

CONTRASTING AGENDA FOR PEACE IN THE MUSLIM SOUTH

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The protagonists in the present conflict in the Muslim South are the Philippine Government, the Marxists, and the Muslim rebels, with each distrusting the others and claiming to represent the interests and views of some segments of the population. The Government asserts that the problems of the region are essentially economic and political in character and thus implemented a reconstruction and development program. The Marxists perceive the conflict as a contrivance of the ruling classes to keep the oppressed masses in collective slavery, and believe that the only alternative is a genuine democratic revolution. The Muslim rebels believe that the (Christian) Filipino people have become the new colonizers, and are convinced that the structure of relationship between the Muslim South and the Republic must be substantially altered. However, it is apparent that: (a) the Government continues to ignore the "national" character of the Muslim population, (b) the Marxists lack appreciation for the cultural and religious roots of the conflict, and (c) the Muslims should also give reassurances of sincerity, if they themselves need it.

There has been little peace in the areas of Muslim concentration in the Southern Philippines over the past decade.¹ Whether the fighting is described as a conflict between Christians and Muslims, or between Northern Filipinos and Southern Filipinos, or between Philippine government forces and rebel terrorists, or between the ruling classes and the oppressed masses, the causes of the conflict are complex and defy both easy description and easy solution. The toll of human suffering in terms of lives lost, bodies maimed, hatreds generated, dreams shattered and property damaged or destroyed is so great that the search for peace in this unhappy land ought to be, if in fact it is not, the foremost imperative of the nation.

There are three main protagonists in the present conflict in this region:

1. The Philippine government, which claims to represent the national interests and views of the majority population (predominantly Christian) of the Philippine Republic;
2. The Marxists, of various kinds, embodied in the Communist Party of the

Philippines (CCP), the New People's Army (NPA), and the National Democratic Front (NDF), all of which claim to represent the interests and views of the "oppressed masses," whether Christian, Muslim or Tribal Filipinos;

3. The Muslim rebels, of which the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is the pre-eminent organization, claiming to represent the interests and views of the Muslim Filipino population.

This essay is premised on the belief that setting out in clear and simple language the agenda for peace in Mindanao and Sulu proposed by each of these protagonists is a worthwhile exercise in the search for peace. It has not often been done, and never with dispassion, for each protagonist has been so concerned to stress the justice of its own position and the injustice or deception of the positions of those it opposes, that statements of its peace agenda turn out to be exercises in propaganda. Our concern in this essay to sift through the propaganda of the protagonists and attempt to delineate the broad outlines of what each sees as the principal problems inhibiting, and hence the essential conditions for, a just and durable peace in the Muslim South.

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This is a large task for an essay of short compass and the danger is that in summarizing complicated issues and policies the writer will disfigure or present a caricature of deeply held convictions. This is not intended, of course. Indeed, the intention is to present as fair-minded a statement of each position as possible, assuming the sincerity and integrity of each protagonist. The writer is aware that many will consider that an unwarranted and naive assumption. There are some, for example, who insist that the Government is not really interested in peace in the Southern Philippines, that despite all its rhetoric to the contrary, it actually seeks to keep things stirred up in Mindanao and Sulu to provide an excuse for continuing martial law.² There are others who just as insistently argue that the Communists are involved in stirring up rebellion among the cultural minorities in Mindanao (especially the Muslims) not out of any real feeling of ideological solidarity with them, but as a tactical ploy to ease Government pressure on CPP/NPA activities in Luzon. Still others contend that the MNLF is not genuinely interested in preserving Islam and protecting the Muslim community; that, on the contrary, the MNLF wants to establish for its own power and glory a new nation-state carved out of Philippine territory, and simply uses Islam as a means to justify itself before, and to attract the support of, the Muslim world.³ Possibly these sorts of charges do apply to certain individuals in each camp, but at the same time it is evident beyond contradiction that the different peace agenda proposed respectively by the leadership of the Government, the Marxists and the Muslim rebels speak to the grievances and aspirations of large numbers of their followers. Our assumption, then, is that the sincerity and integrity of the different communities of people for whom the respective leaders speak, and to whom they must appeal for support, is unquestioned.

Peace is more than the absence of war, the cessation of fighting. It is a state of well-being, which is exactly what the Arabic word *salam*

connotes. The overwhelming majority of human beings in Mindanao and Sulu, and all persons of goodwill elsewhere in the Philippines, sorely desire a lasting and honorable solution to the present tragic, costly warfare which is not just a silencing of guns but the establishing of justice, prosperity, and happiness among all the people there.

The Philippine Government

We begin, then, with a discussion of what the Government of the Republic of the Philippines sees as the major challenges to peace in the Muslim South and what it sees as the conditions for a lasting peace in that region.

Various government officials and documents (e.g., Department of Public Information, 1977:3) in the Muslim South have pointed to many different elements which contribute to unrest and rebellion there. Nearly all stress the historical inequities, misunderstandings, and neglect which have long characterized the region. They put much of the blame on Western colonialism, arguing that the policies of Spain and the United States resulted in severing "the basic unity of Filipinos," and leaving "a legacy of social instability in Mindanao and nearby islands." Government officials and documents acknowledge that not only the colonial administrations but also the politicians of the Philippine Republic accorded low priority to development in the Southern Philippines, especially in the Muslim areas. This neglect had the effect of preventing local citizens from learning the skills and acquiring the habits and frame of thought necessary for their personal as well as regional growth and development. It is readily acknowledged that land-grabbing by powerful and unscrupulous persons and corporations in collusion with some corrupt government officials contributed to an explosive situation in the South. Political factionalism coupled with the existence of private armies loyal to local warlord politicians also contributed. Other contributing factors include the manipulation of religious and cultural differences for self-serving political and economic ends. In short, the Government recogni-

zes that the exploitation of unlettered and powerless people by outsiders, the relative underdevelopment of the region and the inadequacy of social services gave rise among the Muslims to a sense of being discriminated against (Melchor, 1974:163-164, 168). There is also recognition that the massive influx of aggressive Christian settlers from the northern and central islands bringing with them new styles of community life, new values, and new political institutions (such as party politics and the electoral process) proved disruptive to the more tradition-bound Muslim communities (Yap-Diango, 1979).

Government officials and documents emphasize that the fighting which erupted in Mindanao in the past decade is not a "religious war." Foreign Affairs Minister Carlos P. Romulo has remarked with regard to the warfare in the South, that there is "absolutely nothing religious in the conflict, just the usual political, feudal, economic and personal fights" (Utrecht, 1973:91). Ambassador Leon Ma. Guerrero in his widely circulated essay on "Encounter of Cultures" (1973:20) addressed himself to the same issue:

Despite the subconscious fears of the unlettered, the age of religious wars is over in the Philippines, if only because religion itself has, by and large, ceased to be the overwhelming pre-occupation of present-day Filipinos. . . Nobody in the Philippines seeks to convert by force the infidel to *kafir*, which is the essence of a religious war.

Even so, the Government acknowledges that at least some Muslims deeply suspect that the aim of public policy is to convert them to Christianity — and that after the declaration of martial law in September 1972, rumors to that effect were widespread in the Muslim South. One Government report states that "when the armed forces required the surrender of all firearms in civilian hands, some political groups in Mindanao resisted this as an official stratagem to effect forcible conversion" (Department of Public Information, 1977:4).

Indeed, it is the Government's view that various persons and anti-government groups

have deliberately exploited the volatile situation in the South for their own ends, notably leftist elements which have organized and led Muslim rebels. Nur Misuari and the MNLF are regarded as the chief culprits. "The MNLF," says a major Government document, "is one of those groups that have conveniently manipulated the religious fervor of the Southern Filipinos to wage a secessionist movement. . ." The same document (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1977:5-6) also states that

Nur Misuari had established his reputation as a Marxist at the University of the Philippines. As a dedicated ideologue honed in the teachings of Maoism, he spotted a golden opportunity in mobilizing deep-felt Muslim grievances for political ends.

In the Government's view, however, the Muslim rebels have not been more than a tiny minority within the Muslim Filipino community, "the greater majority of whom acknowledge an allegiance to the Republic and support its constituted Government" (Department of Public Information, 1977:8).

Alejandro Melchor, when he was Presidential Executive Secretary, served from 1973 to 1975 as Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for the Reconstruction and Development of Mindanao. In that capacity he spelled out what has been the Government's basic agenda for peace in the Muslim South — an agenda which President Marcos himself reaffirmed in early May 1977 right after talks with the MNLF on the basis of the Tripoli Agreement had collapsed.⁴

The Reconstruction and Development Program for Mindanao and Sulu is part of the national development objectives of the Government which seeks the development of every region of the country and a more equitable distribution of the nation's income and wealth. The Government has sought to assure Muslim Filipinos that they share equally with all other Filipinos in the drive for development, that they are to receive an equal allocation of the rewards and distribution of benefits, and that where historical inequities exist, by neglect or design, the imbalance is to be redressed by

tipping development in favor of the disadvantaged (Melchor, 1974:165).

The Government has the view that the problems of the Muslim South are essentially economic and political in character, not military — hence they require economic and political solutions, not a military solution. Accordingly, the Government's approach is to bring about conditions in the Muslim South for the achievement of national solidarity based on the historical, racial, cultural, geographical, and political oneness of the Filipino nation. The achievement of this unity, however, is a two-way process. Muslim Filipino and other ethnic groups will have to adapt to the socio-political requirements of modernization. At the same time, the Christian Filipino majority will have to appreciate the rich cultural heritage of these ethnic groups, which is an indispensable element of Philippine history and culture and a genuine source of national strength (Melchor, 1974). In connection with this last, President Marcos himself has rejected the concepts of integration or assimilation for the country's cultural communities insofar as these concepts imply the suppression of individual cultural traits and values in favor of one national set of mores (Taylor, 1974:12).

The Reconstruction and Development program of the Government is implemented through three broad types of activities: rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development. The first two cover activities needed to restore normalcy in the region; the third covers the expansion of productive facilities and social services. Rehabilitation activities include assistance to refugees, amnesty and assistance to rebel surrenderees, upgrading and streamlining local governments, and revitalizing the local police and security forces. Reconstruction activities undertake the repair of damaged infrastructure and seek to restore the region to the pre-crisis levels of its productive capacity. Development activities go beyond reconstruction and undertake to accelerate and expand infrastructure projects, agricultural and industrial production, and

health and education services (Melchor, 1974:166).

Beyond all this, the Government program includes projects which preserve and enhance the Islamic heritage and culture of Muslim Filipinos, which, after all, are part of the national heritage and culture. A code of Muslim Personal Law has been drawn up and promulgated; the Philippine Amanah Bank has been established and capitalized to meet the special banking requirements of Muslims; Islamic studies institutes have been set up at the University of the Philippines and Mindanao State University; assistance has been provided for the revival of traditional skills and handicrafts; Arabic has been recognized as an official language in Muslim areas; Islamic holidays have official sanction in the Muslim South; the annual pilgrimage to Mecca has been brought under efficient government management; and many other things have been done to respond to the specifically Islamic concerns of Muslim Filipinos. Presidential Decree No. 410 which reserves ancestral lands for the cultural communities, including the Muslims, aims at defusing one of the most persistent and serious problems in relations between the Muslim South and the rest of the country.

The Government is well aware of accusations that a wide gap exists between what it says it is doing and what is actually seen done in the Muslim South. But it protests that the New Society is not really given a chance to demonstrate its capacity to generate reforms and activate development plans because of the disruption of peace and order by Muslim rebels. So much of its resources are poured into restoring order and providing security for law-abiding citizens. The various "peace talks" it has entered into with the rebels at home and abroad have been unavailing because of the negative and refractory tactics and impossible demands of the rebel negotiators.⁵

The Government is willing to grant regional administrative autonomy in the Muslim South, and has already established the structures for it. The rebels, however, are demanding the sort

of autonomy that would amount to virtual independence and destroy the unitary character of the Philippine State. This the Government cannot allow.

So the fighting continues, with rebels now completely violating the ceasefire proviso in the December 1976 Tripoli Agreement. The first step in any meaningful agenda for peace has to be the cessation of senseless enmity. The Government insists that it is ready to do this and then to proceed on to fully implement the reconstruction and development program. In the words of President Marcos (Tiamson and Cafete, 1979:17), reacting to the breakdown of peace negotiations with the Muslim rebels in May 1976:

On our part, we should, as a mature and responsible government, take this as a challenge, not to make war, as some would strongly suggest, but by systematic and deliberate ways to enlarge the domain of peace, by investing more of our available resources, so that we may quicken the pace of progress, and make more equitable the sharing of its fruits among a greater number of beneficiaries.

The Marxists

Marxists in the Philippines range from intellectuals who simply subject Philippine Society and events to Marxist analysis (a la Renato Constantino) to armed revolutionaries espousing what they label "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought" (a la Jose Ma. Sison).⁶ In looking at the situation in the Southern Philippines, it is generally their perception that the conflict between Christians and Muslims is a contrivance of the ruling classes designed to keep the oppressed masses from uniting together to throw off their collective slavery. Religious differences, say the Marxists, have been manipulated to cunningly divide the oppressed and downtrodden people. One Marxist writer, Felix Razon, contends that over 80% of the Muslims are landless farmers, mercilessly exploited by a combination of the traditional feudal landlords and the more modern mer-

chant or entrepreneurial class tied to foreign transnational corporations which, in turn, connive with corrupt government officials and military officers to manipulate the political and legal institutions to oppress the Muslims. He further charges that Muslim rural and urban workers, craftsmen, artisans and petty professionals, for their part, are subjected to skyrocketing prices of basic commodities, due to inflation, degrading working conditions, unfair taxation, unemployment and discrimination in all forms. Indeed, Razon sounds a theme common in all Marxist reflection on the situation in the Southern Philippines, namely, that the masses of both Muslims and Christians are equally poor and wretched and in thrall to their rulers (Razon, 1976:46). *Ang Bayan*, the underground organ of the Communist Party of the Philippines commented in its August 31, 1978 issue (p. 11) that the "National Minorities" (including Muslim Filipinos) share the same hardships as the broad masses of the Filipino workers and peasants and that (p. 12)

the misery of their lives — sickness, hunger, deceit, insults, neglect, ignorance — is the same misery borne by their brother Filipinos who are exploited and oppressed, just as they are, by the U.S. imperialist, big landlords and big bourgeois compradors.

The immediate enemy is seen to be what Marxists call the "fascist Marcos regime" together with the "reactionary classes," including some Muslim traditional leaders "who resemble medieval despots." The long-range enemy, however, is American, and to a lesser degree Japanese, imperialism operating through the transnational or multinational corporations (e.g., Dole, Del Monte, United Fruit, B.F. Goodrich, Firestone, various timber companies, etc.). Mindanao and Sulu, the Marxists say, provide one of the richest sources of raw materials for the multinational corporations which thus greedily dispossess "the Muslims of their ancestral homes, trampling on their farms and cultural institutions, plundering their natural resources" (Razon, 1976:46-49). This, according to the Marxists, is exactly the root of the

Mindanao Problem. Jose Ma. Sison (alias Amado Guerrero) who until his capture in October 1977 was Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, declared that behind the "brutality and viciousness of the Marcos fascist dictatorship is the scheme of U.S. imperialism, and domestic big bourgeoisie and the big landlord class to remove every obstacle to the accelerated exploitation of the Moro people, seizure of vast tracts of land and plunder of the natural resources in the Minsupala area" (Guerrero, 1977).

Marxists recognize that the Mindanao Problem goes back a long way, and they stress that it was "hatred" for the "national minorities" which prompted the foreign and native ruling classes to spread chauvinism (narrow-minded nationalism) among the Filipino masses, using schools, churches, newspapers, and other ideological instruments for the purpose. They taught the masses to reject the "national minorities" as "uncivilized" people who were either savage or ridiculous. These attitudes helped to excuse the oppression and exploitation of the minorities and treating with contempt their customs and laws (*Ang Bayan*, August 31, 1978:11).

Some Marxists believe that it may be possible eventually to peacefully install in the Philippines a regime of freedom and democracy and prosperity — if ever again open discussion and free elections will be permitted. Many other Marxists, however, are convinced that this is only an illusion — that elections under the New Society, as previously under the Old Society, are bankrupt, impotent, corrupt, and only serve to advance foreign imperialist interests. The only alternative, they believe, is a genuine democratic revolution (Liberation, July 31, 1978:17-18). With regard to the Muslim South, they contend that nothing short of the destruction of the present "chauvinist, oppressive and pro-imperialist state" will bring the Moros the genuine autonomy they desire (Liberation, June 15, 1973:12-13). Jose Sison

has said that the Moros have every right to secede from the present reactionary state and that this is in full accord with Leninist teachings. He points out that the Moro secession struggle is akin to the struggle of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army to create political power independent of, and opposed to, the Marcos regime. Sison invites the Moros to join forces with the CPP/NPA in overthrowing the present regime and the ruling system and to support the effort to carry out a democratic revolution of a new type by the entire Filipino people. It is only through a successful democratic state that the Moros can give full democratic substance to their struggle for self-determination and put right the gross injustices which have been inflicted upon them. But even then, says Sison, the Moros will retain the right to secede as a safeguard against national oppression. "At the same time," he says, "they shall be responsible as they are today for opposing imperialism and reaction and guarding against sheer localism and sectarianism." (Guerrero, 1979).

In a ten-page draft of a "discussion manual" for a *General Mass Course* prepared by the CPP/NPA for use in "liberated areas," there is presented a broad outline of what the Marxists see to be the structure of the revolutionary society they have in mind. The government of that society will be constituted by the "organs of political power," with the Barrio Revolutionary Committee being the basic unit, followed by people's councils for the municipal, provincial and district levels. A National People's Congress — the highest organ of the revolutionary government — will have the participation of all democratic classes and groups in Philippine society. All who serve the people's government, from barrio committee to Congress, will be elected by the people, except that members of the former ruling classes will have no right to elect or be elected and will be prevented from interfering in the choice of officials. Under the revolutionary society, all nationalities (including Muslim Filipinos) and democratic classes and groups and individuals will enjoy the

political and economic rights of which they were deprived under the semicolonial and semifeudal society. Moreover, all democratic classes, groups and individuals will enjoy the full democratic rights to free speech, free assembly, and freedom of religion. The People's Government will confiscate and distribute to the landless the vast landholdings of the big landlords. It will confiscate and control primary and basic industries as well as banks and financial institutions. Private enterprises will be permitted in light and medium scale industries, but price and profit margins will be regulated. The People's Government will also provide free education which will aim at wiping out ignorance and superstition, while raising consciousness along nationalist and scientific lines. Respect will be shown for freedom of thought and religion, though care will be taken that that freedom is not used against the revolution or detrimental to the interests of the people.

Marxists believe that the Muslim Filipinos will be glad to participate in such a revolutionary society. Sison, for one, is persuaded that the Moros are not struggling merely for "cultural autonomy" or "religious autonomy." "The Moro People's struggle," he says, "is clearly an all-round revolutionary struggle for national democracy and is connected to the revolutionary struggle of the entire Filipino people" (Guerrero, 1977). At the same time, Marxists recognize that the Muslim Filipinos and other national minorities are still to some extent under the power of their anti-democratic traditional leaders. The Communist Party of the Philippines has called for the development of a new type of leadership among the national minorities — a revolutionary leadership which will help to supplant the traditional leadership that has not only failed to protect their people but has assisted and participated in exploiting them (*Ang Bayan*, August 31, 1978:13).

The policy of the Communist Party of the Philippines towards all the national minorities has been to make the "necessary class analysis" and to adopt a proletarian stand. "This is the only way by which the Party can most profoundly integrate with them," writes Jose Ma.

Sison. "By developing Party cadres and Red fighters among the national minorities, the Party can overthrow not only the entire puppet state but also the local tyrants in the territories of the national minorities (Guerrero, 1971:274). This, then, is the CPP's rationale for all its efforts to forge solidarity with the Muslims in the South.

The Muslim Rebels

In a *Manifesto* addressed to the Sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in July 1975, the Moro National Liberation Front spelled out in considerable detail the historical and immediate causes for the absence of peace in the Muslim South.

The *Manifesto* begins with the affirmation that the Moro people are a single nation having a common past and a common future, endowed with a common culture and a common religion and occupying a well-defined territory of its own. "Before the era of colonialism," says the *Manifesto*, "this land was the seat of a sovereign and independent government — recognized and respected by both far and near," including the great imperial China of the past.

First Spanish and then American colonialism, "possessed by the overpowering urge to plunder and spread Western civilization," descended upon the Moro nation, encroaching on its sacred land and waging a war of conquest that lasted nearly four centuries (*Manifesto*, 1975: 2).

In the wars of conquest, Filipinos from the North were recruited into the forces of the colonialists and also made war on the Bangsa Moro people. Hence the Filipino people were always at loggerheads with the Moros and they became blood enemies. But the Moros defended themselves, withstanding the successive onslaughts of the colonial powers and their Filipino allies "for the sake of their common freedom, homeland and Islam." The resoluteness of the Bangsa Moro people, says the *Manifesto*, nullified every single agreement

which misguided Moro leaders signed with the imperialists; and the fact is that when World War II broke out, the Moros were "still technically in a state of war with American imperialism" (*Manifesto*, 1975: 4-5, 7). Nevertheless some of the Moros fought on the side of the Americans against the Japanese invaders while a few identified themselves with their fellow Asians. The majority, however, fought in self-defense and in defense, as always, of their national homeland, freedom and Islam. After World War II, the Americans and their Filipino co-conspirators set up a Republic in which the Bangsa Moro people and their homeland were unlawfully and arbitrarily included, despite all their protests to the contrary. This act sowed the seed of the present tragedy in the South — for overnight, the Filipino people, themselves oppressed and colonized all their lives, now became the colonizers of the Moro nation "which had stood the test of nearly four centuries of uninterrupted anti-colonial struggle." The *Manifesto* (1975:8) insists that

...our people have never ceased protesting against such an illegal and immoral imposition. And they have continuously taken up arms against the Philippine government to demonstrate their desire to be left alone to determine their future as well as of their homeland and Islam. . . Insofar as the Bangsa Moro people are concerned, the Filipino government has the birthmarks of its Spanish and American predecessors. Its most distinct mark is its colonial character.

In the perception of the MNLF, as expressed in the *Manifesto* (1975:8-10), the Filipino government and the Filipino people have the following six objectives with regard to the Muslim South:

1. To ensure that the Bangsa Moro people and their homeland will remain forever under the control and jurisdiction of the Philippine Government.

2. To effect the transfer of ownership and domination of the Bangsa Moro home-

land in favor of the Christian majority through the continuous influx of massive migrations of Christians from the Luzon and the Visayas.

3. To eradicate every manifestation of the national unity of the Bangsa Moro people through a divide-and-rule policy.

4. To destroy the national consciousness and Islamic identity of the Bangsa Moro people so as to ensure their complete "integration" into a monolithic Filipino society or nationhood through the promotion of cultural homogeneity. "Without the eradication of the Islamic culture and religion," says the *Manifesto* "integration in a meaningful way is seen as absolutely impossible." Schools, Christian missions and even violence are among the instruments of that eradication policy.

5. To legalize the exploitation and expropriation of the bounty of the Bangsa Moro homeland for the benefit of the Philippine Government, the Christian majority and certain foreign business interests.

6. To further the above aims by generating panic and chaos through the fomentation of violence in the Muslim South so as to force the Bangsa Moro people to abandon their lands, if not actually to bring about their demographic and/or cultural genocide.

It is possible to cite many events which occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's which were the immediate causes of escalated violence in the Muslim South — events such as the Jabi-dah Massacre of March 1968 which had among its spin-offs the emergence of the Mindanao Independence Movement and the MNLF; the terrorist activities of "Toothpick" and his *Itaga* followers in Cotabato in 1970; the violence connected with the election campaigns in Cotabato and Lanao in 1971 which saw Muslim "Blackshirts" and "Barracudas" pitted against

proliferating *Ilaga* groups, and so forth. But from the viewpoint of the Muslim rebels, the over-arching and underlying cause of their rebellion is the sincere and deep-seated fear that the Christian government and people of the Philippines have in mind the dispersion of the Bangsa Moro and the destruction of their region and culture. Dean Cesar A. Majul (1972:15), who is not a rebel but a Muslim Filipino moderate, has articulated that fear in these words:

It is very difficult to erase from the minds of Muslims that the government is a party to having more and more Christian settlers enter their ancestral home to eventually disperse them. Their belief has been nurtured by historical events and strengthened by contemporary happenings. . . This belief gains further credence when they discover that in some provinces where they were in the majority a generation or two ago, they have now become reduced to a minority in spite of their natural increase.

The Muslim rebels, represented pre-eminently by the MNLF, are convinced that nothing short of a substantial altering of the *structure* of the relationship between the Muslim South and the Philippine Republic will suffice to meet their grievances and fears. The MNLF up until mid-1974 had declared that it was engaged in a secessionist struggle which aimed to set up an independent Islamic Republic completely separate from the Republic of the Philippines. On the principle that reach inevitably exceeds grasp, the MNLF acceded to Resolution 18 of the Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (Kuala Lumpur, June 21-25, 1974) which called for a political and peaceful solution to the conflict between the Moros and the Government "within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines."⁷ Accordingly, the MNLF announced at talks with Philippine Government representatives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in January 1975 that it had modified its goal of secession to that of autonomy, spelling out what autonomy entailed in a "Four-Point Proposal."

At first the Philippine Government balked at the sort of autonomy the MNLF was proposing, but in tough negotiations in Libya in late 1976, Government and MNLF representatives concluded the so-called "Tripoli Agreement," signed on December 23 of that year. The Tripoli Agreement set forth the principles of structure and relationship which the signatories at the time believed would bring a just and enduring peace to the Muslim South. The details were to be worked out in subsequent negotiations which were held in the first half of 1977. The negotiations broke down because, claimed the Muslim rebels, the Philippine Government had taken measures to sabotage the Tripoli Agreement. Notable among those measures was the holding of a referendum-plebiscite on April 17, 1977 in the areas affected by the Agreement. Since the exercise was under the control of the central Government and was without the concurrence and participation of the MNLF, it was "illegal," in the opinion of the rebels, and had the "usual manipulated results."⁸

Though negotiations on the basis of the Tripoli Agreement have been stalled since the end of April 1977, the MNLF to this day looks to that Agreement as constituting a viable agenda for peace in the Muslim South.

Among its provisions were the following:

1. The establishment of autonomy in the Southern Philippines within the framework of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic.

2. The areas of autonomy for Muslims in the Southern Philippines will comprise the 13 provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Davao del Sur, South Cotabato and Palawan, and all of the cities and villages situated in those areas.

3. Foreign policy shall be in the competence of the Central Government of the Philippines.

4. In the areas of autonomy, the Muslims shall have the right to set up their own courts which implement the Sharia laws. The Muslims shall be represented in all courts including the Supreme Court.

5. Authorities in the South shall have the right to set up schools, colleges and universities.

6. The autonomous area shall have the right to organize a legislative assembly and an executive council, to be constituted through direct election.

7. A ceasefire is to be effected no later than January 20, 1977.

8. The grant of complete amnesty, release of political prisoners, return of refugees to their homes, and guarantee of freedom of movement and right of assembly.

9. Special Regional Security Forces are to be set up in the area of autonomy for the Muslims in the South of the Philippines.

10. A provisional government will be established to handle the election of the members of the legislative assembly.

The MNLF regards the setting up of the two present *Sangguniang Pampook* and other structures in the two so-called "Autonomous Regions" as nothing but sham. The MNLF suspects that aside from the intrinsic contradiction between genuine autonomy and martial law, the Philippine Government has had to back away from the Tripoli Agreement in the face of criticism from some sectors of the Government and Christian population that too many concessions were being made. The MNLF and other rebel groups are calling on Muslim countries, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia and the oil producing countries (now especially Iran), to apply pressure on the Marcos regime to come to terms with the Tripoli Agreement. They are also calling on the United States to stop supplying the arms which the Philippine

Government uses against the Muslims in the South.

Concluding Observations

In the preceding three sections, the agenda for peace have been summarized respectively for the three main protagonists in the conflict raging in the Muslim South. The contrasts should be obvious to even the most uninformed reader. Even so, the writer begs the indulgence of readers for the presumption of offering the following concluding observations:

1. The Philippine Government continues to ignore the "national" character of the Muslim population of the country, and therefore it fails to make the necessary accommodations to it. The Government's reconstruction and development agenda for peace seems to be predicated on the belief that the Muslim and Christian Filipinos are essentially one people, except that for historical reasons the Muslims have been left behind in their development and need help to catch up with the rest of the country. In fact, however, the Muslim and Christian Filipinos are two different nationalities which have emerged over the centuries from similar ethnic origins. The problem of creating a unified country out of plural nationalities is different from creating a united country out of a homogeneous population.

2. The gap between what the Government says it intends for the Muslim Filipinos and what it is perceived by the Muslims as actually doing is too great. The aims of the reconstruction and development programs are contradicted by the heavy hand of the military in some places in the Muslim South. The Muslims feel they have little reason to rely on the word or the goodwill of the Government and the atmosphere of relationships, past and present, simply does not inspire trust. Many Muslims are convinced that they will just have to fight hard for every concession.

3. The Marxists do seem to recognize the Moros as a nationality distinct from the majority population; and they speak of the Moros' "right" of self-determination. But the Moros associate Marxism (i.e., Communism) with Atheism, and hence most will have nothing to do with it. Moreover the record of Communist societies dealing with Muslim minorities, as in the Soviet Union and China, is well-known among Muslim Filipinos and there is considerable distrust of Marxists on that score.⁹

4. Marxists seem to have little appreciation for the long history and cultural and religious roots of the conflict in the Muslim South. Their effort at class analysis is doctrinaire and simplistic, and they are blinded by their dictum that religion and culture are but functions of economics and politics. Their almost single-minded focus on the exploitative activities of American and Japanese imperialism working through multinational corporations actually attracts little attention from the Moros, probably because the areas where those activities are most heavily concentrated on Mindanao are not the areas where the Muslim Filipino population is concentrated.¹⁰ Moros perceive that CPP/NPA rebels have in fact a rather different aim than the Muslim rebels: the former seek the overthrow of the Marcos regime and the establishment of a people's revolutionary republic; the latter seek only the establishment of a genuinely autono-

mous Muslim region.

5. It is entirely undesirable why Muslim rebels should be suspicious of Government policy and the motives of Christians, but it does seem that they are insufficiently aware of those individuals and sectors in the Government and in the general society which are sincerely trying to understand and respond positively to their legitimate grievances. Muslims do not often enough recognize who their friends are, and thus miss opportunities to forge strong alliances with elements in the Christian population which can strengthen their cause. Not all Christians are their enemies and the fact is, in the struggle for justice and peace in this land, Christians and Muslims of goodwill need each other.

6. It is also understandable why the Muslim rebels are so insistent on their demands for autonomy. But as a practical matter they should be more sensitive to the genuine and legitimate anxieties the Philippine nation has concerning any prospect of territorial dismemberment. Muslims should stress, more than they do, the positive contributions which they can and will make as loyal citizens of the Republic to the enterprise of Philippine (not just Moro) nation-building. If Muslims need reassurances of sincerity of the Philippine Government and Christian population, the latter also look for reassurances of Muslim Filipinos' sincerity.

Notes

¹The "Muslim South" refers to the 13 provinces in Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan and Palawan where the 2.2 million Muslim population of the Philippines has its greatest concentration. These include five provinces (Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi) with Muslim population majorities. The remaining eight provinces have substantial, though minority, Muslim Populations.

²Such a view was actually attributed by the public press to former Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal and it is a view widely held by the critics of the martial law regime.

³This was exactly the charge levelled at the MNLF leadership by former Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor at the talks between Philippine Government representatives and the MNLF under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in January 1975.

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⁴For Mr. Melchor's articulation of Government policy see the article mentioned (Melchor, 1974: 163-171). For President Marcos' reaffirmation of that policy, see "The President's Report on Southern Philippines" (Tiamson and Cañete, 1979:18).

⁵This protest was actually articulated by Secretary Melchor at the Jeddah talks (see note 2) in January 1975.

⁶For an attempt at a Marxist analysis of the "Mindanao Problem" see Silva, (1978). A general Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung Thought analysis of Philippine Society is found in Guerrero (1971).

⁷The text of Resolution 18 is found in *The Southwestern Philippines Question* (1977).

⁸The text of the Tripoli Agreement is reproduced in the *Southwestern Philippines Question* (1977, Annex XI, 76-82). President Marcos' version of the breakdown of the 1977 talks was presented in his May 3, 1977 speech to the Interim Batasang Pambansa, reproduced in Tiamson and Cañete, 1979:1-18. A Muslim rebel account of the breakdown of the talks is given in Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization, (1978:12-14).

⁹For insight into how the Moros come by such knowledge see Robert McAmis, *An Introduction to the Folk Tales of the Maranao Muslims of Mindanao in the Southern Philippines*, Transcript Series No. 9 (1976:15). For a general discussion of how at least one Muslim Filipino understands and reacts to Marxism, see Rasul, 1979, Chapter 4.

¹⁰This point is unintentionally supported in a brochure produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos, October 14, 1979. Entitled "What Has Happened to Our Land, Brother?," the brochure on page 13 (in the midst of a section on "Moros and the Mindanao Conflict") lists local and foreign corporations in Mindanao — and of the 10 provinces cited as having such corporations (which presumably exploit the masses and grab land) only one — Basilan — has a Muslim population majority.

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