

Conflict and Peace in Mindanao: (MNLF)

A summary of Accord and other publications¹

June 2009

General information

	Philippines	Mindanao	ARMM
Area	300.000 km2	95.000 km2	12.000 km2
Population	78 million	18,2 million	2,4 million
Ethnic groups²	Some 12 million	13 Muslim ethnolinguistic indigenous groups (8,3 million): Maranao (2,3), maguindanao (2), tausug (1,5). 18 ethnolinguistic non-Muslim indigenous groups.	Predominantly Muslim
Religions³	Catholic (83%) Muslim (5-10%) Other	Catholic Muslim (18-34%) (76% in 1903) Other	Catholic Muslim (>60%) Other
HDI	84 / 177 (2005)		

Summary of the conflict and the peace processes

Islam arrived to Mindanao before the Spanish Catholic colonizers, and a number of Sultanates were able to resist attempts of external dominance until the US took over as colonial power in 1898. The US and – later- the newly independent government in Manila promoted the settlement of Christians from the rest of the Philippines in the fertile lands of Mindanao, displacing local (Muslim and non-Muslim) population. By the 1960s the local population had been minoritized, while deep-rooted prejudices against Muslims remain up to date in the rest of the Philippines.

Discrimination, Islamic revivalism, and the massacre of several Muslim soldiers during their military service sparked armed struggle for an independent state, first against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and subsequently against the democratic State. When the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) accepted the option of autonomy, a Final Peace Agreement was signed (1996). A splinter group –the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)- continued the armed struggle, with independence and Islam as core components of their agenda. Peace negotiations between the government and the MILF have been going on since 2001, but the final peace agreement is still not in sight. Meanwhile, MNLF and the government are still negotiating the implementation of the 1996 agreement.

Armed conflict and peace negotiations in Mindanao have become among the most protracted in the world. At the same time, Mindanao also benefits from one of the most vibrant and creative civil societies.

Accords

- 1976 December 23: Tripoli Agreement: Autonomy for 13 provinces and 9 cities in Mindanao and Sulu.
- 1987 January 3: Jeddah Accord.
- 1996 September 2: Final Peace Agreement, based on the Tripoli Agreement.

Actors

	Internal	External
Conflict	GRP MNLF	Chief Minister of Sabah (Malaysia) allowed training camps and sanctuary for MNLF during its first years. In 1971 Qaddafi openly declared his support for the Moros.
Negotiations	Imelda Marcos.	OIC. Indonesia.

Data on the armed conflict

Duration	1972 - 1996
Incompatibility	Territory
Factors leading to conflict	Moro common identity develops in the late 60s as a reaction to discrimination and influenced by Islamic revivalism. Jabidah massacre against Muslims on military service (1968).

¹ *Compromising on Autonomy. Mindanao in Transition*. Issue 6, 1999. *The Mindanao Peace Process*, Update Issue 6, 2003.

² Tausug from the Sulu archipelago; Maguindanaws from the Cotabatos; Maranaws of the Lanao provinces. Misuari is a Tausug; MILF is mainly Maranaw and Maguindanaw.

³ Still a contentious issue between the official census and the Office of Muslim Affairs (HDN, 2005)

Factors maintaining conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of violence developed through resistance against colonizing powers and –more recently– proliferation of private armies by Christians and Muslims in the 70s. • Overlapping layers of conflict: Christian-Muslim; class; clans; etc. • People benefiting from conflict and underdevelopment: military, politicians, local elite.
Government troops	?
Paramilitary	The Christian <i>Iloga</i> group had some 35,000 members by 1975. Muslim Blackshirts (70s). CAFGU (in support of the Military). CVO (in support of the Police)
Opposition troops ⁴	?
Child soldiers	About 13% (source?)
Deaths	60,000 (1969-1976) 120,000 (1970-2004) ⁵ 207 rebels, 131 members security forces (1986-2004), ⁶
Displacements	350,000 (1969-1976) (source?)
Refugees	200,000 in Sabah (Malaysia) in the 70s.
Finance	Rebels have had external support from China, Bangladesh and Pakistan at different times. Currently: extortion and other illicit activities.

Negotiations

When? Where? How long? What?	<p>Agreement with Marcos 1975 MNLF formally abandons the pursuit of independence. January 18-19: Peace talks begin in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), chaired by OIC SG. No progress. July: OIC issues a 9-point proposal for the resumption of talks. 1976 Dec. 15-23. 2nd round of negotiations culminate in the 1st Tripoli Agreement. 1977 Talks in Libya (Feb. 9-March 3) and Manila (April 21-30) collapse in the attempt to flesh out details of Tripoli Agreement. "No peace no war" follows. Marcos opts for pushing a socio-economic and infrastructure agenda to win hearts and minds; he implements his own version of autonomy by dividing the 10 provinces that agree to autonomy into two regions. Negotiations break down.</p> <p>Talks with Arroyo 1986, Sept. 5: Pdnt. Aquino meets Misuari in Jolo. 1987, Jan 3: Jeddah Accord, but talks break down as GRP unilaterally implements the autonomy mandate in the newly approved Constitution.</p> <p>3d effort 1992, ? : 1st round of exploratory talks, in Tripoli. 1993, Oct.: formal talks begin, in Jakarta. An Interim CFA is signed. 1994, Sep.: 2nd round of formal talks. 1995, Dec. (?): 3d round of formal talks, in Jakarta. Interim Agreement containing 81 points of consensus. 1996: 4th round of formal talks, in Jakarta.</p>
Model	<i>Sequencing</i> : GRP chose to negotiate with Moro armed groups separately, starting with MNLF, militarily weaker and with stronger international recognition; AFP could then concentrate on combating MILF. Indonesia facilitated a <i>step-by-step approach</i> to the FPA, taking up the easier issues first and the more difficult ones later (vs. Aceh!). Accumulation of consensus points (as later with MILF) was a way to build confidence, and was facilitated by the development of personal friendship.
Negotiators	Imelda Marcos shuttles between Ferdinand and Gaddafi.
Comments	
Ceasefires	1977, January 20: CFA. Collapses towards the end of the year. 1993, Oct.: Interim CFA 1994: Joint CF Committee established.
Monitoring	Independent Monitoring Committee, composed of representatives of CSOs.
Agreements	1996 Final Peace Agreement Creation of a transitional Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) comprising 14 provinces and 9 cities. The Southern Philippines Council of Peace and Development (SPCPD) is to manage peace and development efforts within SZOPAD. Consultative Assembly of 81 members. Congress is to formulate a new law to amend previous Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and to conduct a plebiscite on whether people want to join the ARMM.
Backchannel / civil society diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties maintained multiple channels of dialogue and communication. • Elite and exclusive negotiations, except for a few token efforts to communicate with CSOs.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provisions regarding gender in the negotiation process. • Aquino made some efforts to listen to women and other excluded voices. • After the FPA, MNLF women are vocal about their exclusion from the process. • (Muslim) Women have little decision-making power within their families and communities.
Transitional Justice	No measures.

⁴ www.iiss.org

⁵ Schiavo-Campo, 2005

⁶ HDN, 2005

Analysis

Strategic What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moros: identity, (sovereignty, territoriality) • Government: Constitution, national sovereignty and territorial integrity.
Main features of conflict and negotiations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Peace Agreement (1996) based on the agreement reached 20 years earlier. • Marcos uses 'carrot and stick' approach, offering amnesty and government posts, and development projects, while fighting war.
Factors leading to / enhancing negotiations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1975: military stalemate; threat of embargo by oil-producing Muslim countries; Marcos diplomatic offensive over OIC pressures MNLF to drop its demand of independence. • Both parties needed peace: one for economic development and the other for political survival.
Factors blocking negotiations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philippines still need to find its own identity. Is it a nation of nations? • Lack of state peace policy. • Opposition from local elite (Christian and also Muslim). • Deep social prejudice against Muslims. • Internal disputes among Muslims.
Successes / Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiples initiatives of Inter-faith dialogue. • Ramos Government developed a 'Six Paths to Peace' approach.
Challenges	<p>General issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of Lumads and Christians in ARMM; balance between religions and secularism; reparations; economic redistribution; conflicting land claims; affirmative action policies; redefinition of relations with Manila. • Essential issues for meaningful autonomy: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial capacity. 2. Compensatory justice. • While the FPA may have silenced the guns of the MNLF, it has rubbed salt into wounds of war that had not yet completely healed. • Congress, more than the executive, will emerge as the key institution with the mandate and power to resolve the troubles, for it is the venue where the substantial provisions for autonomy will be debated. • Local governments should play a bigger role in ARMM (and the peace process). • ARMM: Unilateral establishment by Gov't, with a "near-mendicant status". Competition between ARMM officials and Local Gov't Units. • Weapons proliferation.

Role of CSOs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varying orientations and interests compete for popular attention, loyalty and sources of funding, sometimes rooted in divergent political orientations. At times they explode in 'turbing'. • Moro civil society groups are still relatively few. • As in most parts of the Philippines, CS groups in Mindanao come to the fore during times of crisis or significant political change. • Direct participation in the peace process: advocacy; represented in the Consultative Assembly of the SPCPD; a few are intermediaries between parties; monitoring CF. • Core impact: preventing potential conflict spawned by poverty and displacement. • Lumads and women felt excluded from the whole process. • Media set the agenda for public debate; their role can make or break peace. • Only a few academic institutions in Mindanao have engaged in the promotion of peace and development. Some universities have been helping implement the UN Multi-Donor Assistance Program, but the lessons learned from studies have not trickled down to grassroots communities. • Institutional support from churches, business and the media is lukewarm or at times completely absent. • CSOs need to realise that there are no instant dividends after any peace accord!!! • A lot of healing has to take place. • CS will need to form some kind of strategic alliance. • CSOs are crucial in raising strategic questions omitted from the agenda (such as the Lumad agenda), improving transparency, scrutinizing government action and reconstructing social infrastructure.

Implementation

Summary	<p>The 1976 agreement was never implemented.</p> <p>The 1996 has only been partially implemented. MNLF leader Nur Misuari became governor running for elections under the banner of President Ramos' party.</p> <p>Disagreements on implementation began shortly after the signing of the agreement and have lasted up to date.</p> <p>A number of high level Tripartite meetings (GRP, MNLF, OIC) have taken place.</p>
Disarmament	None
Demobilization	None
Reintegration	<p>4,850 rebels integrate in the AFP and 4,835 in the Police (1996-1999).</p> <p>The remaining combatants return to previous activities or join the MILF.</p>
Success	Integration of MNLF combatants in AFP and PNP; peace and order; investment promotion activities.
Difficulties	<p>Everything else, due to lack of funding, capabilities, and legal authority of the SPCPD due to amendments by House of Representatives and Senate (EO 371 became a bureaucratic nightmare that condemned the FPA to failure). GRP assumed a secondary and supplementary role, while the UN and other external donors played a primary role. This did little to reassure Muslims accustomed to neglect from central government.</p> <p>Unrealistic expectations! Great majority of Moros expected a Marshall Plan type of development package.</p> <p>The responsibility for resolving conflicts at the community level and promoting cross-cultural understanding has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of CS groups.</p>

Manila Times, Sept 1 2009: The OIC under Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanuglo convened in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the first session of the tripartite meeting -- GRP, MNLF, OIC --

in 2007; the second in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2008; and the third in Pasay City in March 2009 for the review of the FPA. The OIC's Ministerial Committee of Eight, now the Peace Committee for Southern Philippines (PCSP) chaired by Indonesia, has reported to the pan-Islamic body that Phase I of the FPA was fully implemented and Phase 2's implementation is still ongoing.

Patterns since Marcos' times (70s):

Constitution as a stumbling block; pendulum swings between war and peace; political opposition; government efforts to divide and rule by co-opting Moro leaders; opposition to agreements from (the same families of) local leaders and Congress; government doesn't speak with one voice;... fragmentation; rogue leaders; GRP unilateral implementation of agmt with MNLF (1976, 1986); ARMM (and SPCPD) nothing but another bureaucratic layer providing little except position and privilege for self-interested Muslim politicians; lack of transparency; lack of grassroots consultations; lack of popular support to agreements; little effort to explain the agreement to the population; neglect of concerns of constituencies other than the ones in dialogue (focus on MNLF in 1996, MILF in 2008); Moro hope to expand ARMM (1996, 2008); Institutional support from churches, business and the media is lukewarm or at times completely absent.

Additional information and reflections in the Accord publications:

- For centuries Spain used the tactics of befriending some Moro rulers while fighting others, sowing the seeds of animosity among the various indigenous groups.
- The US also cultivated the development of compliant local elite. Several Moro rulers took advantage of the new colonial laws on land property and became the ancestors of today's Moro landed elite.
- Indonesian ambassador Hartono worked out that it was key to engage Misuari's emotions as well as his intellect. He believes this helped to change Misuari's attitude.
- MILF considered the 1996 GRP-MNLF agreement as an indicator on GRP's seriousness.
- Misuari was cautious on the Final Peace Agreement: 'we have to warn people not to expect too much'.
- "The FPA could not be expected to end all violence in Mindanao."
- "There was nothing 'final' in the FPA."

Islamic diplomacy⁷

- The OIC has used modern interpretations of the principles of Islamic diplomacy in its efforts to settle the GRP-MNLF dispute, which go beyond the principles of conventional dispute settlement such as those used by the UN.
- A unique feature beyond conventional mediation was OIC's aid to Filipino Muslims throughout the process, and the resolutions supporting the MNLF as the 'sole representative of the Bangsamoro people'.
- The OIC used Islamic diplomacy to greater effect with the MNLF than with the government.
- The OIC's support for the authority of the Philippine constitution derives from the OIC charter, where the secular nation-statism has prevailed over Islamic *ummah* in case of conflict.
- The *realpolitik* of national interest prevailed over the militancy of Islamic revolutionary states.
- Given OIC's limitations and poor track record in resolving intra-Muslim disputes (Gulf War), the GRP-MNLF agreement was a major achievement. Both GRP and MNLF were satisfied with their role.
- The combination of conventional, Islamic and Asian processes and approaches made for a unique case of dispute resolution by an international organization.

⁷ Article by Sol Santos

Chronology

- XIVth Century Islam is introduced in Mindanao and Sulu.
1450 Sulu sultanate established.
XVIth Century Maguindanao sultanate and Buayan sultanate established.
1521 Magellan arrives to the Philippines.

1565-1898 Spanish colonial rule

- 1619 Sultan Qudarat becomes ruler of Maguindanao. Greatest Moro expansion.
1645 Treaties delineate boundaries Maguindanao-Spain and Sulu-Spain.
1751 Spain's encouragement of private expeditions against Moros triggers bloodiest period of Moro-Spanish war.
1876 Final Jolo campaign.
1898 February: USA declares the war on Spain.

1899-1945 US colonial rule⁸

- 1899 Kiram-Bates (US-Sulu) Treaty. Never ratified by US Congress. Declared null and void by Pdnt. Roosevelt in 1904.
1906 US troops massacre almost 1000 Moros on Bud Dajo (Sulu).
1912 First formal plan to settle Mindanao with Christians.
1913 US troops massacre more than 500 Moros on Bud Bagsak (Sulu).
1935 First Constitution. US promises independence 10 years later.
Dansalan Declaration asks US not to include Mindanao and Sulu in Philippines.
1941-1945 Japanese occupation

1965 – 1986 Marcos regime

- 1968 March: Jabidah massacre of Moro army recruits releases anger from years of prejudice, ill treatment and discrimination.
1969 **MNLF founded** by young secular-minded students and professionals in Manila.
197? Christian paramilitary (Ilaga) kill 65 in a mosque in Manili.
1971 Intense fighting between Barracudas (Muslim paramilitary) and AFP.
AFP executes 40 Muslims at a checkpoint. Gvmt. Accused of genocide.
1972 OIC requests GRP to protect the lives and property of Muslims.
September 21: President Marcos declares **martial law**.
November: MNLF comes out into the open.
1973 Marcos improves socio-economic conditions in the south while maintaining military operations. He wins over key Muslim leaders outside the MNLF. MNLF's armed wing emerges.
1974 Fighting escalates into large-scale conventional warfare.
February: biggest battle of the war, in Jolo.
OIC officially recognises the MNLF.
1975 War reaches a stalemate. MNLF accepts autonomy.
January: first GRP- MNLF meeting in Jeddah.
1976 Key rebels offered amnesty, money, and pol. positions to surrender with 'dignity'.
December 23: **Tripoli Agreement**.
1977 CFA. Shariah courts established as part of the national system of courts.
April: only 10 of the 13 provinces vote for autonomy in a **plebiscite**.
Marcos unilaterally divides the 10 provinces into two autonomous regions.
Negotiations break down.
May: MNLF granted observer status at OIC.
Dec: S. Hashim announces an 'Instrument of Takeover' of MNLF leadership.
1978 Negotiations resume but GRP chooses to meet Hashim rather than Misuari.
April: OIC recognises Misuari as chairman and spokesman for the MNLF.
MNLF massacres 33 soldiers who had been invited to a "peace dialogue".
1979 Surrendered MNLF founder member A. Alonto joins the GRP panel.
Diplomatic initiatives focus on ensuring the Tripoli Agrmt is being implemented.
1980 March: Malaysia and Indonesia offer to serve as 'honest brokers'.
1981 Misuari fails to receive support for secession.
1982 Marcos consolidates the Philippines' diplomatic position.

⁸ 1899-1916: 20,000 Moros killed (Jubair, 1999, 81)

- Efforts to link NPA and MNLF fail, but co-operate on the ground.
- 1983 OIC calls on Moros to unite prior to new negotiations.
- 1984 March: **MILF is founded**, with a religious as well as nationalist agenda.

1986 – today: Democracy

- 1986 People's Power I. Marcos into exile. Corazon Aquino new President.
 March: MILF ready to discuss peace with Aquino.
 August: With Muslim mediation MILF and MNLF agree to negotiate jointly.
 September: Misuari gains recognition from GRP as its negotiating partner.
- 1987 January: **Jeddah Accord** GRP-MNLF, but talks break down as GRP unilaterally implements the autonomy mandate in the newly approved Constitution. Both MNLF and MILF denounce GRP's moves.
- 1989 Republic Act 6734 creates the ARMM. Rejected by MNLF.
 Nov.: **plebiscite**, boycotted by MNLF, MILF. Only 4 provinces opt for autonomy.
- 1990 Regional elections in ARMM.
- 1992 May: Ramos elected President.
 July: National Unification Commission (NUC) formulates amnesty programme and a negotiation process, based on public consultations.
 October: exploratory talks with the MNLF begin.
- 1993 Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) created.
 October: formal talks begin. Interim CFA. MILF poses no objections to the talks.
- 1994 Ramos organises executive-legislative discussions, to gain support for peace.
- 1995 April 4: a new Islamic rebel group, **Abu Sayyaf**, kills 50 people in Ipil.
 Dec.(?): Interim Agreement containing 81 points of consensus.
- 1996 GRP rushes to mollify politicians opposing the Interim Agreement.
 Agrmt. to establish Southern Phil. Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD).
 Senate presents 9 amendments to dilute autonomy of the agreement.
 Exploratory talks with the MILF begin.
Sep.2: GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement.
 Misuari runs for governor and wins ARMM elections.
 6 MNLF leaders elected to the Regional Legislative Assembly.
 Dec.: MILF holds a huge assembly and reaffirms commitment to independence.
- 1997 March: GRP-MILF Interim Ceasefire Monitoring Committee.
 June: AFP launches its biggest offensive against MILF.
 July: GRP-MILF cessation of hostilities.
- 1998 Estrada elected Pdnt. in alliance with politicians opposed to peace agreement. MNLF leaders, save for one, lose their bids for local positions.
- 1999 On and off MILF-AFP fighting throughout the year.
 Oct.25: formal GRP-MILF peace talks begin.
- 2000
 MILF-AFP skirmishes throughout the year along peace talks.
 March 21: Estrada announces an 'all-out war' against the MILF.
 March 26: MILF calls for a UN-organized independence vote for Muslims.
 May 31: MILF Camp Bushra is bombed, and Philippine flag raised in a mosque.
 July 9: GRP declares victory and announces MILF's 46 camps taken over.
 Sep.2-24: MILF's General Assembly confirms withdrawal from peace talks .
- 2001
 Jan: Estrada falls, Arroyo declares "all-out peace" policy.
 March: Arroyo names Misuari Special Envoy to the OIC.
 March 24: GRP-MILF **General Framework of Agreement of Intent.**
 April: MNLF Exec. Council ousts Misuari, collectively assumes chairmanship.
 June: **Tripoli Agreement on Peace.**
 Aug.7: MNLF and MILF sign an Agreement on General Framework for Unity.
 Aug.14: **Plebiscite** on expanded ARMM. One city and one province vote to join.
 Nov.24: Misuari arrested in Malaysia, accused of rebellion.
- 2002
 March: Arroyo suspends formal peace talks with the MILF after skirmishes.
 April: Geneva Call persuades the MILF to sign commitment against landmines.
 May: MNLF, MILF agree to send a joint delegation to OIC Conference in Sudan.
 June: MILF's project implementing body, the Bangsamoro Development Agency, is set up to "lead,

manage and determine” rehabilitation and development projects in the conflict-affected areas.

2003

Feb.10: GRP presents draft final peace agrmt. with MILF to Congress leaders.

March-May: Several bombs kill dozens of civilians around Mindanao.

May 5: Bishops Ulama Conference offers to mediate.

May 14: OIC recognizes ARMM governor Parouk Hussin as chair of the MNLF.

May 17: Arroyo declares a war of “will and vision” and orders “selective attacks” on “embedded terrorist lairs” in central and western Mindanao.

May 28: MILF announces unilateral 10 day CF, and extends it 10 more days.

June 20: Hashim rejects “terror as a means to resolve differences”.

June 22: MILF extends its ceasefire indefinitely and requests a matching gesture from the military.