

However, before delving into the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts in Mindanao, it is necessary to provide a background of the environment including the factors behind the conflict in Mindanao and the proliferation of firearms in the area.

## II. THE MINDANAO CONFLICT IN CONTEXT

Various explanations have been offered as the cause of the Mindanao conflict. The most persistent of these is religion. Other variations include: (1) the challenge of the minority against an oppressive majority; (2) economic and social deprivation; (3) political manipulations by domestic and foreign sources; and (4) government ineptitude.<sup>26</sup>

While religion is indeed an element in the Mindanao under various national governments, it is certain that religion provides the backdrop, but never the bone of contention for the conflict which has wracked this island.<sup>27</sup> Religious wars typically require a Government official policy of one faith and religious discrimination.<sup>28</sup> However, this was not the Mindanao experience even during the Spanish period, when Spain aggressively propagated the Christian faith. However, religion did lend a certain intensity to the land disputes that mushroomed in the wake of internal and external migration and which were aggravated by official policies that were disadvantageous to the Muslims and Lumads (natives) in Mindanao.

T.J. S. George explains that religion provides the "incentive for a majority to discriminate against a minority ...[and] sometimes the minority seeks religious solutions to their problems."<sup>29</sup> This explanation lends credence to the assertion of Muslims against the majority [of Filipinos] through a religious war.

In a primordialist approach to identity formation, religion is among the culturally distinctive characteristics in distinguishing groups and peoples from one another, in addition to myths of origin, ritual, and genealogical descent.<sup>30</sup> Culture on the other hand, is the "primary defining characteristic of an ethnic group" and that "ethnicity" is only important as far as it assists people to determine their

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<sup>26</sup> T.J.S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> According to Cesar Majul, a noted Muslim scholar as cited in *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> T. J. S. George, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Views associated with Edward Shils and Clifford Geerts as cited in Kingsley M. de Silva, "Ethnicity and Nationalism" in Luc Van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, Paul Sciarone (eds.), *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States* (Great Britain: The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs/The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 1996), p. 110.