

the PNP MNL integrees still needed additional 500 or more firearms for the other training graduates. Hence, in the process, MNLF integrees gain firearms after joining the PNP.

IV. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

According to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, peace-building compromises the establishment of new social, political and economic institutions and structures, and fostering reconciliation in removing the underlying causes of armed conflict. This includes "disarming the previously warring parties", monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening government institutions, and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.¹⁵⁵

One element in making the ever-elusive prospects of peace in Mindanao a reality lies in the present disarmament, demobilization and reintegration [in this sense, the integration of the larger Muslim community with the majority of the Filipinos in Mindanao] efforts. Disarming the populace is particularly important given that the massive availability of weapons has a catalytic role in violent intra-state conflicts.

This task is a daunting one, to some, it seems impossible. Even the discussions on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration issues as initiated by the Government and some sectors in society are often viewed with skepticism. Given the in-group bias that exists both Christians and Muslims, the expressed pessimism over a "gunless Mindanao" is understandable.

As the peace agreement with the MNLF inevitably moves on to its second phase and the commitment of the MNLF leadership to the peace agreement still stands, the prospects seem better. An optimistic view of a peace accord between the Government and the MILF will even hasten the process. Once the Government and the armed groups, both committed to uplifting the welfare of the Filipino people albeit in different ways get their act together and resolve the core issues that underpin the Mindanao conflict, peace and progress is not far behind.

A key component in this regard is to instill the willingness of the community, both between the Muslims and Christians to disarm and demobilize themselves, and in the process establish a united but diverse society. Historically, among other factors, the increasing acquisition of arms was borne out of the need for security. It also showed that people are willing to part with their guns once proper incentives are in place. In the martial law years for instance, many Muslim families parted with their weapons to avail of low-interest loans.¹⁵⁶

The successful integration of the MNLF forces into the AFP and the PNP provides the best example that former warring factions can work on building trust and confidence and later on, achieve

¹⁵⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda of Peace* (United Nations: New York, 1992), p. 32.

¹⁵⁶ T.J. George, p. 241.