

Workshop on Issues and Problems of Southern Philippines

At 2:25 p.m. the Conference resumed. Dr. Alejandro M. Fernandez presided over the workshop. The participants were asked to identify the issues and problems in Southern Mindanao as they saw them. The following problems were enumerated:

1. Political autonomy
2. Land problem
3. Education
4. Military (peace and order)
5. Lack of political participation
6. Foreign involvement in Southern Philippines
7. Apparent economic problem: inequality in opportunities and distribution
8. Refugee problem

Recommendations:

1. Political autonomy

On the whole, they are agreeable to the present setup of regional autonomy as exemplified by Regions XII and IX. They would, however, want more representation of other ethnic groups. The regional government seemed to be monopolized by the Maranao and there was less representation from the Maguindanao, the Tausugs, etc.

2. Land problem

Those who spoke out were against land reform in Mindanao. They cited that there is no tenancy problem like the one in Central Luzon. The problem of land grabbing, however, is real. But unless land ownership is really defined by the authorities for the Muslims and Christians involved in the conflict, there can be no immediate solution to the problem. The problem, however, had been minimized at present.

One observation raised was that the crops on lands that were in the danger areas were harvested by the soldiers and sold in the market. It was jokingly said that this was another form of land grabbing.

3. Education

The sentiment of the Maguindanao group is to have a State University similar to the Maranao State University to be established in the capital town of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao. In fact the Maguindanao Sangguniang Panlalawigan has passed Resolution No. 106 as of August 18, 1977 requesting President Marcos to create such a university to be named after Sharif Kabungsuan, the founder of Islam in the Philippines. More scholars can help guide the masses better-meaning the Muslims. But the schools that they want are those that should include Islam in their curricula. The only school of higher learning in Cotabato City is the Notre Dame University which is run by Christian religious. There must be special schools that can understand Islamic Culture and prevent alienation of the Muslims. The Christian schools promote values different from the Muslim values.

If the Muslim masses are to be educated, then facilities for their education must be provided for. In one way, they suggested that the educational system should be reoriented to be responsive to the needs of the Philippine south.

The problem of teachers in that they are asked to do outside jobs other than teaching, yet they are underpaid. In the south, they had to face all kinds of hazards. It was suggested that the teachers in danger areas be given hazard pay. If this can be given to the military personnel, why not to the teachers?

They also raised the question as to why supervisors were paid for extra work while the teachers were not.

It was suggested that teachers' salaries be raised and more benefits be given to them, including clothing allowance.

It was also suggested that a floating school be provided for the Badjaos who are a sea tribe. The Badjaos are poor and have less access to educational facilities.

4. Military (Peace and Order)

The general sentiment is that the people are afraid of being caught in the crossfire between the rebels and the government

troops. There seems to be a feeling of distrust for the soldiers. There seems to be no assurance that the people's civil rights or their persons are safe. It was suggested that the soldiers be taught the constitution to realize the constitutional rights of the individual. It was hoped that enlightened soldiers could be less abusive of the civilians especially those suspected of being rebels or sympathizers.

5. Lack of political participation

There must be some kind of political enlightenment for the Muslims and highlanders as to their potential power. Political power can be achieved by encouraging more political representation.

Education of the Muslim masses can help improve the quality of their political participation.

The participants criticized the politics of ethnic proteges and the politics of Muslim leaders who are occupying important government positions.

The question of ethnic group rivalry was brought up as a hindrance to the effort towards the broadening of political participation. They said that even if there is a Muslim representation, what happens is that its membership cannot stop thinking in terms of being a Maranao, a Maguindanao or a Tausug. If a certain ethnic group monopolizes political participation, then the adjustment of either group towards the development of national consciousness is jeopardized.

The element of power brokerage was identified as one of the problems in political participation.

Some Muslim leaders were referred to as brokers but the quality of their brokerage was questioned.

Also raised was the question of the goal of brokerage whether political or economic or meaningful special rewards?

Only when the real goal of brokerage is for the people, which is the paternalistic relationship to the community, can the brokers really relate to the national government for the welfare of the Muslim people.

6. Foreign involvement in Southern Philippines

The participants indicated knowledge of involvement by foreign elements in the Southern Philippines conflict. They hesitated, however, to name who the foreign elements are. The position,

however, was if there is less foreign element interference, there would likely be less trouble.

7. Economic problem

The problems as identified were the following:

- a) level of development of the region.
- b) the problem with regard to the interpreter of the programs in the region.
- c) the need of an enlightened planning group and not merely armchair planners. But even those born in the region, when they become planners, develop certain processes and nuances that are at variance with the need of the areas.
- d) economic planning for the region must have priorities that are not nebulous.
- e) there is a need to develop an adequate labor force to meet the requirements of the new industrial setup in the region. Something must be done with the manpower development problem. There is no real manpower development in the region until now, although policy-makers keep on saying that manpower development will be done throughout the country.
- f) the feeling is that the most impoverished group in the South are the Muslim groups.

The participants also expressed fear that the South which is less developed will only provide the resources to the more developed areas—to the industrial center as planned by the NEDA which belong to the foreign and majority group investments. These in reality will provide less benefits to the Muslim groups and Muslim areas. The regional dispersal of industrial center must include the Muslim areas also.

8. Refugees

The conflict in the South resulted in the displacement of people.

The evacuees are resented by plantation owners because evacuees utilize the harvests of the plantation.

Some 100,000 evacuees from Sulu went to North Borneo, creating a problem for the Malaysian government.

The workshop adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

