostilities will be addressed only to recognized MNLF forces, leaving the door open for continuing military operations against groups which can be identified as Abu Sayyaf or “Abu Sayyaf supporters”, an avenue is provided for the military to extend the undeclared state of war in Sulu.



A third area of security policy related to the *de facto* state of war in Sulu has to do with the **continuing and on-going military operations in the province**. As noted earlier, even the recently declared SOMO has an exception: offensive military operations against the ASG and the JI will continue even during the period of effectivity of the SOMO. In the words of former SouthCom Commanding General Edilberto Adan, a “sustained pacification campaign” needs to be undertaken if the situation is to be put under control.

The difficulty with this approach is that, in the past year alone, this triggered the breakout of two major wars in Sulu – once in February and again in November 2005 – leading to the inevitable toll of death, destruction and displacement of thousands of families. These continuing operations are also responsible, as likewise pointed out earlier, for whole barangays having been abandoned for years now in the municipality of Patikul, for example. The sitio of Talibang in Barangay Buansa, Indanan municipality, is another example of an area that has been abandoned by its residents because of continuing military operations. Accounts also abound from ordinary residents about relatives having been killed because they have been mistaken as being Abu Sayyaf members. Thus, the policy of continuing military operations has led to numerous cases of widespread destruction, death, displacement and human rights violations particularly against civilians which call for a re-examination of this policy. Can the objective of securing the people – since after all this should be the ultimate objective of any security operation – and bringing peace to the province not be achieved through other means?

It is proposed that **an alternative approach to securing communities be adopted, that of giving these communities, through their Local Government Units and the Philippine National Police forces assigned there, the primary responsibility for securing their areas**. Where significant elements of the Moro National Liberation Front also exist – as in the Bud Tumantangis area of Indanan or the Bitanag area in Panamao, for example – the MNLF forces can also be brought into the equation. It is only when these local forces are unable to handle the security situation in their areas that the AFP units should be called in. This approach calls for a close coordination of information exchange and mobilization of forces and, basic to all this, trust.

However, **for such an approach to be effective, it will require (a) that the Local Government Unit Chief Executives, specifically the Mayors and the Barangay Chairmen, be in their communities and (b) that the PNP be sufficiently motivated and adequately trained to take primary responsibility for security in these communities**. As these preconditions appear difficult to meet given the situation in most municipalities today, it is suggested that this approach be tested in selected areas and, if found to be effective, be expanded to new areas that are willing and able to take on responsibility for their own security.

In this connection, it is also recommended that **an aggressive campaign to inform all sectors regarding the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) be undertaken throughout Sulu**. It is noted that officers of the AFP are taught



the IHL principles in the various military institutions they go through, and that there are continuing refresher seminars undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross in the different military camps, but nevertheless the conduct of military operations in Sulu often show a disregard for basic human rights. Thus, as noted earlier, there are whole barangays in the municipality of Patikul, for example, which have been abandoned for years, some as long as eight years now, because continuing military operations are undertaken in these areas and anyone found in these areas are assumed to be enemies. The use of heavy armaments such as howitzers and mortars as well as aerial bombardments also result in indiscriminate damage to properties as well as civilian casualties. In fact, even the Sulu Roadmap for Peace and Development points out that the military participants in the Sulu Bridging Leaders' workshop admitted that "indiscriminate or too much use of force in military operations often displaces innocent civilians, and results to collateral damages, abuses, violation of human rights/civil liberties and insensitivities to the culture of the people".

But the problem rests not with the military alone. A common practice among Suluanos, for example, is to extract revenge against relatives of persons who may be considered one's enemies, even if these relatives are themselves not directly involved in the conflict between the two parties. This violates the principle of distinguishing between combatants and civilians or not engaging in battle persons who do not participate in hostilities.

The use of landmines in the municipality of Pata, for example, is well known as a weapon being used in the clan conflicts in that area. Landmines, particularly those that detonate upon contact, are one of the weapons that have been banned from warfare precisely because they do not distinguish between combatants and innocent civilians. Recently, a landmine injured a woman in the municipality of Kalingalan Caluang as she went to a well to wash her family's clothes. Even the MNLF is guilty of this. A ranking MNLF commander last year admitted to using landmines in their encounters with government forces, although it is claimed that these were subsequently defused and removed.

Thus, all sectors in Sulu society need to be informed regarding the principles of International Humanitarian Law and the rules that have been agreed upon among civilized states covering the conduct of hostilities. The help of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the body that is considered the "guardian" of the IHL, can be requested to undertake this program in Sulu.

Fourth is the **policy with regard to the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu**, which likewise needs to be re-examined and refined. One thing appears to be clear with regard to the ASG: the Government has spelled out a no-negotiation policy aside from enunciating an objective of destruction or annihilation of the ASG. However, what is not clear is whether we know who the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu are. The policy of the Southern Command is to go after the Abu Sayyaf and Abu Sayyaf supporters, which in the view of many appears to be a blanket authority to run after practically anyone. What appears to be happening is that most incidents that occur in Sulu – which at other times would have



been attributed to bandits, kidnapers or extortionists -- are now attributed to the Abu Sayyaf, and practically every person killed in an encounter, whether known or unknown, is identified to be an Abu Sayyaf member. The Abu Sayyaf, in the view of many Suluanos, becomes a convenient scapegoat.

The Abu Sayyaf is also undoubtedly the reason the U.S. Government has insisted on a military presence in Sulu. As pointed out earlier, the Americans made it clear in 2003 that they were going to go after the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu. Having been rebuffed by Suluanos at that time, they found other ways to insinuate themselves into the province, this time under the guise of humanitarian programs. Clearly the use of humanitarian programs by the Americans has a two-fold objective: gathering ground intelligence to supplement efforts undertaken by such activities as the operation of the electronic reconnaissance aircraft operated for over a year over the island of Jolo as well as an effort to “win the hearts and minds” of Suluanos to the cause of the Americans.

This issue of the Abu Sayyaf is discussed in greater detail below.

A fifth policy area that needs to be re-examined is that which relates to so-called “**loose firearms**”. As noted earlier, there is what appears to be a very conservative estimate of around 30,000 “loose” firearms throughout the province. The policy is to collect these loose firearms by any means possible. The approach was clearly enunciated by former SouthCom Commanding General Adan when he said, referring to armed groups in Sulu, that this would be done through “a sustained pacification campaign that aims:

“First, to convince the armed groups of Sulu that there is a better alternative to the ‘culture of guns’ now prevailing;...

“Second, to convince the armed groups in Sulu to avail of Government incentives to give up their arms and weapons;

“Third, to impress the armed groups and their leaders that they face certain destruction if they resist.” (The Desirable End State in Sulu, November 21, 2005.)

As pointed out earlier, the Tausug fascination with weapons has deep sociological and psychological roots and cannot be eliminated or extinguished through a policy of coercion. This is an issue that must be studied closely so that appropriate and effective policies and approaches can be identified and adopted. A purely militaristic approach may create more problems than it may solve.

A sixth policy area has to do with **information sharing**. The impression of the populace is that information is being withheld or hidden from the people, possibly on the belief that there is no need to advise people of developments on the security front or, worse, that they cannot be trusted. Thus, for example, people are often in the dark as to what the status is of the series of violent incidents that have taken place in Sulu all these years. The majority of these incidents remain unresolved after all these years with people not knowing where things stand.



For example, to this day, the killing of Bishop Benjamin de Jesus eight years ago is still unsolved. The killing of Pangutaran Mayor Abdul Sanuh in 1999 likewise remains unresolved to this date. As likewise is the case with the killing of Fr. Benjamin Inocencio in Jolo in December 2000.

In the past five months of this year there has been a series of violent incidents in the Metro Jolo area, including, for example:

- the ambush of the jeep of Barangay Chairman Akarab Asara along Scott Road in the heart of the town of Jolo on January 7, resulting in the death of his driver;
- the wounding of 10 persons in front of the Lambayong Mosque in Busbus, Jolo on January 28;
- the killing of four persons and wounding of two others in what has been termed the Palar massacre on February 8, occurring just a few meters away from the 3rd Marine Brigade headquarters;
- the killing of Police Officer Henry Elumbaring right in the Philippine National Police headquarters at Camp Asturias on February 10;
- the beheading of a certain Abujar on the same day, February 10, with his body found in a garbage dump along Scott Road in Jolo;
- the bombing of a videoke bar right outside the headquarters of the Philippine Army 104th Brigade on February 18, resulting in the death of five persons and the wounding of 19 others;
- the bombing of the Sulu Consumer's Coop store on March 27, resulting in the death of 5 persons and wounding of 9 others;
- the ambush of a passenger jeep at Barangay Asturias, Jolo on April 6, resulting in the death of one person and wounding of 5 others;
- the killing of Mr. Asula Binang on April 11 along Serantes St. in Jolo;
- the kidnapping of Mrs. Caridad Vergara and her son Beltran on April 12;
- the attempted kidnapping and subsequent killing of Mr. William Halim on April 13;
- the wounding of 6 civilians in a grenade explosion at Barangay Asturias, Jolo on April 16;
- the killing of Mr. Jaime Go on April 17;
- the killing of Philippine Marine Sgt. De Luna at the end of the runway of the Jolo airport on May 21;
- the killing of Marine Sgt. Joel Muhadi Dagonia in downtown Jolo on May 22;
- the killing of Marine Sgt. Rico de la Cruz and Marine Cpl. Junni in a store in downtown Jolo on the same day, May 22;
- the killing of Mr. Binang Sali near the Tulay Mosque in downtown Jolo on May 23;
- the killing of Mr. Juric Palalas in downtown Jolo on May 24; the killing of Mr. Roel Vernal in downtown Jolo also on May 24;

And so on and so forth.



This is but a partial list. A complete list is two to three times longer than this. But to this day, little, if anything, has been announced to the public regarding the status of these cases.

In several meetings held the Philippine National Police has been asked to provide updates on the status of investigations regarding these and other cases, but it appears that the PNP is either unable or reluctant to divulge information on these cases. This is a major factor leading to the loss of credibility of the PNP among Suluanos.

Another case in point, for example, involves the presence of the U.S. military forces in the province of Sulu. The Balikatan exercises, which were joint exercises of the Philippine and U.S. military forces, were supposed to have taken place for a period of one month, from February 17 to March 16, 2006. However, for a year prior to this period, U.S. military troops were already seen moving around Sulu, without any explanation being given as to why they were there. Moreover, an aircraft which clearly belonged to the U.S. Air Force was for months circling around the island of Jolo and nearby islands, day and night, without any explanation as to what it was doing. Finally, in early February 2006 an announcement was made regarding the forthcoming Balikatan exercise, with a public forum conducted identifying the various medical and engineering projects that this ostensibly humanitarian program was going to undertake. Two weeks before its scheduled end, the Balikatan program was pre-terminated, but American troops continue to remain in Sulu up to this day. Their continued presence is supposedly under a vague long-term program called Bayanihan, but no explanation has been given as to what the objectives of such a program are and what specific activities are to be undertaken under this program.

While the Balikatan exercises were supposed to take place only in Sulu and mainland Mindanao, U.S. troops have been sighted in Tawi-Tawi and have been engaged in operations alongside Philippine Navy personnel conducting searches on vessels plying Tawi-Tawi waters.

The basic issue is this: if security is for the people, if the purpose of all these activities is to provide a secure environment for the welfare of the people, why are people not being advised as to what these security activities are and what objectives are expected to be achieved? Why are people not being advised regarding the status of investigations on past incidents so that they know that efforts are being undertaken to provide justice to the victims and their families? **Constant dialogue must be maintained with the populace**, and the military and police forces must be open to queries regarding their activities. In a place like Sulu where opportunities for information dissemination are limited, **the police and military authorities must take special steps to ensure that information is spread as widely as possible** – through the radio, through the limited circulation newspapers, through regular public fora organized precisely for this purpose, etc. -- so that people develop the view that the authorities are concerned about their safety



and welfare and are in fact taking steps to ensure that their security is provided for and that justice is served where it is called for.

All these policies and actuations of the military and police authorities in Sulu have led, as mentioned in the beginning, to a cycle of mistrust and antagonism between the civilian population and the authorities charged with the responsibility of protecting them. This cycle needs to be broken. The more the military forces are perceived as acting like an outside conquering colonial force the more they will encounter opposition and violent reaction from the populace they are supposed to protect and serve. The longer the police appear to be unresponsive to the need of people to be protected and to see that wrong-doers are brought to justice, the more likely it will be that people will take justice into their own hands. The cycle can be broken by the military and the police adopting another posture: that of being the protectors of the people as provided for under the Constitution.

It is recommended that the Provincial Peace and Order Council together with the military and police commands in Sulu sit down and review the policies and posture of the AFP and the PNP vis-à-vis the security situation in the province with the end in view of coming up with an approach that will enlist the support of the general populace in the pursuit of peace in the province rather than its enmity. Where certain policies require the approval of higher authorities, these should be endorsed to these said higher authorities for appropriate action.

3. There should be a **deliberate effort on the part of the military and police authorities to reach out to the civilian population**. This can be done in at least two ways.

First, it should be made a standard operating procedure of field units of the AFP and the PNP to **conduct regular consultations with the populace** in their areas of responsibility. This should be done at least once a month in different locations which can be accessible to different sectors of the population. Through these regular consultations the military and police authorities can accomplish a number of things:

- a. Hear what feedback there is from the populace regarding the peace and order situation in their respective areas, in the process receiving what could be useful intelligence information;
- b. Identify what problems the populace is facing which can then be endorsed to the appropriate agencies of government for needed action;
- c. Listen to complaints regarding the actuations of their men which they should act upon in an appropriate manner;
- d. Inform the populace regarding plans and programs that the concerned AFP or PNP unit intends to undertake, in the process eliciting the cooperation of the populace where this is needed.



In this manner, the AFP/PNP units make themselves more accessible to the civilian population and break down the barriers of mistrust that have built up over the centuries.

Secondly, the Civic Action Programs of the military and the police, known as SALA'AM need to be continued but improvements need to be introduced in the manner of their execution.

The briefing of the Philippine Army on its SALAAM Program states its objectives as being that of gaining the sympathy of the people and introducing government to the people. These are short-term goals which should be secondary. The primary goals should be to address the priority needs of the people. The AFP should therefore adjust its approach from being one which is centered on what the military requires – support of the people – to one which is focused on the needs of the people they are supposed to be serving.

Moreover, the manner in which the military's civic action programs are undertaken likewise appears to emphasize short-term objectives. Case in point is the 3-kilometer water distribution system set up by the 7th MBLT in Danag, Patikul, Sulu. This is a very impressive apparently well-executed project meeting a very real need of the communities along the route, serving an estimated 2000 households in three barangays. However, the project appears to reinforce certain attitudes on the part of the communities being served which are undesirable. For example, all along the route very impressive water tanks where the people can fetch water have been set up displaying very prominent signs saying: "Ang Tubig na Ito ay Libre". If water is given out for free, the question of the sustainability of the project has to be raised. The Battalion Commander in charge of the project admitted that the people in the area have refused the entry of the water district because with the water district they would have to pay for the water services provided them. How then would the water system be maintained? Once the marine battalion moves out of the area – which one hopes would happen some day – who would look after the project and ensure its continued efficient operation? Having said that, one nevertheless has to acknowledge that the project has brought significant benefits not just in terms of water supply but health and sanitation as well to the communities served. What is being emphasized is that the manner of implementing projects is just as important as the actual physical project itself.

All too often, CIVAC projects of the military are meant to impress, to entice and to attract the people. This is because of the overt objectives aimed at by the military in undertaking these projects: gaining the sympathy of the people and winning them over to the side of the government. In the process however, many of these projects undermine the self-reliance of the people and create an attitude of dependence and even mendicancy because of the manner in which they are undertaken, which can only work against the long-term interests of the community.

On the other hand, one hears favourable reports regarding the CIVAC work undertaken by the Philippine Army's 35th Infantry Battalion in the Talipao area when it



was stationed there, working with farmers in the field, working with the community to repair mosques, providing tutors to help schoolchildren with their studies and similar activities. Reports from Talipao indicate that the people in the area appreciate the efforts of the soldiers in helping them address community needs.

It is suggested that the military learn from the experience of Civil Society Organizations on the desirable way of undertaking projects in which community participation and ownership is developed from the very outset, from the time projects are first identified and designed, to their detailed planning, construction, operation, maintenance and periodic monitoring and evaluation.

4. With regard to the Philippine National Police, the trust and confidence gap stems from other causes. The rash of killings and kidnappings that have occurred in the capital town of Jolo and its adjacent municipalities, considered the gateway to the province, plus the fact that very few of these, if any, appear to have been solved give the impression that **the PNP is helpless to stem the tide of criminality overwhelming Metro Jolo**. The very existence of the Jolo Internal Defense Force (JIDF), a composite force of PNP and AFP personnel, is an admission that the PNP is unable to address the peace and order problem in the capital town. This despite the fact that the PNP Provincial Director recently declared that the command has 100 police officers and men assigned to the town of Jolo.

Aside from the Jolo Police Force, there are three PNP Provincial Mobile Teams physically located within the town of Jolo: the 1509th Provincial Mobile Team, the 1512th and the 1514th. Each of these Provincial Mobile Teams is supposed to have a strength of 150 men, indicating that there could be as many as 550 policemen physically located in the town of Jolo. While it is true that these PMTs are supposed to be augmentation forces dispatched where local police forces need to be strengthened, given the critical situation in the Metro Jolo area, the PNP Provincial Director should be able to dispatch additional men to assist the Jolo Police Force and place the situation under control.

This inability to control the crime wave within the Metro Jolo area is compounded, as pointed out earlier, by the fact that the PNP is often unable to provide basic information on the status of investigations regarding these crime incidents occurring right at its doorsteps. After all, the provincial headquarters of the Philippine National Police in Sulu is also located in the town of Jolo. One of its own police officers, Henry Elumbaring, was shot within the grounds of the PNP headquarters at Camp Asturias on February 10 of this year.

The PNP has complained that it is unable to obtain the cooperation of witnesses to many of these incidents. On the other hand, Civil Society Organizations like the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Jolo Vicariate receive reports from civilian informants regarding many crime incidents occurring in the Metro Jolo area. This is an indication that people lack trust in the capability of the PNP in addressing crime situations in the province and instead turn to other organizations to help them.



The Philippine National Police in Sulu will have to exercise stronger leadership and dedication to its role as the front line protector of the people. It will have to be more proactive in the discharge of its duties and should be prepared to take primary responsibility for the safety and security of the people of Sulu.

If the program areas outlined above are adopted on a sustained basis, it is believed that progress can be achieved in bridging the gap between the people of Sulu and the military and police authorities assigned to serve and protect them.

Resolving outstanding issues with the MNLF

Clashes with the MNLF forces loyal to Chairman Nur Misuari have been responsible for the two “wars” that occurred in 2005 (February and November) and the resultant displacement of thousands of innocent civilians – approximately 70,000 in February and 12,000 in November. Despite the view espoused by some within the government and the military establishment that the MNLF is a “spent force”, their ability to engage the military head-to-head at least for a limited period of time indicates that the government should not be over-confident with regard to its ability to overcome or even control this group. Moreover, as shown by the recent visit of the delegation from the Organization of Islamic Conference, Chairman Nur Misuari still enjoys the confidence of the OIC, which is a potent political force as far as the country’s international economic and diplomatic relations are concerned.

Hence, the resolution of issues outstanding between the Government and the MNLF needs to be addressed seriously.

There are essentially two issues: (a) compliance with provisions of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Government and the MNLF, and (b) speedy resolution of the case of Chairman Nur Misuari. Fortunately, these are currently being addressed by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), and it appears that significant headway is being achieved. But it also appears that from the viewpoint of the OIC delegation tasked to look into the matter, much still needs to be done. Moreover, the OIC has requested that Misuari be allowed to attend a tripartite meeting to be held in Saudi Arabia in July (now possibly postponed to later in the year) to tackle the remaining issues under the Peace Agreement. Given his present status of detention under the non-bailable offense of rebellion, the Philippine Government needs to see how this request can be accommodated.

But, as noted earlier, action is underway to resolve these issues. What need to be avoided in the meantime would be incidents that can spark another violent confrontation between government and MNLF forces. This likewise is being addressed by the OPAPP through its current negotiations on the declaration of a cessation of hostilities between the Philippine military forces and the MNLF.



Two other initiatives can be considered in the meantime to strengthen the degree of confidence between the MNLF and the Government. First, Government may look at what long-term development programs can be initiated in areas which can be considered to be strongholds of the MNLF, specifically, for example, the areas in and around Sitio Marang, Barangay Bwansa, Indanan Municipality and the Bitanag area in Panamao Municipality. These could start with livelihood programs for MNLF forces and their families. Second, Government can also consider setting the groundwork for AHJAG (Ad-Hoc Joint Action Group) – type operations between the MNLF and the AFP, similar to what has been established between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces and the AFP.

Reviewing the Policy and Strategy with regard to the Abu Sayyaf

The campaign of the military against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu is reflective of the approach taken by military forces operating in this area since time immemorial, starting with the Spanish colonial forces, the American colonial regime and now the Philippine Republic military forces. It is relatively simple: search and destroy; no negotiations, no discussions.

While the campaign appears to have achieved some success – Mujib Susukan was killed in February 2003, Ghalib Andang (Commander Robot) and Nadzmi Saabdula (Commander Global) were captured and eventually killed in March 2005 while in detention, aside from lesser personalities having been killed or arrested – it does not appear that the planned extermination of the Abu Sayyaf is nearing achievement. In fact, if reports are to be believed, the activities of the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu appear to continue unabated. The Abu Sayyaf have been blamed for the Palar massacre on Feb. 8. They were tagged as the culprits behind the Feb. 18 bombing of a videoke bar outside the gate of the Philippine Army 104th Infantry Brigade. They have also been identified as being responsible for the bombing of the NDJC Coop Store on March 27. In fact, it appears that the Abu Sayyaf are being blamed for practically all violent incidents occurring in the province of Sulu except for those which can be immediately attributed to other clear causes, such as the ambush of the passenger jeepney headed for Kalingalan Caluang on April 6 which most likely was related to the clan war going on in that municipality. This raises the question as to whether the authorities have a clear idea regarding what the Abu Sayyaf is and who can be considered as being affiliated with this group.

It is suggested that the Government review its policy with regard to the ASG in Sulu and consider an adjustment in strategy and tactics relative to this group. A number of things need to be considered in this review.

First, as noted earlier, **the ASG in Sulu is different in character from the ASG in Basilan**. It is less organized than the Basilan ASG was at its height and really operates as a number of individual groups following individual leaders or commanders. In a sense one could even say that **there is no ASG as an organization in Sulu**.



Second, **the various key personalities identified as ASG commanders in Sulu are driven by different motivations.** Radulan Sahiron and Jumdal Gumbahali (Dr. Abu) are actually MNLF commanders who opted to continue pursuing the vision of an Islamic state after the MNLF leadership under Nur Misuari decided to negotiate with the Philippine Government and accept autonomy under the Philippine flag.

Al-Bader Parad is believed by most Suluanos to be a military asset, fielded by the military in order to infiltrate the ASG and in the process take action against selected ASG personalities. The most likely target would appear to be Dr. Abu because Al-Bader's younger brother Lalong was (until his death a few months back) the son-in-law of Dr. Abu. It is said though that Dr. Abu has become aware of this plan and has warned Al-Bader not to attempt to approach him.

The fielding of military assets in the ASG is not unprecedented. Edwin Angeles (aka Ibrahim Yacob), was the first operations chief of the Basilan-based Abu Sayyaf Group under Abdurajak Janjalani. In February 1995 Angeles surrendered to the Philippine Marines in Sulu on the pretext that he no longer saw eye-to-eye with Janjalani. In reality, though, as Angeles himself revealed, he was actually a military asset fielded to infiltrate the ASG. Subsequent to his surfacing, Angeles worked as a civilian agent of the Intelligence Command of the Philippine National Police.

Other known ASG personalities in Sulu, like the Sailani brothers, Omar and Iting, are hired guns who undertake assassination missions for paying customers.

Third, there are indications that **the ASG tag is being used by third parties for their own purposes.** For example, there are supposed to be extortion letters that have been sent to businessmen in Jolo demanding protection payments. These letters are supposed to have been issued by Radulan Sahiron or his son Ismin. However, people who know Radulan claim that he does not engage in this type of activity, that he is in fact a strict Muslim following very closely the tenets of Islam and that it is likely that other parties are using his name because of the fear that they believe it will bring to their targeted victims.

These indicators would seem to suggest that **the single-minded approach of the Government to exterminate the ASG in Sulu should be replaced by a variegated strategy that adopts different approaches to the different personalities being targeted.** Thus, for example, in the case of Radulan and Dr. Abu, discussions can be undertaken initially with representatives of these persons to determine if some common ground of understanding can be reached with these two personalities. Since their opposition to government appears to be based on certain principles, discussions on these principles can be initiated to attempt to arrive at an understanding of what drives these individuals. Once an understanding on principles is achieved, details can be discussed regarding the extent of their culpability in incidents attributed to them, their willingness to take responsibility for their actions, developmental concessions for their communities, etc.



As part of this process, the government can show its sincerity by bringing priority development initiatives to communities which are considered strongholds of these selected leaders. Again, these development initiatives should be done in a manner which involves community members every step of the way.

Related to this, the government should look at the issue of the abandoned barangays in Patikul municipality. These barangays are supposed to have been abandoned because of the military operations against the ASG in these areas, and the continuation of these operations for the past so many years has prevented the residents of these barangays from returning to their homes. If the residents can be allowed to return without fear of being mistaken as being ASG members or sympathizers and if development initiatives can be introduced in these areas, this could go a long way to strengthening confidence in the government's sincerity to bring peace to Sulu.

In the case of individuals like Al-Bader, if it is in fact true that he has been fielded as a military asset, the military should consider terminating the services of such individuals. It however has been denied by the Task Force Comet Commander that Al-Bader is a military asset. Nevertheless the perception among Suluanos remains.

With regard to ASG personalities who are known killers, kidnapers, extortionists and just plain criminals, like the Sailani brothers, the pursuit operations should continue with greater vigor particularly since the targets will now be more focussed, and possibly even with the cooperation of those leaders like Radulan and Dr. Abu who, if properly approached and motivated, may be willing to focus on bringing peace to Sulu by ridding the province of these bandit elements.

Addressing the Issue of Clan Conflicts

As noted earlier, clan conflicts resulting in protracted violence between warring families is part of the Sulu landscape. It arises from elements within the culture of the Tausugs of Sulu as well as the failure of government to provide adequate security and speedy justice to aggrieved parties.

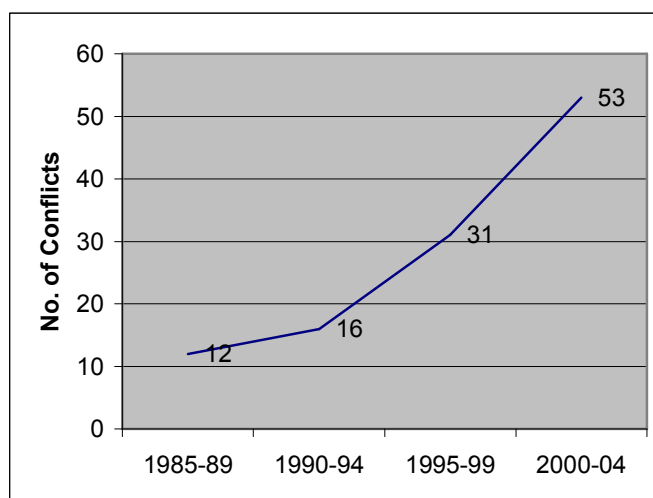
For example, it is interesting to note that there are two Regional Trial Courts (RTCs) in Sulu and five Municipal Circuit Trial Courts. The two RTCs are presided over by two Judges, one of whom is at the same time the Presiding Judge of the Shariah District Court. Thus, this latter Judge can only provide 50% of his time to either court for which he is responsible. For the five MCTCs there is only one Judge who, moreover, is based in Zamboanga and goes to Jolo once a month. There is only one Prosecutor in the province to handle all cases brought before the courts.

There are also four Shariah Circuit Courts (SCCs) and one Shariah District Court (SDC). There are three Judges presiding over the four SCCs, one of whom handles two SCCs. As mentioned earlier, the Presiding Judge of the Shariah District Court serves at the same time as the Presiding Judge of one of the RTCs.



However the Shariah Courts have very limited scope as far as the kinds of cases they handle. The SCCs in Sulu – which incidentally are all physically located in the town of Jolo although each one covers several different municipalities -- handle mainly divorce cases, although they also attend to solemnization of marriages and conversion of religion to Islam. The SDC handles mainly changes of names as well as solemnization of marriages, although it is authorized to serve as an appellate court for cases which go through the SCCs, aside from addressing issues of inheritance, custody, guardianship, paternity, filiation, petitions for the declaration of death, petitions for cancellation or correction of entries in the Muslim Registries and actions arising from customary contracts in which the parties are Muslims. Thus the kinds of incidents that normally give rise to clan conflicts – land disputes, abductions, acts of lasciviousness, slander, libel, actions bringing shame to an individual or his family – would need to be handled by the regular court system which, as noted above, is inadequately manned.

The available statistics arising from a recent study on clan conflicts in nine provinces in Mindanao were cited earlier – 145 recorded clan conflicts over the last 65 years, half of which (76) are still unresolved. The statistics compiled by the author of the study, Dr. Jamail Kamlian, are interesting because they show that clan conflicts in Sulu have been on the upsurge over the last 20 years. From 1985-89, 12 conflicts were recorded. From 1990-94, 16. From 1995-99, 31 were recorded, while during the last five years covered by the study, 2000-2004, a total of 53 clan conflicts, 37% of the total number of conflicts identified, occurred. (See chart below.)



It is not clear why there has been this alarming increase in violence among families in Sulu. It could just be a function of the memories of the respondents to the survey – more incidents occurring during recent periods come to mind easily as compared to those which took place 10, 20 or 30 years ago – but whatever the explanation, it is still a serious security concern.



A study undertaken by the Ateneo de Zamboanga University Research Center last year, “Management of Clan Conflict and Rido Among the Tausug, Maguindanao, Maranao, Sama and Yakan Tribes”, came up with a number of recommendations to address these types of conflicts:

1. Strict enforcement of the law on the ownership and carriage of guns;
2. Ensuring clean, honest and orderly elections, possibly with the involvement of a Council of Elders respected by the community;
3. Support of traditional methods of resolving clan conflicts;
4. Use of blood money for the benefit of the community, not just the aggrieved party;
5. Promotion of a culture of peace through peace education;
6. Provision of livelihood assistance;
7. Training of conflict mediators.

In the case of Sulu, traditional methods of conflict resolution are in fact being adopted in many instances. It has in fact reached a point where the traditional methods were formally adopted by the Provincial Government of Sulu through the enactment of Provincial Ordinance No. 01-2002 entitled “An Ordinance Enacting the Code of the Tausug Customary Law”, approved into law on March 13, 2002.

With regard to the resolution of clan conflicts, it is suggested, first, that **an office or at the very least an official of the Provincial Government be assigned to monitor and attend to clan conflicts (Clan Conflict Monitoring Unit or CCMU)**. Clan conflicts to be focussed on can then be broken down into two categories: **Existing Unresolved Conflicts** and **Potential New Conflicts**.

With regard to existing conflicts, the following measures should be undertaken:

- a) Inventory existing unresolved conflicts. For this purpose, the studies on clan conflicts referred to earlier can serve as a starting point.
- b) Analyze the unresolved conflicts in order to identify the factors or reasons as to why these remain unresolved.
- c) Once the bottlenecks have been identified, analysis can be undertaken as to actions needed to break the deadlock. In some cases this may be a matter of identifying an appropriate mediator. In some cases it may be a matter of



generating the needed resources to resolve the conflict (*diyat* or *bangun*). Or it may be some other factor which can be attended to.

- d) Once a formula has been identified, action can then be taken, under the supervision of the CCMU, to attempt to resolve the conflict.

With regard to potential conflicts, a system of monitoring needs to be set up down to the level of the barangay or even sitio. Again, the CCMU will need to supervise this. Steps necessary in setting up this system would be as follows:

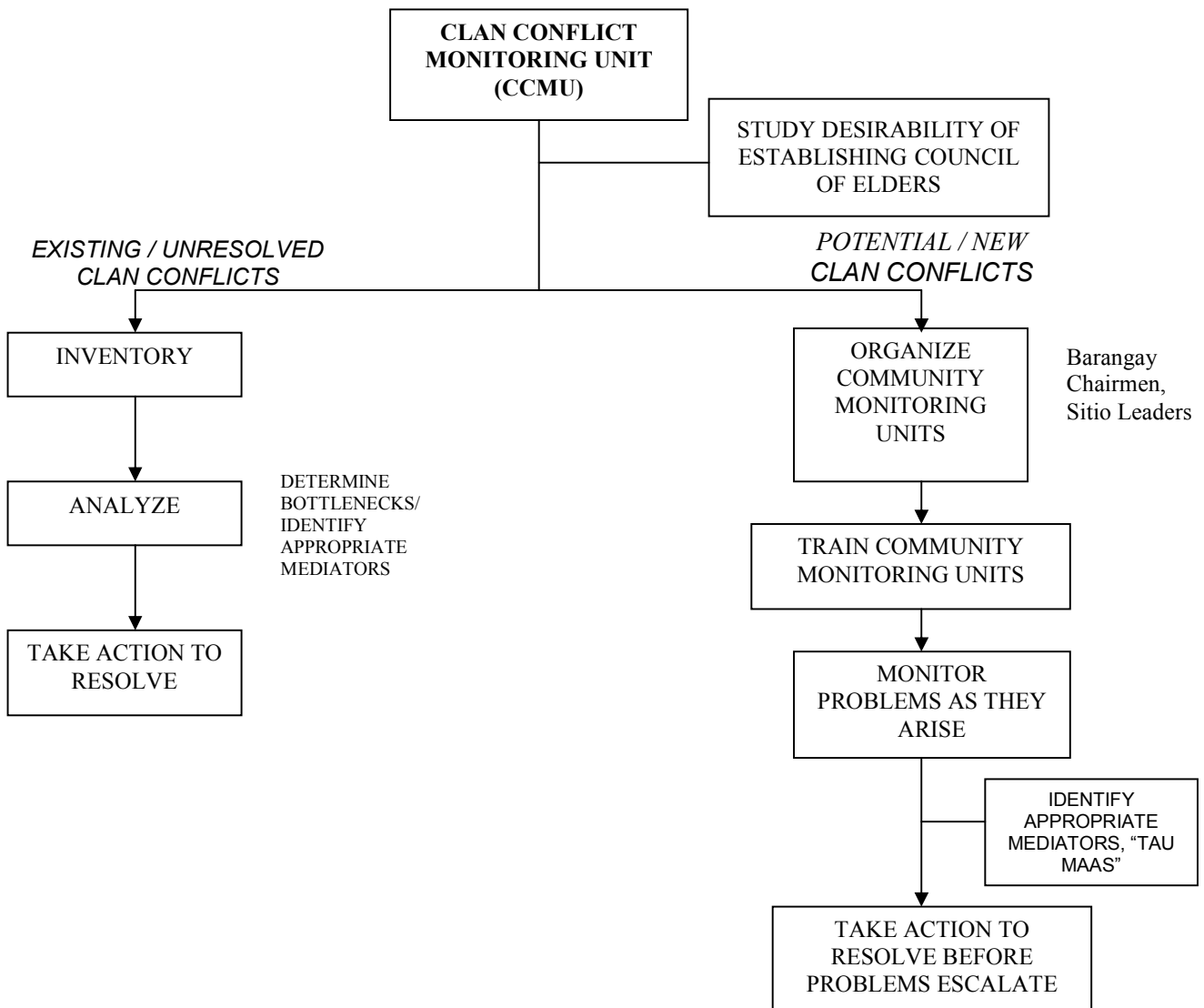
- a) Have Barangay Chairmen identify individuals in each sitio who will be responsible for monitoring potential conflict incidents.
- b) Conduct meetings with Barangay Chairmen and designated sitio monitors to discuss operation of the Conflict Monitoring System (CMS). Essentially this would entail identifying potential conflict situations as they arise, for example, land disputes, thefts in the area (carabaos or cattle stolen, etc.), problems with abductions or elopements, etc.
- c) Sitio monitors would submit monthly reports to the Barangay Chairmen, who in turn will forward these to the Provincial Government Conflict Monitoring Office. When reports are not received in a timely manner, the CCMU will send people out to the concerned barangays to check on the situation.
- d) Where potential conflict situations are identified, the CCMU will dispatch persons to meet with the Barangay Chairmen and Sitio Monitors concerned in order to determine what steps need to be taken to defuse the situation or prevent the conflict from developing or escalating. It is anticipated that for the most part this would entail identifying the appropriate persons who could mediate between the parties concerned in order to defuse the tension.

The CCMU can also look into other possible action areas, such as, identifying persons respected in different communities (*mga tau maas*) who can be tapped to be mediators for conflicts in their communities, or the establishment of a provincial level Council of Elders who can address major conflicts that require intervention beyond their community, etc.

The basic principle involved in this latter exercise is to take pre-emptive action by heading off or preventing local conflicts from escalating into full-fledged clan wars.



A chart reflecting the processes discussed above is found below.



Addressing the Issue of Terrorism

As noted in the earlier discussion, the issue of terrorism is a complex one which calls for clear-headed thinking. Acts of violence are simply that, acts of violence, and only become acts of terrorism when it is clear that they are intended to achieve a political or ideological objective, forcing a government or some other organization to adopt a particular course of action which has political or ideological implications. In the Philippines, references to the Abu Sayaff Group, for example, often add the phrase that the ASG is linked to Al Qaeda, thus using this alleged link as a justification for labelling it a terrorist organization.



It is suggested, therefore, that **the very first thing for governmental authorities to do, when faced with acts of violence, is to determine whether these acts constitute acts of terrorism or are simply criminal acts.** Criminal acts carry less of an impact on society as a whole than acts of terrorism. Their immediate impact is on the victims of the acts and while, if left unchecked, the criminal acts may spread and affect other victims as well, as a rule their impact is more limited.

A terroristic act, on the other hand, because of its very nature, has a much wider sphere of impact. Because it is intended to elicit a reaction from parties other than the immediate victims of the acts of violence perpetrated, its impact goes beyond its immediate victims. In fact, its impact could be on society as a whole.

Thus it is important for the authorities not to indiscriminately label all acts of violence as terroristic acts, in the same way as it is unsound to attribute all acts of violence to the Abu Sayyaf. Not properly analysing a crime can lead to a failure to resolve it, which could be one reason why the majority of crimes in Sulu remain unsolved. It is possible, though, that applying the label of “terrorism” to an act is seen by some as serving as some kind of a license for authorities to take what otherwise would be considered to be extraordinary courses of action, and this could also explain why authorities are quick to label many acts of violence as being terroristic in character.

The second thing that can be done with regard to terrorism in Sulu – if in fact terrorists or terrorist organizations are operating in Sulu – is to **actively inform the citizenry regard the situation being faced.** It is not enough to provide an interview or two for the newspapers or the radio stations. The police and military authorities must actively seek out opportunities to meet with different segments of society and provide them the information that is available on the problem facing everyone. In this manner the authorities will be helping to bridge the credibility gap that currently exists and will be addressing directly the disbelief that Suluanos generally have when the matter of terrorism is brought up. Moreover, an objective of these dialogue sessions would be to elicit the cooperation of the citizenry in fighting what should be a common enemy for everyone, again setting up linkages between the populace and the authorities.

Only if frank exchanges of information and points of view take place can an understanding of perspectives be arrived at and cooperative undertakings achieved. In this regard, the **authorities should make a special effort to interact closely with civil society organizations who can serve as linkages to the rest of the populace in Sulu.**

Strengthening the Role of Civil Society

A major area of concern is the **seeming passiveness of Civil Society in doing its share to proactively address the issue of peace in Sulu and bridge the gap between the populace and the authorities.** The impression given is that people are in a sense resigned to their fate and become mainly passive spectators of events swirling around them. On the other hand, when Civil Society does move it is often in a confrontational manner, which only deepens the animosities existing between the concerned sectors.



There have however been some encouraging developments along these lines over the past several months. To begin with, the working groups of Civil Society in Sulu have been broadened to include the business sector, which traditionally has been considered a separate category in itself. Thus, for example, the Task Force on Peace and Unity includes not just the Chamber of Commerce and Industry but even representatives of prominent local businessmen themselves. Secondly, there are specific vehicles where multi-sectoral participation is present, leading to dialogue among sectors. Again the Task Force on Peace and Unity is one, which aside from having representatives from the academe, from Muslim and Christian religious groups and other non-governmental sub-sectors, includes, as mentioned earlier, representatives of the business community, the Provincial Government and the Philippine National Police. In March 2006, a groundbreaking workshop was held in Jolo, Sulu, wherein representatives of various sectors – Civil Society, Local Government Units, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and the Moro National Liberation Front – sat down for four days and discussed directions for the future of the province. Out of that workshop a core group was formed, again with representatives of all five sectors, which on its own has been holding periodic meetings focussed specifically on the peace and order situation within the Metro Jolo area.

Nevertheless, needless to say, much more needs to be done. **Civil Society needs to be aware of the potent role it can play in bringing about peace in Sulu.** After all, Civil Society can be viewed as reflecting the sentiments of the masses of people in Sulu. But beyond reflecting the sentiments of people, Civil Society needs to realize that it can and should play a role in helping shape people's views.

To begin with, **Civil Society should make people aware that each and everyone has a role to play in bringing about peace in the province,** that the matter of peace is not one which is to be attended to by government or by the military and police authorities alone but one in which every resident of Sulu has a stake and a responsibility to bring about. **Civil Society can serve as a conduit for proper information reaching the people about events affecting their lives.** It should be able to help people discriminate between what is fact and what is rumour. It should be able to provide fora where people can discuss different points of view. And **Civil Society should be able to put people in touch with the government authorities** who are supposed to attend to their needs as well as the police and military authorities who are supposed to secure their well-being.

With Civil Society, **the religious sector plays a very critical role.** In a society like Sulu which is predominantly Muslim, the guidance of the religious leaders is especially important. The Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development currently has a weekly radio program, *Ulanig sin Kasajahitraan* (Echoes of Peace), which touches on Islam as a religion of peace. This should not only be continued but should in fact be expanded into other media so that more people hear the message of peace from their religious leaders.



In short, **Civil Society has an educative and bridging or connective role to play in bringing people together**, in bringing them in touch with others and in opening doors for cooperative working relationships to arise in the pursuit of peace in the province. Civil Society should take the lead in addressing the peace and order situation in the province because if it does not, it has no one to blame but itself if others step in and create chaos in Sulu society.

Combating the Trade in Illegal Drugs

In interviews conducted shortly before he was killed, Datu Bas (SPO4 Basier Isad, head of the PDEA Operations group in Sulu) pointed to the critical need for logistical support for the campaign against illegal drugs. According to Datu Bas, they were receiving funds sufficient only for 15 liters of gasoline a week for their operations. What was most striking was that part of this support was coming from a private individual, former Governor Sakur Tan, the rest from the Municipal Government of Jolo. Datu Bas pointed to the need for mobility and communications so that an effective intelligence network could be set up to monitor the activities and movements of persons involved in this trade.

What is equally important is the determination to combat this evil and to resist the pressures that would inevitably be brought to bear on law enforcers assigned to this task. Datu Bas and his men reflected this in their work. Politicians whose relatives were arrested for being either drug users or pushers found out that they could not influence the PDEA team to release their relatives, so they stopped trying. Unfortunately, the officials to whom the arrested persons were turned over were not as firm in their resolve as the field personnel of PDEA, and often arrangements could be worked out on the basis of connections and “requests”.

Again this is an area where the Civil Society sector, and again particularly the religious sector, can play very important roles. First, CSOs can help run campaigns informing people regarding the dangers of getting involved with illegal drugs. Religious leaders could remind people how the use of illegal drugs runs counter to their faith and undermines not just their health but even their morality. Second, CSOs can help in organizing communities to guard against the entry of illegal drugs in their areas. After all it would be their families and their children who could be affected by this. Third, CSOs can help the law enforcement units resist the pressures they inevitably encounter in the course of their work. By providing the law enforcement units the needed moral support, CSOs can strengthen their resolve to do their duty despite the pressures brought on them.

This is one area where the civilian population can work very closely with the authorities.

Accountability

There is a major outstanding issue in all of this, though. Even if people agreed to take the needed difficult steps to attempt to resolve the peace and order problems facing



the province of Sulu, there is still the question of accounting for past transgressions. Everyone has suffered from the strife that has beset Sulu over the past three decades since martial law was declared. If one considers clan conflicts, the killings and the destruction of property goes back much further than this.

Innocent civilians have been maimed and killed. Properties have been stolen or destroyed. Combatants on all sides have been killed, on and off the battlefield. No one has been spared.

And no one's hands are clean, either. All sides – the military, police, the MNLF, the so-called ASG, politicians and civilians – have violated each other's rights at one time or another. Ordinary farmers have been killed and have been labelled subsequently as ASG combatants by the military. Soldiers on marketing trips have been executed in cold blood in broad daylight. Politicians have eliminated their political rivals and appropriated for themselves public funds intended for the benefit of their constituents. Civilians have kept quiet and have allowed themselves to be corrupted. And so on and so forth. We all have a share in the blame. We cannot point to others as the guilty parties and protest our innocence.

But shall we just wipe the slate clean and start anew, forgetting all past transgressions?

Or shall we insist that justice be done and that all guilty parties must be answerable for their past actions before any discussions on reconciliation are undertaken?

Or is there some middle ground where acceptance of responsibility and atonement for past misdeeds is achieved but progress is at the same time made in rebuilding a just and peaceful Sulu?

If this issue of accountability can be addressed to the satisfaction of all sectors concerned – but most of all to the satisfaction of the people of Sulu – then one can begin the process of healing the wounds that have been inflicted on Sulu and the Filipino nation over the past five centuries.

One way of going about this is to consider the convening of a Healing and Reconciliation Commission, similar to a Truth Commission, but one whose objective is to heal the wounds that have been inflicted on Sulu for so many decades. This Commission would have the mandate of examining the factors that have been dividing Sulu these past four to five decades in order to identify those elements needed to bring justice and healing to the people of Sulu. The Commission could receive testimony from all individuals, organizations and sectors who wish to identify factors that can bring reconciliation and healing to the province. Part of the testimonies could also be complaints regarding violence perpetrated against various individuals and groups in order to determine how justice is to be dispensed and the wounds caused by such violence could be healed. The Commission could be made up of individuals from within Sulu as



well as outside, to include social psychologists, religious leaders, experts on human rights violations, experts on the history and social dynamics of Sulu and the like.

Hopefully, in this manner, not with the intention of pinning blame but with the objective of achieving justice and reconciliation, can significant steps be taken to bring peace back to Sulu.



GOVERNANCE

The Context of Governance in Sulu

Survey Responses

When asked whether they believed peace prevailed in the province, the overwhelming majority of respondents in the survey carried out in the 18 municipalities of the province of Sulu – 83% -- stated that the province was not peaceful (*bukun mahanung*). This was consistent with earlier responses such as when people were asked how they would compare the situation of the province today compared to 10 or 20 years ago, again the majority – 72% -- replied to say that the situation of the province today was chaotic (*halubilu*). However, this contrasted with the majority response of 62% who believed that their particular communities were peaceful. Hence, it appears that people in Sulu feel safe in their respective communities but believe that the province as a whole has serious peace and order problems.

When asked why they believed the province was not peaceful, 75% of the responses focused on security issues -- unstable peace and order, clan conflicts, military abuses, presence of bad elements like the Abu Sayyaf and the like – while another 16% focused on governance issues.

However, in response to the question “what is needed to bring about peace in the province”, close to 29% of the responses focused on good governance, approximately the same number of responses as the need for improved security conditions (29%). Although the question was not explicitly asked, this could be interpreted to imply that in the minds of people improved governance would lead to improved security conditions.

What do people mean by good governance? Following were some of the specific responses:

- Just and honest leaders (*nakurah adil iban mabuntul*)
- Stop graft and corruption (*hiig in pagbalsa sin parsukuan sin raayat, igun in namamarinta bukun adil iban sugarul*)
- Cooperation among local government officials (*magtaayun in namamarinta ha hulah, magtibuuk in mga namamarinta*)
- Strict application of the law (*pakusugun in pagpanaw sin sarah*)
- Leaders should unite with their constituents (*magtabang-tabang in tau-maas sin kawman sambil pa raayat pagtaayunan pikilan*)

In addition, there were some other interesting responses such as:

- Islamic laws should govern Sulu
- The Sultan should rule Sulu
- The Americans should help in governing Sulu



Follow the example of the Malaysian government

What are some of the common perceptions of the people regarding their political leaders? Following are some responses from the survey:

Mga politician putingan (Politicians are liars)

Pamarinta sugarul panakaw (Government of thieves)

Mataud in corrupt (Many are corrupt)

Nagnakurah pasal sin IRA (Became leaders because of the IRA)

Mga nakurah bukun mabuntul (Leaders are not honest or straightforward)

Mga nakurah piyaparuli in baran nila (Leaders are more concerned with their personal interest)

Pamarinta bukun adil (Government is not fair, just)

Way pangandul sin tao ha kaibanan nakurah (People do not trust some politicians)

Pissukuh in pamarinta (Government is oppressive, coercive)

Mga politician in maghilu ha kawman (Politicians create chaos in the community)

If this is the perception of the people regarding their political leadership, why does it appear that people just seem to accept the status quo? After all, there seems to be little that the people of Sulu are doing to actively reform the system.

Feudal Hangover

First, it seems as if Suluanos are having difficulty throwing off the experience of living under the feudal system exercised under the Sultanate. The Sultanate was established in Sulu in the middle of the 15th century A.D., around 1450, and until the American colonial regime – that is to say, for a period of more than four and a half centuries -- it was the dominant system of government in the Sulu archipelago, although its fortunes rose and fell with the tides of history. Under the Sultanate system the Sultan was both a political as well as religious leader. In the words of the late Professor Cesar Adib Majul, one of the foremost scholars on Muslims in the Philippines, “the sultan...stood as the symbol of the unity and integrity of the State” but at the same time was considered “the shadow of Allah on earth (*zil lullah fil ‘ard*)” (Majul, Muslims in the Philippines, page 380). Individual Sultans had numerous enemies and opponents during their particular reigns, but the institution of the Sultanate as a political entity and the fact that the Sultan also stood as a symbol of the Islamic faith and was the head of the Muslim community in the realm, exercising certain ecclesiastical powers, was never questioned. This was consistent with the concept of Islam not just being a religion as narrowly understood but being in fact a way of life, encompassing all aspects of the believer’s life.

While the Sultan was not an absolute or despotic ruler –there was a great deal of balancing of power needed to be exercised by the Sultan with the *Datus* who likewise wielded considerable power in their respective territories of influence – nevertheless to commoners the Sultan’s word was law. Moreover, the Sultanate was an elitist system,



with the Sultan attended to by various Ministers or *wazirs* organized into the *Ruma Bichara* or Council of State, Council of Advisors or Cabinet. All regular and voting members of the *Ruma Bichara* were royal *Datus*, although occasionally an *orangkaya* was included. An *orangkaya* was a commoner who however wielded considerable influence in his district or area of residence because of the wealth which he may have accumulated from his land estates or from trading activities. Thus even when commoners were included in the system of governance, these were individuals who enjoyed an elevated status way above the vast majority of other commoners.

Another aspect of the Sultanate system of governance worth noting is the absence or, at best, blurring of lines of distinction among different sources of income or revenue of the Sultan. While on the one hand being considered the Head of State, the Sultan was nevertheless recognized to have sources of private or personal income. These would include income from land estates which he may have inherited or acquired. The Sultan also participated in trade, in some instances even investing in the voyages of some Chinese junks which would regularly visit Jolo on voyages from China. Then there were pearls and tortoise shells beyond certain sizes decreed by law or tradition which had to be turned over to the Sultan but which he paid for. These were considered personal property of the Sultan, to be disposed of as he saw fit.

On the other hand, though, there were State revenues, such as revenues from Crown lands, customs duties, licenses for trade, payments of personal taxes from subjects, fines paid by erring subjects, booty derived from expeditions, etc. These were supposed to go to public expenditures such as covering the cost of administering the Sultanate, the maintenance of schools, caring for orphans and widows, maintaining the military forces, etc. The Sultan was however given a great deal of discretion in the disposal of these revenues, and little if any distinction was made between State and personal income of the Sultan.

Irrelevance of the Electorate

A second factor to consider in assessing why there is seeming passivity on the part of the Sulu citizenry to demand accountability on the part of their elected officials would appear to be that under the existing electoral system, the involvement of the electorate can be considered to be irrelevant. In other words, it is not the people's votes that determines that outcome of elections but other factors. Hence this, to a significant degree, influences people's perspectives regarding their ability to influence the system of governance prevailing. Regardless of what people do, the results of political exercises will be as decided upon by others.

For example, one particular Mayor interviewed described how ballots are filled up before the elections actually take place. In this Mayor's municipality, the results of elections are determined in this manner. There is reason to believe, though, that this is not an isolated experience.



Another Mayor talked about the need to make financial provisions to ensure that the tallying of votes and the subsequent proclamation of winning candidates are in one's favor. This particular Mayor also spoke about the need to plan for electoral protests in the event one's opponent was more "fortunate", and even described actual payments made to Judges and COMELEC officials attending to these cases. Election results can be maintained or overturned if adequate financial resources coupled with the expertise of "professionals" with the right contacts in the right places are mobilized.

A third Mayor confided as to how, in the elections of 2004, he was advised by military officers as well as emissaries from Manila that they, the Mayors, would be given a free hand to handle the local elections – from Mayor to Councilors – so long as they did not concern themselves with the outcome of the elections for national positions – President, Vice-President, Senators and Congressmen. The implication was that if a particular Mayor did not agree to this arrangement, the outcome of the local elections – to include the Mayor's own position – could be interfered with by national officials and the results would most likely not be in his favor.

People have also noted what in Sulu is referred to as the "Brigade elections", i.e., financial provisions for military officials supervising vote-counting inside military camps, oftentimes resorted to as a security measure. One particular mayoralty candidate recounted the experience where his watchers were told to leave the military camp where the vote-counting was taking place and were told to return the following day. Despite their protestations they had no choice but to follow the military officer's orders. According to this candidate, the watchers of his opponent were however allowed to stay. When his watchers were allowed back into the camp late the following morning, the counting had been completed and, not surprisingly, his opponent had won.

Faced with these realities as to how electoral exercises are conducted in Sulu – and, it must be pointed out, this is not unique to Sulu and can be observed in many if not most other places in the Philippines – and the consequences on governance that this has, it is inevitable that people would just shrug their shoulders and just accept the situation – which is what most people in Sulu have done.

IRA

A third element that people point to as having negatively impacted on the quality of governance in Sulu is the system of Internal Revenue Allotments (IRA) by which national funds are disbursed to local government units (LGUs). With the automatic release of the IRA to the LGUs having been institutionalized and with the amounts now running into hundreds of thousands if not millions of Pesos a month, the temptation is quite strong to divert these proceeds for unofficial purposes – which in the perception of many if not most people in Sulu, is in fact happening. This, however, would be in keeping with traditions in Sulu, as noted earlier in the description of financial management practices during the time of the Sultanate, where the lines between State and personal funds were, at best, blurred.



To give an idea of the amounts that are involved, as per records of the Department of Budget and Management, the province of Sulu is supposed to have received an IRA of close to PhP 330 million last year, approximately PhP 27.5 million a month, of which a minimum of 20% or around PhP 5.5 million was supposed to have been spent on development projects monthly while 5% or around PhP 1.35 million was supposed to be set aside as a calamity fund.

For its part, the capital town of Jolo received an IRA of PhP 52.6 million last year, or PhP 4.4 million a month. Out of this amount, Jolo is supposed to have budgeted not less than PhP 880,000 a month for development projects and set aside PhP 220,000 as a calamity fund. At the other end of the spectrum, the municipality of Hadji Panglima Tahil received an IRA of almost PhP 13 million last year or a little over PhP 1 million a month. Again, the development fund from this would run to not less than PhP 200,000 a month, with the calamity fund of PhP 50,000 a month being set aside for emergencies.

Even Barangays are recipients of significant budgets. The biggest barangay in Sulu, Barangay Busbus, with an official year 2000 population of 28,000, received an IRA of close to PhP 6 million last year or PhP 500,000 a month, out of which P100,000 is supposed to go to development projects and PhP 50,000 is set aside as a calamity fund. The smallest barangay in the province, Barangay Sayli in the municipality of Tapul, received an IRA of a little less than PhP 400,000 last year or around PhP 32,000 a month, with roughly PhP 6,000 of this supposed to go to development projects and PhP 1,500 being set aside for calamities monthly.

It is the development and calamity funds that are normally tapped for “unofficial” expenditures, although experienced administrators would be able to work out ways to draw funds from other portions of the IRA. Audit requirements have so far not been problematic and are complied with amicably. One informant who served as part of the security detail of a Treasurer described how audits undertaken by Cotabato- or Manila-based auditors were usually undertaken at Panciteria Rizal where, aside from meals being enjoyed, envelopes exchanged hands and audit forms were subsequently approved by the visiting auditors.

Pre-Martial Law Days

But things were not always like this. People in Sulu still recall that before the martial law era, the electoral process was still credible and political governance was an honorable profession. People looked up to their political leaders whom they could always find in their hometowns and run to whenever problems arose in their communities and whose judgments they respected. Laws were enforced strictly and swiftly. As a result, peace reigned over the islands. Coffeeshops were open till past midnight in the town of Jolo. People would walk back to the Poblacion of Indanan late at night after coming from the last showing of the movies in downtown Jolo without any fear of being held-up or killed. Visitors from Manila or even abroad could come and go to the beaches or even travel to the *guimba*.



One Tausug professional recalls how, during his younger days, the local government officials in his hometown of Parang were highly respected because they were always around and responded to the people's needs. Even the Health Inspector was referred to as "Doctor" by the residents even though he was not an MD because he would dispense basic medication for headaches, colds and coughs to residents who would pass by his office with minor health complaints. This same professional served as a watcher every election during the 1960s and he observed that the elections were orderly, the Philippine Constabulary kept their distance from the polling precincts and the vote-counting was honest and uneventful.

This however changed in 1969, the election during which Marcos ran for a second term. The informant recalls that before the polling precinct he was assigned to opened on election day, 7 men entered and ordered them to leave, announcing that they would take care of filling up the ballots. Martial law followed three years later.

Legacy of Martial Law

Martial law is credited with having introduced new elements into the exercise of local political power.

To begin with, as part of its counter-insurgency campaign against the MNLF, the AFP applied the tactic of undermining the MNLF by attracting its commanders to lay down their arms in exchange for all sorts of concessions. These ranged from appointments to government positions – to include positions normally subject to elections -- creation of municipalities and even provinces to accommodate some of these commanders attracted "to the folds of the law" and enable them to take over as Governors or Mayors of these newly-created LGUs, the awarding of timber concessions, concessions to collect and export bangus fry, concessions to import various types of products, etc. This effort was quite successful as it did succeed in attracting several ranking leaders of the movement to come out and in the process weakened the MNLF. A number of these leaders were then armed and mobilized as Special Para-Military Forces (SPMF) to strengthen the AFP's campaign against their former comrades-in-arms.

In the case of Sulu, this had a significant impact on governance in the province. It created a new political elite which to this day exists and maintains its control over particular areas of the province. Its control was enhanced by logistical and other support it received from the Government and the AFP and which it continued to receive at least up to the late '90s and possibly even up to this day. It will be recalled that during the hearings of the Feliciano Commission in 2003 following the so-called Oakwood Mutiny, Marine Captain Danilo F. Luna testified regarding the transfer of ammunition replenishments intended for the Philippine Army's 104th Brigade and the 3rd Marine Brigade in late December 1997 which was diverted to one of the Special Paramilitary Forces in Sulu. This transaction was subsequently confirmed by the then SouthCom Commander Lt. Gen. Romeo Padiernos.



Thus not only was a new political elite established, but it was a political elite that was armed by the Government, initially to side with the Government in the fight against the secessionist MNLF. Once armed, though, it became difficult to draw the line between the use of these arms for the anti-secessionist fight and its use in pursuit of political and other personal objectives of the commanders/politicians concerned.

Abdication of Governance

These are but a few of the many factors that impact on the exercise – some would say, the absence – of governance in Sulu. As noted, some of these elements are not unique to Sulu but they appear to occur in a degree that has gone beyond control. In the view of some people, the political leadership can be considered to have abdicated its duties and the burden of governance has had to be taken on by others, in many instances, the military leadership in the field.

As a result, people have developed a cynical view of their political leaders but appear helpless to be able to do anything about it. On the other hand, though, as noted earlier, people do acknowledge the importance of good governance to the task of building peace in Sulu.

Given this context, what can be done to transform the system of governance in Sulu to one that addresses the felt needs of the citizenry and contributes to bringing about and strengthening the foundations for peace in the province? Following are some recommendations.

Recommendations

Exercise of Leadership by the Provincial Governor

Any effort to reform the system of governance in the Province of Sulu will have to start with the Chief Executive of the Province, the Provincial Governor. As the highest ranking executive officer in the province, the Governor must exercise firm and decisive leadership on this issue of governance within his area of jurisdiction. This responsibility cannot be passed on to anyone else; it cannot be delegated; it cannot be addressed by proxy. The Governor himself must exercise his power of supervision over all local government officials in the province.

There are, of course, political considerations to take into account, particularly with local government elections coming around next year. This, conventional wisdom dictates, cannot be avoided and must be taken into consideration.

But the Governor has many weapons in his armory that he can utilize for this purpose. There is, to begin with, the very powerful weapon of example. By demonstrating, through his own personal example, his presence in the province, by



pushing the implementation of provincial development projects, by publicizing on a regular basis an accounting of the IRA that the province receives, by going around the province to check on the welfare of his constituents, the Governor will be delivering a very powerful message: the Provincial Government is intent on bringing about peace and prosperity in the province and will take all necessary measures to ensure that this is done. Moreover, by showing his personal example of good governance, the Governor will have every right to insist that all other local government officials should likewise behave in a similar manner.

Several observers in the province, to include the former PNP Provincial Director, noted that this approach was responsible for the success of the former Governor in enforcing a firearms ban within the Metro Jolo area. It is said that the former Governor would go around town without any firearms, setting the example for others to follow. Mayors from the different municipalities would thus refrain from an ostentatious display of firearms whenever they would visit the capital town because in their view “*makaluman kan Gobnor*” (it would be shameful to the Governor, i.e., if the Governor can go around without firearms, why not us?).

In addition, the Governor has many ways of persuading and cajoling local government officials and staff to attend to their duties. There is, to begin with, his amiable personality which puts people at ease in his presence. There is his high degree of intelligence and very effective communication skills which he has consistently displayed, both in private as well as in public.

The Governor can also use different kinds of incentives to persuade Municipal Governments to be more proactive in their work, such as joint venturing with them or providing counterpart funding or other resources – such as the plowing services by the Provincial Government tractors, which have made a significant impact in many areas – in the pursuit of specific development initiatives.

The Governor can be lavish in his praise of others and can regularly provide public recognition to well-performing local government officials and staff. There is no limit to the persuasive measures that the Governor could utilize to encourage effective performance on the part of the various local government units.

And then, of course, there is the other side of the coin: sanctions. These as well can come in a variety of forms and can be applied in a calibrated manner. While realizing that these are resorted to as a last resort and that they can have negative political consequences, they are nevertheless part of the arsenal of weapons the Governor can unleash in his campaign to bring development to his province. Moreover, if used properly, the potential negative impact of sanctions can be overcome by the positive reaction of people when they see demonstrations of decisive leadership exercised in the pursuit of their welfare.



But the keystone of all this and the starting point for bringing effective leadership to the level of the municipalities and even down to the barangays is the personal example of the Father of the province, the Governor.

Develop Strategies Appropriate to Different Categories of LGUs

The Local Government Support Program in ARMM (LGSPA) has developed an interesting approach to dealing with different LGUs in the ARMM area. They have developed a set of indicators which enable them to categorize these different LGUs according to their level of readiness to undertake socio-economic development programs in their respective areas. These indicators include such elements as: willingness of the Mayor to share power; the relationship between the Mayor and the Sangguniang Bayan; how open the LGU is to undertaking development programs; etc.

Depending on where along the spectrum of readiness each LGU is located, a specific approach is taken by LGSPA with regard to the development initiatives offered or introduced. This will heighten the chances of those development initiatives achieving their desired effect as they would be designed to mobilize the particular strengths the LGU has displayed as well as address those areas within the LGU that need to be fortified.

It is proposed that a similar approach be taken with respect to the LGUs in Sulu. One can re-examine the indicators developed by LGSPA and possibly adopt them but supplement them with others such as:

- a) Extent of presence of the Mayor in his municipality;
- b) Percentage of monthly IRA devoted to development projects;
- c) Status of implementation of development projects;
- d) Consultations of Mayor with constituents;
- e) Status of peace and order in the municipality;
- f) Etc.

Regular, possibly monthly, evaluations would be undertaken of each LGU by an independent body utilizing the indicators or criteria developed. On the basis of these evaluations, the various LGUs would be categorized into high-, average- and poor-performing LGUs. These evaluations could start on the municipal level and eventually work itself down to the barangay level.

High-performing LGUs would then be “rewarded” by, for example, having programs/projects not just from the Province but also from donor institutions and national government agencies focused in their areas. External agencies would be advised to focus their resources in these particular LGUs as they can expect that they would be properly utilized. This will deliver the message that good governance brings benefits to the community, which in turn would strengthen the political capital of the leadership in that area.



Other forms of rewards can be provided as well for high performers. The Mayors and their key staff can be provided opportunities for advanced training, educational tours and the like. Staff who have shown exceptional performance and potential can of course be rewarded through career advancement opportunities. Since often there is a correlation between socio-economic development and peace and order conditions in an area, Mayors and the local police in the high-performing LGUs can be given greater responsibility for handling security matters in their area.

Poor-performing LGUs, on the other hand, would need hand-holding in areas of weakness by experts from development agencies. Stricter fiscal discipline measures would need to be introduced to ensure that public funds are handled properly. And if, as would often happen, peace and order conditions are poor, the military would have a greater presence and influence on the handling of security matters in these areas.

Furthermore, although the Local Government Code provides for the automatic release of the IRA direct to the LGUs concerned, ways can be explored by which the development and calamity fund portions of the IRA of poor-performing LGUs can be withheld or delayed until such time as said LGUs meet some minimum standards of performance. Thus, for example, future releases of development and calamity fund portions of the IRA would be contingent on the strict and proper accounting of prior releases of these funds. With the proper intercession of the Provincial Government, it is likely that budget administrators at DBM can come up with creative ways to achieve this objective since after all the end-goal is the improvement of governance in the province.

In short, a variegated approach to development among the LGUs is proposed to be adopted, taking into consideration the present situation of each LGU not just in terms of its physical, social and economic characteristics but, even more importantly, the readiness of the LGU and its leadership to focus on its mandate of public service.

In this regard, it is further suggested that discussions be entered into with the Department of Interior and Local Government in Manila to elicit their participation in a program to conduct spot checks and quick unannounced audits of LGU performance. Someone from DILG Manila could make an unannounced visit to selected municipalities in Sulu to, first, check on the presence of key municipal officials and, second, check on projects being implemented. This effort could complement the regular (monthly) evaluation proposed to be undertaken of all LGUs in the province. DILG Manila is proposed to be the partner for this exercise rather than DILG ARMM as the latter may be more susceptible to political pressures from parties within Sulu.

A similar and appropriate evaluation system could likewise be developed for the Provincial Government as well.

For this purpose, **it is recommended that the Provincial Government work closely with LGSPA to develop such a strategy, starting from the development of performance indicators, mode of monitoring and rating and the subsequent formulation of development interventions appropriate to each category of LGU.**



Likewise, as mentioned above, discussions can be initiated with DILG Manila to determine the feasibility of their involvement in undertaking spot checks on LGUs in Sulu.

Strengthen the Involvement of the CSO Sector in Governance

Efforts to reform the governance system should focus not just on those who govern but equally important should involve the governed as well. After all, the purpose of governance is to provide an environment of peace and prosperity where people can exercise their rights and pursue their goals as citizens of a society.

There are quite a number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the capital town of Jolo which can serve as mouthpieces or conduits for the expression of people's views on governance. Among the leading ones are the Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development (SUCPD), which groups many of the religious leaders in the province for the purpose of strengthening the practice of the Islamic faith among the populace; the Concerned Citizens of Sulu (CCS), which includes a number of prominent personalities in the province concerned with the advancement of civil liberties and human rights among the people; the Sulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), which is the grouping of businessmen in the province; and a number of others.

Except for the Concerned Citizens of Sulu (CCS) which has spearheaded a number of rallies in the town of Jolo on such issues as human rights abuses and the Balikatan military exercises, the other CSOs in Jolo have generally maintained a low profile and have concentrated on their areas of focus. It is suggested that the peace and order situation in the province as a whole and in the capital town in particular has deteriorated to such an extent that the citizenry has to sit up, take notice and do its share to try and actively restore harmony and tranquility to Sulu. The quality of governance, which has been noted by people to have likewise deteriorated but which has also been identified as a significant factor in bringing peace to the province, is one area that Civil Society should involve itself in.

Specifically, it is proposed first that **the evaluation of LGUs described in the earlier section be undertaken by independent CSOs trained for this purpose.** The identification of the CSOs and their training can be part of the exercise recommended to be undertaken by the Provincial Government jointly with LGSPA.

However, given the fact that for all intents and purposes the CSO community in Sulu is limited to organizations found only in the capital town of Jolo and its immediate environs, it will be necessary to undertake an effort to build up People's Organizations (POs) or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the other municipalities. This can be done through the joint efforts of the existing CSOs in Jolo as well as supporting external organizations and/or networks like Pagtabangan BaSulTa.

Second, it is further recommended that **CSO or citizenry participation in the various special bodies of the LGUs be complied with as provided for under the**



Local Government Code. These special bodies include the Local Development Council, the Local Health Board, the Local School Board, the Peace and Order Council and the Pre-Qualification, Bids & Awards Committee. Moreover, People's Law Enforcement Boards as provided for under Republic Act 6975 establishing the Philippine National Police, as amended by Republic Act 8551, should likewise be set up with the participation of three members from the private sector.

However, in undertaking efforts to strengthen CSO involvement in governance, one has to watch out for counter-efforts on the part of local political leaders to preempt this process by setting up and accrediting CSOs "friendly" to themselves. This has been noted in other places in the country where entrenched political elite have tried to frustrate the processes provided under the Local Government Code where the citizenry can participate in governance activities and check on the performance of their government administrators.

Encourage the Religious Sector to Exercise Influence on Governance

The religious sector in Sulu can exercise significant influence on the citizenry and on the political leadership if it chooses to do so. Islam, as has been noted, is more than just a religion as that term is commonly understood. It is a way of life which influences all aspects of the believer's daily existence. The devout Muslim starts his day with pre-dawn prayers, the *Subu*, and ends his day with evening prayers, the *Aysa*. Throughout the day, prayers are recited three times more, at noon, mid-afternoon and sunset, so that throughout the day the devout Muslim is constantly reminded of the need to submit to the will of Allah, which is the primary obligation of the Muslim.

In his dealings with his fellowmen, the presence of God is a constant reminder, from the simple greeting of "The peace of Allah be with you", to the setting of appointments *Insha Allah* "God willing", to the silent prayer of *Bismillah* ("In the name of Allah") whispered before meals or before embarking on a journey, to the more formal "*Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*" ("In the name of God Most Gracious, Most Merciful") salutation before making a formal statement in a meeting.

Thus Islam permeates all aspects of the believer's life, and therefore the guidance of religious leaders and scholars carries great weight in Muslim societies.

In Sulu, the Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development groups together a number of the leading religious leaders of the province. It is usually from the ranks of the Sulu Ulama Council that the Mufti of the province is chosen. Every Wednesday, Imams from Jolo and surrounding municipalities gather at the offices of the Sulu Ulama Council in order to discuss the subject for the forthcoming Friday *khutba*. This is the sermon to be preached during the noontime Friday prayers when most Muslims would gather in their mosques. Aside from this, usually after the sunset prayers, *Magrib*, people would stand up in the mosque to discuss issues that come to mind. These could be occasions when the Sulu Ulama Council could suggest the discussion of matters impacting on governance in society.



There is also in Sulu a branch of the *Tabligh Jam'at* (literally, community or followers reaching out). The *tabligh* movement was started in New Delhi in 1920 by Maulana Mohammad Ilyas as a way to counteract the growing trend at that time of Muslims leaving Islam. It aims basically to heighten people's awareness of their Islamic faith and to encourage them to follow the true path of Islam.

These are just two religious organizations that can mobilize to, on the one hand, encourage people to choose the right leaders and exercise vigilance to reform the electoral process. On the other hand, as well, they can remind political leaders of their responsibilities as Muslim leaders.

Under Islam, for example, the foundation of governance is God's word as revealed in the Qur'an and expounded in the *Sunnah* (the deeds, sayings and approvals) of the Prophet Mohammad. Among the qualities of a Muslim leader, for example, are responsibility and accountability. As the Prophet Mohammad said, "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock. The *amir* (ruler) who is over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock." Under Islam, the leader must always be aware that leadership entails trust. As the Prophet Mohammad put it, "All of you are trusted, and you are all responsible for the trust entrusted to you."

Three principles of good governance under Islam are *Shura* (consultation), *Ihsan* (righteousness) and *Adalah* (justice). The Islamic leader, therefore, should be transparent and prepared to listen to his constituents (*Shura*), should follow the tenets of his faith in exercising his authority as a leader (*Ihsan*) and must govern with justice (*Adalah*).

There is much richness in Islam to bring about reform in the system of governance in Sulu. It simply needs to be emphasized and brought to the forefront of the minds of the leaders and people of Sulu. And in this task, the religious leaders of the province play a leading role.

Introduce Practical Methods of Training for LGUs

In general, Local Chief Executives (LCEs), whether in Sulu or elsewhere in the country, are practical, field- and people-oriented individuals. They need to attend to myriad details everyday, everything from the status of development projects in the field; the latest crimes that may have been committed; budgetary issues; visitors that may be coming to see them; providing contributions for illnesses, funerals, sports events, etc.; in Sulu, resolving clan conflicts; contributing to the *diyat* or blood money; balancing competing political interests; planning for the next political exercise; etc. They have little time to listen to lectures by noted governance experts and read materials which are supposed to enlighten them on the latest techniques of public administration.

But it is important to broaden the horizons of LCEs in order to upgrade capabilities for improved governance. It is suggested that Pagtabangan BaSulTa (PB)



assist in looking for practical methods of training that would stimulate the interest of LCEs and at the same time benefit both themselves and their staffs and constituents.

One method would be to set up twinning arrangements between the province and its various municipalities with parallel units elsewhere in the country and even abroad. These are usually done on the basis of a “sister” province or municipality tie-up with another province or municipality elsewhere, but often these “sister” arrangements exist only in name and are marked only by the visit of one LCE to his counterpart LGU.

What is being proposed is that the twinning arrangement focus on active collaboration of the “sister” units on some activity, a project where some complementation can be achieved between the two units, a common problem that the two sister units can address collaboratively, or some other activity that the two LGUs can actively work on together to their mutual benefit.

For example, the waste disposal problem of Metro Jolo could be tackled jointly with another LGU or set of LGUs that have similar problems, exploring alternative systems that would be appropriate for each LGU, identifying other LGUs or contractors or donor institutions that may have the needed expertise, pooling resources in order to bring the cost of the individual projects down, etc.

Or experiences and expertise could be shared between LGUs having a drug problem. The partner LGUs could exchange information regarding the various ways in which drug pushers ply their trade and effective methods for combating them, possibly an exchange of drug enforcement officials in order to learn from each other, sending drug addicts from one LGU to another LGU that has improved drug rehabilitation facilities, etc.

There are many ways by which these twinning arrangements can be worked out. What is important is to identify the partners that would have the right fit with the local LGUs and who would be willing to invest the needed resources to work collaboratively with Sulu LGUs.

Another practical training method would be to identify LCEs from other areas in the country who could communicate with Sulu LCEs in terms that they would understand. There are several tough no-nonsense LCEs who have brought outstanding development to their areas. One can point to former Marikina Mayor and now MMDA Chairman Bayani Fernando, Puerto Princesa Mayor Edward Hagedorn or Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte. They could be invited individually to come and visit Sulu and meet the Governor and various Mayors there, to talk about their experiences – both on the side of politics as well as the side of public administration – exchange ideas about their respective local governance goals and the methods they applied to achieve them and possibly even agree on certain projects they could undertake collaboratively. The point is that the Sulu LCEs would be interacting with people who have faced similar challenges as they have rather than some academics who may be well-schooled and may know all the theories but would have little if any experience in running an LGU.



PB may want to take up the challenge to consider these and other practical training methods that Sulu LCEs may find appealing and beneficial to their respective LGUs.

Identify/Develop a New Breed of Leaders

As is the case elsewhere in the Philippines, the tendency to keep political power “in the family”, as it were, exists in Sulu. The Tan family has been in power in the capital town of Jolo for several terms. The Hayudini family has controlled politics in Patikul since time immemorial. Parang has been the turf of the Loong and Tingkahan families (who are related to each other). The Tulawies have controlled Talipao for as long as one can remember. The Estino family has controlled Panglima Estino since it was created. The same situation existed in Kalingalan Caluang until the younger Caluang Mayor was shot and killed late last year. The Arbison and Omar families have controlled Luuk under an internal arrangement where power shifts between the two of them. Recently moves have been undertaken to split the municipality so that each family will have its own piece of the pie. The Anni family has controlled Siasi for at least two generations. And so on and so forth.

Needless to say, this is not a desirable situation. Not only does centralization of governance in the hands of one family lead to an ossification of policies and practices, but the tendency is that abuse of authority results from such a state of affairs.

There is no lack of talent and desire to serve among Suluanos. People just need to be given the opportunity and the assurance that a level playing field will be provided for all who wish to involve themselves in the thankless job of serving their fellowmen in elective positions.

A first step to ensuring that leaders with the proper orientation are available for future generations is to identify and develop a new breed of leaders. This can be done by focusing on the youth. This provides the chance that the proper values of dedication and service can be developed early on so that these values take root and influence the future behavior of these potential leaders.

This can be done by starting in the schools at all levels, elementary, secondary and tertiary. Various programs can be initiated: summer camps, apprenticeships, community service programs, in-school training programs and workshops, mentoring programs (where students skilled in one area help other students having difficulty in those areas), etc. These would be programs designed, first, to instill certain values in the youth and, second, provide an opportunity to identify those young people who stand out by virtue of their dedication and commitment as well as the initiative shown in undertaking whatever tasks are assigned to them.

Similar programs can be designed and undertaken for out-of-school youth as opportunities should not be limited only to those in school.



Young professionals can be another focus of this program, young men and women in their mid- to late-20s, starting out in their jobs or businesses, who can hopefully still be fired up with the idealism of youth. Appropriate programs can be designed for them, such as discussion groups to obtain their views on pressing issues of the day, workshops with young people from other provinces, skills upgrading programs which would help them in their jobs or businesses, community volunteer work to help younger people or their barangay officials, civic assistance programs such as helping in electoral exercises, and so forth and so on. Through all of these one provides an exposure to new ideas and community service and at the same time provides the opportunity for leadership skills to shine through.

In all these programs which may be designed, there should be a deliberate effort to inculcate Islamic values in the youth.

Within the PB consortium, Consuelo Foundation can take the lead as its mission and mandate is to work with the youth.



ECONOMY

Poverty in Sulu

When asked how they viewed their present condition compared to the past, 82% of Suluanos interviewed stated that they were worse off today than they were 10 or 20 years ago. When asked why they considered themselves to be worse off today, 78% of the responses pertained to the lack of income-earning opportunities: *way usuaha* (no jobs), *kulang in usaha* (inadequate earnings), *masigpit in kabuhianan* (difficult to earn a living), *timaas in panyagaan bibihun* (cost of necessities of life has increased), etc.

Thus, the lack of livelihood or income-earning opportunities is a major issue among Suluanos. Based on the Family Income and Expenditure Survey of the National Statistics Office, poverty incidence in Sulu was at a level of 92% in 2000 and 88.8% in 2003. These statistics were however recently revised by the National Statistical Coordination Board when it reported surprisingly low poverty incidence levels of 58.9% in 2000 and 45.1% in 2003 for Sulu. The wide variances are, to say the least, surprising and leads one to wonder about the reliability of official statistics in the Philippines. Whatever the case is, though, poverty is a fact of life in Sulu.

This has long been recognized as a principal factor contributing to instability and chaos in Sulu. When faced with an uncertain future, no clear prospects for a decent job, no source of income to put the next meal on the table for one's family, it becomes inevitable for people to turn to unwholesome activities just to make ends meet.

Thus, for example, it was not surprising that during the time of the Sipadan hostage-taking, the ranks of Commander Robot's band swelled from its original number of around 30 to, according to some accounts, 3,000. With the ransom proceeds at his disposal, it is said that Robot was able to attract new recruits with the offer of a gun as well as a monthly salary. Unemployed youth from Talipao and surrounding areas rushed to join him.

Thus, any program aiming at bringing about a long-term regime of peace in the province has to address this issue of livelihood. Peace can prosper only in an atmosphere where the individual is confident of being able to provide for his basic needs and that of his family.

Profile of Sulu Economy

It is difficult to obtain comprehensive and reliable statistics regarding the structure of the economy of Sulu. What is available indicates that major sectors of economic activity are the following:

Coconuts. In terms of hectarage and number of families involved, the coconut industry is the largest in Sulu although it has been exhibiting a decline in recent years.



From a production level of 219,622 metric tons in 1999, the industry posted declines every year until 2004 when production dropped to 201,821 metric tons, a decline of 8% over this five-year period, recovering slightly in 2005 to 202,512 metric tons. At a conversion factor of .159 metric tons of copra for every metric ton of whole nuts and an average price of P16/kilo, this translates to a copra value of P 515 million in 2005. Thus the coconut industry generates copra valued at half a billion Pesos every year.

Based on year 2000 data of the Philippine Coconut Authority, approximately 58% of the agricultural land in the province of Sulu was planted to coconuts, with some 24,000 farmers working on producing this crop. Assuming an average family size of 5, this would mean that some 20% of families in Sulu were involved in the production of coconuts.

There is one coconut oil mill in Sulu, with a rated copra crushing capacity of 52,500 metric tons a year. This can process the entire copra production of the province.

Fruits. Sulu is known for its exotic fruits, many of which are found in few other places. There are several varieties of local mangoes such as the *bawnuh*, the *mampallam* and the *wanni*. Of course, there is durian (*duyan*), mangosteen (*manggis*), marang (also known as *marang*), rambutan (*usaw*) aside from lanzones (*buwahan*) and several varieties of bananas, mainly *saba* but also the *bungulan*, *lakatan* and *latundan* varieties. There are also several varieties of citrus, the most common being the *kalamansi*, known locally as *suwah kalamundin*, a variety of sweet orange known as *suwah mamis* and five or six other varieties.

In 2005, some 87,585 metric tons of assorted fruits were recorded to have been produced in Sulu. At an average price of P20/kg., this would have been worth some P1.7 billion.

Fruits are mainly sold as fresh fruit with very little being processed into candies, jams preserves or juices, although there is a traditional jam made from durian which is known as *mantakilya*.

Coffee. Coffee has been a traditional crop in Sulu but has only been cultivated for the local market. There was an attempt in the late 1990s to establish a 2,000-hectare plantation which would supply the major coffee manufacturer in the country, Nestle Philippines, but this was short-lived with the death of its principal proponent, the late Mayor Hadji Magdar Loong of Parang Municipality. Only around 200 hectares of the proposed 2,000 - hectare plantation was actually developed due to Hadji Magdar Loong's passing away.

In 2005, some 4,829 metric tons of coffee was produced in the province, with an estimated value of P290 million.

Abaca. Abaca is another traditional crop of Sulu, but with the onslaught of the war in the province starting in the 1970s up to the present time, many of the old abaca



plantations have been destroyed and abandoned. In 2005, some 2,500 metric tons of abaca were produced in the province, with an estimated value of around P76 million.

Prior to the 1970s there were large trading operations in abaca situated in the town of Jolo. The conglomerates of the Aboitiz and Elizalde families has warehouses in Jolo which served as the based of their abaca trading operations and from which they shipped out abaca to Manila and subsequently abroad. While one still finds abaca being delivered to warehouses in Jolo today, they represent a shadow of the volume before the martial law period.

Seaweeds. Sulu is the second largest seaweed-producing province in the country, after Tawi-Tawi. Seaweed production in 2005 reached a level of 184,776 metric tons, a 5% increase over the previous year. For the last five years, Sulu seaweed production has been at this level of 175,000-184,000 metric tons. At an average price of P25/kg., the 2005 production level of seaweeds was valued at P4.6 billion.

Seaweeds are sun-dried and sold as raw dried seaweeds through middlemen. There was an attempt in the early 1990s to set up a crude seaweed processing plant in the municipality of Indanan which would have dried, bleached and chopped the raw seaweeds for sale to traders and processors, but the plant was never completed.

Fisheries. As expected, the fishing industry is a major industry in the province, with both commercial and municipal fish capture levels recorded at around 77,000 metric tons in 2005. At an estimated average price of P50/kilo for the various types of fish caught, this would translate to an estimated value of fish production of approximately P3.5 billion.

There are no fish processing plants in Sulu. The only processing, if it can be called as such, that is done is drying some of the fish caught, although the bulk is sold locally or in Zamboanga as fresh fish.

However, even the most basic ingredient which is ice needed to preserve fresh fish is in short supply in the province, and ice has to be imported from Zamboanga for use in Sulu.

Thus the rudiments of agriculture and fisheries-based industries exist in Sulu but remain undeveloped beyond the most basic production levels.

Development Programs

The Provincial Government of Sulu has come up with a development program, the principal elements of which are two: development of land-based agriculture through the mobilization of government-owned tractors to till some 20,000 hectares of land, and development of the fisheries sector through the initial distribution of 1,000 pumpboats to fishermen in coastal and island municipalities.



The Provincial Government's tractor program was launched aggressively and has achieved tangible results. The main crop targeted is the planting of cassava and a marketing tie-up has been established with San Miguel Corp. which has been subcontracting with farmers throughout the country for the production of this crop.

Infrastructure development – mainly roads and ports – has been undertaken principally with the assistance of foreign donors, mainly the U.S. Government, and there are plans to develop an economic zone in the province under the Regional Economic Zone Authority.

Recommendations

It is however recommended that the Provincial Government provide a sustained focus on developing a wide-ranging livelihood program for the province of Sulu. It should be a program which will aim to reach as many able-bodied Suluanos as are willing to undertake income-generating activities which will not only provide them a decent level of living, provide them opportunities to give their children a proper education but, more importantly, restore their dignity as individuals who can provide for themselves without having to be dependent on the government or politicians to take care of them.

For this purpose it is recommended that a two-pronged program be undertaken: first, a program which will target the development of significant indigenous resources and, second, a program which will tap the opportunities available for employment overseas.

Strategy I: Development of Local Industries

Focus on Indigenous Products. It is proposed that focus be given to the development of industries based on resources which are indigenous and which have traditionally been undertaken by the populace in order to eliminate or minimize any new learning processes that may have to be introduced. Indigenous resources that people are comfortable working with will facilitate the introduction and propagation of these industries.

There are many local industries that can be further developed beyond current production levels. These include coconuts, coffee, abaca, cassava, assorted vegetables, assorted fruits – various varieties of mangoes, various varieties of bananas, durian, marang, mangosteen, lanzones, rambutan, etc. – cattle, seaweeds, municipal and commercial fisheries, etc.

Thus, for example, in the case of coconuts focus could be given to maximizing the value-added from this crop, i.e., virgin coconut oil, coco-coir fiber, coco flour, charcoal, soap, vinegar, etc. This should however be done in a manner which benefits groups of coconut farmers who organize themselves to take advantage of these downstream



products which they can develop from their traditional crop. There are, for example, village-level coconut oil mills that can be set up in producing barangays. In Davao del Sur, for example, a farmers' cooperative set up last year a 10,000-nut per day oil mill which can produce 1,240 liters of cooking oil and 680 kilos of copra cake as a by-product daily at a cost of less than PhP 3 million. Even smaller oil mills can be set up.

If, however, the establishment of the village-level coconut oil mills will endanger the viability of the existing large oil mill in Sulu, farmers can still supply their copra to the existing mill so long as arrangements are developed where the farmers participate in the value-added that may be obtained from by-products such as coco coir, charcoal, coco flour and other such coco-based products, rather than these being appropriated solely by the owners of the oil mill.

In the case of fruits, for example, focus could be given to such products as jams and preserves, candies as well as purees and juices aside from the fresh fruits themselves.

Abaca, known traditionally for the production of cordage or rope, has many other uses such as meat casings, tea bags, cigarette paper, filter paper, currencies and security paper as well as other specialty products.

Basic Product Shortages. It is to be noted also, for example, that for a basic product like eggs, Sulu has to import its requirements from Zamboanga, very little if any production being available locally. Rice is likewise imported from Zamboanga as well as Sabah. As also noted earlier, even ice is imported from Zamboanga.

Thus, there are many local industries that people are familiar with and have engaged in traditionally that can be further developed, thus minimizing the learning curve that would have to be gone through. It would be a matter principally of building on the traditional production methods and upgrading and extending them further into new end-uses.

In addition, as noted, there are basic products needed in the province which can be locally produced but are not being done so in sufficient quantities. Thus, a great deal of potential for economic growth exists in the province.

Market Linkages. It is proposed that primary focus be given to the markets for the various products to be developed. This is where the weakness of many industry development plans lies. In many instances it is assumed that products, once produced, can be automatically sold. In other instances, inadequate attention is given to competition from other sources of the same product, so that continuity of sales or stability of pricing is endangered. Another factor that is often ignored when a market focus is absent is attention to product standards or innovations, which also impacts on the ability to sell one's products at reasonable prices.

Thus, it is suggested that programs to develop any of the local industries identified earlier start by considering linkages with buyers. The Sulu Provincial



Government is in fact doing this in the case of the cassava industry, which is the focus of its tractor and farm plowing program. The cassava produced under this program will be sold to San Miguel Corporation which is a major buyer of this product.

The same can be done with regard to another major product, seaweeds. Tie-ups can be established with major processors such as Shemberg and MCPI in Cebu or Marcel in Zamboanga City. Plans to do some primary processing in the province – which had been started in the past but which were abandoned – could be looked into again.

The earlier tie-up with Nestle for the coffee plantation project that was started in Parang can be revived if production of this industry can be revived on a relatively large scale.

San Miguel Corporation and Nestle could also be a market for many of the fruit products which can be made into juices, jams and ice cream.

Thus, it is proposed that the starting point for the development of any of the local industries in Sulu begin with a consideration of marketing tie-ups with major buyers, either locally or even abroad.

Organization of Production Units. Tie-ups with major buyers like San Miguel Corp., Nestle, Shemberg, etc. are enhanced if one is able to offer significant volumes of product with a consistent quality. This puts the producer in a position where he can negotiate favorable terms with the buyer.

Thus it would be necessary to organize farmer/fisher-producers so that their production efforts are synchronized and conform to agreed standards. This will often require organizing the farmers or fishermen into units like a cooperative or a farmers' or fishermen's association. In some instances one might even consider setting up a corporation where the farmer/fisher-producers are the shareholders. These organizations will result in the farmers/fishermen being able to agree among themselves on common production methods, planting and harvesting schedules, processing methods, etc.

For this purpose, technical assistance will need to be provided to the farmers or fishermen for the purpose of setting up the appropriate organization and developing the unity of direction as well as agreement of organizational policies needed.

Technical Assistance for Production and Processing. While the industries that are being proposed to be developed focus on traditional products, it will still be necessary to provide upgrading of production and processing methods. This may involve such things as providing improved seed varieties, fertilization, application of pest control methods, harvesting techniques, storage methods, etc.

It may even be necessary to reorganize the industry into various segments. Thus there could be farmers focused on primary production while others concentrate on the downstream aspects of the industry. In the case of coffee, for example, a group of



farmers could focus on the planting, maintenance and harvesting of the coffee plants and beans while a different group may take care of roasting or processing the harvested beans. A third group might concentrate on packaging the finished product while a fourth group could focus on marketing and delivery to buyers. And so on and so forth. The industry might therefore be reorganized for specialization of different aspects of the production and processing cycle.

For this the assistance of technical experts will be required.

Financing Linkages. The production and processing units will require financing particularly during the early stages of development of the industry. This is also one reason why the production groups will need to be organized: sources of financing will require a legal entity which will be the recipient of the financial resources to be provided.

Financing can come from various sources. If the marketing linkages are established with large buyers, it may be possible to obtain funding in the form of advances from the buyers. In the case of some industries, for example the poultry industry, the chicks and feeds are provided by the ultimate buyer of the chickens or eggs to be produced in the form of an advance, to be deducted from the value of the final product to be delivered. If Letters of Credit are resorted to as a form of payment by the buyer, advance payments on these L/Cs can be obtained from the banks involved.

Financing can also be obtained from governmental agencies specialized in the products being focused on. Thus, for example, the Philippine Coconut Authority occasionally has credit facilities obtained from international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme or the Asian Development Bank to fund various aspects of the coconut industry. In like manner, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources occasionally has funding for the acquisition of fishing vessels or gear.

Then of course there are banking institutions which can provide financing for viable projects, subject, of course, to the submission of needed feasibility studies, compliance with collateral requirements and all other policies and requirements of the concerned banks.

It will most likely be necessary to assist the farmers/fishermen identify the appropriate sources of financing for their specific projects. For this purpose, the involvement of financing experts may be required.

If industries are organized in this manner – establishing market linkages, helping the farmers/fishermen organize themselves into production and processing units, providing technical assistance for improved production and processing methods as well as providing assistance in obtaining financing – there is a greater chance of having the livelihood programs succeed in assisting the farmers and fishermen rather than if they were left on their own to fend for themselves. For this purpose, it is proposed that the Provincial Government set up a Livelihood Unit which will look into and pursue the development of what are identified to be the priority industries of the province.



The starting point for all this would, of course, be a master study which would look into the various industries in Sulu which could be developed, identifying the priorities and recommending steps to be undertaken to pursue the various programs identified. This first step has been undertaken through a study which has been supported by the Local Government Support Program in ARMM (LGSPA). A review of this study in order to confirm its findings and recommendations would be appropriate at this point.

Strategy II: Deployment of Suluanos Overseas

Estimates of Filipinos overseas vary widely. Some estimates place the number of Filipinos abroad at as many as 11 million – almost 13% of the total population of the Philippines -- if one considers illegal or undocumented migrants, those called in the local jargon as “TNT” (*tago ng tago*, i.e., “always hiding”). Other estimates, like those of the Department of Foreign Affairs Overseas Absentee Voting unit, place the number of Filipinos overseas at 7.4 million, only 5.5 million of whom however would be eligible to vote, i.e., 18 years of age or over.

Only two other countries have more nationals abroad, China – with around 35 million – and India – with around 22 million.

There are no estimates of the number of Suluanos living abroad, however.

Every year approximately 1 million Filipinos leave to work abroad. During the first half of 2006, 565,000 OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) left to work overseas. When the OFW phenomenon started in earnest in the late 1970s it was explained at that time that this was to be considered a temporary phenomenon, because of the difficulties encountered in creating sufficient jobs in the Philippines at that time which would provide individuals a level of income that would provide their families a decent standard of living.

However, what was considered temporary has become a permanent feature of the Philippine economic landscape, one which the economy can no longer do without. Remittances from overseas Filipino workers are officially estimated at a level of around \$10 billion a year, although some analysts believe that the true amount could be closer to \$20 billion a year if one considers funds sent through informal or unregistered channels (returning co-workers or friends, unregistered remittance services, etc.) If one considers the fact that total exports from the Philippines in 2005 amounted to \$41 billion, remittances from overseas Filipinos adds another 25% (or 50%, if one accepts the estimate of unregistered remittances) to the country’s foreign exchange earnings, certainly a level that would seriously hurt the economy if it were eliminated or significantly reduced.



Thus, deployment of workers overseas is a permanent and now indispensable feature of the Philippine economy, and one which Suluanos can take advantage of also. Many view employment abroad as the key to breaking out of the poverty which they may endure in the Philippines, and it is not uncommon to find well-built homes and even whole communities throughout the country which compare much more favorably with their neighbors, their advantage being that one or two family members work overseas.

Rather than just have Suluanos fend for themselves again in trying to find employment opportunities abroad, it is suggested that the Provincial Government of Sulu again assist in this regard. The Municipality of Jolo has in fact taken the first step in this regard by arranging for teams from the Department of Foreign Affairs to visit Jolo in order to enable residents from Jolo and neighboring municipalities to apply for passports without having to travel to Zamboanga City or even Manila for this purpose.

Market Linkage. Again, it is suggested that this exercise start from establishing linkages with the markets for the overseas workers – i.e., direct employers, placement agencies, Embassies of countries hosting overseas workers and even the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) which has time and again expressed its desire to help uplift the condition of Filipino Muslims. The Provincial Government could meet with representatives of the various Embassies and the OIC to (a) determine what particular skills are in demand in their respective countries and (b) solicit their assistance in finding employment opportunities for qualified Suluanos. The same could be done with placement agencies who recruit persons for deployment abroad. In the event that particular companies or employers could likewise be identified, the needed linkages should also be established.

One way by which these market linkages could be established would be to organize Job Fairs, where placement agencies, embassies, employers, etc. would be invited to visit Sulu and make presentations on the employment opportunities in their respective countries or companies. They will then have an opportunity to meet potential candidates and make their evaluations of their suitability for their needs. These Job Fairs could be held once or twice a year and could also be a way by which visitors – who could subsequently be the base of a tourism industry -- could be invited to visit Sulu.

Training Requirements. Once information is obtained regarding the most marketable skills, steps should be taken to orient the various training institutions in Sulu to gear themselves in these directions. These skills may require long-term education – such as in the case of nurses, medical technologists, accountants, engineers. In this case, coordination would need to be undertaken with the institutions of higher learning in Sulu, such as the Mindanao State University, the Notre Dame of Jolo College, the Sulu State College or the Islamic Institute for Southern Mindanao.

Where short-term skills training is sufficient – as in the case of automotive mechanics, computer technicians, carpenters, masons, etc. – the appropriate training institutions in the province can likewise be geared along these lines. The Provincial



Government has its Manpower Skills Training Center in Tanjung, Indanan, which can be oriented in these directions.

Communication skills, particularly in English and, if the individual is going to the Middle East, Arabic, should be improved so as to facilitate the adjustment of the individual in the country to which he will be deployed. Training in communications skills can be made part and parcel of any technical skills training program.

Cultural Orientation. It would also be helpful if cultural orientation sessions could be designed and provided for individuals who have already landed employment opportunities and are preparing to depart. It is important for individuals, particularly those departing for abroad for the first time, to be given pointers on what to expect in the countries they will be going to and residing in, the differences in culture and values, behavioral modes that they will need to be aware of and conform with, and other factors needed for persons going abroad. This will help minimize any “culture shock” that the individual may suffer, particularly if he is travelling abroad for the first time and if he will be working alone rather than with a group of other Suluanos or Filipinos who can at least provide some psychological support.

There are groups specialized in providing these types of orientation seminars. The Provincial Government could coordinate with them and eventually develop its own in-province capability to undertake these types of orientations.

Support Services. Other support services could be provided for potential candidates for employment abroad, such as arranging for processing of passports in the province – as has been initiated by the Acting Mayor of Jolo – arranging for the needed medical examinations by accredited clinics, obtaining needed clearances from different government agencies such as the National Bureau of Investigation, and others. The basic objective would be to facilitate matters so that the opportunity of working overseas can be provided to as many qualified Suluanos as possible.

Concluding Note

What has been suggested above basically entails organizing in a logical manner opportunities that people can avail of in order to find gainful employment for themselves. It requires that someone or some organization focus on putting the various pieces of the programs together, and it is suggested that the Provincial Government be the coordinating center for this. Given the fact that the majority of Suluanos believe they are economically worse off today than they were 10 or 20 years ago, this is a matter important enough for the Provincial Government to focus on.



RELIGION

*“Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves”
(Qur’an 13:12)*

As pointed out in the discussion on the results of the survey undertaken in the 18 municipalities of Sulu, people believe that strengthening their faith in God is the second most important factor in improving their personal situations, which the majority of people (82%) say has deteriorated compared to ten or twenty years ago. Because this deterioration in their personal conditions is attributed to economic difficulties, economic solutions – the provision of income-generating opportunities – are seen as the primary key to addressing their problems. But, as pointed out, interestingly religion is seen as the second most important factor.

This was brought out often in private discussions which the Study Team had with various individuals. The need to strengthen people’s practice of their faith was pointed out frequently. A frequent point of reference for many people was the *Tulay* Mosque, the central mosque in downtown Jolo, which in a sense is a symbol of Sulu. The mosque has been the recipient of various donations from the Middle East for its reconstruction but to this date the reconstruction work has not been completed.

The following sentiment was expressed, in more or less similar terms, by a number of individuals: *“In Tausug bihayaon way na sipug. Bukun sadja tau in pagtakawun. Bisan in Tuhan, pagtakawun da nila”*. (“The Tausug today has no shame. Not only does he steal from his fellowman. He even steals from God.”) This is a sentiment expressed with reference to what is commonly perceived to be corruption in the handling of the donations provided for the rebuilding of the mosque.

Religion is therefore a factor which many people believe plays a significant role in correcting the ills of Sulu society.

Islam as a Way of Life

Islam is often referred to as a way of life. By this is meant that it is to be viewed as not just being a religion that focuses on prayers and spirituality but as a system of beliefs emanating from divine revelation (the Qur’an) that govern all aspects of a person’s life.

Beyond the Five Pillars – *Shahadah* (profession of faith or the belief in the oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Mohammed), *Salah* (prayer, five times a day, linking the worshipper to God), *Zakah* (obligatory sharing of one’s wealth with the needy), *Sawm* (fasting during the month of *Ramadan*) and the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) – Islam defines codes of conduct for all aspects of the believer’s life: marriage, sex, raising a family, running a business, finance, the treatment of animals, death and burial procedures, etc.



In everyday life, Suluanos – as with most Muslims – greet each other not with the greeting of Westerners – “Good morning” or “How are you” – or even of other Filipinos – “*Kumusta*” (“how are you”) or “*Magandang umaga*” (“good morning”) – but instead with the religious greeting of “*Assalamu alaikum*” (“Peace be unto you”). When leaving the house in the morning or starting on a journey the Suluano will pause briefly to reflect and call upon God to bless his day or his journey: “*Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*” – “In the name of God the Merciful, the Beneficent”. In speaking to a crowd or at a forum or meeting the Suluano will preface his remarks by calling upon God – “*Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*” – and will extend his greetings of peace to his listeners – “*Assalamu alaikum warahma tullahi wabarakatuhu*” – (“May the peace of Almighty God be upon you”).

Hence, while, as with any faith, there are Muslims who take their faith seriously while others take it lightly or, worse, adopt a wrong view of their religion, one can nevertheless say that as a general rule it would appear that many Suluanos believe that a strengthening of their faith in God and in adopting the practices prescribed by Islam is a necessary ingredient to bringing about peace in their society.

Islam, Terrorism and Jihad

In the minds of many non-Muslims and particularly Westerners, terrorism conjures the image of a Muslim suicide bomber. Due to misperceptions of what Islam promotes and prejudices that have built up over decades if not centuries, Islam is seen as a religion that promotes violence against “infidels” and the use of terror tactics to overcome one’s enemies. Even in the Philippines, as pointed out earlier, a survey conducted in early 2005 showed that 47% of respondents considered Muslims to be terrorists or extremists.

Volumes have been written regarding Islamic principles of a just war, circumstances under which violence can be utilized as an instrument to achieve peace and justice and the much misunderstood term of *Jihad*.

Suffice it to point out, for purposes of this report, a few principles in Islam regarding *Jihad* and violence:

1. In Islam, human life is considered sacred. The Qur’an reflects this where it is written that “...if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people” (5:32). This sacredness is based on the fact that man was created as God’s representative on earth: “Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a viceregent on earth’” (Qur’an 2:30). Further, “It is We Who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down...” (Qur’an 7:11). Moreover, God forbids killing: “Do not kill the soul which God has made sacred, except for a just cause” (An’am 6:151); “Whoever kills asoul, unless it be for manslaughter or



for mischief in the land, is like one who killed the whole of mankind” (Ma’ida 5:32).

2. Nevertheless Islam allows war to be waged in the service of a just cause, principally the defense of one’s faith, one’s values and one’s homeland: “And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you (who are liable and able to fight, and who participate actively in the fight), and do not exceed the limits, surely God does not love those who exceed the limits” (Baqara 2:190). This latter quotation also illustrates the fact that in war non-combatants are not to be targeted and should even be protected. In fact it is said that Islam introduced humanitarian principles to war centuries before it became an issue between nations. Among the principles of war advocated by Islam are treating the enemy with mercy, banning torture, respecting the enemy’s dead, not attacking civilians and innocent targets and even providing humanitarian aid to the enemy. The latter is illustrated by the fact that during a period of drought and famine in Mecca, after the Prophet was forced to leave by his enemies there, the Prophet sent gold to his enemies so that they could buy wheat, dates and animal feed.
3. *Jihad* should be understood as being the effort exerted by Muslims to overcome the obstacles that separate man from God. To understand this, the story is told of a discussion that the Prophet Mohammad had with his friends after the Battle of Badr, from which they emerged victorious. The Prophet told his friends, “You have now returned from the minor *jihad* to the major one.” When his friends asked him, “What is the major *jihad*?”, the Prophet replied, “It is *jihad* against the *nafs*”, where *nafs* is understood to be man’s worldly nature, his desires and passions, which often stand in the way of man’s submitting to God’s will. Thus, *Jihad* is to be understood to be a lifelong struggle of the believer to draw closer to God and is principally an inner struggle. Of course, there is the outer struggle, the defense of one’s faith when it is threatened, but as the Prophet has pointed out, this is to be considered a minor *Jihad*.

Unfortunately, as with all faiths, there are adherents who interpret and practise their faith in ways that run counter to the true intention of their religion. It is this which has captured the attention of non-Muslims and has led to wrong interpretations of Islam and reinforced the prejudices that exist with regard to this faith.

Islam as a Religion of Peace

Nevertheless, despite the prejudices regarding Muslims and their faith, Islam, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and the strong U.S.-initiated campaign against global terrorism targeting principally Muslim countries – Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran – not to mention the Muslim-dominated areas in the southern Philippines, it can still be said that in essence, Islam is a religion of peace. The name itself, Islam, and the Arabic word for peace, “*salam*”, come from the same root word, “*Salima*”. The term “Muslim”, in fact,



is said to refer to a person who has made peace with God – implying complete submission to God’s will – as well as peace with his fellowman.

The everyday phrase with which Muslims greet each other, “*Assalamu alaikum*” is in fact derived from the Qur’an: “And their greeting therein shall be Peace” (10:10). One of the names of God in Islam is *Dar al-Islam*, the “Abode of Peace”. In Paradise, it is said, the only thing that believers shall hear shall be the word “peace”: “They shall hear therein no vain or sinful talk, but only the saying, ‘Peace, Peace’” (56:25-26).

In Islam, peace has a very specific meaning. In the words of the late Mufti of Sulu, Ustadz Ibrahim Gadzhali, “...a Muslim is one who makes his peace with God and man. Peace with God implies complete submission to his will, and peace with man is not only to refrain from evil or injury to another but also to do good to him”.

However, peace in Islam is intertwined with justice. One can have peace only on the basis of justice, where justice is understood as maintaining the equilibrium that exists in nature and in society, ensuring that everything is in its rightful place. When this equilibrium is upset it becomes the duty of every Muslim to work to correct this condition and ensure that justice is served. One quotation from the Qur’an shows the importance of justice in Islam: “O, Ye who believe, be steadfast in the service of God’s truth and bear witness for justice and let not hatred of a people seduce you so that you deal with them unjustly. Act justly for that is what piety demands” (Ma’ida 5:8).

As the Muslim scholar Mohammed Abu-Nimer has stated it, “the ultimate purpose of Qur’anic revelation for Muslims is to create a peaceful and just social order” (“Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice” p. 60).

Religious Sector in Sulu

There is one formal organization in Sulu which brings together a number of Muslim religious leaders. This is the Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development, previously chaired by the late Mufti Ustadz Ibrahim Gadzhali, now chaired by the current Mufti of Sulu, Ustadz Jul-Asri Abirin. The Council has broadened its definition of *alim* (singular) or *ulama* (plural) to include anyone with a degree of higher learning, not just limiting the Council to religious scholars.

Pagtabangan BaSulTa (PB) established a working relationship with the Council last year through the late Ustadz Ibrahim Gadzhali by arranging a weekly radio program where Council members could speak on Islam and peace and exhort Suluanos to orient themselves along the road of peace as envisioned by their faith. This program, aired every Saturday morning over radio station DXSM, is called *Ulanig sin Kasajahitraan* (Echoes of Peace). In addition, PB arranged for a weekly newspaper column in the Sulu Peninsula Journal whereby Council members could also write their thoughts also on the topic of peace as advocated by Islam. The newspaper column was called *Suwara sin Kahanungan* (Voice of Peace).



The Council is also represented in the Task Force on Peace and Unity which was the body under whose umbrella the present review of the peace and order situation in Sulu was prepared.

The Council helps to coordinate the activities of the various Muslim religious leaders in the province. On a weekly basis, on Wednesdays, several member *Imams* meet at the offices of the Council to talk about the topic which would be discussed in the *Khutbas* to be delivered in the noontime prayer service the coming Friday. In that manner the Council is able to influence the faithful by providing religious guidance impacting on that aspect of their lives. The Council runs religious schools (*Madaris*) which teach the faith to young people, aside from emphasizing Islamic values, the teaching of Arabic and other basic subjects. The Council also sends some of its members to help impart the faith in areas where the services of religious scholars and preachers are needed.

There is another group that is helping to strengthen the practice of Islam among Muslims in Sulu, and that is the *Jama'a Tabligh* (Followers Reaching Out). The *Tabligh*, as it is known for short, started in New Delhi in 1920 aiming to strengthen the belief of Muslims in the fundamentals of their faith and inspiring them to live according to their beliefs. *Tabligh* members go around various communities speaking to people about their faith, as well as showing by their personal example how they believe their faith should be reflected in their daily lives. Their activities are directed towards raising the consciousness of people regarding their religious responsibilities and obligations, promoting mutual cooperation and encouraging people to live according to the principles of Islam.

The *Tabligh* is another group that can be a very potent force to remind people about the tenets of Islam with regard to establishing a regime of peace in Sulu.

Within the small Catholic community in Sulu there is also an active religious sector. One of the leading schools in the province is the Notre Dame of Jolo which has been moulding young Tausugs for over half-a-century. Quality education is provided at all levels, from the elementary grades up to post-graduate studies.

Aside from the school, which is run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) with the help of Dominican sisters running the Girls' High School with the Marist Brothers running the Boys' High School there is a very active Vicariate which is involved in various programs for the people of Sulu. The Vicariate has a Mass Media Ministry which runs a radio station and a TV channel in Jolo (DXMM) aside from a radio station in Tawi-Tawi (DXGD); a Social Development Ministry (SDM), which undertakes various economic programs for the underprivileged; the Vicariate has also set up a number of housing projects for the people of Jolo and is a program partner implementor of various NGOs including Christian Children's Fund and Tabang Mindanaw.

Thus the Catholic religious sector in Sulu can also be a partner in helping spread the gospel of peace among the people of Sulu.



Addressing the Issue of Peace

Given the fact that Sulu is predominantly Muslim, the Muslim organizations like the Sulu Ulama Council and the *Jama'a Tabligh* can play very critical roles in bringing about an "Abode of Peace" in the province. That role would principally be one of providing guidance to the people on what the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet tell us regarding the way we should lead our lives as servants of God.

Guidance can be provided through the weekly *khutbas* as well as the discussions that often take place after the sunset or *Magrib* prayers. Definitely the *Madaris*, the religious schools where children are taught Arabic, Islamic Values and other subjects would be another venue for providing guidance to the faithful. The initiatives started – *Ulanig sin Kasajahitraan* and *Suwara sin Kahanungan* -- using the broadcast and print media, can be continued and possibly even intensified.

Various fora can be held in venues throughout the province to talk about how Islam exhorts the faithful to build a peaceful and just society. This can be done not just with local experts but even with authorities from outside the province or even outside the country. In this connection, the religious community in Sulu may wish to explore setting up linkages with like-minded organizations elsewhere, Islamic in character and oriented towards bringing peace throughout the *Ummah*, the community of believers.

There are many other initiatives that could be undertaken, but it would be the religious leaders of Sulu themselves who would be in the best position to determine the roles they can play and how specifically they can provide guidance to the faithful.

As the Qur'an has stated, people will have to **want** to bring change in their society and they will have to **take the necessary steps** to bring about this change. And this change has to start from within us. Only then will God help us.



PEACE EDUCATION

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences must be constructed” (Constitution of UNESCO, 1945).

Education is often seen as the key to breaking out of poverty, whether on a societal or individual basis. Thus analyses of the educational system in the Philippines have focussed on issues of quality – as measured by performance on various standardized tests given – adequacy of facilities – the perennial issue of number of classrooms, textbooks, etc. – the quality of teachers – addressed by various teacher training programs – the issue of equity or access to education – addressed by scholarship programs – the mismatch between education and the demands of the economy – addressed by collaborative mechanisms between industry sectors and educational leaders – and other such issues.

A number of official inquiries into the state of the educational system have been undertaken over the years, to include the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education in 1969, the Congressional Commission on Education which submitted its report in 1991 entitled “Making Education Work: An Agenda for Reform”, the Task Force on Higher Education of the Commission on Higher Education in 1995, an ADB-World Bank study on the educational sector undertaken in 1998-1999, the Presidential Commission on Education Reforms in 2000, to name but a few. All these have focussed on the issues identified earlier. Rarely, if ever, has attention been given officially to the question of how education can contribute to bringing about a just and peaceful society.

But today, possibly more than ever in the past, when issues of morality in public life are literally tearing the country apart, when the inadequacy of the justice system in this country has been glaringly highlighted, when people have begun to clamor for reform in basic institutions in the democratic society that the Philippines is supposed to be, the question of how the educational system is geared to address these issues comes to the fore.

In Sulu, these issues are painfully crystallized in the quest for peace. As summarized in this report, the state of unpeace in Sulu is reflected in the state of war that effectively prevails in the province, the dominance of the military establishment in determining the future of the province, the apparent lack of concern of the political leadership for the welfare of their constituents, the effective abdication by the local political leadership of their responsibilities, the inability of the masses of people to freely choose their leaders, the absence of basic justice in the face of unrelenting violence, and other conditions which the people of Sulu experience on a daily basis to the point that they have come to accept them as being part of life in this province.

But, if the premise that was stated in the introduction of this report is accepted, that peace has to start from within, that peace is not imposed from the outside but has to



grow from within each individual in society, then the role of education in the process of planting the seeds of peace in each individual begins to take primordial importance.

Depending on the circumstances of each individual child, the school becomes a critical factor in molding the outlook, values, attitudes and behaviour of children between the ages of 5 to 11 or 12, if they only complete elementary schooling, 5 to 16 years if they are fortunate enough to proceed to high school, and 5 to 20 or 21 years if they fall within the 30% of young people in the Philippines who are able to enter the tertiary or college level of education. Thus educational institutions can be a potent force for opening up the minds of young people in Sulu to the potentials of adopting a culture of peace in their homeland.

Peace Education Research

It is within this context that Tabang Mindanaw, acting in behalf of the Pagtabangan BaSulTa consortium, commissioned a research study to determine how peace education might be introduced in formal institutions of learning in Sulu. The basic concept was to identify and/or develop learning modules on peace which could be introduced at all levels of education, from the elementary to the tertiary levels of education. These could be either independent modules on peace or topics which could be incorporated into other subjects such as language, history, social studies and the like.

Realizing that several schools in different parts of the country have already developed various peace education curricula, several educational institutions in Zamboanga City and Sulu were invited to submit proposals to:

- a) Review existing modules on peace education,
- b) Evaluate these modules to determine their relevance to the particular conditions in the province of Sulu,
- c) Draw up recommendations on which existing modules could be adopted and where new modules would need to be developed.

Out of five institutions invited two submitted proposals. The study was eventually undertaken by the Research Center of the Ateneo de Zamboanga University.

Structure of the Recommendations

In brief, it has been proposed that the peace education initiative in Sulu be structured with a framework that adopts six themes or paths to peace:

1. Understanding peace and cultivating active non-violence
2. Intra- and inter-cultural appreciation and understanding
3. Promoting social justice and human security
4. Preserving the environment
5. Attaining inner peace
6. Respective human rights and responsibilities



These paths are anchored on three objectives:

- a. Developing the knowledge needed for a proper understanding of the social and natural context within which the individual exists and his/her obligations as a member of society
- b. Cultivating the values required for a just and peaceful society, values such as respect for oneself/others/environment, commitment to justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, compassion, humility and selflessness, non-violence, respect for and tolerance of other cultures and beliefs, among others
- c. Developing skills needed to bring about peace and justice in society, skills such as critical thinking, empathy, cooperation with others, communication, consensus building and conflict resolution.

Annex D at the end of this section details the concepts, values and issues identified for each of the paths or themes that make up the framework.

Modules Reviewed

The Research Team assessed seventeen sets of instructional materials in order to identify specific modules which could be adopted in relation to the concepts, values and issues that make up the peace education framework. These instructional materials were:

1. Peace Education Teaching Exemplars for Elementary Schools (UNICEF-DepEd-OPAPP)
2. Peace Education Teaching Exemplars for Elementary and Secondary Schools (DepEd-OPAPP)
3. Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution: A Teaching Manual (UPCIDS-NDU)
4. Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution: A Training Manual (UPCIDS-NDU)
5. Our Nation, Our World (SIBS Publication)
6. Peace Education Modules (Notre Dame Educational Association)
7. Basic Orientation Modules on Peace Education (Ateneo de Zamboanga University)
8. Culture of Peace: Islamic Perspective (AmanPhil)
9. Peace Education: A Teacher Training Manual (Miriam College)
10. Learning to Live Together: Teachers Resource Book on Education for International Understanding (Asia Pacific Center for International Understanding)
11. Culture of Dialogue (Silsilah)
12. Panagtagbo sa Kalinaw (Catholic Relief Service)
13. Panaw sa Kalilintad (Tabang Mindanaw)
14. Child Learning Center Curriculum Manual (HESED)
15. Module on Interreligious Dialogue (ACEID)



16. Basic Orientation Seminar on the Culture of Peace (Notre Dame of Jolo College Peace Center)
17. The Life and Hadith of Rasulullah: A Coloring Book (Grayline Enterprise, Philippines)

From these materials specific modules or lessons were evaluated against the peace education framework. Those deemed to be appropriate given the unique conditions in Sulu were then identified to determine if they could be adopted either per se or with modifications.

Madaris Education

Particular attention was given to the Islamic schools known as the *madaris* (plural for *madrasa*). The report notes that there are in fact three categories of Islamic teaching in schools: that which is provided in public elementary schools, that which is provided in mainstreamed private *madaris* in Muslim communities and that which is available in weekend *madaris* institutions.

The first two – Islamic curriculum provided in public elementary schools and that which is provided in private mainstreamed *madaris* – have in fact been standardized under Department of Education Order No. 51, Series of 2004. DepEd has defined the curriculum and the number of instruction hours to be devoted to each subject for the purpose of arriving at an officially recognized standard of education which would entitle students to be recognized as having gone through an officially accredited system of education. Subjects defined for both the public schools and the mainstreamed *madaris* include English, Filipino, Arabic, Science and Health, Mathematics, Islamic Values and Makabayan. The basic difference between the two types of schools lies in the time allocated for each of these subjects. Thus, for example, in the public schools, English is to be taught for a minimum of 100 hours a year while Arabic is allocated 60 hours. In the mainstreamed *madaris*, both English and Arabic are provided 80 hours a year. Islamic Values are taught for a total of 120 hours a year in the *madaris* while in the public schools 40 hours a year is allocated during the early grades (1 to 3) and 60 hours in the higher grades (4 to 6).

The weekend *madaris*, to which many students who attend the regular public schools go to supplement their education, focus on the Arabic language and Islamic studies.

As far as peace education is concerned, various concepts incorporated in the framework defined by the Research Team are in fact included particularly in the subject of Islamic Values and hence are already part of the regular curriculum.



Status and Plans

The Research report on Peace Education is currently being reviewed by a committee under the Task Force on Peace and Unity, which is a Task Force which was set up under the Executive-Legislative Agenda of the Sulu Provincial Government and is made up of representatives of various sectors. The committee will determine the appropriateness of the Research Team's recommendations and will aim to identify modules which can be piloted, hopefully during the second semester of schoolyear 2006-2007.



ANNEX D

PEACE EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

- I. Understanding Peace and Cultivating Active Non-Violence**
 - A. Concepts of Peace (Islamic, Christian, Other Faiths)
 - B. Definition of Peace and Conflict
 - C. Definition of Violence (Levels of Violence)
 - D. *Jihad al Akbhar* (Humility and Selflessness)
 - E. Physical Violence/Small Wars/Big Wars
 - F. Values of Bravery, Violence – *Pagbanta/Rido*
 - G. Forgiveness
 - H. Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms
 - I. Conflict Resolution/Management/Transformation
 - J. History of Mindanao Conflict/Peace Process

- II. Intra- and Inter-Cultural Appreciation and Understanding**
 - A. Tausug (including Sama and Badjao) People, Culture and History
 - B. Self-Respect
 - C. Tolerance
 - D. Culture of Dialogue (Basic/Foundation)
 - E. Forms of Dialogue: God, Self, Other Creation
 - F. Prejudice and Biases
 - G. Cultural Solidarity

- III. Promoting Social Justice and Human Security**
 - A. Human Security; Efficient Delivery of Services
 - B. Governance (including *Datuism*; Mainstream and Alternative Leadership)
 - C. People Participation/Empowerment
 - D. Social Justice; Islamic Concept of Social Justice; No Oppression, Corruption and Despotism
 - E. Rule of Law; Justice System

- IV. Preserving the Environment**
 - A. Coastal/Marine Preservation
 - B. Dynamite Fishing
 - C. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Refuse
 - D. Floods: Root Causes
 - E. Sustainable Development
 - F. State of Natural Resources
 - G. Ecology, Stewardship, Integrity of Creation



V. Attaining Inner Peace

- A. Harmony, Unity (*Tawheed*)
- B. Concern for others
- C. Volunteerism
- D. Spirituality
- E. Self-Respect
- F. Cooperation vs. Excessive Competition
- G. Interreligious Dialogue
- H. Addiction/Alienation/Apathy/Proliferation of Drugs

VI. Respecting Human Rights and Responsibilities

- A. Civil, Economic, Social, Cultural, Political Rights
- B. Human Rights and Responsibilities
- C. Rights of a Child
- D. Internally Displaced Persons' Rights
- E. Gender and Peace

CAPACITY BUILDING

A number of institutions have been working in the field of peace-building in Sulu. For the most part these have been individual organizations but in recent years a number of mechanisms were set up to attempt to coordinate the activities of these organizations and hopefully achieve certain synergies in the process. The key coordinating mechanisms are described below.

Task Force on Peace and Unity

The Task Force on Peace and Unity (TFPU) was established in 2005 in response to the Executive-Legislative Agenda of the Sulu Provincial Government, which had identified the objective of forging peace in the province as a primordial goal. The Task Force is multi-sectoral, involving representatives from the Provincial Government, the Philippine National Police, the religious sector, the business sector and civil society organizations. Admittedly, though, it is the civil society organizations that are dominant in the Task Force.

The Task Force has operated informally, though meeting quite regularly during the period from September 2005 to May 2006, in an attempt to identify directions for working towards peace and unity in the province, as is its mandate. The formulation of the Culture of Peace program covered by this report was in fact done under the umbrella of the Task Force.

Key institutional members of the Task Force include the following:

- Provincial Government
- Philippine National Police
- Sulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Sulu Ulama Council for Peace and Development
- Waqaf Foundation
- Bangsa Moro Youth Organization
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
- NDJC Peace Center
- Sulu Tanjuh Organization
- Ittihadush Shabab Almuslimin
- Mindanao Commission on Women
- Sulu Peace Advocates Federation

It has to be admitted though, that in recent months, the activities of the Task Force have decreased, mainly because of the rise of other coordinative mechanisms like the Area Coordinating Center which are undertaking activities similar to what the Task Force was focused on. Hence the Task Force has to redefine its role and directions.



Moreover, while members in the Task Force represented organizations, the involvement of these organizations in the activities of the Task Force was minimal. In most instances it was really the individuals representing the organizations that were the principal influences. In many instances the organizations themselves had few, if any, organizational activities, revolving mainly around the key individuals representing them.

This, in fact, is a reflection of the state of the Civil Society sector in Sulu. There are many NGOs in Sulu – one directory has a listing of around 50 organizations -- but for the most part they are characterized by two elements: first, they are concentrated in the Metro Jolo area, and, second, the scope of their activities is quite limited due to the fact that the organizations revolve around one or two key individuals.

Bridging Leaders Core Group

On March 27-30, 2006, a pioneering workshop, known as the Bridging Leadership for Sulu Stakeholders Workshop, was held in Jolo, Sulu, which brought together representatives of five sectors – the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, the Moro National Liberation Front, Local Government Units and Civil Society Organizations – to open channels of communication among these sectors and see if a common agenda towards peace could be established.

The workshop focused on crafting a Road Map for peace in Sulu, utilizing inputs from the sectors participating in the workshop.

Out of this workshop emerged a Core Group, consisting of three representatives of each of the sectors, which was intended to continue the dialogues which had been started during the workshop.

Under the prodding of the Civil Society sector, consisting principally of TFPU members, the Core Group in fact met several times, at intervals of two weeks each, in order to discuss the peace and order situation within the Metro Jolo area which had been deteriorating during this time.

Area Coordinating Center

The Provincial Area Coordinating Center (ACC) in Sulu was established in response to instructions from the national government for the creation of such units in all LGUs to address emergency situations arising from natural or man-made disasters. These ACCs would be a companion-unit to the local Disaster Coordinating Councils (DCCs) but, as originally envisioned, would focus on internal security-related disasters. It was for this reason that the ACC had the Governor of the Province as its Chairman and the highest ranking military officer in the Province as Vice-Chairman. As originally designed, the ACC was to be a defense-related entity.

Following the March Bridging Leaders' Workshop in Jolo, a view emerged principally sponsored by a ranking military officer that the ACC could serve as the



implementing mechanism for the action points identified in the Sulu Road Map for Peace and Development. This would however require that the ACC membership be expanded to include the sectors and the specific personalities who participated in the March Bridging Leaders' Workshop, and that the MNLF and CSO sectors likewise be appointed co-Vice-Chairmen of the ACC.

Recently moves were taken to set up ACCs at the level of municipalities, with focus on those areas which are the centers of armed conflict. Hence, ACCs have been established in the municipalities of Panamao – where the MNLF forces under Ustadz Habier Malik are located – and Indanan – where the camp of MNLF State Chairman Khaid Ajibon is located. Indanan is also the scene of current (early August 2006) fighting between the AFP and alleged Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah forces.

Coordination

A basic issue that needs to be addressed therefore is what the respective roles of the TFPU and the ACCs would be relative to the pursuit of peace and development programs in the province of Sulu. The Bridging Leaders Core Group has effectively been replaced by the ACC.

One approach would be to utilize the TFPU to serve solely as an umbrella organization for CSOs focused on peace building. The CSO sector in Sulu is weak, as indicated earlier, and needs strengthening. Moreover, unlike the AFP, PNP or even the LGUs which have formal organizations, the CSO sector is uncoordinated and strikes out in several directions depending on the impetus of the times and resources available. Hence, the TFPU could serve as the coordinating mechanism or umbrella organization for the CSO sector, out of which the CSO participation in the multi-sectoral ACC could grow.

The ACC, in turn, would be the focal organization for implementing the program for peace in the province. If this is done, however, it needs to be clear that the ACC will divorce itself from its original focus of being an internal security-oriented unit and will devote itself solely to a program of peace-building. There is the very real danger that, because of its origins and its structure, the peace building program becomes hostage to the political orientation of its leadership or the defense issues for which it was set up.

Moreover, if such an approach is adopted, it would be necessary to modify the concept under which the TFPU was established. The TFPU would no longer be associated with the Provincial Government – which caused its establishment in the first place – and would no longer be multi-sectoral in nature.

There are, of course, other approaches which could be adopted. One approach would be to set up an entirely new coordinative unit for the purpose of the peace program, one that would be multi-sectoral as the ACC is but not saddled by any of the issues adverted to earlier.



Strengthening of the CSO Sector

As mentioned above, the CSO sector in Sulu is weak, consisting of organizations that, first, are located mainly in the Metro Jolo area, second, have very limited activities, and, third, revolve around one or two key individuals.

Unlike the AFP, PNP and LGUs which have substantial resources at their disposal and which have formally sanctioned organizational structures, the CSO sector for the most part operates on a voluntary basis and with little or no resources to speak of which can sustain them. By their very nature, CSOs operate mainly on the basis of the dedication and commitment of their members. This is why the issue of sustainability is a major one where CSOs are concerned, and this is particularly true in a place like Sulu.

At the same time, though, the CSO sector can be a very potent sector in efforts at bringing peace and development to the province. CSOs can serve as links between the populace – from which they arise – and the political, military and police authorities, working in both directions, serving as a voice for the populace to the authorities as well as a channel of information from the authorities to the people. At the same time, because of the status of many of the CSO members – many coming from the academe, for example -- CSOs can help people form their views regarding the situation in Sulu and what each citizen of the province can do to bring about peace in their homeland.

However, this is a long and arduous task and one which requires deep commitment in the face of obstacles and challenges which the CSOs will inevitably face. Only the most dedicated will survive.

In this connection, it is instructive to briefly look at the experience of the Palestinian people and the process by which the non-violent resistance movement known as the first *Intifada* arose and developed.

The First Intifada

Intifada is an Arabic term which means “shaking off” or “arising”, and in the Palestinian context was utilized to convey the message of the Palestinian nation wanting to “shake off” the Israeli occupation of their land, remove the external controls imposed on the Palestinians by Israel and take their destiny into their own hands.

The first *Intifada* is generally acknowledged to have been launched in December 1987 when, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the subsequent fighting that took place, but the later diversion of attention from the Palestinian issue to the Iraq-Iran war, the Palestinian people realized that they had to rely on themselves and their own resources if they wanted to effect political change.

Prior to this, however, as early as the 1970s, popular movements arose among the Palestinians in reaction to the occupation by Israel of the West Bank and Gaza. In the 1970s, charitable organizations were established to address pressing needs of the masses



of people – hospitals, relief aid societies – as well as professional and cultural associations – art, theatre, literary, journalistic, legal and medical associations. In the 1980s, though, activity began to shift to mass organizations such as labor unions, voluntary work organizations, student organizations, popular women’s organizations, so that by the time of the launching of the first *Intifada* in December 1987, one already had a base of organizations experienced in providing services for the masses. One such organization, for example, the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, exemplified one aspect of this experience by bringing urban professionals, principally medical personnel of whom there were around 700 in their membership, in contact with rural folk, thus heightening the sense of solidarity among Palestinians.

These organizations were not revolutionary in nature, aiming principally at self-reliance and providing services that were sorely lacking in Palestinian society. However, when the time came to mobilize for non-violent resistance against the Israelis, as was the call of the first *Intifada*, the mass base was there and the experience of solidarity, or working together led to its early successes.

The Palestinian experience is relevant to the situation in Sulu because, first, it reflects the realization among the Palestinians in 1987 that they had to rely principally on themselves to bring about change in their society. This is a realization that Suluanos have to come to as well. Second, civil society organizations were first set up to respond to specific needs in Palestinian society, as mentioned, hospitals, medical associations, relief organizations, legal associations, etc. Perhaps this is a direction that Sulu CSOs can explore, identifying needs in the province that private voluntary efforts can respond to. Moreover, this experience led to the linkage of urban and rural Palestinians, opening their eyes to the conditions in each other’s areas and forging a bond among them. The Jolo-centered CSOs likewise need the exposure to conditions in the interior and in the islands in order to broaden their perspective of conditions in their homeland. Third, once the linkage and exposure had been established in Palestine, mass-based organizations could then take root. This could again be one way that civil society organizations – people’s organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc. – could be established in areas outside the town of Jolo.

There is much more to the Palestinian resistance movement that can be discussed, but the point that is being made is that the groundwork has to be laid if effective civil society organizations and movements are to be established. There are no shortcuts. There is no substitute for the experience of working on the ground serving one’s fellowman in whatever field of expertise or interest one might have.

Challenges of the CSO Sector in Sulu

A number of challenges face the CSO sector in Sulu which need to be addressed.

First, as pointed out earlier, there is a need to strengthen those NGOs which currently exist and which, in the context of the Culture of Peace program, are oriented



toward building a regime of peace in the province. Currently, Tabang Mindanaw and AIM-Mirant have assigned one staff to serve as a “coach” to help some of the CSOs along these lines but the task is enormous. One approach could be, from the perspective of Pagtabangan BaSulTa, for individual PB consortium members to “adopt”, as it were, individual NGOs in Sulu and assist them undertake the needed internal re-examination to determine the directions in which they would orient themselves as well as the particular tasks needed to strengthen themselves internally. If the needed expertise is not available within the PB consortium, perhaps PB could help identify other potential “foster” organizations who may be willing to work with Sulu-based NGOs.

This partnership cannot, however, be short-term. As the Palestinian experience has shown, you had organizations with a decade or two of experience working in the field by the time of the first *Intifada*. PB will need to think in terms of these kinds of timeframes.

One approach that can be adopted is to mobilize some of these existing organizations in some of the priority programs or projects that have been identified. Thus, for example, the Sulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry could be invited to lend its expertise in the analysis and organization of particular livelihood projects along the lines suggested earlier. The Bangsa Moro Youth Organization and/or the Ittihadush Shabab Almuslimin could be mobilized in the task of identifying and developing a new breed of leaders for Sulu. These involvements would be in partnership with the appropriate PB consortium member, e.g., Philippine Business for Social Progress to work with the Sulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry or the Consuelo Foundation to work with Bangsa Moro Youth Organization and/or Ittihadush Shabab Almuslimin.

Second, one needs to see how the CSO sector can grow in areas outside Metro Jolo. Unfortunately, in this kind of work, one cannot just transplant organizations from one setting to another and expect them to flourish. By its very nature, the type of work undertaken by civil society organizations requires an internal commitment. One cannot cajole people to organize themselves – as often happens – because of the promise of “projects” or resources that will be made available to them. This results in a corruption of the organization from the very outset since the motivation becomes not one of self-reliance or service but one of dependence on external resources being provided. Once the carrot is removed the likelihood is that the organization will collapse.

One needs to get people to realize why it is necessary to organize themselves. Thus, for example, as had been suggested earlier, if the involvement of the civil society sector in the field of governance is deemed to be important, people will need to be brought to the realization that their participation in the local Bids and Awards Committee or the local Peace and Order Council will bring benefits to their community. Once the seed of desire for involvement has been planted, its careful nurturing can follow.

Again, this is a slow and, at times, painful process, but one that has to be gone through if the chances for the long-term viability of the organization are to be strengthened.



POSTSCRIPT

A Third “War”

As this Report is being printed, Sulu is under siege again. At midnight of July 31, the AFP launched what it called “Oplan Ultimatum” which supposedly aimed at capturing or killing Basilan Abu Sayyaf Chairman Khadaffy Janjalani and two Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah personalities, Dulmatin and Umar Patek, who were supposedly hiding out in Barangays Kagay and Sawaki in Indanan Municipality. The AFP initially announced that they expected the operation to last two days but it is now going into its second month.

The operation has been marked by the fielding of eight battalions of AFP officers and men stationed in Sulu, augmented by another battalion of Special Forces and several companies of Scout Rangers brought in from elsewhere in Mindanao aside from Philippine Air Force helicopters and OV-10s launching rockets and dropping bombs and several Philippine Navy vessels cordoning the island of Jolo. This, all in pursuit of what is estimated to be 200 Abu Sayyaf fighters.

Already, as of the first week of September, the AFP has admitted to some 11 deaths among its soldiers and several scores wounded. The number of ASG killed and wounded is undetermined, as is the number of civilians killed as part of what the AFP easily terms “collateral damage” – a term picked up from the Americans – as if this justifies the death of non-combatants, and the number of civilians displaced from their homes.

This makes it three “wars” that the people of Sulu have gone through in a span of 19 months since February 2005 when the confrontation between the AFP and the MNLF erupted in Panamao.

This, after hopes had been raised that some progress was being made along the path to peace following the Bridging Leadership workshop in late March 2006 that brought together five sectors of Sulu society, notably to include the AFP and the MNLF forces loyal to Chairman Nur Misuari.

Principles of Peace

This underscores one of the principles highlighted earlier: **that any gains achieved along the road to peace must be jealously guarded, as these can disappear overnight** – as they did on the evening of July 31, 2006.

Unfortunately, as all this was going on, key local government officials of Sulu were nowhere to be found. Ostensibly they had joined the bandwagon of the



Administration to file the People's Initiative to amend the Constitution with the COMELEC. This raises the question of the priorities that LGU officials in Sulu have, joining a political exercise which had the trappings of a carnival while some of their constituents were under attack. A number of these officials, to include the Governor and several Mayors, flew back to Jolo on September 1, a full month after the hostilities had started, to attend a Provincial Peace and Order Council (PPOC) meeting which had been convened to discuss the situation. Three days after the meeting, a number of these officials flew out again.

During the PPOC meeting, only two members of Civil Society were in attendance and were for the most part silent, except for very brief remarks given towards the end of the meeting. This reflected the passive attitude of the civilian sector to the turmoil going on around it. This could possibly be attributed to the fact that Sulu society has become so used to violence in its midst and to the feeling of powerlessness to do anything about it that when something does erupt people just wait for it to blow over, as it were. The violence will end, a lull will take place, until the next cycle of violence erupts once again.

This highlights two other principles stressed in this Report: first, **that the people of Sulu must want peace, that it must be foremost in their hierarchy of desires**, and, second, that they should not look to others to bring peace to their homeland but **that they can only depend on themselves, on their own efforts, and on the strength that God gives them**, if peace is to come to Sulu. Unless these principles inform the peace-building effort, little if any progress will be attained in establishing a lasting climate of peace in Sulu.

Fortunately, small communities are already demonstrating some of these principles. The residents of Talibang, in Barangay Buansa, Indanan Municipality, for example, have expressed their desire to return to their sitio from which they were forced to evacuate in 2000 when the military launched an operation to rescue the Sipadan hostages. They have not been able to return since. However, despite the lack of support and even opposition from local government officials, the residents have taken it upon themselves to begin rebuilding their homes – without any external assistance -- and to request armed groups to desist from utilizing their area as a battleground. Despite what many would consider to be overwhelming obstacles, the residents of Talibang are demonstrating their determination to reclaim their homeland and build it into a sanctuary of peace.

Already, other communities in the troubled area of Patikul Municipality, are beginning to follow suit, asserting their right to reclaim their home communities which they were forced to abandon five to eight years ago because of military operations.

It is small acts of courage like this which give hope that all is not lost in the quest for peace in Sulu.



The Building Blocks of Peace

Peace does not come about by force of arms. A conquering army that believes it has won the peace because it has destroyed its enemies is deluded.

Nor is peace the result of legal systems or political structures, peace agreements signed or declarations of peace zones. These are all nice to have, they may even be ingredients to peace in an area, but they do not bring it about.

Peace needs to start from within the individual. It must be his basic outlook in life, his orientation which guides all his actions. Without the individual being predisposed to peacefully resolve the conflicts he will encounter throughout life, if the first option, the instinct, is to reach for a weapon to resolve problems, then peace will not come.

In Islam, as in all of the major faiths, man is at peace when he makes his peace with God. This is the wellspring, from which peace of mind, peace of heart, peace within society and peace within the world emanates.

Hence, the foundation of a program which aims to bring peace to society must be religion, in the case of Sulu, Islam, the religion of Peace. It is upon this bedrock that a Culture of Peace program should be built.

That foundation is reinforced through **peace education**, which focuses primarily on the youth, and attempts to mould the thinking and orientation of the younger generation towards building a society based on peace and justice.

But peace education can be broadened to reach all sectors of society, working through the organs of the mass media as well as other vehicles – seminars, workshops, fora, public events, etc. – to influence attitudes and behaviour in society towards paths to peace.

Upon this foundation – **religion** and **peace education** – the social structures of peace can be erected: **good governance**, an environment of **security** and the provision of **livelihood opportunities** that will allow individuals to earn a decent living to provide the basics of food, shelter, health and education for themselves and their families.

But these elements cannot be addressed on a piece-meal basis. They need to be tackled as a whole if an environment of peace is to prevail in society. Attempting to educate the youth in the ways of peace while around them they see a culture of corruption and neglect among their political leaders will only breed a generation of cynics. Offering livelihood programs and attempting to stimulate investments while personal security cannot be assured, where businessmen are not safe from extortion or kidnapping syndicates, will result in failed economic programs.



Hence, an abode of peace, *Dar-ul Salam*, can only be erected if all the building blocks, the foundation and the structures, are all in place.

A Multi-Generational Program

It needs to be stressed, though, that peace is not attained overnight. Building the structures of peace in society will span a generation or two, possibly even longer. The roots of unpeace, particularly in Sulu, span a period of centuries. Transforming its effects in individuals and in society towards the service of peace will call for commitment and perseverance on the part of individuals dedicated to building and protecting peace as well as the establishment of institutions which will maintain continuity in programs which are initiated.

Unlike traditional programs, it is difficult to set milestones which will chart the progress of a peace program. There are no concrete structures that can be measured, as in the case of roads and bridges. There are some statistics that could be tracked – e.g., reduction in violent crimes, reduction in clan conflicts, increase in number of cases filed with and resolved by the courts, increase in private investments, etc. – but these would be external manifestations of the existence of an atmosphere of peace in society. And it would be difficult to set targets of accomplishment within fixed timeframes.

But the soul of peace, the changes within the hearts of Suluanos, will remain beyond the reach of measuring devices. One can only guess at it on the basis of the external manifestations one sees. But by their very nature, these internal changes will need time to take root and grow.

It is for these reasons – the immeasurable timeframe for peace programs to take effect and the difficulty of establishing benchmarks of progress – that peace advocates must not lose heart, that perseverance is required even when conditions appear to be discouraging and, most important of all, that vigilance must be exercised to protect whatever gains may be achieved.

Warriors for Peace

If progress is achieved, then perhaps the warrior Suluanos, known for their courage and ferocity in battle, will be known as *Gagandilan sin Kasajahitran*, Warriors for Peace, applying their courage, honor and steadfastness in the pursuit of peace for their homeland.



Research Team

The Culture of Peace study for Sulu was undertaken by a two-man team consisting of Victor M. Taylor and Abraham J. Idjirani.

Vic (known to his friends as “Wahoo”) has worked in government, the NGO field and in the business sector. Following his studies at the Ateneo de Manila University, Vic spent two years teaching at the Notre Dame of Jolo College in Jolo, Sulu. The ties he established in Sulu at that time have lasted to the present. Upon returning to Manila, Vic spent five years working with the Office of the President of the Philippines and subsequently two years serving as a Technical Assistant to one of the Undersecretaries in the Department of National Defense. During his tenure at the Office of the President, Vic oversaw several programs aimed at addressing the secessionist struggle in Mindanao during the early 1970s and joined the Panel that undertook the first Peace Talks with the Moro National Liberation Front in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in early 1975, under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Vic also worked for five years in the Middle East, specifically Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and later headed a management consulting company in the Philippines. He also served as Country Representative of a U.S. electric utility that made investments in the power sector in the Philippines and currently is a Principal in an energy company with partners from the United States introducing a thermal energy storage system in the Philippines.

Abe Idjirani is currently Secretary-General of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo. He has had a varied work experience including one with the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor. Abe has a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education, a Master’s degree in Education as well as a Bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering.

In his capacity as Secretary-General of the Sultanate, Abe was invited in 2001 to meet with U.S. State Department officials in Washington D.C. for discussions on the situation in Mindanao.

