

# **The Struggle for Self-Determination of the Bangsamoro Revolutionary Fronts: A Historical Perspective and Current Realities**

Saturday 18 August 2012, by [SOLIS Richard](#) (Date first published: August 2012).

## Contents

- [INTRODUCTION](#)
- [1. PUSH FORWARD: The GRP-MNLF](#)
- [2. THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETER](#)
- [3. MNLF DIVIDED](#)
- [4. THE MILF: The Bangsamoro](#)
- [5. LESSONS FOR LEARNING - \(...\)](#)
- [6. CONCLUSION](#)

## INTRODUCTION

In the neo-liberal stage of global capital, the internationalization of the dominant mode of production has facilitated the formation of one global market and establish an interdependence of nations. The financialization of capital and the advent of electronic technology as some of its basic characteristics has increased the intensity of unifying the world materially and spiritually and even suppress the bases for national conflicts and antagonisms between and among nations and peoples.

The current stage of capitalism today even blurred the relationship of the social classes in countries and nations. It has been manifested in the diminishing role of the superstructure-nation-state- in almost all of the countries. Neo-liberal policies and programs have been implemented in the recipient countries by the un-elected and unseen technocrats behind the multi-lateral institutions thus rendering hollow and irrelevant the role and functions of a nation-state.

The classical understanding that the ruling class in any given nation used the state as their political instrument to dominate the people has become subject for rethinking.

In the peripheral country like the Philippines or in Mindanao in particular. The process of making the island as one feasible market has been started in the late eighties but especially in the mid-nineties during the period of President Fidel Ramos who had signed the 1996 peace agreement with Nur Misuari of MNLF. But the process has also created uneven, backward and combined development of capitalist mode of production in the different areas in Mindanao. The economic exploitation, political marginalization and cultural alienation of most of the peoples in the island has intensified as the global capital with the direct cooperation of the island's bourgeoisie hungered for more profit at the expense of the toiling masses. The development of political consciousness of people especially in the far-flung areas has been stunted and hence has created a situation susceptible for fundamentalist and ultra-left infiltration and influence.

The broadest section of the dominant nationality also known as Christian settlers, the Moro people and the Indigenous peoples or Lumads in Mindanao and the neighboring islands have been struggling for democratic, social and national emancipation and liberation against the unending greed of the global capital and its local partners. They have been suffering from the same problems, struggles against the same cause of suffering but they have not reached a higher level of solidarity. In fact their differences and peculiarities have been used by their enemy to divide them while the global capital has treated them as one entity as a productive force and as a viable market.

The struggle for self-determination of the Moro people should be seen as the struggles of the Lumads and the toiling masses of the Christian settlers. The struggle of the Lumads and the Christian settlers should be seen by the Moro people as part of their struggle of democratic, social and national liberation. But this kind of outlook can be best understood if one should put the struggle in its historical perspective and contextualize it in the current realities. The following then is an attempt to read and understand the struggle for self-determination of the Moro people.

## **1. PUSH FORWARD: The GRP-MNLF and GPH-MILF TALKS**

Currently, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace panels had just concluded their 30<sup>th</sup> Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In their (Government of the Philippines-GPH and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front-MILF) joint statement, they identified the positive developments of the talk especially in the discussion on power and wealth sharing through the creation of Technical Working Committees (TWCs). They also condemned the latest attacks by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) to the different villages in the province of Maguindanao to derail the peace talks. It is expected that the final signing of peace accord is in the offing in a very near future. Initiatives have been started already with regards to Constitutional Change from both houses of Congress and from the certified allies of the current administration in Congress precisely to prepare for constitutional accommodation of the peace accord.

Sixteen years ago today, the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) had signed a final peace agreement. The peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF is the second agreement that was signed, the first one was signed in 1976 or twenty years earlier and famously known as the Tripoli Agreement. The 1976 peace agreement was signed by the GRP under the Marcos dictatorship and the 1996 peace agreement was signed between the GRP headed by President Fidel V. Ramos a former general and the Chair of the MNLF, Nur Misuari (who also signed the 1976 Tripoli Agreement in behalf of the MNLF).

Thirteen (13) years after the Tripoli Agreement (1976) and during the period of President Corazon C. Aquino (the mother of President Noynoy Aquino) a law Republic Act (RA) 6734 creating the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was integrated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution but after several years that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) had splitted from the MNLF. After the signing of the final peace agreement between the MNLF and the GRP in September 1996, the RA 6734 was amended and became RA 9054. It had defined the nature and characteristics of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao where the key players were given by then the Ramos administration to the MNLF headed by Nur Misuari who ran unopposed in a regional election in 1997 as governor of ARMM under the ruling party (Lakas NUCD). In November of 1996 or less than three months after the signing of final peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF, the government opened up talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the stated main objective is to resolve the Bangsamoro problem. For almost sixteen years now that talks have not reached anything except agreements in principle. Meanwhile, the MNLF have been divided

several times effectively weakening their position in pursuing the fulfillment of the incomplete implementation of the agreement. The MILF has been divided too even before the signing of an agreement with government. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter or BIFF which accused the MILF current leadership to be too compromising with the government. After creating the BIFF, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) was formed as a political front of the BIFF under the leadership of Ombra Kato, the former commander of the MILF Base Command 105.

Meanwhile the government of President Benigno Aquino (PNoy) had enacted another law RA 10153 to postpone the May 2011 ARMM election to 2013 synchronizing with the national elections and gave authority to the President to appoint the Executive and Legislative bodies of ARMM. The law (RA 10153) specified that its purpose is to have the present set up of ARMM to act as transition mechanism for the “new” autonomous set up as a preparation for the expected result of the talks to constitutionally accommodate the MILF - that is if the aforementioned talks will not go nowhere. But already, both houses of Congress have announced that they want to have some amendments to the country’s constitution so that economic policies can be changed favourable to the foreign businesses and intentionally hiding the accommodation agenda for the MILF. PNoy has distanced himself from this congressional initiative but both leadership of the houses are identified with the administration and definitely such initiatives are not just circumstantial to the current phase of the GPH-MILF peace talks.

This early, signs of constitutional accommodation like the MNLF, are already becoming visible with the outcome of the GPH and MILF talks.

The abovementioned and the succeeding narratives are intended to serve as historical framework of the peace talks between the government and the Moro revolutionary fronts which have opted to resolve their struggle for national self determination on the negotiating table and the government’s framework in the engagements with the Moro fronts.

For almost fifty years of the Bangsamoro struggles and more than one hundred fifty thousand lives lost, millions of people dislocated, billions of properties destroyed and priceless opportunities lost, one has to ask if all these efforts and sacrifices are really worth it at least in terms of the concrete gains achieved especially of the basic Bangsamoro masses. At this point it is very important to take into account the role of the different sets of leadership of the different revolutionary fronts with regards to the gains and victories as well as the opportunities lost and threats which have unfolded their way in the protracted process of negotiation as the main stress these fronts have opted. It is also very important to have a glimpse to the class background of the key responsibilities on the leadership of the Fronts. And it will be helpful to know the attitude and role of the Bangsamoro ruling class in the different processes of the peace negotiations.. Lastly, but definitely not the least, is the attitude of the Fronts regarding the struggles for self determination of other non Moros specifically the Indigenous Peoples or Lumads.

On the other hand, it is very important to know the constant framework used by the government in dealing with the different Moro fronts. One can easily notice a consistently of the government peace framework towards the struggle for self-determination.

Having said this, we have to look on the nature of nationalism the fronts have been struggling for self determination. In the process we have to know the role of the masses and democratic forces within the Moro people in whose name the fronts have struggled for self determination.

And in the last part, we will try to analyze in whose peace that they (Fronts) want to achieve, “peace among the diplomats or negotiators or peace among nations and peoples.”

## **2. THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE MORO PEOPLE - A Brief Historical Perspective**

The struggle against colonial power by the Moros has started more than five hundred years ago. The economic, political and social structures of the Moros then had reached higher level especially in the southern part of the Philippines vis-à-vis in the central and northern parts of the country. So the opposition against colonial powers specifically against the Spanish occupation was very strong in the southern part of the country. The Spanish colonizers gained footholds in key areas in Mindanao but they had never gained full control of the interior areas occupied by the fighters of the Moro Sultanate defending their territories. The colonizers had used religion and the religious Christian missionaries to help in the colonization of the inhabitants including the non Moros and Moros as well in these areas. During this period, monotheism was already predominant within the sultanate since Islam was already introduced centuries earlier by the Muslim traders and missionaries to the area. The Islamic faith had helped in the resistance against the colonizers who made use of religion (Christianity) to further their colonial interests. The remnants of the Spanish churches and fortresses can still be seen even today in key areas of Mindanao especially along the water routes e.g. Tamontaka in today's Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipality, Dulawan the present day Datu Piang both part of Maguindanao province and Pikit part of North Cotabato to mention a few.

The struggles against the Spanish colonizers were led by the Sultanate in the south and by the intellectuals in the North. The latter, was the generation that was the product of the new class which emerged in the new system of economic, social and political structures imposed by the Spanish colonizers e.g. encomienda and hacienda systems. Agricultural crop production intended for the needs of the colonizers and their countries and not for the local needs or the colonized inhabitants. Some families from such generation had sent their sons to study in Europe (the colonizing country such as Spain) and were influenced by the prevailing thoughts of equality, fraternity and liberty. These students and intellectuals brought back these new ideas to the country and led the struggles under the leadership of Katipunan against the Spanish colonizers at the same time of the struggles were continued by the Moros in the southern part.

At the eve of the defeat of the Spanish colonial power in the country at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new colonial power, United States of America came in to fill in the vacuum of the Spaniards in a historical buy off also known as Treaty of Paris in 1898. The defeated colonizer sold the territory they never fully subjugated to the new colonizer. And the rest would be a painful and bloody history of the new colonial brutality and occupation to neutralize and defeat the struggles for national liberation of peoples from the north to the southern part of the country.

In the 1930's, with the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu effectively neutralized and rendered ceremonial and the leadership of the Katipunan and the local revolts literally decimated while the new working class movement (the Communist and Socialist Parties of the Philippines merged in 1938) had still on its early stage, the United States Imperialist power had consolidated the young national bourgeois class to form a colonial government. The first constitution of the country was formed in 1935 has been patterned letter by letter to the US constitution. The process was actively participated by representatives of the new ruling classes of the dominant nationality and the Moro people from the mainland of Mindanao as well as from the islands like in Sulu.

The life of a new national government was disrupted when the Japanese imperial power had tried to attack and subjugate the whole country and its people. A national united front for the defense for the fatherland was organized together with the defeated US army and also the Moro fighters who joined with the Filipino forces from the North and the central part of the country including the newly merged Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (Communist Party of the Philippines), to put strong and

credible guerilla warfare against the Japanese occupying forces. It is important to note that the old Communist Party was playing an important role based on the call of the Third International (post Lenin/Trotsky period) to defend the Fatherland against fascism. The Hukbalahap (Hukbo ng Bayan laban sa Hapon or Army of the People against the Japanese) was formed on this purpose.

After the Second World War the new Republic of the Philippines (1946) was formed with the new bourgeois and ruling class from the North to the South participating. The US imperialist power had ensured its influence in all spheres of life of the Republic by enshrining it in the Constitution.

The development of industrialization of the country was ensured by the US imperialist to fit the role which the imperialist power would want the colonies to play. It had to make sure that it supplied the foreign colonizers with raw materials and to receive the goods coming from the latter. This kind of import oriented and export dependent economy made a one sided development for the foreign interest with the development of the new national bourgeoisie making sure that their policy is implemented and the development and orientation of the political superstructure - the nation-state had been tasked to do just this policy.

Peasant unrests and uprisings in the North and Central parts of the country were superficially solved by transferring these people to the South - Mindanao - the new place of hope and fulfillment of the peasants to own the lands they till become a reality according to government propagandists. In all these struggles which had happened mostly in the northern part of the country, the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP) in most part were playing a decisive role against the US imperialist and the puppet government. In the 50s, the US imperialist thru the puppet government had made sure that the PKP would be defeated and annihilated if they refused to surrender. In response, the HUKBALAHAP was transformed into Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan or HMB building a strong peasant army and almost defeated the puppet government if not for a direct but covert imperialist intervention.

Mainstreaming and integration of all peoples in this colonial set up by US imperialism was made possible thru Religion and Education. And the Moro and the non Moro peoples in Mindanao were not spared with this policy and program. Their political set up like the Sultanate and Indigenous Power Structure were in a subtle manner becoming powerless and the western concept and method of resolving conflicts and governance were taking over. In the main, the ruling class of the Moro and the non Moro peoples had participated in these explicit and implicit processes in the exploitation, marginalization and integration of their people to one nation-state framework of the dominant nationality and its own ruling class.

The ruling class of the Moro people reacted seriously when their interests (both economic and political) were directly threatened. In the late sixties, when the puppet Philippine governments were exposed and became unpopular, a new nationalist movement headed by the newly established Communist Party (CPP) in 1968 and intellectuals were fighting for the national and democratic interests. In some of these movements, the Moro intellectuals were actively involved.

During this period there was, somehow, a convergence of interest of the traditional political leaders and the intellectual Moro professionals and students to fight for the people's national interests. Thus they formed the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) in 1969. In the later period of same year the first batch of young Moro intellectuals and students were sent to Malaysia to have military training. It would be followed by several batches later. It is very important to note that the first batch of trainees was headed by the Nur Misuari a Moro professional teaching in the University of the Philippines and who got involved in activism together with Jose Maria Sison who became the chairperson of the new Communist Party of the Philippines.

The Islamic countries which financed the military trainings of the young Moro fighters hired British mercenaries and tapped Malaysia to host the activities. It should be remembered that a year before (1968), there was a Jabitah massacre where young Filipino Muslim recruits were massacred by the Philippine military when they refused to go on mission to infiltrate Sabah for the interest of the Philippine government. This mission is called as OPLAN MERDEKAH, which was intended to get back Sabah from Malaysia. Hence, Malaysia was more than willing to host the military trainings of the young Moros against the Philippine government.

Together with Nur Misuari were the sons of prominent ruling families of the Moro people. And with its Islamic connection in the Muslim countries the MIM got financial support notably from Libya and Saudi Arabia where Hashim Salamat was studying and became active in the national struggle.

The foreign donors were not actually at ease with the Moro traditional leaders leading the young movement because they might collaborate with the puppet government in the process as history would prove it. Obviously these donors were convinced by the argument of the young intellectuals and students to give the financial support directly to them. With this arrangement the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was formed in the late sixties and early seventies. It was mainly composed of young intellectuals who had studied in the universities inside and outside the country. At early stage, there were several sons of the ruling class of the Moro people but later they were the first ones to give up and go back to the mainstream or to the government. Revolutionary and guerilla lifestyles were too much for them to sustain.

During this period a consciousness for a truly national identity was beginning to form and consolidate. Before this, the Moro people were those independent ethnic groups found in different areas/territories in Mindanao. The territories which were once comprised the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu had effectively weakened, disorganized and disintegrated. The MNLF had started to help in consolidating a national consciousness among the Moro people and start a national political movement of the struggle for self determination. This was done outside the traditional political structure and led by the non-traditional intellectuals.

The political movement headed by the MNLF aimed at political secession from the Philippine nation-state arrangement. The national oppression perpetuated by the majority nationality referred as those Christians in Luzon and Visayas who controlled the national government personified this kind of oppression which the MNLF also called as Manila colonialism. The active role of US Imperialism in the puppet government and orientation of the bourgeoisie were never factored in.

The main form of the struggle which was directly and indirectly supported by the Islamic countries (mostly numbers of the organization of Islamic countries - OIC) was armed struggle and had combined guerilla and conventional warfare on the ground.

President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972 to effectively suppress and neutralize the young movements led by both CPP and MNLF. A loose coordination was established between the two groups in fighting the same enemy.

The massacres and massive dislocations of the Moro civilians made the OIC to aggressively help both overtly and covertly the MNLF. They even facilitated the escape and having a safe base of Nur Misuari in their respective counties.

The intervention of the OICs had dual effects to the MNLF. First, it helped the organization survived and be projected in the international level and second it also helped the MNLF became very dependent on them. In fact the impact of this arrangement was the neglect of the MNLF leadership of consolidation works of its forces and continuously raising of their political consciousness to

understand their struggle for nationalism.

The MNLF leadership was literally forced to sit down by the OICs with the Philippine government to have peace talks in mid 1970s. The talk led to the so called Tripoli Agreement in 1976. Disagreements and divisions among the leaders of the MNLF broke up after the signing of the agreement. As a direct result of these political uneasy arrangements disorientation and demoralization sipped in among both leadership and rank and file within the organization. Surrenders of some of the leadership had occurred making easy for the dictatorial government to inflict serious damage to the organization. Never again did the MNLF reach the high level of struggle after the Tripoli Agreement. The main stress of the weakened leadership of MNLF became the peace negotiations where the Marcos government had an upper hand and controlled set up. It was a political trap which the bourgeois leadership of the MNLF took and the direction of the process from that time on is the mainstreaming of MNLF to the nation-state arrangement of the Philippine government. The 1996 final peace agreement was just the formalization of this process of political accommodation and mainstreaming.

### **3. MNLF DIVIDED**

The division which had occurred within the MNLF was obviously the result of the serious weakness with regards to the internal organizational consolidation. It was also a direct result of external interventions both by the OICs and the Philippine government through massive and intensified militarization of the latter against the ground forces of the MNLF and peace negotiation with the foreign based leadership of the MNLF with the active cooperation of the host countries of the OICs. The abovementioned reasons made the divide and rule tactics of the Marcos dictatorial government a success in weakening and neutralizing the struggle for national liberation of the Moro people led by the MNLF. In fact, the basis for the MNLF division was along the ethnic differences and particularities. The national consciousness of a "bangsa" or nation was not consolidated and never consummated and ethnic conflicts and division had dragged down the Moro people once again. Eventually, the Maguindanao ethnic group formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) whose leadership was composed mainly by the intellectuals and professionals of the Maguindanao tribe. The MNLF reformist group formed their own separate organization and was headed by the Maranao professional and intellectual members of the Maranao ethnic group. And this made the original MNLF as headed by the ethnic group in Sulu called the Tausugs to negotiate with the government while other groups negotiating separately.

During this period the consciousness of national identity of Moro people and the national political movement started by the original MNLF for a national struggle for self determination was stunted and co-opted and began to disintegrate again.

The formation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which had started after the Tripoli Agreement but was only formalized in the late eighties was a manifestation of the failure of internal consolidation of the MNLF and the intense pressures from the other countries (OICs) and massive Philippine military assaults on the ground.

### **4. THE MILF: The Bangsamoro and Its Struggle Redefined**

The stress put on the Islamic aspect was to differentiate the opposition of the MILF founder, Hashim Salamat (acted as foreign minister of the MNLF during the Tripoli Agreement) from the stress on the nationalist aspect put up by Nur Misuari who was accused as non-religious and very secular. This

kind of orientation immediately attracted the support of OIC individual members like Saudi Arabia and the MILF because official member of the Muslim Brotherhood because MNLF was still recognized by the OIC as the only legitimate representative of the Moro people.

The MILF started a movement to unite the Moro people especially the 13 ethno-linguistic groups into one national consciousness and identity thru Islam and from the Sunni tradition like its principal patron, the Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood which recently won the elections in Egypt after Mubarak.

In the later stage, MILF defines the Moro people and their ancestral domain/homeland as those who are natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and its adjacent islands including Palawan and Sulu archipelago at the time of conquest or colonization of its descendants whether mixed or of pure blood. It is revealing here that the basis for Bangsamoro nationhood is on the superficial and mechanical aspects rather than the historical and collective experience of people whose consciousness as distinct people and identity is a result of the process of a national political movement towards achieving political objective. The definition does not even consider the individual and collective acceptance or non-acceptance of people to become or not become part of the nation and identifying themselves with the struggles for social and national liberation.

The abovementioned description was reinforced by its slogan of "one nation, one faith" the fear of external imposition of one's faith to others. In fact, it will be ironic to even think that the struggle for national liberation as led by the MILF to resolve the national contradiction and the national oppression with its own kind of oppression even during the period of its struggles.

It is worth noting that the MILF has never considered and recognized the rights of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) as distinct people with distinct history and ancestral homeland and therefore a distinct aspiration. Their definition states clearly that the IPs are part of the definition of Bangsamoro and their ancestral domains are also integral part of the Bangsamoro homeland as mentioned above.

It is very obvious that the Philippine government through its negotiating panel does not point out this objective reality out amidst the most logical results of such framework will invite another level of conflicts. From its nation-state framework, this is favorable so the government can effectively rule the divided peoples. But most importantly, genuine struggle for the democratic right to self-determination and its direction will be determine by the broadest participation of the people in whose name the struggle has been launched and sustained. The respect and support of other democratic forces can be realized if in return their democratic rights and aspirations are respected and supported. The truth about a nation which oppresses other nation cannot be genuinely free will be tested in the concrete situation of the Bangsamoro and the Lumads.

## **5. LESSONS FOR LEARNING - CORRECTING IDENTIFIED ERRORS**

As things stand today, one can have a glimpse of what will be the nature of political arrangement which can be reached by a compact peace agreement between the GPH and the MILF. In one of the mutually agreed principle, it is stated that the present set-up of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which is the product of series of peace agreements if the MNLF since 1976, 1989 and 1996 with previous governments, is not acceptable and therefore should be replaced. It is obviously a blatant way of saying that the previous talks between the government and the MNLF are a failure but the reasons for such failed project have never been mentioned. Nevertheless, it is like saying that the laws created for the constitutional bases for the existence of the political entity called ARMM should be replaced or amended. Clearly, it is not saying on something on the framework behind the government's position of enacting such laws in the past which will be the



same framework in having another arrangement albeit different actors.

It should be pointed out that the government has been an active participant in these failures because it (government) wants to manifest today that it is the MNLF which is at fault why the project failed. The so-called tripartite review of the 1996 peace agreement and its implementation between GRP and MNLF while there is an on-going talks between the government and the MILF is more to please the OICs rather than understanding the reasons behind the failures and correcting them. The importance of objectively identifying the reasons of the failed peace project between the government and the MNLF will have great implication for the success of the current peace process between GPH and the MILF. For instance, it is very clear that the government has been consistent in its one nation-state framework and so far one can clearly see that this framework has been the one utilized by the government in all the peace processes including the present one. If there are changes, they are just in the forms or shape but not in substance. The GRP or the GPH has never changed its position and its framework in any peace negotiations – that is Constitutional accommodation and mainstreaming of revolutionary groups. It has not gone to the “out of the box” solution in dealing with the different national liberation movements.

It is therefore very imperative to learn lessons from the GRP-MNLF peace process in order not to repeat the same failures.

In the experience of the MNLF with regards to the role of the International bodies and mechanisms, the manner and characteristics of the level of the International interventions should be moderated especially by the MILF. Dependency on the abovementioned bodies should be avoided. The tempo and substance of the talks should be dependent on the capacity of the MILF to engage. It is very difficult to gauge the reasons and sincerity of the International bodies in their engagements with the talks but one thing is sure that they are there not without interest of their respective governments of their countries. Malaysia for instance has been consistently involved in the talks even during the times of the MNLF and now as the third party directly engaged in the talks has its own interest in Sabah. This is the obvious reason why the MILF has never touched the issue of Sabah in their claim of the ancestral domain of the Moro people. All stakeholders should be very critical on the involvement of this International bodies because more likely their framework is not different from the nation-state framework of the Philippine government because they need for instance the mechanisms to develop the very rich resources in Mindanao and create a viable market for their neo-liberal globalized economy. Besides if they will be involved in the political outcome of the national liberation of the MILF, they can be tasked to do the same by the oppressed people and ethnic groups in their respective countries. The role of the US should be contextualized in its regional interests especially with the rising influence of China and the corresponding threats in the balance of power in the changing geopolitics in this part of the world.

The setting up of a new autonomous political entity should not only be new in terms of replacing the old people in the ARMM or adding new structures but building mechanisms and infrastructure for political and economic empowerment of the broadest section of the people in the specific identified areas. The political set-up should be inclusive and will be more than the structure of the MILF and pluralist in its framework. In fact, MILF should redefine itself in this changing context and therefore it will have different role in the new political entity.

The strengthening and consolidation of this superstructure is very important because there is no independent economic system developed in the Bangsamoro. The neoliberal phase of globalized capitalist economy has made the whole country as one economic entity and part of the global market. The global capital with the active participation of the ruling classes of the dominant and dominated nations in the country has united their interest at the expense of the great majority of the peoples both Moro and non-Moro in the region. The MILF should have at this stage, its own

economic agenda and program with all the peoples within the region in mind and that this program will not be part of the current neo-liberal globalized economy of capitalism. Substantive reforms in favor of the majority of peoples should be placed in all economic and fiscal policies otherwise the process of the opening up for the global capital interest the vast natural resources and wealth of the region will just create situation for intense exploitation of both its human and natural resources. This economic framework is very imperative since it has been proven that "an autonomous nation does not enjoy rights equal to those of a sovereign nation". Failure to appreciate such arrangement will be another phase of accommodation and mainstreaming of the MILF and a more radical group and movement will emerge to take over and continue the struggle for right to self-determination in the name of the Moro people.

The role of the basic masses of the Moro people should be decisive in all phases of the peace process. The struggle of self-determination is not only political but democratic as well. The consciousness of a national identity should be translated into a political movement with clear democratic aspiration of the whole communities as represented by the MILF. The active role of the people in the peace process will ensure the sustainability of the success of a political settlement between the negotiators. Periodic but mechanical consultations with the people, who have also been involved in the previous peace negotiations, will not be democratic and sustainable. Participative and transparencies are both decisive aspects in any transformative peace process.

One feature which has played a very important role in the peace process between the GPH and MILF is the role of the non-government organizations or NGOs. One could not see this kind of participation during the previous talks.

NGOs can contribute positively in the success of the peace process like institutionalization of memories of the previous talks and development of skills of the personnel of MILF involved in the talks or in preparation for the eventual signing of a compact peace agreement. NGOs can also generate the needed funds and financial requirements needed for the technical needs of the talks. In terms of enhancing the management skills and machineries in the development of the communities involved. On the other hand, the NGOs can lead the MILF farther away from the basic masses and in the day-to-day struggles for economic and political empowerment of the basic masses of the Moro people. NGOs tend to deal with projects rather than the needs of the political movement of people in the communities. NGOs generally are not grounded on the actual activities of the communities and therefore do not feel the actual needs of poor people in terms of reducing the level of their poverty even if they (NGOs personalities) attend all kinds of conferences (local and international) on poverty. They become experts in packaging the poverty of the people and making project proposals for them and can make beautiful reports afterwards without substantially touching the lives of the peoples. They have already packaged the peace process and surely the dynamism of the political and peoples' movements will be subtly downplayed and can only have a mechanical end of signing a peace agreement. Institutionalizing any process will lost its dynamism and vitality. But most importantly it should be pointed out that NGOs are not neutral, they represent the interests of their donor partners which are usually from the most developed countries which funded institutions which have appropriated the neo-liberal policies in the communities through the NGOs. The NGOs of these type are the implementers of neo-liberal program of global capital from below. In this context, the danger NGO-izing the peace process is worth a serious consideration.

The current phase of neoliberal globalization of capital has created one people and one market but also unevenness and backwardness of economic system creating conflicts among and between peoples which all the more intensify the economic exploitation and political marginalization of the majority of people from both dominant and dominated nations/peoples in the country in general and Mindanao in particular. The deteriorating situation has added more fuel to the already burning fire of the national liberation movement such as the MILF. The Lumads in Mindanao just like the MILF

has been struggling for self-determination based on historical fact of distinct development of people and the current realities of their own indigenous political structures. In the negotiation with the GPH, the MILF should not only respect but support the Lumads struggle of self-determination. Both their nationalism are coming from the same level and principle. Genuine peace can never be achieved in Mindanao if the democratic rights of all the oppressed and marginalized peoples are not respected and social inequities are not corrected in favor of the broadest section of the peoples

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The struggle of the Bangsamoro for self-determination has been one of the longest national liberation movements in the world. It has started with the Indigenous Political Structure of the Sultanate to the formation of nationalist and revolutionary political organizations which has been the product of the increasing level of consciousness of a national identity. A political movement has been developed and strong religious bonding helped in the collective struggles with its ups and downs in the different stages of the movement.

There have been obvious weaknesses in terms of consolidation of a national consciousness as a nation and its ethnic peculiarities have been used by the government to divide them and weakened their position in the negotiating table.

The role of the International solidarity has been very helpful to the liberation movement especially in the internationalization and projection of its situation and aspiration and the excesses of the government in the suppression of their rights as peoples. Logistical, material, political and financial supports have helped the Moro people in sustaining their struggles but too much reliance on these external factors have made the Moro liberation movement dependent on them and basically neglect the internal needs for consolidation and forego relying on its internal consolidating capacity to further the movement on the next higher stage without the external pressures. One should be very careful with solidarity coming from above they tend, as past experience would show, to be in solidarity more with those nationalism from above practitioners. Solidarity coming from below should be encouraged and developed for they are proven to be genuine and sustainable. The nationalism from below practitioners have the same situation, same aspirations and the same struggles with those who are involved in political movement for social and national liberation and emancipation for all kinds of oppressions and exploitations. Solidarity among the basic masses of the Moro people, Lumads and the toiling masses of the dominant nation will bring the struggle for self-determination into genuine democratic and national liberation. Any genuine liberation movements should internalize this framework as basic obligation in order not only to attain national liberation but also eliminate the basis of conflicts and antagonism amongst the people we proclaim to struggle with.

The concept of peace which should be agreed upon will not be exclusive. This means that it will include the other peoples' democratic interests in the identified region so that the other non-Moro people will not only be supportive of the right to self-determination struggle of the Moro people, they will even struggle together with them. In order to be sustainable and participative, a successful peace process should get the support of not only the Lumads but the dominant nationality as well. Democratic issues and the nationalism of the broadest number of peoples from both nations and peoples should be struggled together as common good and interest of the people. While the organized section of the toiling masses from the dominant Christian settlers and the Lumad support, the struggle for self-determination of the whole Moro people, there should be a solidarity relationships among the toiling masses of these people to ensure that the whole struggle for national liberation, the democratic and social issues should be integrated to the struggle. This is solidarity

from below which should be strengthened and developed in all the stages of the peace process. This will ensure that the struggle for self-determination will result to peace to all nations/peoples.

It has become crystal clear by now that the peace framework employed by the different governments towards the Moro Revolutionary Fronts is mainstreaming and constitutional accommodation. It is always within the Philippine Constitution framework. It has not changed this framework from the first peace talks with the MNLF which by this time the government in the nation-state outlook would always want the MNLF or the MILF to remove from their political demand, the concept of cessation or territorial separation from the country, which is a blatant disrespect of the principle of self-determination. It should be understood that only the freedom to secede makes possible free and voluntary union, between nations.. for without the right to divorce - to have a separate state - there can be no truly free marriage - unity or federation among nations.

Hence, unless the government should be bold and daring enough and think an “out of the box” solution to the right to self-determination issue of the Moro and Indigenous peoples, it is bound to perpetually have peace talks between the Moro and other Revolutionary groups. Because unless the root causes of the problem are identified and concrete but sustainable solutions will be taken then the country will disintegrate and Mindanao might end up to the direct control of the global capital and its agents in the region outside the nation-state framework of the Philippine government. This kind of peace will be peace among the negotiators or their principals while the majority of the people will have peace of the graveyard.

**Richard S. Solis**, August 2012, Mindanao, Philippines

---