

Peace



IMPORTANCE OF A PEACE PLATFORM

Peace is perhaps the most elusive of all human and political aspirations. Did we not believe or wish to believe that peace would be achieved with the end of the Second World War and the Cold War? That peace would prevail with the defeat of the capitalist class by the working class? That peace would ensue after the ouster of dictatorships?

Peace is a complex, much abused and highly contested concept. In recent times, after September 11, 2001, peace has been used as a justification for war. Governments all over the world have made peace synonymous with “global security” – against “terrorism”. Here at home, our governments have made peace the equivalent of “national security” – against “communism”, “Islamist secessionism” and any such attempt to “overthrow government”.

These notions and actions, however, have not brought us or other citizens of the world that “feeling of being secured”. They have, in fact, increased our individual and collective sense of insecurity. There is no safe place in the world today – not in poor nations or in rich ones, not in undemocratic nations or in democratic ones.

For Akbayan, taking peace seriously means not being simplistic about peace or war. At the same time, the party does not believe that peace is inconceivable or unattainable because it is complex. The most urgent task of the party is to educate itself and the larger society about the causes of conflict/war, the breadth and depth of the meaning of peace, and, the traditional and alternative paths to peace -- what paths have been tried, what paths have failed/ succeeded, what paths remain untested, what paths are likely to achieve success in the immediate and long-term.

For Akbayan, peace is an important platform because of three major reasons. Firstly, peace is an integral element of the party’s vision of a transformed society. Secondly, armed conflicts here and abroad have caused the massive loss of innocent lives. The work for peace is thus urgent. It has become a moral obligation not just a political goal. Thirdly, political-social change -- in theory and practice – has always involved “conflict”. As a political party struggling for change in Philippine politics and society, Akbayan needs to reconcile the requirements of such struggle with the requirements of peace.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WAR

Across the globe, people have been led to believe that contemporary wars are primarily about religion (Islam vs. Christianity) or ideology (totalitarianism vs. democracy). For Akbayan, war is about power and hegemony: the use of violence to “take over” or “take control”. War thrives on the principles of domination, subjugation and machismo. War feeds on “an exaggerated sense of one’s power, virility and right to dominate”.

Indeed, conflicts that lead to war are often ideology or religion-based but it is the quest for power and hegemony, not ideology or religion per se that causes war. Ideology and religion merely serve as mobilizing factors in the waging of wars.

The U.S-led war against terrorism claims to have an ideology (freedom, democracy) but we know that it is the desire to maintain “superpower” status (which is actually an anti-thesis of democracy) that drives the U.S to sustain this war.

In the Philippines, past and current governments have repeatedly declared war against communism and Islamist secessionism, in the name of democracy, liberalism and sovereignty. We know, however, that dealing with competing ideologies has been reduced to a matter of “eliminating threats or enemies of the state”.

Unlike other types of crime, ideology-based armed conflicts are state-centered and are neither directed at specific persons nor guided by narrow interests. In most cases, though, vested interests are highly visible. We know that the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were fueled largely by commercial interests (i.e., oil). In Mindanao, the armed conflicts have been known to be crucial in developing careers of military personnel. Waging war against Muslims in Mindanao has become part and parcel of any military general’s resume. Philippine presidents, meanwhile, especially the incumbent President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, have been quick to turn to “anti-communism” as a rallying cry to consolidate a fragmented military.

In other words, war is also about deception. It is about deceiving people into believing in imminent danger even when there is none. It is about convincing people that there is no alternative to solving societal problems except through the use of arms.

What war is may be debatable but the costs of war cannot be disputed. War is costly. War claims lives, destroys property and displaces people. The 9/11 attack took more than 3,000 lives while the post 9/11 U.S war against Afghanistan and Iraq claimed tens of thousands. The recent war between Lebanon and Israel resulted in almost 1,200 deaths. In our country, the body count for the casualties of war between the GRP and the communist insurgents and the Muslim rebel groups has reached hundreds of thousands. In recent years, more than 700 civilians -- 300 of which were political activists and almost 50 were journalists -- have been murdered. It is “killing season” once again -- ever since President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (and her generals such as Gen. Jovito Palparan) took over government in 2001.

We also know that while it is the men who often go to war, it is the women and children who bear the heaviest cost of these wars. A generation of orphans has emerged in several war-torn areas of Mindanao.

Cost/Impact of the Mindanao Conflict

Since the Mindanao war of 1972, it is estimated that some 120,000 lives have been lost, countless more wounded and billions of pesos lost in damage to property. Moreover, a generation of orphans has emerged in several war-torn areas of Mindanao.

Likewise, more than a million people have been rendered homeless and destitute, and 200,000 to 300,000 Muslim refugees from this region are now reportedly residing in Sabah, Malaysia. Many more have migrated to Metro Manila (estimated to be about 50,000) and other safer parts of the country. It has been reported that between 1972 to 1977, the first five years of the war, annual military expenditures rose from PhP51.8 million to PhP3.5 billion, or by almost 700 percent, while the personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) rose from 60,000 to 250,000.

Economic and social costs have also been huge. To counter the secessionist movement in Mindanao, Philippine governments -- since the Marcos administration -- have increased military spending to twice that spent on health or education. Due to the conflict, many arable lands have been left unproductive and communities abandoned in Mindanao. Investors have been scared/driven away.

Properties have been destroyed and many communities deprived of basic social services. Local political and social institutions have been weakened and the psychological damage to communities where Moros, [and] Christians AND LUMADS had hitherto peacefully co-existed is now immeasurable.

While the exact cost of the Mindanao conflict will never be known, its real cost is definitely reflected in the present unequal development of various communities in Mindanao. In areas where the fighting has been intense such as Cotabato, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan, development is limited, governance is weak, if not absent, and poverty is endemic.

According to the latest poverty data from the National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) Mindanao is home to seven of the 10 poorest provinces namely Zamboanga del Norte, Maguindanao, Surigao del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Sur, Misamis Occidental and Lanao del Norte. Zamboanga del Norte is the country's poorest province with the largest increase in poverty incidence -- from 47 percent of the families in 2000 to 64.6 percent (about 573,506 people) in 2003.

- Akbayan Platform Committee, October 2006

War also presents a cost to democracy. War, in fact, destroys democracy. Human rights, civil/political liberties and other democratic institutions are often part of the casualties of war.

Governments all over the world, including our own, have failed to recognize that the real, imminent danger lies in the roots of armed conflicts. All of the on-going armed hostilities – between the GRP and the MILF, between the GRP and the CPP-NPA-NDF -- trace their roots to massive poverty, powerlessness, and social injustice. All these conflicts involve land disputes, claims of injustice, disrespect for culture/religion, and, failure of governance. Even the conflicts in the Middle East involve a people's sense of injustice, particularly the sense of unjust displacement of the Palestinian people from their homeland.

Armed rebel groups continue to exist because more often than not, government gives them reason to exist. The MNLF and the MILF exist because Philippine state and society have yet to recognize and pay for a historical debt. The roots of the Mindanao conflict can be traced to the organization of the Philippine nation-state by the colonial powers. In 1898, through the Treaty of Paris, Spain sold Muslim-dominated areas of Mindanao even though these territories were never theirs to sell.

History of the Mindanao Conflict

The Mindanao problem traces its roots to the organization of the Philippine nation-state by the colonial powers. The Spaniards were unable to colonize the Islam-dominated areas of Mindanao. Upon the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, however, the Americans claimed authority over the Moroland much to the resistance of the Moro people. Even then, the Moros were marginalized economically, politically, socially, and culturally. The policy of land registration, the establishment of a western judicial system, and the resettlement of Mindanao by Christians resulted in the minoritization of Moros and Lumads in their ancestral land. After the 1946 colonial liberation, the Philippine central government in Luzon retained its rule over the established sultanates in Mindanao, carrying over the continuous marginalization of the Moros. The late 1960s saw the emergence of the Moro armed struggle for liberation particularly the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The period was marked by military atrocities directed towards Filipino Muslims. At the same time, the offering of scholarships to young Moros to attend Islamic universities in Cairo and Medina strengthened the sense of Moro nationalism and the need to defend the Islamic way of life and the Moro communities in Mindanao. The Jabidah massacre of 1968 -- where Moro trainees were massacred by their Philippine army superiors after refusing to be part of the invasion of Sabah (Malaysia) -- is said to be the defining moment for contemporary Islam-inspired armed movements in Mindanao. This event, coupled with the 1972 declaration of martial law, crystallized the call for the establishment of the Bangsa Moro (Moro homeland).

The ongoing armed conflict in Mindanao is rooted in the Moros' historical claim to their "right to self-determination" as a people with a distinct history and identity.

- Akbayan Platform Committee, October 2006

The CPP-NPA-NDF, meanwhile, thrives on the reality of mass poverty particularly in the rural areas. Essentially, being poor means not having a lot of options. Among the poor, taking up arms is sometimes the only available option and the CPP-NPA-NDF has been capitalizing on this feeling of desperation.

Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: A Backgrounder

While the Communist Party of the Philippines was established by Jose Maria Sison and other student activists from the University of the Philippines Diliman to counter the atrocities of the Marcos regime, communism had found its place in Philippine society as early as 1930 through the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). CPP's precursor was founded by trade union movement leader Crisanto Evangelista.

The PKP -- after merging with the Socialist Party of the Philippines -- proceeded to battle Japanese forces during World War 2 under the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (HUKBALAHAP). Because of internal conflicts, failed attempts to join the parliamentary process and leadership problems, however, the party found itself weary and defeated towards the end of the 1950's. Jose Maria Sison tried to revitalize the old party but found it to be a lost cause. On December 26, 1968, he bolted the party to form the new Communist Party of the Philippines. A few months later, on March 29, 1969, the New People's Army (NPA) was established in Tarlac. However, the cadres eventually moved to more mountainous Isabela province as a result of military operations in their former base.

On September 21, 1972, the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos issued Proclamation No. 1081 and plunged the country into Martial Law. A few months after, on April 24, 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF), the umbrella political organization of the CPP and other mass democratic institutions, was formed. The social milieu at the time contributed to the rapid growth of the national democratic movement.

The national democrats were powerful players in the anti-Marcos movement, until the BAYAN founding congress fiasco in May 1985 and the decision to boycott the 1986 elections. Seen in retrospect, both have been widely conceded to be tactical errors of the Party. It was also in the mid-1980's that the Party had undergone its most painful period. Fueled by paranoia and unrest that the New People's Army had been infiltrated by Deep Penetration Agents (DPAs), Party leaders embarked on an anti-infiltration campaign involving arrests, tortures and detention of fellow cadres that left an estimated six hundred to nine hundred persons dead.

There was no due process, confessions were extracted under duress, and those suspected had to make up stories as a stop-gap solution to halt the torture. The impact on the Party was devastating.

A few years after, the Communist Party of the Philippines was further fractured as a result of a document entitled "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify the Errors" written by Armando Liwanag. Joel Rocamora describes this period as follows:

Nineteen ninety-three will be marked as a watershed in the history of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). For a quarter of a century, the CPP operated as a unified party that led a much larger national democratic movement. In 1993, the CPP split into two or more parts. After a year of intense inner-party struggle, several large staff and territorial party units broke away from the central leadership starting in mid-1993. What was lost to the CPP was not just a large chunk of its membership and organizational capability. The CPP also lost its ideological and political hegemony over the national democratic movement. As a result, the whole Philippine progressive movement has entered a period of intense and rapid organizational and ideological change.

For the central leadership, however, that juncture in CPP history – also known as the Second Great Rectification Movement (SGRM) – "has been resoundingly successful, as proven by the tremendous growth in strength and advance of all the revolutionary forces and people under the CPP leadership in all forms of struggle."

At present, whether or not the Communist Party of the Philippines remains a potent force and provides the right solution to the nation's social ills depends on whom you ask. Sison and his Reaffirmist (RA) supporters stand by the Party line and continue to maintain the inviolability of its "concrete analysis of concrete conditions." Some of those who bolted the Party now hold key positions in AKBAYAN and joins it in its unwavering struggle towards participatory democracy and participatory socialism.

Today, the aboveground organizations of the CPP-NDF work on crucial and specific areas of advocacy, like human rights and areas. Despite deep ideological differences, RA-affiliated organizations, particularly those that have found their way to Congress, work with AKBAYAN (albeit tactically) on key issues that unite the Left, i.e., the anti-GMA movement. Government forces, especially in recent times under the helm of Jovito Palparan, have not hesitated to lump AKBAYAN together with the extreme armed Left and have in fact included its leaders in their hate list.

While AKBAYAN joins the clamor against extra-judicial killings perpetrated by the State (mostly against the CPP-NDF bloc), it does so under the frame that oppressions in general have to be fought – whether perpetrated by the State or by non-state actors. Hence, it continues to join the victims of the anti-infiltration drives seek accountability for the purges. It continues to join the farmers of Bondoc Peninsula in their struggle against the landlord-NPA alliance in Quezon. It continues to rally against the PTC tax, the use of landmines, the deployment of child combatants and the excesses of armed struggle in general.

- *Akbayan Platform Committee, October 2006*

Akbayan recognizes that states or governments are not the only initiators or perpetrators of war. Non-state actors too can be faulted for promoting a culture of violence. The Al Qaeda, a private organization, staged the most infamous and deadly attack (on civilians) in recent history. Here at home, the anti-infiltration campaign of the CPP-NDF-NPA that led to the deaths and disappearances of more than 2,000 activists and party cadres in the 1980s is an open secret.



Even we in Akbayan have experienced the threat of non-state actors: not too long ago we exposed evidence that some of our leaders have been placed on the hit list of the extreme Left.

Akbayan, thus, condemns all sources and forms of oppression/violence. We recognize, in fact, that violence takes place not only in battlefields but even in homes and bedrooms. For Akbayan, war is not only about the use of weapons but a “state of mind”. Without the disarmament of minds, war and other forms of violence will always be present in our culture and society.

WHAT WE MEAN BY PEACE

For Akbayan, peace means the absence of war. Peace exists when violence no longer plays a determining role in resolving conflicts between governments and citizens, between peoples, and, between nations. Peace thrives on the principles of tolerance, pluralism, and, respect for human rights and diverse cultures.

Peace, however, is not only about the absence of war but the presence and/or the creation of conditions that promote full human and societal development. Even without war, there can be no peace if poverty, inequality and injustice persist. Peace should not be equated with maintaining a status quo meant to reproduce a non-egalitarian society. Often, the causes of war and violence lie in the systemic flaws of this kind of society. Peace that does not promote equality and justice is, at best, a flawed peace. To achieve peace, there has to be development and equal access to the fruits of development. Conversely, development cannot be sustained in an environment that is continuously threatened by violence.

Peace is freedom from fear and violence in the streets and in the homes. For Akbayan, there can be no peace if women continue to experience violence by virtue of their being women. Akbayan believes that patriarchy, not just war or poverty, is a source of oppression particularly for women. There can be no peace if the structures of patriarchy continue to subjugate women and if human relationships continue to be embedded in a culture of machismo.


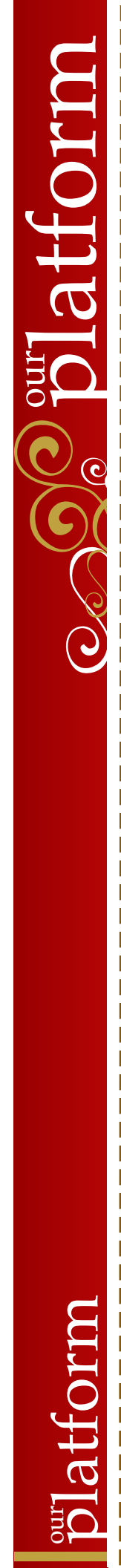
Peace is not about the absence of struggle but the presence of a culture of pluralism and democracy. Peace is not about the absence of conflict but the availability of peaceful means to conflict resolution. Peace is about political processes and institutional arrangements making room for varying views, needs, cultures, lifestyles, and, respecting civil/political liberties and human rights. This is what we mean by “peaceful politics”.

Peace is both means and end. Akbayan believes that human security should be the over-arching framework upon which peace and development should be pursued. Not global or national security over human security. In keeping with the universal declaration of human rights, Akbayan believes that the rights-based approach to peace building is the best way to achieve peace.

Akbayan accepts the UN definition of “human security”, to wit:

Human Development Report, 1994 and 2005:

[“Human security” should not be equated with “human development”. Human development is a broader concept defined as a process of widening the range of people’s choices. Human security means that people can exercise these choices safely and freely – and that they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow.



Human security means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in patterns of daily life (whether in homes, jobs, communities). Loss of human security can be human-made (wrong policy choices), stem from the forces of nature, or both.

Human security stresses that people should be able to take care of themselves; it is a critical ingredient of participatory development. It is therefore not a defensive concept -- the way territorial or military security is -- but an integrative concept.

Most of the threats to human security fall under seven categories: (a) economic security (b) food security (c) health security (d) environmental security (e) personal security (f) community security (g) political security.]

Integral to our vision of a transformed society is "a continued state of peace". We want immediate/operational peace but we also want long-term/sustainable peace. Peace is not complete if people are not free from fear/violence and free from want.

"Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free."

- the 14th Dalai Lama, Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1989

OUR PREFERRED PATHS TO PEACE

Practice Peace

Akbayan is an open, legal, democratic Left party. It is in our nature to embrace peace as a means for societal change.

While Akbayan has chosen to espouse peaceful, non-militaristic means toward change, the party cannot easily dismiss other modes of resistance -- such as armed struggle and active non-violence --- as irresponsible or naïve.

Active Non-violence (ANV) is a body of strategies and tactics and a way of life founded on a resistance to injustice, a recognition of the dignity of the human person, even of the oppressor, and a consistency in ways and means. It spans withdrawal of support from key institutions of unjust and oppressive systems, civil disobedience, fasting, boycotts, general strikes and other forms. It has formed part of people power revolutions in our history.

- Akbayan Platform Committee, October 2006

The party is cognizant of the role of these various forms of resistance in national liberation. Philippine history is replete with armed struggles and political revolutions. Our ancestors -- from the warriors of the Katipunan to the Muslims who were massacred in Bud Dajo -- fought our colonizers with bolos and brave hearts. In the not-too-distant past, we ousted a dictator through a bloodless people's uprising.



Akbayan is aware that necessity (i.e., objective and subjective conditions) dictates the appropriateness of forms of struggles at given periods and junctures.

Akbayan knows that all forms of resistance are indictments of oppression. We maintain, however, that the excesses of armed struggle and the dangers it breeds far outweigh the possibility that it can be used as a viable medium of significant systemic change. Any human rights violation caused by or in the name of the armed revolution is as tragic and as deplorable as the state-sponsored violence it seeks to counter. Indeed, clenched fists, when sullied by the blood of innocents, can no longer be held up in righteous protest.

Our struggle, thus, is guided by what we know about war and what we mean by peace. We choose democratic means to achieve democracy because we know war destroys democracy. We believe in and uphold civilian supremacy to the extent that even in the face of political harassment – from the “Right” and the “Extreme Left” -- we choose to rally political, not armed defense.

At the same time, we know there can be no peace if the status quo remains unchallenged. Enduring in the struggle and continuously offering an alternative platform for peace and development is our chosen path to long-term peace. This platform and our engagements must be comprehensive enough to encompass political, social and economic relations needed to build a society of peace.



Peace is something that is to be achieved not only outside of us but also within and among us. Part of our peace platform is to practice alternative conflict-resolution within our ranks: to resolve differences through discourse and not through violence. We shall endeavor to keep pluralism and internal democracy alive in our party – at all times. We shall recognize differences while insisting on equal treatment. In our interpersonal relations – especially in the relationships between men and women -- we will also strive to be more just. We shall strive to practice what we preach.

Advocate for Genuine Peace Processes and Security Sector Reforms

Akbayan believes in the political settlement of ideology-based armed conflicts. These conflicts are deeply rooted in societal problems. They should not and cannot be addressed through militaristic solutions. Neither can they be resolved through quick-fix solutions such as political accommodation.

On the GRP-NDF Peace Talks. After over a decade of on-off peace negotiations between the GRP and the National Democratic Front (NDF), there appears to be no end in sight to the 37-year old armed conflict between the two sides. A most crucial element for success is missing in the peace talks: a major ideological or strategic shift on the part of the parties to the armed conflict.

An ideological or strategic shift means that warring parties finally recognize that a military and political stalemate has been reached and that such impasse needs to be broken. The experiences of El Salvador and South Africa show that such a shift on the part of the Salvadoran government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation (FMLN) and both the apartheid government and the African National Congress (ANC) were essential to the attainment of peace. Both the GRP and the NDF have not really veered away from their original objective for going into the talks: to use the process as one of the tools for eliminating the other. The GRP wants to crush the NDF and its component organizations, especially the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA) which it has branded as “terrorist organizations”. It seeks to maintain the current “elite democracy” – a political and social order with the formal trappings of democracy but which is



actually dominated and controlled by an entrenched politico-economic elite – without undertaking any substantial reform. The roots of rebellion and insurgency lie precisely in the persistence and institutionalization of this unjust order. The CPP-NPA-NDF engages in peace talks in support of its primary strategy of “protracted people’s war” for overthrowing the government and establishing a “national democracy” – essentially a one-party authoritarian state patterned after China in Mao’s time.

Despite the talks, the violence has continued unabated. Over the past two years, in fact, extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations have increased sharply. Scores of activists identified with the “national democratic movement” as well as with other left groups have been shot and killed in cold blood by unidentified men widely believed to be military and paramilitary forces. The Arroyo government has done nothing to stop these extrajudicial killings and is even suspected of being directly responsible for them. Left groups have been actively involved in mass campaigns for the impeachment or removal of Arroyo for corruption and electoral fraud. Moreover, the government counter-“terrorist” efforts directed against the CPP-NPA-NDF in both the military and politico-diplomatic spheres have been proven ineffective. The CPP-NPA-NDF has also been partly responsible for the increased political violence. It has stepped up its killings of government troops, “class enemies” and members of rival leftist groups.

Left to themselves, the GRP and the NDF are unlikely to budge at all from their current intransigence. The only way that they can be made to listen to reason, to put an end to all the violence and to genuinely open up to the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the armed conflict is for pressure from the national and international community to be brought to bear down on them.

It is very important that those working for peace who are not aligned with the GRP nor the NDF strive to build a broad and vigorous peace movement consisting of a vast network of popular organizations of various sectors, non-governmental organizations, human rights groups, religious organizations, business groups, political parties, etc. Such a peace movement could put pressure on the GRP and the NDF to work more seriously for a peaceful settlement of the long-standing armed conflict.

The role of the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG) in the GRP-NDF peace negotiations has evolved from providing good offices in 1998 to facilitating the talks and funding the operations of the Joint Monitoring Committee for the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAR-HR/IHL). It is time for the RNG to go beyond the role of a “mailbox” – as it were, pushing the envelope of the peace talks -- and to assume the interventionist stance it took in the Middle East peace talks or those between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It is time for the RNG to exert pressure on the two parties to make strategic shifts and show evidence of an earnest intention and the capacity to reach a negotiated political settlement. With support from the national and international community, the RNG can perhaps move towards that of mediator, as Finland did in the peace process between Aceh and Indonesia.

Together with the peace groups in the Philippines, the RNG would have to harness the support of the broader international community not just for attaining the peaceful resolution of the GRP-NDF armed conflict but also for post-conflict truth and reconciliation, and, for reconstruction and development efforts.



The peace process revolving around the GRP-NDF talks cannot be taken in isolation from other peace processes between the GRP and other rebel groups (i.e., MILF, MNLF, and other left-wing forces as the Rebolusyonyong Partido ng mga Manggagawa and the Rebolusyonyong Partido ng mga Manggagawa-Mindanao). Whatever agreements are forged in one process have significant repercussions in the others. Hence, those involved in peace advocacy in one would have to work closely with those in others.

On Anti-Communism, Anti-Insurgency. We eschew the absolutism of the CPP paradigm and we built a platform of participatory socialism and participatory democracy diametrically opposed to the Maoist proposition. Communism, however, has been and continues to be a legitimate world-view, challengeable only by a better world-view. The revolution that has been waged on its behalf, discredited as it may be for many, is still a compelling indictment of very real state oppressions.

Hence, we consider the current anti-communism campaign being waged by the military as Philippine-style McCarthyism that constitutes a serious assault on freedom of association and freedom of speech. The Arroyo-sponsored all-out war against the Left is a serious encroachment on civil liberties and human rights.

It is likewise clear that GMA is using the communist bogeyman strategy as part of her politics of survival and as a means of consolidating and getting support from a deeply divided military.

Aside from the fact that the current anti-insurgency strategy is flawed as it lumps together all opposition forces and employs the same policy of indiscriminate annihilation for all, its failure to address the roots of the insurgency – widespread poverty, injustice, alienation from work, inaccessibility to state infrastructure – renders it not only unsustainable, but also susceptible to breeding further insurgency.

On the Mindanao Conflict. As mentioned earlier, the armed hostilities between Philippine government and Muslim rebel groups such as the MILF and the MNLF have historical roots. For Akbayan, the first step towards resolving the Mindanao conflict is to recognize these roots and the historical debt owed to Muslims in our country.

Given this history, Akbayan accepts that our Muslim brothers and sisters should not be denied of their right to self-determination. Our task as Akbayan, however, is to insist that government discontinue its policies of either total war or political cooptation because these policies only serve to heighten the ire of Muslims against the Philippine state. Government must look into the roots of the Mindanao conflict instead of fanning anti-Muslim sentiments.

The Mindanao conflict is not only historical in nature – it is a continuing saga. Continued marginalization of the Moros in Mindanao has several manifestations: economic deprivation, lack of political participation, inadequate or poor delivery of health and social services, lack of infrastructure, non-preservation of Muslim identity, general feeling of physical insecurity (both individually and collectively). The Mindanao conflict has cultivated widespread economic, political and cultural marginalization too overwhelming to ignore.

Government must also take into consideration the fact that the Mindanao problem is not only about conflicts with the Muslims but the marginalization of lumads or indigenous peoples (IPs) as well. Not all of these lumads have been Islamized: their identity as IPs must be properly recognized and their needs appropriately addressed. Government must recognize the right of IPs to their ancestral domain.



Furthermore, the Mindanao conflict should be resolved, first and foremost, by Mindanaoans. But because the conflict is also about national governance, everyone must be involved in finding the appropriate solution to this problem. It is in this context that Akbayan continues to advocate for peace talks between the GRP and the MILF.

As a national party, we lean towards the idea of autonomy or autonomous governance of Muslims in Mindanao. We are aware, however, that the (autonomy) offer of previous governments has failed to achieve both peace and development in Mindanao. Akbayan has yet to sharpen its critique of these past solutions but we know that in these cases, autonomy has not been genuine particularly because past and current governments have refused to cut the umbilical cord that has always tied the Moro elites to Malacanang.

The Mindanao Conflict: Alternatives Explored

The Marcos Administration. With both sides suffering heavy losses, the government and the MNLF searched for a pragmatic way of dealing with the issues. After a stalemate in 1975, the Marcos government tried a political settlement. It concluded a peace accord, the Tripoli Agreement, on 23 December 1976, under the mediation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The accord defined the substantive principles for the establishment of autonomy and cease-fire among the thirteen provinces and nine cities of Mindanao, without undermining Philippine sovereignty. While the Tripoli agreement signaled the departure of the MNLF from secession to that of autonomy, it was, at the same time, a tacit recognition of the rightful claim of the Moro to their homeland. The provinces and cities to be included in the Tripoli Agreement as areas of autonomy were actually the territories under the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. The agreement likewise affirmed and recognized the right of the Muslims to establish their own courts, their own educational, administrative, economic and financial systems. The government pushed for the holding of a plebiscite to determine which of the thirteen provinces and nine cities were willing to be part of the autonomous region. Only ten provinces opted for autonomy. Marcos then created two autonomous regions, Region IX and Region XII by virtue of Presidential Decree 1618. The MNLF did not accept the government position and reverted to its secessionist stand. War resumed, mostly calculated and primarily for propaganda purposes. The MNLF, a considerable force to reckon with in the 1980s, fragmented along ethnic lines: the Maranao faction under Dimas Pundato organized the MNLF-Reformist Group (RG) in 1982 and represented the traditional stream, and Hashim Salamat's Maguindanao faction formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984 and represented the Islamic revivalist group. The MNLF under Nur Misuari remained and represents the secular wing of the Moro people.

The Aquino Administration. Capitalizing on her popularity, the Aquino government (1986-1992), in an effort to find a solution to the Mindanao problem, successfully included in the 1987 constitution a provision on the state's recognition of the rights of the Muslims of Mindanao and of the indigenous peoples of Cordillera (Article X, Section 15 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution). This constitutional provision paved the way for the establishment of an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao, which resulted in the passage of the Republic Act 6734 on August 1, 1989, the act creating the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). After the plebiscite on November 19, 1989 of the thirteen provinces and nine cities covered by the Tripoli Agreement, only the four provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi opted to join. The ARMM was officially inaugurated on June 6, 1990. The MNLF rejected the autonomy. It remained steadfast in its original proposition of "all (of the thirteen provinces and nine cities) or nothing."



The Ramos Administration. After his assumption to power as president of the Republic, Ramos created the National Unification Commission (NUC) on July 28 1992 by issuing Executive Order No. 19. After conducting numerous consultations in the entire country, the NUC submitted its consolidated recommendations to the President on July 1, 1993. Thereafter, on September 15, 1993, Pres. Ramos issued Executive Order No. 125, which defined the approach and administrative structure for the government's comprehensive peace efforts. The "Six Paths to Peace" was formally adopted as the major components of the peace process, to wit:

First. The pursuit of social, economic and political reforms which address the root causes of insurgency and social unrest;

Second. Consensus building and empowerment for peace, which seek to make consultations with the people a regular part of governance;

Third. Peace talks with the different rebel groups aimed at final negotiated settlements;

Fourth. Reconciliation, reintegration into society and rehabilitation of rebels, including amnesty and other measures to address the needs of former rebels, demobilized combatants and civilian victims of the armed conflicts;

Fifth. The protection of civilians and the de-escalation of conflict, which includes such measures as limited suspension of offensive military operations (SOMO), recognition of peace zones, intensified delivery of basic services to conflict areas and strict implementation of laws and policy guidelines for the protection of human rights; and

Sixth. The building of a positive climate for peace, which includes confidence-building measures between government and the rebel groups and peace advocacy and education for Philippines society as a whole.

The Office of the President for Peace Process (OPPP) was likewise created to continue the work begun by NUC. The Six Paths to Peace served as the guiding posts for the various peace initiatives undertaken by the Ramos administration. The process and the outcome of the peace process between the GRP and the MNLF is very much reflective of it. Former President Fidel Ramos pursued the peace option out of the conviction that development could thrive only in an environment of peace. After four years of negotiation, the GRP and the MNLF, with the participation of the OIC concluded another peace agreement on 2 September 1996.

The September 2, 1996 Agreement. The signing of the agreement set the tone for all the peace and development initiatives that came to SZOPAD. The opening line of the agreement states: "the final agreement on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement." This illustrates the desire to reach an agreement on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement signed on 23 December 1976. There are 154 points of consensus in the agreement and it is divided into two phases.

Phase 1 covers a three-year transition period starting after the signing of the peace agreement and calls for the establishment of the Special Zone of Peace and Development in Southern Philippines (SZOPAD), the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) which will ensure that peace and development projects and programs are effectively accomplished, and the SPCPD Consultative Assembly. During this phase, the process of integration of MNLF elements with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) will commence.



The peace agreement calls for the establishment of a SZOPAD covering fourteen (14) provinces namely, Palawan, Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Cotabato, Maguindanao, Davao del Sur, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and Sarangani, and ten (10) cities namely General Santos City, Cotabato City, Kidapawan City, Marawi City, Iligan City, Pagadian City, Dapitan City, Dipolog City, Zamboanga City, and Puerto Princesa.

The provisions of Phase 2 shall be recommended by the government to Congress for incorporation in the new Organic Act. The pertinent, but highly contentious, provisions of the final agreement shall cover the following areas: the power and structure of the executive council, legislative assembly and the administrative system of the new regional autonomous region and its representation in the national government (agreement 21 to 72); the establishment of the special security force for the autonomous region (agreement 73 to 93); system of education (agreement 94-125); the economic and financial system, mines and minerals (agreement 126 to 151); and, the establishment of the Shari'ah (Islamic) courts (agreement 152).

While the MNLF has decided to work within the Philippine political and economic mainstream given the 1996 agreement, the MILF continues to seek an independent Islamic State. With MILF's position, the government continued to pursue peace talks with the MILF.

The Estrada Administration. On March 21, 2000, the peace talks between the GRP and the MILF collapsed when Pres. Estrada declared his "all-out war" policy in Mindanao. The government adopted once again a military solution when it declared a total war policy against the MILF. The result of the military campaign was tragic, with no clear victors. The military campaign was more expensive than what was launched by Marcos and it displaced more civilians than Marcos did. The peace agreement with the MNLF remained but did not prosper. There was a failure to deliver the promised peace and development in SZOPAD.

Frustrated with the Mindanao policy of the Estrada government, Nur Misuari lambasted the government during the May 2000 meeting of the OIC's senior officials in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and during the OIC's International Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur in June 2000. Misuari warned that the MNLF would be left with no other option but to insist on independence if "genuine autonomy" under the Tripoli agreement was not implemented. His remarks provoked a storm of criticism from congressional leaders and from the Estrada administration.

The Arroyo Administration. The Arroyo administration resumed the peace talks as soon as it assumed power in January 2001, with the first exploratory talks held in March that year. Three formal peace negotiations were held that same year - in Tripoli, Libya in June and in Malaysia in July and October. The Arroyo administration suspended formal peace talks in March 2002 but back-channel talks and agreements continued. In February 2003, on the eve of the presentation of the government peace panel's draft final peace agreement, military operations were launched purportedly against a kidnap-for-ransom gang. The military later admitted, however, that said operations were targeted at the MILF which was reportedly building another camp in Buliok, Pagalungan. Thus, military offensives against the MILF and unfounded accusations of government against the MILF in reported terrorist bombings tainted the Arroyo government's sincerity to pursue peace negotiations.

External Aid. The Philippines has been a regular recipient of donors' assistance - though mostly in the form of loans rather than grants -- to finance its various development endeavors. The donor community slightly increased its development assistance to the country after the signing of the



peace agreement in 1996. Such solidarity was manifested in various donors' initiatives in SZOPAD, thereby establishing a "peace and development" aid industry in the Southern Philippines. One such initiative was the SPCPD-NEDA-UN/Multi-Donor Program. It was composed of different actors representing varied interests and expertise. However, contrary to the public pronouncements of the various actors involved in the program regarding their intention to contribute towards "peace and development" in the SZOPAD, the discourse that defined the course of the multi-donor program was not the rhetoric about "peace and development". The discourse that shaped the nature of the multi-donor program was anchored on one of the specific provisions of the peace agreement that called for "a special socioeconomic, cultural and educational program to cater to the MNLF..."

However, it was development work, with poverty reduction as main emphasis, which remained the focus of the overseas development assistance policies of most of the donors involved in the multi-donor program. Therefore, the donors' involvement in peace-building was rather incidental. The various components of the multi-donor programs were primarily in response to the development needs of the MNLF combatants, their families and communities. There is no question that these programs are badly needed in these communities, with or without the peace agreement.

While there have been considerable "development" breakthroughs accomplished by the program as intended, the SPCPD-NEDA-UN/Multi-Donor Program unintentionally generated problems that could affect the future course of the peace process. Instead of championing the cause of bringing peace and development in SZOPAD, the donor community limits itself by the way it has constructed its assistance. In the midst of a highly fragmented society, the SPCPD-NEDA-UN/Multi-Donor Program became partisan. Worse still, it has in a way "hijacked" the peace process from those who have the main stake in keeping it. In the rush to implement programs, the multi-donors failed to secure the needed social preparation of the beneficiaries, leading to a dole-out mentality. Moreover, the "documentation culture" that persists in the development industry exposed the MNLF to a great risk, should the peace process collapse.

- Akbayan Platform Committee, October 2006

Akbayan also needs to develop its ideas on "decentralized governance" that form part of the discourse on conflict-resolution in Mindanao. Akbayan, in principle, accepts the concept of federalism. The party believes that the political process will be better managed under a federal set-up where (i) accountabilities are clear and decentralized, and, (ii) government institutions are made more accessible and brought closer to citizens. The details of this set-up, however, need to be subjected to further party discourse because Akbayan wants to ensure that its idea of federalism will address concrete problems rather than create "local Marcoses, Aquinos, Ramoses, Estradas, and Arroyos". The party also believes that the organization of Philippine political society must take into consideration the diversity of cultures and ethnicities within the country, and, the reality of unequal economic and political relations between those in the center and the periphery.

In the ultimate analysis, solutions such as federalism, autonomy, independence are mainly about forms and structures of governance. What is more important to Akbayan is this: any solution offered for the resolution of the Mindanao problem must be geared towards addressing real problems on the ground such as massive poverty and income inequality, extreme marginalization of lumads, intermittent armed hostilities, internal displacement, presence of anti-Muslim sentiments, government corruption, environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources.



On Security Sector Reforms. For Akbayan, security sector reforms are important. These are reforms in the military and police institutions meant to enable them to become participants in, rather than obstacles to, the process of democratization, the fulfillment of human rights and the building of a modern state. Security sector reforms may pave the way for security sector governance.

Akbayan is aware that problems in the security sector lie not only within the military and police institutions but in political processes that are supposed to govern these institutions. The appropriate relationship between the military/police and civil society also needs to be problematized further. The party has to develop further its ideas on what reforms need to be undertaken and how these can be propagated and institutionalized.

Call for Disarmament and the Reform of Foreign Policy

Akbayan rejects the “policy of deterrence” that gained prominence during the Cold War -- i.e., the threat and fear of mutually assured destruction. Akbayan believes that this policy does not deter and exacerbates, in fact, animosity between groups in contention. The policy also increases the probability of wasting opportunities for identifying common interests and taking joint action towards achieving them.

Akbayan calls for disarmament – of nuclear weapons, of private armies and paramilitary groups, and, of non-state actors (i.e., de-mobilization of arms must be the outcome not the pre-condition of peace negotiations). We also call for the scaling down and professionalization of the Armed Forces to a smaller standing army and the civilianization of the National Police as part of security sector reforms. We likewise support the ban on anti-personnel and all other landmines and the control of small arms and light weapons. Most enduringly, we call for the disarmament of minds, the dismantling of militarism, sectarianism, vanguardism and sexism – toward the building of a culture of peace.

Through our work with the diplomatic community in the Philippines, overseas Filipinos and fraternal parties in other countries, Akbayan seeks to contribute to a reform of Philippine foreign policy.

We desire a foreign policy that rejects the hegemony of a superpower and a unipolar world, and, envision an ideologically diverse global community, equitable bilateral and multilateral relations, including in economic matters; people-to-people solidarity, the decrease in all forms of violence within and between societies, the reform and democratic governance of the coercive arms of states and the flowering of cultures of peace in various countries.

Strengthen the Peace Constituency and Educate for Peace

A peace constituency is a social movement of civil society groups, organized communities, social institutions and individual peace advocates who organize their ranks and engage the parties to the armed conflict to catalyze citizens’ actions, address the impact of the conflict on society and create the conditions for peace building. These non-combatants in an internal armed conflict – the civilians – could constitute a people’s peace movement and, indeed, should be recognized by the armed parties as a domestic third party in the peace process. They, too, have analyses of the roots of the armed conflict and proposals on how to achieve a just and lasting peace. They have a primary stake in the prospects of war -- they pay the highest price in the armed conflict -- and peace. Their community and/or basic sectoral agendas are the bases of community-based peace processes and must be reflected in the agenda of any national negotiation.



Their participation in the peace processes assures to a greater degree that citizens' perspectives will figure in the deliberations, they will be committed to the outcomes and will assist the implementation of agreements, and, helps create and deepen a culture of peace in society.

The peace constituency should take on a pro-active stance and seek to participate in some way in the negotiation process – directly or indirectly – and help shape the negotiating agenda to ensure that the peace talks address the root causes of the conflict. Akbayan believes that peace processes should not be limited to official peace negotiations between warring groups. Peace processes may be people-initiated and community-based -- such as various models of Peace Zones, programs for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, grassroots training in International Humanitarian Law, -- or national, such as consultations of the National Unification Commission and peace negotiations. These are designed to achieve certain elements of the peace agenda, and are participated in at various levels by the peace constituency.

This peace constituency can and must draw strength from existing international humanitarian law backed by the Geneva conventions and their protocols -- on protection of non-combatants including women and children, preservation of cultural structures, and, protection of medical facilities. The United Nations has also established guidelines for the internally-displaced persons. Furthermore, there are international treaties that prohibit the use of certain types of weapons (e.g., landmines).

The party also believes that localized peace “processes” must be promoted but caution must be taken against the localization of peace “negotiations” meant to coopt and divide communities/ concerned groups.

Peace groups should also seek to raise awareness and educate the public about peace and the need to promote a culture of peace. Part of the task of peace advocates in the Philippines is to mobilize international support for peace processes and to work closely with international forces supportive of the peace efforts. Once a peace pact has been reached the peace movement could help in truth and reconciliation efforts, and in mobilizing appropriate national and international aid for the rehabilitation and development of war-affected communities. The peace constituency should monitor events and generate attention when violations of peace agreements occur or when pact provisions remain unfulfilled.

Akbayan, as part of the broad peace constituency, shall build on existing national, local and international efforts to prevent and stop wars, and, to build a culture of peace.

