

Chronology

March 1968

At least 28 Moro army recruits killed in the Jabidah massacre on Corregidor island, triggering widespread Muslim indignation. The incident releases pent-up anger from years of prejudice, ill treatment and discrimination. Moro students in Manila hold a week long protest vigil over an empty coffin marked 'Jabidah' in front of the presidential palace.

1968 to 1971

Moro student activism grows. Moro consciousness, based on Islamic revivalism and knowledge of a distinct history and identity, gathers steam. Political organisations emerge, to culminate eventually in the establishment of the MNLF.

Land conflicts in Mindanao escalate. Paramilitary groups proliferate; some attached to Christian politicians, some to loggers, and some to Muslim politicians. Hundreds of young Moros are sent to Malaysia for military training. Sabah becomes a supply depot, communication centre and sanctuary for Moro rebels. Towards 1971, the Constabulary takes control of many towns because of growing violence. Schools are closed, farms abandoned, commerce stagnates, and refugees increase. The Christian-led Ilaga paramilitary group enters the scene. One attack, at a mosque in Manili, leaves 65 men, women and children,

dead and mutilated. A BBC radio report of the massacre draws the attention of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. On 21 July 1971 leaders from all sectors of Moro society publish a manifesto demanding that the government take action to stop the attacks. The government calls the manifesto a threat. In August, the residents of Buldon fortify their town after killing some Christian loggers. The army responds with a weeklong artillery bombardment. By September, the cycle of reprisals is uncontrollable. In October, fighting between the Barracudas (paramilitary group led by Muslims) and government troops leaves hundreds dead on both sides. In November, 40 Maranaw Muslims are summarily executed at a military checkpoint in Tacub. Muslims accuse the government of genocide.

1972

In January, the government takes eight Muslim ambassadors on a tour of Mindanao to show that the charges of genocide are exaggerated. The third Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) in Jeddah requests the Philippine government to protect the lives and property of Muslims. In July, a Libyan and Egyptian delegation tours the troubled areas and concludes that while no strong evidence exists of state-supported genocide, there is clearly a war between Christians and Muslims. On 21 September, President Marcos declares martial law. One month later the first

organised Moro counteroffensive is launched in Marawi. The MNLF comes out into the open and claims leadership of the Moro secessionist movement.

1973

Marcos attempts to improve socio-economic conditions in the south while maintaining military operations. Presidential decrees order relief and welfare projects and resettlement of refugees, and declare certain Moro lands as inalienable. A 'Presidential Task Force for the Reconstruction and Development of Mindanao' is constituted to rebuild areas devastated by violence. Marcos wins over key Muslim leaders outside the MNLF. The Philippine Amanah Bank is created to expand the class of Muslim entrepreneurs. The Southern Philippines Development Administration is created to bolster business activity. The 4th ICFM (in Benghazi) maintains the pressure on Marcos, but recognises that the problem is 'internal to an independent sovereign state'. Marcos responds by realigning his foreign policy and organising diplomatic initiatives to win over the Muslim world.

1974

The MNLF gathers strength and broad support from Philippine Muslims. Fighting escalates into large-scale conventional warfare. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) creates two integrated commands — the Central Mindanao Command (Cemcom) for the Cotabato-Lanao areas, and the Southern Command (Southcom), for the Zamboanga peninsula and the Sulu archipelago. In February, Southcom unleashes its full force on MNLF rebels, who have taken control of Jolo, in the biggest battle of the war. In mainland Mindanao, Cemcom attacks the MNLF forces in Cotabato. Abroad, the MNLF gains official recognition from Muslim countries as the representative of the Moro people. The 5th ICFM urges the Philippine government 'to find a political and peaceful solution through negotiations' and officially recognises the MNLF.

1975

The war reaches a stalemate. In January, the Philippine government panel holds its first meeting with MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari and his deputy Salamat Hashim in Jeddah. Marcos sends negotiating panels to MNLF commanders in the field. The MNLF undergoes fierce debates on how to respond to the Marcos initiatives. The issue is settled for the MNLF by the 6th ICFM, which supports autonomy as the basis for negotiations between the MNLF and the GRP. The definition of autonomy comes from the Working Paper of the Committee of Four (Senegal, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Somalia) which provides for self-government within the framework of Philippine national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Marcos intensifies his diplomatic initiatives, sending delegations, including special emissary Imelda Marcos to Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria. The Philippine government opens embassies in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Algeria, Lebanon and Kuwait. Relations with 13 other South Asian, Middle Eastern and African Muslim nations are strengthened. The Philippines also lobbies the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Meeting.

1976

With negotiations in full swing, Marcos builds his case. He meets the OIC Secretary General, the Senegalese Amadou Karim Gaye, in Kenya; sends a delegation to the 7th ICFM (Istanbul) and the Non-Aligned Summit (Colombo); invites the Committee of Four to Zamboanga City and Manila; and sends Imelda Marcos to personally confer with Gaddafi. In the field, local ceasefires are forged, providing space to implement a 'policy of attraction'. Key rebel leaders are offered amnesty, livelihood projects and business opportunities, as well as political positions that allow them to surrender with 'dignity'. Surrenderers include Amelil Malaguio, head of the Kutawato (Cotabato) Revolutionary Committee, and Abdul Hamid Lukman, a former municipal judge who was Misuari's legal adviser in Jeddah.

23 December 1976

The Tripoli Agreement is signed by Misuari and Defence Under-secretary Carmelo Barbero. It provides for autonomy in 13 provinces and nine cities in the southern Philippines. Marcos instructs Barbero to include one last point in the text: that 'the Philippine government shall take all necessary constitutional processes for the implementation of the entire Agreement'.

January to April 1977

A general ceasefire is arranged. Marcos approves the Code of Muslim Personal Laws, which establishes Shariah courts, as part of the national system of courts. Talks resume in February to hammer out details of implementing the Tripoli Agreement. A deadlock arises when the MNLF insists that the 13 provinces be immediately declared a single autonomous unit. Marcos maintains that certain constitutional procedures, including a plebiscite, are needed because the majority of the people in the 13 provinces are not Muslims. Imelda Marcos hurries to Libya on 12 March to solicit Gaddafi's help. He suggests forming a provisional government to supervise the plebiscite. Misuari refuses to head the provisional government. On 25 March, Marcos issues Proclamation 1628 declaring autonomy in the 13 provinces. On 17 April, a plebiscite is called over objections from the MNLF. Only 10 of the 13 provinces vote for autonomy. Marcos implements his own version of autonomy by dividing the 10 provinces into two autonomous regions — Regions 9 and 12. Negotiations break down.

May to December 1977

The 8th ICFM (in Tripoli) allows Misuari, for the first time, to address the conference. Ministers express disappointment over the outcome of negotiations. By this time, however, the improved image of the Philippines is working in its favour and the ICFM simply recommends that negotiations continue. This shakes the MNLF leadership, and a split emerges. In Jeddah on 26 December, Salamat Hashim announces an 'Instrument of Takeover'

of the MNLF leadership, a move supported by traditional leaders Rashid Lucman, Domacao Alonto and Salipada Pendatun. Misuari counters by expelling Hashim and charging him with treason. Arab supporters are equally divided: Egypt supports Hashim while Libya leans towards Misuari. Mediation by the OIC and Muslim World League fails. Not wishing to be used by the traditional politicians, Hashim transfers to Cairo and goes on to form the 'new MNLF', eventually the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Lucman and Pendatun reinvigorate the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organisation to gain support, but Arab states ignore them.

1978

Negotiations between the Philippine government and the MNLF resume but the Philippine panel chooses to meet Hashim rather than Misuari. Meanwhile, the Marcos government presents a report to the OIC on the functioning of the new autonomous regional governments. The 9th ICFM meets in Dakar, Senegal from 17-29 April, and Misuari is recognised as the chairman and spokesman for the MNLF. Hashim cannot be present because Egyptian authorities, not wishing to antagonise Libya further, prevent him from leaving Cairo. MNLF members in the field conduct kidnappings and ambushes. In Patikul, Sulu, a local MNLF leader invites the AFP to a peace dialogue. When they arrive, General Teodoro Bautista and 33 soldiers are shot dead. Government policy turns increasingly violent.

1979

Misuari reverts to his former goal of secession and renews efforts to convince Islamic states, but to no avail. His only new supporter is Iran, after a visit to Imam Khomeini in June. Meanwhile, the Philippine panel continues negotiations with the Hashim faction in Cairo. Surrendered MNLF founder member Abul Khayr Alonto joins the government panel. The 10th ICFM (in Morocco) affirms support for the Tripoli Agreement. Diplomatic initiatives focus on ensuring that the Agreement is actually being implemented.

1980

Pocket wars and skirmishes continue. In March, Malaysia and Indonesia offer to serve as 'honest brokers' arguing that the problem has regional implications that could best be resolved by ASEAN. The Philippine government takes newly installed OIC Secretary General Habib Chatti (of Tunisia) on a tour around Mindanao to meet Muslims and the new Regional Legislative Assemblies. The 11th ICFM (in Islamabad) requests the Philippine government to implement the Tripoli Agreement.

1981

Misuari fails to convince a summit conference of heads of states in Taif, Saudi Arabia to support secession. He fails likewise to convince the 12th ICFM (in Baghdad), which resolves to 'make new contact with the Government of the Philippines for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in text and spirit'. Marcos 'lifts' martial law (but keeps his dictatorial powers) in a bid to win further legitimacy for his regime. In May, opposition leader Benigno Aguino, released from prison and allowed to go into exile in the US, visits Misuari in Jeddah and promises to support the Tripoli Agreement. MNLF forces kill 120 government soldiers in Pata island, off Jolo. In retaliation, more than 15,000 troops are sent to the island in a massive operation that infuriates Muslim local government officials.

1982

Marcos consolidates the Philippines' diplomatic position. He visits Saudi Arabia's King Khaled and OIC's Habib Chatti. The 13th ICFM calls on government 'to speed the implementation' of the Agreement. It also appeals to the MNLF to prepare for new talks 'as a united front'. The newly established Moro Revolutionary Organization, a member of the communist-led National Democratic Front (NDF) calls for a 'people's war as the main form of the Moro people's revolutionary struggle'. Efforts to link communist and Moro insurgencies fail, but local forces co-operate on the ground.

1983

The 14th ICFM (Dhaka) calls on Moros to unite prior to new negotiations that will put the Tripoli Agreement into effect. MNLF military activities begin to wane, but the New People's Army (NPA - armed group of the NDF) offensives in Mindanao keep the AFP engaged. Benigno Aquino returns from exile and is assassinated on arrival at Manila airport. Popular challenge to the Marcos regime intensifies throughout the country.

1984

Marcos wins new battles on the diplomatic front. He sends emissaries to the 4th Islamic Summit (in Casablanca) and to the World Muslim Congress (in Karachi). In February, he holds bilateral meetings with the presidents of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore. The 15th ICFM reaffirms its commitment to respect the territorial integrity of the Philippines and again calls on the MNLF to close ranks. In March, Hashim's 'New MNLF' officially declares itself a separate organisation with the name Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with a religious as well as nationalist agenda. The NPA gains in strength and starts to launch larger attacks. Mass demonstrations become spontaneous and the first nationally coordinated *welgang bayan* (people's strike) shows the depth of popular opposition to Marcos.

1985

Armed attacks by the NPA intensify along with legal, popular opposition to the regime. Marcos schedules a snap presidential election to defuse widespread tension. The legal opposition unites behind Corazon Aquino, Benigno's widow, as the anti-Marcos candidate. The NDF boycotts the exercise, calling the elections a 'sham'.

1986

Snap elections are held, with Marcos proclaimed as winner. Days later, he is

ousted after a failed coup sends millions of people to the main thoroughfare, known as 'EDSA' to protect mutineers from counter-attack. The Marcos family is flown to Hawaii by the US government. Corazon Aquino takes her oath as President and establishes a revolutionary government. She appoints a commission to draft a new constitution, which includes provisions for autonomy in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera region of Luzon.

In March, the MILF sends a message of its readiness to discuss peace with Aquino. In August, with OIC and Muslim World League mediation, the MILF and the MNLF agree in principle to negotiate jointly in an expanded panel. But on September 5, Aquino visits the MNLF camp in Sulu, to talk peace with Misuari. Misuari seizes the initiative and gains recognition for the MNLF from the government as its negotiating partner. The MILF displays political strength through a militant consultative assembly in October, but fails to elicit a government response.

1987

Philippine government and MNLF panels meet in January in Jeddah and agree to discuss autonomy, 'subject to democratic processes'. Aquino turns down MNLF requests to suspend autonomy provisions in the draft Constitution, which is ratified in February. The MILF launches a five-day offensive to assert its presence. This prompts a meeting with government panel chair Aquilino Pimentel, who requests a temporary ceasefire. Talks between the government and the MNLF break down as the government unilaterally implements the autonomy mandate in the newly approved Constitution over MNLF objections. A Mindanao Regional Consultative Commission (RCC) is organised, and a new autonomy bill is submitted to Congress. Both MNLF and MILF bitterly denounce the government's moves.

1988

Aquino meets with the RCC, and starts diplomatic initiatives by briefing Islamic diplomats in Manila about the government's peace programme, emphasising that the Tripoli Agreement is being implemented within constitutional processes. Draft autonomy bills are submitted to both Houses of Congress.

1989

Congress passes Republic Act 6734, which creates the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and Aquino signs it into law on 1 August. A plebiscite is held on 19 November, and the MNLF and the MILF call for a boycott of the exercise. Only four provinces — Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi — opt for autonomy.

1990

Regional elections are held in ARMM. A regional governor and regional assembly assume positions. Aquino signs Executive Orders that define central government relations with the ARMM, which is officially inaugurated on 6 November.

1991

The 20th ICFM (in Istanbul) calls for a resumption of negotiations between the Philippine government and MNLF.

1992

In February, Fidel Ramos, candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections, meets Gaddafi in Tripoli to discuss a comprehensive and permanent solution to the war. In May, he is elected President and immediately issues a call for peace. He appoints a National Unification Commission (NUC) in July to formulate an amnesty programme and a negotiation process, based on public consultations. The first round of exploratory talks with the MNLF is held in October in Tripoli. The NUC starts a consultation process, including a meeting with the MILF.

1993

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas hosts a second round of exploratory talks. The NUC submits its consolidated recommendations in July, prompting Ramos to issue Executive Order 125 defining the approach and administrative structure for government peace efforts. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) is created to continue the work begun by the NUC. Formal talks between the government and the MNLF begin in October in Jakarta. An Interim Ceasefire Agreement is signed, along with a memorandum creating support committees to discuss substantive concerns. Alatas reports the progress of negotiations to the 21st ICFM (in Karachi). The MILF poses no objections to the talks. The OIC visits Sulu in December.

1994

Ramos issues Proclamation 347 granting amnesty to rebels and creating the National Amnesty Commission. A government-MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee is established. Ramos organises executive-legislative discussions, to gain congressional support for a peace treaty. The second round of formal talks with the MNLF begins in September. Ramos visits Saudi Arabia in October and meets King Fahd and OIC Secretary General Hamid Alfigabid (of Niger). Minor military engagements take place before almost every important meeting of the peace process.

1995

Support Committees meet to discuss defence and a regional security force; education; economic and financial systems, mines and minerals; the functioning of a Legislative Assembly, Executive Council and representation in the national government and administrative system; and Shariah courts. On 4 April, armed men believed to be members of a new Islamic rebel group, Abu Sayyaf, raid the town of Ipil, killing 50 people and causing millions of pesos worth of damage in looting and burning. Both the government and the

MNLF issue separate statements calling for greater commitment to peace. The government sponsors a series of Mindanao Peace and Development Summits in key cities from May to November. The government panel briefs Libya on the progress of the talks in October. At the end of the year, the third round of formal talks resumes in Jakarta. An Interim Agreement is signed, containing 81 points of consensus. Predominantly Christian opponents throughout Mindanao denounce this Agreement. Political opposition increases. Vigilantes vow to attack if the Agreement is finalised.

January to June 1996

The government rushes to mollify politicians opposing the Interim Agreement. Consultations are held every month with local officials and members of Congress, with Ramos himself participating in some consultations. The government organises public meetings in Mindanao to promote the Interim Agreement. In June, Indonesia calls a consultation for the OIC Committee of Six. A meeting of the GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee results in agreement to establish the Southern Philippines Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD).

July to August 1996

Members of Congress express opposition to the Interim Agreement. The Senate organises public hearings, and calls on the executive to justify its actions and commitments. The Senate agrees to support the agreement, but only with nine substantial amendments, which dilute the powers and autonomy of institutions to be set up under the agreement. Six senators continue their opposition, and lead a group of politicians who file a 54-page petition asking the Supreme Court to nullify the Agreement. Catholic bishops express support for the agreement, subject to refinements in the text. Misuari announces his bid for the ARMM governorship. The 9th Mixed Committee meeting and 4th round of formal talks take place in Jakarta. Exploratory talks with the MILF begin.

September to December 1996

The Final Peace Agreement is signed on 2 September. The MILF distances itself from the Agreement, but commits not to stand in the way of peace. In the ARMM elections, Misuari runs for governor and wins, and six MNLF leaders are elected to the Regional Legislative Assembly. Ramos issues Executive Order 371, which departs from the Agreement on some significant points. The government forms a new negotiating panel for talks with the MILF in October. The MILF, in a display of strength, holds a huge assembly near Cotabato City from 3-5 December, and reaffirms commitment to independence.

1997

Government and MILF representatives meet and issue a joint press statement. Heavy fighting in Buldon leaves more than a hundred dead and mars talks. Another meeting in early February is suspended because of renewed fighting. The committees meet again in March and agree to form an Interim Ceasefire Monitoring Committee, with Fr Eliseo Mercado as chair. Meetings take place in April, May and June but are bogged down by continued fighting. The AFP

launches its biggest offensive in June. By July, an agreement on cessation of hostilities is forged. Further meetings between the two sides follow.

1998

A new president, Joseph Estrada, is elected. He has an electoral alliance with politicians who opposed the peace agreement. Anti-agreement politicians do well in the local elections. MNLF leaders, save for one, lose their bids for local positions. Ten congressional representatives draft a bill to amend the Organic Act on ARMM in accordance with the peace agreement's provisions. A new government negotiating panel is constituted to talk to the MILF.

1999

New outbreaks of fighting between MILF and AFP followed by re-establishment of ceasefire. Government recognises two MILF camps. ARMM elections are due in September. Three bills have been filed in Congress to amend the Organic Act on the ARMM, expanding it in accordance with the 1996 Peace Agreement. A plebiscite on the new autonomous region is due by the end of year, but may be deferred. ■