

COMMENTS AND REACTIONS

WINNIE MAGDARAUG

Based on the history of our Muslim brothers in Mindanao, their aspirations have been characterized by open struggle against central authority. Their history is replete with the struggle against the Spaniards, then the Americans, and then the central government. Despite military adventures made by both Spain, America, and our central government, our Muslim brothers in Mindanao have not actually been subjugated by us. They have been convinced to be assimilated into our national mainstream through plebiscites and assurances of giving them their just dues. Our national government can be seen also to be leaning backward to give way to certain demands of our Muslim brothers and to accommodate them in order to stay by the sea. Even the Civil Code of the Philippines has acknowledged and has manifested this accommodation by recognizing the practice and marriage customs of our Muslim brothers. Today, to "buy" the peace again in Mindanao, we have granted regional autonomy to Regions 9 and 12 dominated by our Muslim brothers. The problem that I foresee is the composition of the leadership of these autonomous regions — the leader that has the backing, the trust, the confidence of majority of the people assuming that this accommodation, which we are granting now to Regions 9 and 12, would not work out the peace that we desire.

Assuming that fighting continues, would our central government withdraw the grant of autonomy to these regions or would it result again to an open arms struggle in order to subjugate our Muslim brothers?

Even in the grant of regional autonomy, Prof. Fernandez told us that there is a wide gap between the legitimate demand of the MNLF and the autonomous regional government which has actually been given to Regions 9 and 12.

Would this grant of autonomy pacify our Muslim brothers?

Since our discussion yesterday and today about regional autonomy is taking Regions 9 and 12 as models for granting the same autonomous regional government to other regions of the archipe-

lago, it would be using a model that has a very different structure, considering that our Muslim brothers have very different religious, political and social orientation as compared to the rest of our country. So, I would say that these cannot be the models that we must desire. Our national government has retained, as its exclusive prerogative, the right to enter into plebiscite and on foreign policy. The reason as I have been able to glean from the lecture of Dr. Fernandez is that, it would be reducing, our sovereignty and integrity if we grant this right to Regions 9 and 12. Actually, it is a smart move for President Marcos to see to it that peace is obtained in Mindanao and this grant of local autonomy is one of the mollifying gestures that the central government can offer our Muslim brothers. But still, it is my impression that this strategy is still experimental. I'm not also certain whether the administrative machineries, the mechanism, the political philosophy behind the grant of this autonomy is also applicable to all the regions in the Philippines.

OBDULIA CINCO

The grant of regional autonomy to Regions 9 and 12 has made a formulation of the foreign policy. While the President has espoused a policy of collective friendship with all nations, just whom to select and which countries to select as friends and non-friends would be quite difficult. Therefore, I should say that the best policy would be to adjust. We could formulate new changes again and reformulate the policies. There would be no such thing as a strict policy of friendship because as we all know, there is no such thing as being friendly all the time with one country. As we see it now and as what has been explained to us by our historian, Dr. Fernandez, and I repeat, I think the policy would be to adjust. Thank you.