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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

On March 8, we are celebrating International Women's Day and President Cory Aquino has designated the whole month of March as Women's Month. So we should try this month to be aware about women's issues, concerns and problems. I would like to focus here on one specific issue: the Trafficking of Women and Children. Do you know that Human Trafficking is the third most lucrative industry in the world, next only to guns and drugs? About 2 million people are trafficked for different purposes: sex trade, labor force or donor donation. With regard to the trafficking of women and children, the predominant reason is for sex trade. In the Philippines, there are about 400,000 women victims of trafficking, 100,000 of whom are children!

I am sure you have read in the newspapers recently and heard over the radio the testimony of an eleven year old girl, "Nene" who managed to escape a trafficker who attempted to snatch her to bring her to a van where there were already 2 unconscious children. Thanks be to God that lucky girl bit his arm and managed to escape. Among the trafficked adult women, 51% consent to the trade and 41% victims are forced into it. There is need for consciousness raising among women, among parents, among law enforcers, etc. Women in general have to do something in their own areas of responsibility to stop this trafficking of women and children. There is need for the economic empowerment of women so they are not vulnerable to the seductive promises of recruiters.

As we celebrate International Women's day, let us commit ourselves to the elimination of all exploitation and violence against women and children.

Lovingly yours,

S. Mary John Manangan OSB
Sister Mary John Manangan, OSB

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

IMAGES OF HOSPITALITY

by Sr. Pia Lansang, OSB
Manila Priory

It was December 15th, the third week of Advent 2008. My destination was “1007 Paris Street, Malate, Manila”. At first glance, the curious mind thinks “oh, what a classy-sounding address – “Paris!” And that number – the last 3 digits are “007”. Yet this place has no connection with the film’s crime-busting operations of Secret Agent “No.---” (serial identity). No, this is “*Tuluyan*.” Literally, it means “a drop-in shelter” which extends hospitality to poor street families in our crowded urban streets. It is a welcome center located just about 4 blocks from us Missionary Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica’s Priory of Manila. On this morning, several Sisters, headed by Sr. Cecille Ido, OSB, along with her Socio-Pastoral Apostolate (SPA) staff, some volunteers and guests were hosting an Advent celebration for our modern-day “strangers,” the itinerant street “pilgrims” in an age of globalization. Ever on the go, they walk from block to block, zone to zone, corner to corner in search of “pagpag” (the throw-away leftovers and other items in garbage bins). An average street family has no known address, no registered census number, no domicile, no roof over their heads. Home is a mobile “*kariton*” (a pushcart) measuring all of 5-x-2 feet. Everything about them and their lives seems *strange*, out of synch with what you and I would consider a normal and stable lifestyle.

Seven months later, as I am writing this reflection on hospitality -- in June 2009, this center of hospitality has already welcomed at least 137 street people (34 families). From the insecurities and dangers of the streets, here they can freely walk in; as transients, they can spend some peaceful moments away from the madding crowd. Feeling at home, they avail themselves of the house facilities: water for washing -- of hands and feet (recall the ancient welcome ritual of hospitality?), taking a shower, washing their clothes, using the comfort room, cooking their food and taking a rest from the heat of the day and the worries of the night. Extending a day of hospitality to these poor people includes on certain days scheduled group prayer, catechism lessons and values formation, as well as some initial self-help livelihood activities, like weaving doormats.

This little story of hospitality can be multiplied a hundred times over, in similar or parallel ways, in our congregation, (and beyond our own Benedictine communities): -- images of Missionary Benedictine hospitality in different forms: from the Philippines to Africa, from India to Europe and America, from Korea to Brazil, and so on. In our **125 years** (1885-2010) of missionary service through schools, hospitals, dispensaries and clinics, social centers, reach-out programs, soup kitchens and feeding programs, even a “welcome room” and hot meals for “road wanderers” (the homeless) at the *Pforte* (parlor), and so on. How many noteworthy acts of hospitality have been and are still being done by our pioneering and succeeding generations of Benedictine missionaries! And in some way or other, that includes you and me, *everyone of us*, as part of the great mission tapestry of hospitality woven down the decades of our history. Wherever you are, be it in the service of your foreign mission or within the confines of your

particular local community, you put into practice our Benedictine hospitality, perhaps often unseen and unsung.

Let's get into a flashback mode (in electronic "DVD" language). On May 8-29, 2009 I felt privileged to attend, along with other Benedictine and Cistercian monastics, a Seminar on the Rule of St. Benedict conducted by our well-known commentator on the RB, Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB. An excellent teacher, she led our group to an inspiring adventure: a process of discovery (or re-discovery) of the gems of the RB through textual analysis. (I am of course aware that many other Sisters and Priors have likewise undergone a similar intensive study of the RB with her). One of the chapters we dealt with was Chapter 53 "On the Reception of Guests", therefore on HOSPITALITY. To begin with, "look to the text itself" (study the text), she says, and not immediately make use of commentaries ...for you yourself will come up with your own (or the same) discoveries.

BENEDICTINE HOSPITALITY

This reflection paper, however, is not an RB textual exegesis.¹ But going back to our introductory story above ("*Tuluyan*"), how many images now surface in my mind as I re-read RB 53. To briefly name some: 1) fundamental Christian-Benedictine attitudes: "*all guests are to be welcomed as Christ*";² "*show honor to all*"; "*meet the guest with courtesy and love*"; "*show humility to a guest on arrival and departure*"; 2) gestures of hospitality towards the guest: "*pray together (invite them to pray) and be united in peace*"; "*read the divine law for instruction*"; "*every kindness to be shown to him*"; food is served ("*the superior may break his fast for the guest's sake*"); 3) washing rituals: the abbot "*shall pour water on the hand of the guest*"; he and the community "*shall wash their feet*;" 4) universality and inclusiveness of hospitality: "*all guests to be welcomed*"; hospitality to be extended to strangers, pilgrims, the poor (and pilgrims / itinerants again) to whom especially "*great care and concern are to be shown*"; and to those "*who belong to our faith*".

OUR CONSTITUTIONS

Echoing some of the hallmarks of our Benedictine hospitality, our Constitutions point to our practice of hospitality as *missionary service* (N505). Concretely our norms stipulate for creating a welcoming space for guests, *providing facilities* and services for "*a friendly reception of guests*" (N407); to be "*communities that are open and hospitable*" (SN 602.1) – in fact we sometimes interrupt the monastic silence and table reading (to me, a form of breaking the fast from speech) when guests happen to join us for meals in the refectory. Moreover, our serving of food, giving alms to the needy, and inviting the guests to our Divine office are ways of "*sharing our material and spiritual goods of our common life*", -- an expression of genuine hospitality (IV,6).

SCRIPTURAL IMAGES of HOSPITALITY

The classic image of hospitality in the Old Testament is the story of Abraham in *Genesis 18:1-15*. The Lord appears to Abraham "by the oaks of Mamre" in the three strangers. Abraham runs from the entrance of his tent to meet them. He prostrates before them (addresses them as "My Lord") and invites them to a meal. Abraham's guests prove to be angels, and his act of hospitality is rewarded with the blessing of the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in their old

age. In the New Testament the image of Jesus as the “Man for Others” stands out. In Jesus, we find the practice of hospitality par excellence. He is the paragon of openness and service to all, without exclusion. We find him sharing his time, his wisdom, love, his own person (himself). He reached out to strangers (Samaritan woman); to friends (Martha, Mary and Lazarus); the sick (paralytic at pool of Bethzatha). He did not only share but also received hospitality even from sinners (Zaccheus). His hospitality was giving all he had – teaching, feeding the multitudes, drawing all through his great warmth and openness of heart.

This hospitality of Christ continues today. In the daily Eucharist Jesus welcomes us to the Table of the Lord, feeding us with his own Sacred Body and Blood. Daily we hear Christ’s invitation “Take and eat”; “take and drink”; “This is my Body”; “This is my Blood.” His is a total giving, free and without reserve. The image of God’s invitation to abundant life (Is 55:1) comes to mind “*Come to the waters all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come, buy corn and eat, and, at no cost, wine and milk.*”

HOPE AMIDST LIMITATIONS

In our practice of hospitality, in all our efforts to serve in the best way we can, we are often brought face-to-face with our limitations which are real: time, strength, personnel. A shadow-image of near helplessness? Or an image of hope amidst the challenges of hospitality? First of all, in many of our communities, we have become fewer and older. Yet the demands of work are the same, if not more. Guests, “pilgrims” and the poor will always be with us. How can we help and receive help? Taking just one concrete example to start with – how are our “Front Desks” (Reception / Parlor areas)? Some communities have found creative and effective ways and means of finding help in the practice of this important Benedictine value of hospitality. Get outside help through Oblates (if you have them)? Volunteers (if available)? Paid receptionists (if affordable?)....the considerations are valid, and the questions might never end. What can help? But if hospitality is truly important to us, we could meet the challenge in this global age and time. And our hospitality will then continue to thrive and be a transforming force to meet Christ and bring His love in the world we live in.

Lord, help us to reach out and extend a hand to the lonely, the unloved. Make our hospitality like yours, generous and sincere. Amen.

Guide Questions for Reflection:

1. Share a personal experience on how you practice our mission of Benedictine hospitality in your own field of work within or outside the monastery walls.
2. Discuss one or two policies that can help to create a more welcoming atmosphere in our communities, opening up our Pories and our hearts to persons of every need.
3. Identify one gospel value that you have found most significant in relation to your actual practice of hospitality.

¹For a thorough textual exegesis on RB 53, see Aquinata Böckmann, “Expanding Our Hearts. Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict”, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2005, pp. 163-213.

² For valuable insights and a concrete practical guide, cf. “Cenobial Culture”, Sr. Josefina Nepomuceno, et al. Manila, Philippines 2003, pp. 63-70.

(Editor's note: Even if this is heavy reading, I urge you to read it. It is crucial to our sovereignty as a nation. For brevity, I omitted the footnotes- SMJ)

THE MINDANAO SITUATION: A Mix of Converging Elements (abridged version) *Luzviminda*

The people of Mindanao are tired of war. Forty years of armed conflict have brought nothing but death, destruction of private property and public infrastructure, massive displacement of civilian populations, and greater poverty. Today, Christians, Muslims, and affected residents long for genuine and lasting peace. But there are converging elements in the present situation that, taken in mutual context and from a more distant perspective, suggest other factors at play and raise thoughtful questions for all Filipinos to ponder.

Internal Factors of Mindanao Conflict

In 1951, part of Pres. Ramon Magsaysay's over-all counter-insurgency strategy to defeat the Huks in Central Luzon was to incorporate civil resettlement projects with his military campaign. This was popularly known as the —Land for the Landless Program which the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) implemented. Reporting directly to the Chief of Staff, EDCOR provided incentives to Huks to give up their arms in exchange for the grant of government land (—homesteads) to which surrenderees would be given title. Each returnee's family received 6-10 hectares, farm animals, seed materials, and an initial supply of food. By 1955, some 1,500 Huk guerillas had quit their armed resistance to take advantage of the EDCOR program. A total estimated area of 9,000-15,000 hectares was distributed. Another internal factor was the steady influx of immigrant settlers from Luzon and Visayas, who slowly displaced indigenous tribal communities and local Muslim population. In 1903, Muslims accounted for 76% of the Mindanao population. By 1980, it had decreased to 23%. Of the (then) 23 provinces in Mindanao and Sulu, only 5 (and in Mindanao itself, only 2) still had a Muslim majority. Despite both internal irritants, peace still prevailed in Mindanao — until external factors came into play.

The Philippines' Claim on Sabah (formerly North Borneo)

An abbreviated timeline of the Philippines' claim on Sabah highlights the following information: 1658 – Granted by the Sultan of Brunei to the Sultan of Sulu for the latter's help in quelling a local rebellion □ 1878– Leased by the British North Borneo Co. from the Sultan of Sulu (Jamalul Alam). The operative term of the document was in the word —*padjak* – originally written in Malay with Arabic script – which meant —lease. But the promoters of the British North Borneo Co. took the term to mean —grant or —cession. □ 1881 – The British North Borneo Provisional Association, Ltd. (BNPPA) was formed to take over the lease. Later in the year, the BNPPA obtained a Royal Charter from the British Crown. □ 1946– Through the *North Borneo Agreement*, the British North Borneo Chartered Co. (BNBCC) transferred its —sovereign rights and assets to the British Crown. On July of the same year, the *North Borneo Cession Order in Council* annexed North Borneo as a Crown Colony. □ 1963 – British North

Borneo was granted self-government. In September, the state united with Malaya, Sarawak, and Singapore, forming the Federation of Malaysia.

Operation “Merdeka”, the Jabidah Massacre, and the Mindanao Insurgency Problem

The Philippines continued to pursue its claim over Sabah, arguing that the territory had never been sold to foreign interests, that it had only been *leased (pajak)* by the Sulu Sultanate, and therefore remained the property of the Sultan and within the territorial jurisdiction of the Republic of the Philippines. In July 31, 1963, paragraph 12 of the Manila Accord between the Philippines, the Federation of Malaysia, and Indonesia read: —The Philippines made it clear that its position on the inclusion of North Borneo in the Federation of Malaysia is subject to the final outcome of the Philippine claim to North Borneo. The Ministers took note of the Philippine claim and the right of the Philippines to continue to pursue it in accordance with international law and the principle of the pacific settlement of disputes. They agreed that the inclusion of North Borneo in the Federation of Malaysia would not prejudice either the claim or any right thereunder. Diplomatic ties between the Philippines and Malaysia became problematic when a covert operation (Aug- Dec 1967) to foment dissent among Sabah’s non-Malay ethnic groups was initiated by the Philippine government. Code-named —*Operation Merdeka*, some 200 Tausug and Sama recruits from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi trained in Simunul, Sulu and later transferred to Corregidor. The recruits, however, refused to obey their orders when they learned that their mission would entail fighting fellow Muslims in Sabah, and possibly killing relatives who were living there. In March 1968, the Jabidah Massacre took place. The late Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr.’s exposé on the fiasco in the Philippine Senate resulted in a diplomatic protest by Malaysia. Moshe Yegar’s book —*Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* wrote about the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the establishment of a training camp at Pangkor Island in Malaya: —In 1972, the MNLF, with Nur Misuari at its head, took the lead in the Muslim revolutionary movement against the government. The movement had begun in 1969 when ninety volunteers left for military training in the Malay Peninsula. A committee of seven was elected, and Nur Misuari was chosen as chairman... At the beginning of 1969, he met Dato Udtog Matalam, and made contact with two other prominent Muslim politicians, Salipada Pendatun from Cotabato, and Rashid Lucman from Lanao. They were of help to him in the organization of a training camp on the Island of Pangkor on the west coast of Malaya, in which he was also a participant. In this manner, armed conflict was —exported to Mindanao.

A New U.S. Global Defense Posture

After the Cold War ended in 1991, the military competition between the United States and Russia was replaced by a spirit of improved international relations. U.S. military spending was cut back and fixed military installations were closed down, among them Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base in the Philippines. This did not mean, however, that the United States would tolerate any diminution of its clout in areas considered vital to its national interest. A new global defense posture had to be defined, one that would maintain America’s influence and effective capacity to deploy forces wherever and whenever needed, without the former Cold War bases. The new U.S. global defense posture was enunciated by then Defense Undersecretary Douglas Feith when he appeared before the House Armed Services Committee in Washington, D.C. on 23 June 2004: —We are not talking about fighting in place, but on our ability to move the fight. We are not talking only about basing, we’re talking about the ability of our forces to operate when

and where they are needed. The new defense posture had to assure: (1) rapid deployment; and (2) access to multiple launching pads.

The South China Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC)

The strategic importance of the Straits of Malacca to China was clearly stated in a study by Mokhzani Zubir and Mohd Nizam Basiron, entitled *The Straits of Malacca: the Rise of China, America's Intentions and the Dilemma of the Littoral States*: —The bulk of the Middle Eastern oil to China passes through the Straits of Malacca, Lombok and Sunda. However, the Straits of Malacca is the preferred route for many as it offers the shortest distance and the most secure route replete with navigational aids. This makes the Straits of Malacca an important shipping route for China and the other Northeast Asian economies such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea... For the United States, the importance of the South China Sea may be gleaned from a Nov 2007 study entitled *At the Door of All the East: The Philippines in United States Military Strategy*, published by Focus on the Global South: —The self-avowed aim of the US is to perpetuate its position of being the world's sole superpower in order to re-order the world. Its strategy to perpetuate its status is to prevent the rise of any rivals. To do this, it is seeking the capacity to deter and defeat potential enemies anywhere in the world by retaining and realigning its —global posture or its ability to operate across the globe through its worldwide network of forward-deployed troops, bases, and access agreements.

Today the US believes that, of all its rivals, China poses the greatest threat and must therefore be contained before it becomes more powerful. U.S. forces are to be positioned at strategic locations in the South China Sea in order to fulfil two main objectives – deterrence and containment.

Legal Framework and Operating Vehicles for U.S. Military Presence in the Philippines

The answer to the U.S. problem of how to maintain its influence and retain capability to rapidly deploy forces anywhere without fixed military bases was provided by two legal documents: the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA, 1998) and the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA, 2002). In the eyes of the United States, the VFA and MLSA provided several benefits:

- Less expensive to operate and maintain, compared to permanent military installations.
- Faster deployment capability and greater operating flexibility.
- Strategic presence at low exposure to public notice and local political flak.

Operationalizing the new U.S. global defense posture in the Philippines was accomplished by two types of military installations, each corresponding to their respective legal documentary framework: □ *Forward Operating Site (FOS)* – An expandable host-nation —warm site with a limited U.S. military support presence and possibly prepositioned equipment. It can host rotational forces and be a focus for bilateral and regional training. These sites will be tailored to meet anticipated requirements and can be used for an extended time period. □ *Cooperative Security Location (CSL)* – A host-nation facility with little or no permanent U.S. presence. CSLs will require periodic service, contractor and/or host nation support. CSLs provide contingency access and are a focal point for security cooperation activities. They may

contain prepositioned equipment. CSLs are: rapidly scalable and located for tactical use, expandable to become a FOS, forward and expeditionary.

U.S. Presence and Active Role in Mindanao

In January 2003, then Pres. George Bush received a letter from then Chairman Hashim Salamat of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Openly inviting U.S. facilitation in Mindanao, the letter stated that —we are amenable to inviting and giving you the opportunity to assist in resolving this predicament of the Bangsamoro People. The U.S. State Department engaged the services of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to undertake the Philippine Facilitation Project (2003-2007). USIP’s Special Report 202 which was released on Feb 2008 mentioned: —In 2003, the U.S. State Department, seeking to prevent international terrorist groups from exploiting the conflict in the Philippines, engaged the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to facilitate a peace agreement between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF. The State Department felt that the Institute’s status as a quasi-governmental, —track one-and-a-half player would allow it to engage the parties more broadly than an official government entity could. To accomplish its mandate, USIP launched the Philippine Facilitation Project (PFP). In a surprisingly candid statement, the USIP report reads: —Today’s complex diplomatic landscape increasingly requires new tools and techniques of conflict management, including quasi- and non-governmental actors, to accomplish U.S. foreign policy goals. Because of its ability to deal with nonstate actors and sensitive issues underlying civil conflict, USIP can be a useful instrument for advancing US interests.

The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) and the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE)

Negotiations between the Philippine government (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), facilitated by Malaysia and assisted by the USIP, led to a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) with the MILF, which would set up a Bangsamoro Homeland.

The Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) would be the Homeland’s governing body and enjoy several concessions:

- Internal waters (15 kilometers from BJE shores).
- Territorial waters up to RP baselines.
- Land use and development of all natural resources.
- Exploration and production of all potential sources of energy.
- 75% share in total production revenues from natural and mineral resources.
- Power to review and revise existing contracts.

Separate civil justice, electoral, financial and banking, education, legislation, legal, economic, police and internal security force, judicial system and correctional institutions.

News of the scheduled signing of the MOA-AD at Kuala Lumpur on Aug 05, 2008 came out only a few days before the event. The ambassadors of the United States, Japan, and Australia, including the OIC Ambassador to the Philippines, were invited to witness the signing ceremonies. However, local Mindanao residents and government officials in areas that were

supposed to have been included in the territorial definition of the MOA-AD vigorously opposed it, and complained about the lack of prior consultation and transparency in the conduct of the negotiations. On 14 October, the Supreme Court of the Philippines, voting 8-7, declared the MOA-AD —contrary to law and the Constitution: —The Court held that respondents’ failure to consult the local government units or communities constitutes a departure by respondents from their mandate under EO No. 3. Moreover, respondents exceeded their authority by the mere act of guaranteeing amendments to the Constitution. EO No. 3 defines the authority of the GRP Negotiating panel. The contents of the MOA-AD are matters of paramount public concern involving public interest in the highest order, the Court noted.

The Importance of Mindanao and Palawan to U.S. Interests

In May 2006, the United States and Japan signed the *United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation*. Key implementation details involved realignment of U.S. installations and forces on Okinawa, such as the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) and the relocation of the U.S. Third Marine Expeditionary Force to Guam. Timetable was from 2010 until 2014. A problematic situation came up before Pres. Barack Obama’s Japan visit in November 2009, when several thousand Okinawa residents staged a massive protest rally, opposing the relocation of the Futenma Air Station to another site in Okinawa. Meanwhile, earlier in October, Defense Secretary Robert Gates went to Tokyo and categorically stated that the U.S. government was not interested in renegotiating the bilateral agreement on the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. Diplomatic pressure was brought to bear, as U.S. State Department warned that Japan renegeing on the Okinawa relocation deal could harm the alliance between the two countries. Japanese media reacted very negatively to what was perceived as —intimidatory diplomacy by the United States over a sovereign equal. Prime Minister Hatoyama’s tough decision was how to respect the stated preference of fellow Japanese nationals regarding the Okinawa deal, without further antagonizing the United States. He has decided to undertake further consultations with coalition partners in Parliament and temporarily shelve any decision on this contentious issue until May this year. Faced with the possibility that Japan might not agree to implement the Okinawa relocation, it becomes understandable why the United States so urgently seeks to ensure access to certain areas in Mindanao and Palawan as alternative sites for the strategic positioning of its forces in the South China Sea region.

Resumption of Negotiations

After a hiatus of two years, signals concerning possible resumption of talks between the Philippine government and the MILF started to resurface. Shortly after Pres. Obama’s visit to Asian nations in November, U.S. State Department Secretary Hillary Clinton came to the Philippines and spoke about an —impetus for both parties to forge a peace agreement as the term of the Arroyo administration winds down. Another local news item reported on Pres. Obama’s letter to the MILF, —assuring them of America’s continued support for the peace process and expressing a desire to see formal negotiations resume as soon as possible. Meanwhile, later in the same month, political rivalry between two local contenders to the gubernatorial seat in Maguindanao, a province in southwestern Mindanao, resulted in a heinous massacre of journalists and unarmed civilians. Media and public attention were riveted to this high-profile event and the series of breaking news that came after. A Dec 02, 2009 article posted at a local TV website mentioned that —the long-stalled peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

will resume in Malaysia next week (Dec 8-9), and that —the formation of the International Contact Group (ICG) cleared the way for the much awaited formal resumption of peace talks. The news item slipped through public awareness and attention. News about the formation of the new ICG, whose Framework Agreement was signed by the respective panel chairpersons of the GRP and the MILF on 15 Sep 2009, also went unnoticed by the public at large. Contents of the Framework Agreement were posted in *MindaNews*, a Davao-based local newspaper. The members of the ICG are Japan, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and international non-government organizations (INGO) – Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (Geneva-based), The Asia Foundation (U.S.-based), Conciliation Resources (London-based), and Muhammadiyah (Indonesia-based). The ICG had a meeting in Manila on 04 Dec 2009. On the closing day (09 Dec 2009) of the GRP-MILF talks in Kuala Lumpur, Datuk Othman Razak, who hosted the meeting, was quoted: —We have agreed to begin negotiations on a comprehensive compact. We hope to sign probably by the end of the first quarter of next year, by March or early April.

The Desire for Peace and Other Agenda

Given their own free choice, all human beings would naturally want to avoid conflict and conditions of war. Who would not gladly support every opportunity to achieve genuine and lasting peace, especially after having suffered so much death and devastation for over forty years?

The danger is that the Mindanao people’s ardent desire to live a life at peace can be overlaid by the agenda and motives of other actors, not necessarily congruent with the well-being of those whose lives will most directly be affected by official policy and decision-making. It becomes even more unfortunate when calls for greater process transparency or more inclusive participation are looked upon as obstructionism to the peace process which should be isolated and handled accordingly.
