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Philippines: ARMM - Where Democracy was Murdered

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The administration of President Noynoy Aquino (PNOY) has put the postponement of ARMM election in August 8, 2011 and synchronize it to 2013 election one of its priority bills. The reasons for the postponement have been varied depending on the various views of the Presidential Advisers whose common denominator is closeness to the president but all of them are not from Mindanao. The House of Representatives had immediately passed House Bill (HB) 4146 and the Senate had just passed the Senate Bill (DB) 2756 (June 6, 2011) just before they adjourned their session "sine die". This unfortunate approval by both houses of congress was done because of the pressure of the President himself using the magic of the pork barrel and despite of the overwhelming resistance and disapproval of the majority of the people not only in ARMM but in the whole country as shown by the result of the survey conducted by Social Weather Station (SWS) as early as first week of March 2011. Fifty one percent (51%) of the respondents did not favor the postponement of ARMM election did not agree and only twenty four percent (24%) favored it.

The President's pressure was so strong and intense that the governors in ARMM had to change this views many times but they finally stood for elections just before the Senate decided to postpone it. The COMELEC because of the same pressure had to postpone the filing of candidacy of those running for different positions in the ARMM several times.

Almost a Year After... How life has changed in ARMM for the worst!

It has not been a year yet since PNoy became the President because of his pledge to the people who voted for him that he would be complete opposite to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) and that he would follow the wishes and wisdom of the people. In fact in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) he stated that the people will be his boss (Kayo po ang Boss ko!). And now, less than a year after PNoy is acting just like, if not worse than his predecessors including the Dictator Marcos who was ousted by the people and put his (PNOY) mother into the presidency and whose legacy including his late father Senator Ninoy Aquino, has made PNoy got the highest mandate of the people in 2010 elections.

In PNoy's speech during the 113th Celebration of the Philippine Independence, he had emphasized that freedom without dignity is not worth it but dignity without democracy is unthinkable or freedom without democracy is simply a fallacy.

How can the people of ARMM live with dignity when democracy has been hijacked by those people they put in power to help them guard and nurture it?.

How can the people of ARMM live with dignity when democracy has been murdered by those people who claimed to be the bearer of its light because they have been direct beneficiaries of it? Why are the peoples of ARMM punish by depriving to them democracy because reforms should be in place before they can genuinely and democratically chose their own leaders? And the worst is that, PNoy and his advisers as well as supporters are trying to say the people of ARMM do not want reforms

now as if having elections as set by law (RA. 9333) would mean people would want to continue with the Ampatuan way of governance and block voting style during elections. As if having elections as scheduled the people of ARMM would not want that the billions of pesos or dollars which came in the region would not be audited and have people be accountable to them. As if having ARMM election in August 2011 would not provide the proper atmosphere to the ongoing talks between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). No, in fact, the people of ARMM want the opposite. They want clean and honest elections that is why they want that as part of the preparation the COMELEC should be cleansed first before they (COMELEC) can clean the voters' list. In fact, the people of ARMM wants more than the cleansing, they want to see the people in COMELEC punish and jail for rigging the 2004, 2007 and 2010 elections and not put them in charge of the elections synchronized or unsynchronized ones. And in fact, the people of ARMM would not just want to stop the Ampatuan's style of block voting they would want to see the Ampatuans and the their supporters all arrested, put into trial and sent to jail for murdering the votes of the people of ARMM for so many years and for the Maguinadanao massacre which they did to continue their rule in the region unchallenged. And in fact, the people of ARMM would want to see all those responsible in creating and protecting the Ampatuans arrested, put into trial and punish by at least jailing them or buried them alive using the backhoes which buried the 53 innocent people murdered in Maguindanao last November 23, 2009. Then and only then can genuine reforms be instituted by PNoy with the people and not apart from them but definitely excluding the Presidential Advisers and their anointed ones.

The people of ARMM would want to see PNOY and his Administration not just be different from the previous administration but should be far better in terms of looking into their interests. And this is best implemented by active participation of the people themselves. Reforms even for the best intention for the peoples' interest without the people whose names have been used for such reforms are not sustainable to say the least but worst because it is dictatorial in essence. To have reforms from above is not only dreaming but it is as if trying to hit the moon from Malacanang.

After almost a year in office, PNOY and his advisers should stop blaming the past GMA administration for the failures or inaction of today. They should not be conscious of their present works for the next administration not to have the same difficult situation than they have had. They should focus their works to answer today's burning issues of poverty, hunger and corruption and proactively work for the sustainable and holistic solution. Then the positive impact of these actions for the next generations and administrations will be in place. In short, PNOY and his advisers should altogether stop blaming the past for the woes and miseries of peoples today and should immediately wake up from daydreaming for making the works of the next administration as difficult as he has after GMA. They should come to their senses and work with the people to solve the problem or at least alleviate of hunger by almost a third of the population (more than 50% in ARMM). They should focus to solve or at least minimize the problem of unemployment which affect almost 50% of the total labor force and develop alternative but sustainable livelihood so that the unending exodus of our precious human resources leaving the country (almost 5,000 workers leave the country everyday looking for work anywhere in the world). These modern "exoducians" can definitely help the country more than the other countries which exploit them.

They should focus to understand the historical complexities and current realities of Mindanao in order to make a step towards building sustainable, people centered and community based peace in Mindanao in particular and the country in general. PNOY should not only listen to his non-Mindanaoan advisers who become instant experts on Mindanao but most especially to the voices of Mindanaoan on the ground.

And reforms in the ARMM for 21 months?

PNoy and his advisers must be dreaming! Even if they put their most favorite friends in the different positions in the Region, they can never perform or even make a difference in the ARMM except maybe to prepare themselves for the 2013 elections (Senate version on the synchronization of the elections).

The freezing of the assets and finances of the Ampatuans in the different banks for instance is again hollow propaganda because everybody knows that the Ampatuans were and are not fan of the banks and if they did have money in the banks, these are not in their names. The Administration can better check the banks in specific period (just before the declaration of martial law in the province of Maguindanao and the City of Cotabato) and they can have a surprise in their lives. One of the managers of these banks had already died. But worst is that, freezing the Ampatuans' assets, they have also frozen the money intended for the ARMM budget the biggest part of which is for the personal services and salaries. Definitely a deliberate move to pressure the ARMM employees to submit themselves to the wishes of Malacanang. The moves are not hurting those officials who have enriched themselves in the region for they will always have their reserves. They are surely hitting the ordinary people working in the ARMM.

Included or inserted in the bill for the postponement and synchronization of elections in the ARMM in the authority for PNoy to appoint ARMM officials who will be in acting capacity to govern ARMM for the next twenty one months. These OICs will have greater advantage over the other candidates in 2013 because of these appointments. So when the political adviser of PNoy was saying over the radio during an interview just before the senate approved SB 2657, that the reason for synchronization of elections in 2013 would eliminate the undue advantage of the Administration candidate over the others (no administration candidate had ever lost in ARMM elections). He was eating his words. Worst, he (political adviser) and two others (Sec. Ging Deles and Sec. Robredo) will be part of the screening committee for the appointees of PNoy. The process will make sure that their favorites (albeit past records) will be the ones who will be elected in 2013 elections. "Daang matuwid o daang mapanlinlang...? Make your choice...

ARMM will have a full meaning consistent of the actuations of PNoy and his advisers, "A" stand for Aquino and should be read as Aquino Region for Muslim Mindanao.

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P.S.

* <http://mindanaonotebook.blogspot.com/2011/06/armm-where-democracy-was-murdered.html>