

Reflections on the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) Between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

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Contents

- [Bangsamoro – The PNoy Administ](#)
- [A Bangsamoro is Possible. Can](#)
- [The Right to Self-Determinatio](#)
- [A Genuine Autonomy can only be](#)
- [A Community-based and People-c](#)
- [The Bangsamoro and the Constit](#)
- [The Building of the Bangsamoro](#)
- [Ensuring Human Security: \(...\)](#)

Introduction

Mixed feelings and reactions of peoples in Mindanao and elsewhere have been observed after the October 15, 2012 signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Obviously, some people are very happy because after more than fifteen years (15) a vision of a peaceful Mindanao can be realized and an atmosphere conducive for making business in this part of the country has been created. Some have explicitly expressed their anger, especially from Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Nur faction because for them the FAB has hijacked the implementation and closure of their 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA). Considerable others have felt sad because they know that the content of the FAB does exclude their basic agenda to freely determine their own future together or separately with the peoples referred to as citizens of the Bangsamoro and as represented by the MILF in the negotiating table with the GPH. And many others felt anxious because the signing of the FAB can create another hope for the Bangsamoro people only to be placed on the realm of nothingness as the experience of the MNLF is telling us today.

Another group or a part of the MILF, which will not be satisfied in the long process of peace building and form a separate group to claim their own pie of the peace dividends. A possibility of some members of the MILF will be tempted to the perks and privileges brought about by the policies and the framework of the peace agreement and forget about their revolutionary vision of building a society of sustainable peace. Such feeling has been reinforced by the manner and modalities of the negotiation wherein the GPH is negotiating with only the involvement of the Executive. The results of which can still be challenged and changed by the co-equal branches of government like the Legislative and the Judiciary just like the 2008 MOA-AD experience when the Supreme Court blocked the signing of the MOA-AD on the eve of the signing and eventually declaring it

unconstitutional but after hundreds of lives lost and millions worth of properties destroyed and almost half a million peoples in different parts of Mindanao are dislocated.

Bangsamoro - The PNoy Administration version of the BJE-MOA-AD?

Definitely, both panels have learned hard lessons from such costly experience like stressing that the one signed is just a framework and not the whole concept of Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) or the New Autonomous Political Entity (NAPE). The details are reserved in the Annexes which at the same time considered as approved too with the signing of the FAB as claimed by the panels. But as the saying goes ... "the devil is in the details".

This leads some to raise some serious questions like: can the panels approve what is not written yet? What will happen to the FAB if there will be disagreements in the details or the Annexes? With the unveiling of the details in the annexes in the coming days we expect more reactions from people. The handling of the two co-equals (Legislative and Judiciary) can be managed by the popularity of the President Noyonoy Aquino (PNoy) but if such handling backfires then the lives of the Mindanaoan will be put in danger once again.

But a worst thing can happen in the lives of the people in Mindanao in particular and the country in general is when the popularity of PNoy can make the administration to shortcut the democratic processes like making a law (RA 10153) to synchronize elections in the ARMM with the National Elections in May 2013 but appointing his favourite friend as acting Governor in the region justifying that the said official will not run in the May 2013 elections so as to have a level of playing field with the other candidates in such democratic process such as the elections. But as of today, not only that this favourite friend and acting Governor will run as Governor with full backing of the Administration in the failed project of ARMM, PNoy himself convinced the other candidates, including the five ARMM governors and others, who would want to run as Governor, to not only contest the elections against his friend but not to oppose or point out the glaring scandal as well.

One can just surmise that PNoy wants somebody who will not challenge the set up of Transition Commission (TransCom) and support it while it fulfils its works in drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law, preparing for the Constitutional amendments on the RA 9054 which created an expanded ARMM and Chapter X Sections 15-21 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. It should be noted that a person who will be elected in ARMM - in May 2013 elections will have his term up to 2016, a very critical period because of Constitutional infirmities of the dual existence of two governments - the creation of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) with full ministerial functions and the ARMM with the Executive and Legislative branches of government have been voted by the peoples in the region as provided by RA 9054 and RA 10153 respectively. The former will have the Presidential Executive Order and Congressional Bills but not back-up by Constitutional legacy. The BTA will not be elected by the people in the region but will act like any government institutions although as it is becoming clear now it will have a ministerial form of government model after Malaysia with a federal and ministerial set-up of government. Definitely, the ministers including the Chief Minister will be appointed/selected by the MILF but will govern all the peoples in the region.

The FAB states that with the creation of BTA, the ARMM ceases to exist, which means that the Law (RA 9054) is deemed amended and its existence will be based on the assumption that the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) has been promulgated and ratified in a referendum and plebiscite. This period can happen before or right after the ARMM elections in May 2013 since by 2016 the Bangsamoro government officials will be elected. This simply means that since BTA is considered as Transition period, people in the ARMM including the 6 municipalities and 735 barangays in

Mindanao will be governed by people they did not elect. Definitely, the BTA officials, who will be chosen and appointed by the MILF will be accountable to the appointing authority and not to the people they will govern. But the worst thing is the people will be made to elect officials in May 2013 elections, spent millions if not billions of pesos from their taxes only to be replaced by those they did not elect which again peoples' money will be used to establish it. If this is a kind of democracy under the "*matuwid na daan*" straight path of PNoy, people will be happy to have its opposite.

This very undemocratic process was not even done during the darkest period of our country under the Marcos dictatorship.

In such political manoeuvre one cannot help but compare the 1996 FPA with the MNLF where Nur Misuari as Chair of the MNLF became the governor of the ARMM and the Chair of the Southern Philippine Council of Peace and Development (SPCPD). ARMM was made to serve as core area for the autonomous governance and the SPCPD which covered 13 provinces and 9 cities will be the machineries to expand and broaden the core territory. Nur Misuari had to be elected in the ARMM elections under the ruling Party Lakas-National Union of Christian Democrats of then President Fidel V. Ramos.

This political arrangement was made to give the MNLF its transition phase to implement the Tripoli Agreement in the Autonomous Government. And the rest is history.

The FAB is the expression of a corrected version of the 1996 FPA. It is called a framework because the realization of the Self-Governance of the Bangsamoro is work in progress. Only when the Bangsamoro Government is strongly built can the two panels of GPH and MILF sign the Final Peace Agreement. Meanwhile the TransCom will be established to draft the BBL and the proposed Constitutional Amendment and the BTA takes over the ARMM before 2016 precisely to prepare for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Government.

In the experience of the GRP-MNLF with the ARMM, three or five years were not enough. In fact RA 9054 (the law which created an expanded ARMM), was only made into a law in 2001 or five years after the 1996 signing of the FPA.

There will always be a possibility that the BTA will continue its work beyond 2016. This simply means that the ARMM provinces, 6 municipalities and 735 villages will be governed by the people appointed by the MILF and not elected by the people for a very long time.

The extreme anxieties of these people therefore are not without bases. The reasons are definitely not because they do not want to have peace for their untold experiences of miseries, lost of lives and properties have already been to its limits. In fact, it is their wish to have peace but definitely a genuine and sustainable one, the basic or fundamental requirements of which are democratic and transparent principles in all the stages of the peace process. Otherwise, what is the difference between the FAB and the FPA (signed in 1996 with the MNLF) other than appeasing the parties of the revolutionary Parties involved and passing to the next administration the problems of the people struggling for self-determination.

For the GPH this is simply accommodating the MILF to the mainstream society and for the MILF, it will be a rare political opportunity to have a self government in their specific territories. It will be an opportune chance for the latter to show the world that they can have self governance without capitulating to the dominant system of the ruling elites of the dominant nationality as well as from their own Bangsamoro elite who will surely take advantage of such democratic space. And the people specifically the majority of the toiling masses of the three peoples affected in the identified territories and in whose name the peace process is made, they will be the least consulted and

democratically involved.

A Bangsamoro is Possible. Can we have BangsaMamalo , too?

And the most concerned and anxious feelings of people with the FAB are coming from the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) or the Lumads. They have been active in trying to engage the panels of both the MILF and the GPH about their own agenda but to no avail. They have consistently expressed their concerns on their ancestral domain and the role of their existing Indigenous Power Structure (IPS) in the outcome of the peace process on what is now called as FAB. Now their greatest fear has come that they have been unilaterally considered as part of the Bangsamoro in both substantial aspects as a people with distinct identity, history, Indigenous Peoples Structure (IPS) and cultural aspects with the Moro people. Their ancestral domain are now formally categorized as Bangsamoro territories as shown in the FAB.

Of course, they have an option to choose to be within the territorial scope of Bangsamoro so that they can be allowed to stay in their own territory and their Indigenous justice and governance will be justly considered in the drafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. But what if, they choose not to belong to the Bangsamoro? Will they retain their ancestral domain separately from the Bangsamoro which after all they have historically preserved and developed as their lives are integral part of their ancestral domain? Have both panels considered this kind of option? Can there be inclusive and genuine agreement on framework for peace without the IPs and their distinct agenda not being considered. Must the IPs become citizens of Bangsamoro in order to continue their ownership of their ancestral domain? Can they also become the name they choose for themselves like BangsaMamalo? Must they be involved in armed struggle for self determination so that they can also be heard and listened to by the government or the MILF? Why did both panels not get their free and prior consent before including them and their territories in the FAB? And of course both panels will say that the IPs will have their freedom to be or not to be in the FAB in the referendum/plebiscite. This kind of reasoning will entirely miss the point of free democratic participation of the concerned and affected peoples in the areas. Besides with the absence of information equilibrium in the consultation/education process and the one-sided dialogue conducted, the IPs will have less chance to have objective information in order to have an informed consent.

Can the IPs use other language aside from violent and armed struggle in order to be seriously heard? The IPs cannot avoid raising serious questions and comparison like the peace envisioned by the Communist party of the Philippines (CPP) and the FAB of the GPH and the MILF and their differences with regards to the concerns of the IPs. The experience of the IPs with the CPP has been very traumatic but revealing. The CPP is very much concerned with the IPs not because of their distinct struggle for self-determination as people and the central role played by their ancestral domain in the sustainability of their democratic struggle. The CPP needs the areas of their ancestral territories which are mostly in the mountainous and rural areas to build up their guerrilla bases and implement their Maoist strategy of surrounding the cities from the countryside (IPs areas). The CPP does not have the intention of respecting and developing the Indigenous Political Structure (IPS) but build the revolutionary political organs in the IP areas and the young IPs being recruited to the New Peoples' Army (NPA). The IPs and their territories have become the sources of human, material and financial resources for the CPP's strategy. Their forests and the minerals within their ancestral domain became sources of income through the collection of revolutionary taxes. Can we spot the difference here with the FAB?

The IPs are about to experience this kind of lives with the FAB. They have been co-opted with their basic rights with regards to political and wealth sharing. The FAB has been approved and signed

with its annexes which have still to be worked out and finalized. It cannot be denied that considerable parts of what is claimed and included in the Bangsamoro are the ancestral domain of the IPs. In fact, many of the richest parts or areas included in the Bangsamoro as shown in the FAB are historically and currently owned and occupied by the IPs. Furthermore, the IPS of the IPs are actively existing compared to the Sultanate of the Moro people. But both realities are not given due consideration and importance. In fact, in the abovementioned arrangement with regards to power and wealth sharing, it will only be the GPH and MILF panels, who will discuss and the people including the IPs will only be consulted or ask during the plebiscite and the referendum stage of the agreement. Again, in this kind of unfolding situation, the IPs have material bases for their deep worries and extreme anxieties too.

The Right to Self-Determination is a Basic Right of the Bangsamoro But what about the Basic Rights of their long-time neighbors?

In a multi-ethnic and multi-nationalities nation-state like the Philippines, the struggle for the right to self determination is both basic right and complicated political activity. Much of these complications can be seen in places where the different communities of peoples have been living together for very long years and their political, economic and even cultural lives have been deeply intertwined. The complications have been intensified and become divisive when selfish group of people from a bigger nation become greedy and narrow-minded that they impose their will over the people of a smaller and weaker nation and almost always in connivance with the small group of elite of these smaller nations.

The elites who usually claim to be the legitimate representative of peoples or nations in the struggle for self-determination will always want to have a self rule or greater independence if not outright independence from the dominant nationality as their stated political objective. And the methodology and form of struggle employ to achieve this political objective is through armed struggle and political settlement through political negotiation while maintaining the option of other forms of struggles.

In the post Cold war era, one can easily observe that gone were those days when the national liberation movements had achieved secession or independence from the dominating or the ruling nationality usually through a bloody armed revolution.

Nowadays, the political objective of national liberation movement is achieved through political negotiation and self determination is expressed through self rule and governance within the framework of the national integrity and sovereignty of the dominant nation. These have been the results of serious realization that achieving the political objective of self determination cause considerable loss of precious lives and destruction of so many properties. The self governance as political objective of nationalist movements has been positively accepted by government of the dominant nationality because it (self governance or autonomy) satisfies the national integrity and sovereignty of a nation-state. Since such kind of political settlement is mutually satisfactory to the government and the revolutionary nationalist movement, there has been an observable trend in the world today that the autonomy as an expression of self determination is more and more accepted compromise for a peaceful political settlement.

The success of an autonomous political arrangement is another story but much is needed for the concerned parties in terms of their democratic track record, mechanism and organizational disposition in achieving and sustaining their political objective.

A Genuine Autonomy can only be done in a Democratic Context

It matters very much for instance, how the national or central government's attitude and sincerity in the process of peace negotiation and the realization of a political settlement. The past and current concrete experiences of the government in relation to the existing autonomous government will be enlightening. The national government especially with a very popular President has been practically dictating everything in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao from having or not having the elections and appointing its Executive and Legislative officials. Hence, unless the national government and its officials learn to correct its attitude in interpreting autonomy based on their in their own understanding of self governance and not trusting people in the region to govern themselves despite its limitation and lack of experience based on the standard set by the national officials, no autonomy or whatever "self governance" arrangement can be successful. Such control can be in the forms of fiscal and financial arrangements or directly appointing and putting their own people in the Regional machineries. The maintenance and control through the National Internal Revenue Allocation (IRA) is the best example of this practice where the local government unit (LGU) officials are more beholden to the national government which controls the IRA through the Department of Budget and Management directly under the office of the President than the regional government. The national government and its officials should always respect the self governance arrangement even if they feel that it is not what they think it should be. After all it is the literal meaning of autonomy and it should be simply understood as it should be - "self governance."

The problems here can be seen in both parties. The understanding of autonomy by the national government is "autonomy" to the other political parties especially from the opposition or warlords loyal to the opposition. The ruling party usually dictates who will win as governor in the ARMM since its conception (Marcos period up to the present). In short, nobody but nobody can win in the ARMM elections unless the ruling and the dominant national party gives its support.

The revolutionary groups like the MNLF should also share the blame because they had willingly accepted the interpretation of autonomy by the national government. It has been a show of decadent expression of what has become of their revolutionary principles and lack of respect to the martyrs of the movement and the people who struggle and put trust in their leadership.

So when one hears the phrase that the ARMM is a failed political project, people will ask who are responsible for its failure?

A Community-based and People-centered Autonomy

And speaking of the people, it should always be noted that they are the most important and decisive stakeholders in any peace process. Genuine revolutionary movement and Party are building and talking peace in the name of the people and should always do it with them. The peace talks should therefore not only for themselves (revolutionary movement and party) but for the betterment of the lives of the people and their communities. Any form of struggle for self determination can only be successful and sustainable if people or at least a considerable number of people in the territorial scope of the peace talks are supporting such political project. In fact, if there will be conflicts between the two panels talking, they should always go back to the people for guidance and proper resolution of conflicts. The attempts to win over the people or divide the revolutionary organization is part of political manoeuvre to weaken the negotiating capacity and the legitimacy of the negotiating panel usually done by the powerful nation state against the revolutionary movement. One can easily see this kind of experience with the MNLF during their negotiations starting from the Marcos dictatorship - 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement - series of splits

and setbacks affected the negotiating capacity of the Front and the credibility of leadership of Nur Misuari. This will not be impossible to happen with the MILF and the FAB it signed with the PNoy administration.

The Bangsamoro and the Constitutional Questions

The Transition Commission (TransCom) prepares for the creation of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) which when installed is effectively replacing ARMM but can be effected only if the R.A. 9054 creating an expanded ARMM is replaced by another law drafted by the TransCom, made as urgent Bill by PNoy, pass through both houses of Congress and go back to the people for plebiscite. The Bill has to pass this long and winding road which will prolong the preparation of the putting-up of the Bangsamoro government after 2016. During the whole process, the BTA cannot be installed, it will be the ARMM governed by PNoy's favourite who would be elected in May 2013. One should remember that this 2013 May election is not really a democratic election for an autonomous region considered not only a failed project by the MILF but also the PNoy's administration because it signed the FAB. The TransCom will cease to exist after it accomplishes its three tasks namely; drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to be approved in a long process, prepare for Constitutional amendments specifically the Section 15-21 of Article X of the 1987 Constitution and work for a development framework for the Bangsamoro in close coordination of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) and the Bangsamoro Management and Leadership Institute (BMLI). It is an independent body existing parallel with the ARMM. The Executive and Judiciary Bodies of the ARMM will be in frozen animation stage because their function is to wait for their political demise. Now in such situation, the people in the identified Bangsamoro or the ARMM will be waiting with much anticipation and hope and can only accept a positive answer with regards to the BBL. But what will happen if this hope will not be realized. We are only discussing here the involvement of the Congress, there is still the Judiciary and the Supreme Court with PNoy's appointee as Chief Justice but the other Justices are not necessarily supportive of her with regards to the FAB or the BBL. Besides the acknowledgement of both parties as shown in the signed FAB, that the ARMM is a failed project can be another way of saying that the peace process with the MNLF led by Nur Misuari had been a failure. It is not clear however if the laws which have created the current ARMM are also considered flawed and should be replaced or amended. The R.A. 8734 of 1989, which created the first Autonomous region was the result of peace negotiation of MNLF under Nur Misuari with the former President Corazon Aquino. This was the result of a plebiscite conducted in 1989 to determine the areas/provinces which would be covered by the Autonomous region and which Nur Misuari and the MNLF boycotted because they believed that it was not in the spirit of 1976 Tripoli Agreement. Only four provinces out of thirteen provinces voted to be in the autonomous region.

The 2001 Plebiscite has created the expanded ARMM with five provinces voted in favour and one city and the six municipalities in Lanao del Norte also voted to be included in the Autonomous region. This time around, Nur and MNLF participated but this was a late move by the National Government after the signing 1996 FPA and Nur was not in power anymore. The MNLF was deeply divided with Misuari on one hand and the Council of 15 on the other hand. The MNLF had asked for the extension for the transition period but former President Gloria M. Arroyo did not sign the R.A. 9054 into a Law but made it lapsed into a Law. The FAB quoted part of these laws like in the territory and the sharing of powers (FAB chapter III no. 2C) which maybe an indication that the failure being referred to in the FAB (Chapter I no 1) is only about the political structure managed by MNLF's Nur Misuari's group but not the Constitutional basis in the creation of ARMM. This brings to the question of, can the ARMM cease to exist without changing or amending the legal basis for its existence? The Supreme Court's decision on the unconstitutionality of the MOA-AD which was supposed to create the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) is not in dissimilar situation.

During the period of the BTA, can we have two existing systems in one country? Is the ministerial form of government during the BTA period and the creation of Bangsamoro government, the form of government stated in Article X sections 15-21 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution?

The Building of the Bangsamoro should be based on Transparency and Democratic Principles

The New Autonomous Political Entity (NAPE) and the process of building it should be democratic and transparent. This simply means that the basic thing or step to do is to get the consent or the consensus of considerable number of people. The people can only have an informed decision and consent if the process which they are the main beneficiaries is transparent in all the stages of the process of building or achieving a political objective. It is very difficult to explain to the people and expect their understanding and eventual consent if they do not know the basic contents of the FAB. The Annexes namely on Power Sharing, Wealth Sharing, Modalities of the Implementation and the Normalization are still in the making. For instance, one cannot expect the IPs to support and give their consent to the unknown agreement on wealth sharing because if it will be 75-25 in favour of the Bangsamoro as proposed and stated in MILF Final Working Draft as Comprehensive Compact of 2010 (Annex 3 A Guiding Principle - Arrangement in Wealth sharing letter c) even if they decide to be included within the territory of Bangsamoro and to become citizens within it or not at all.

Informed decision to give free consent can only be derived from a democratic setting and transparency of the process and free access to a balance information. People who do not have objective knowledge of what is happening in this political process can become very suspicious and not trusting because they know that this event can affect not only their lives but the future of their children. The prolong absence and much delayed process of getting answers to their queries about the FAB and the actual contents of the Annexes can lead to desperation and in such situation they can be very vulnerable to manipulation by extreme forces and fundamentalists.

In concrete, this means that the historical and current realities of the areas and peoples covered by the Bangsamoro have to be seriously considered. The tripeople composition although in different proportions and numbers should be part of the input of the political structure. The Indigenous Political Structure (IPS) of the Lumads should not only be considered but recognized as well. It should always be respected and should never be replaced if one needs to get the support of the considerable population of the Lumads. The political struggles of the Christian settlers including their religious practices and beliefs should be discussed with them and find ways and how to factor them in the Bangsamoro arrangement. These steps can surely generate the widest and broadest support from these significant groups/peoples to the FAB. These moves can surely prevent the manipulation of the traditional and extremist elements to sow intrigues and fuel another round of conflicts among and between the peoples.

It has been argued that the FAB is a product of the negotiation between the MILF and the GPH and therefore one should not expect that the agenda of the IPs and the migrant settlers or the Christians to be included in its primary objective. But then since the nature of autonomy as shown in the FAB is both territorial and cultural, they included peoples aside from the citizens of the Bangsamoro in the claimed territories and therefore these peoples should be democratically made to participate in matters directly affecting their lives and their future.

Ensuring Human Security: A Basic Requirement for Normalization in the

Bangsamoro

In the FAB, both parties (GPH and MILF) have recognized that the gauge of its success in terms of peacebuilding is the positive development in the normalization stage. At this stage, people and communities can start building and picking up the pieces of their lives. It is creating atmosphere where people can heal the wounds of the past and begin to build their trust to one another once again.

Integral part of normalization is the commitment in words and in deed to respect basic human rights where the citizens with the Bangsamoro are free from fear of violence and crimes and where long-held traditions and values continued to be honoured (FAB Chapter VIII no 2). This commitment can be genuinely done if the past injustice and human rights violation can also be given due importance and justice to the victims. The families and relatives of the victims of these violations have been waiting for the day when they can have justice to their loved ones and see the perpetrators answer for their crimes.

Among others, the Maguindanao massacre stands out as one which should be urgently resolved and should have a fast but fair closure so that people affected can move on with their lives with an assurance that the nightmares they have suffered for so long can finally be put to rest with justice.

The case of Maguindanao massacre which will have its third anniversary in November 23, 2012, is very important with regards to the normalization stage of the FAB because of the involvement of the political warlords whose clan is based in the heart of the Bangsamoro territory and after three years, nothing substantial has happened to the case except having an arraignment stage of several dozens of suspects. Almost fifty percent (50%) of the perpetrators are still freely roaming around. Several of the witnesses who bravely came out to testify have already been murdered. The family of the mastermind have still effective control of several municipalities in the Maguindanao province. The impunity in which this heinous crime had been done is still very much felt in the areas. Lives of people have become very cheap especially if you happen to be at the opposite side of the ruling party or from the powers that be in the area. Some observers are saying, that if the same zeal of commitment of the PNoy administration in running after the former President Gloria M. Arroyo is applied in helping the Maguindanao massacre victims get justice, then the case will be resolved fair and square before PNoy's term ends in 2016.

The political dynasty and warlords are still very active and have become powerful in the identified territories of the Bangsamoro and their continued presence will not be very helpful to the normalization stage. In fact, it will be one of its greatest obstacles because it can definitely affect the building of policy structure and arrangement and having a police service which is professional and free from partisan political control will be almost next to impossible.

The phenomenon of "Rido" or clan wars can be another challenge for the Bangsamoro. The role of the clan and its value of "maratabat" prevent early resolutions of warring clans in some areas of the Bangsamoro territories. Members of the clan can unite to defend itself against the other clan with which it has conflicts transcending even their political affiliations. Oftentimes, the warring clans belong to different Moro revolutionary groups but the military hardware of the latter have been used on these wars. This will be another great obstacle to be hurdled in establishing normalization works and building up a professional and non-partisan political control of the police.

And finally, the most important part of the normalization process is the decommissioning of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF). In the FAB (Chapter VIII no 5), the MILF shall undertake a graduated program for decommissioning of its forces so that they can be put beyond use.

This is a very interesting part of the agreement because it will be the MILF which will initiate the decommissioning of its armed forces. The basic question here is when will be this gradual decommissioning? Will it start with the BTA? During this gradual phase, will the police works in the Bangsamoro before the 2016 be under the Philippine National Police? Can there be two armed forces in the country during the BTA period or when the Bangsamoro Government starts to govern but that the gradual phase has not been completed. The maintenance of the MILF of the BIAF with its weaponry can be understandable in the sense that it can be their assurance of the completion of the implementation of the FAB. The experience of the MNLF and its Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF) and its status after the FPA is still very fresh in everybody's mind. What will be the constitutional solution or accommodation of the FAB or the GPH-MILF Final Peace Agreement with regards to the gradual decommissioning of the BIAF.

The abovementioned matters need serious reflection of all the concerned peoples not only in Mindanao but of the whole country as well. We are all stakeholders in this peacemaking and country building processes.

Some of us will continue our lives like "business as usual" anyway the Bangsamoro or the MILF are just found in some parts of Mindanao so what is happening in these parts cannot affect us. But since we are all integral part of the country which is also part of the global world we are closely interlinked and our lives are deeply intertwined. The global market led by the global monopoly has made us one so as to easily get their profit from "peaceful consumers" and one viable market. The perpetual divide which is promoted among and between us is the easiest way to immobilize us in order to enter our territories and freely exploit our human and natural resources while we are busy quarrelling with each other.

Our option therefore has become limited before our territories' resources are depleted and overexploited. We should unite and work together for our common good and fight against all those greedy profiteers out to destroy the integrity of creation. Time is fast running out and our energies are exhausted and people are becoming desperate. We should act now in unity to build and strengthen peace.

The peace that we should build will be based on the promotion and development of the common good and common understanding. This is institutionalizing the just and sustainable peace in our communities and our country.

The opposite of this option is a failure and peace of the graveyard. And this can only be blamed on all of us - the peace stakeholders. ###

R. S. Solis, October 18, 2012
