

Mindanao, the Sulu archipelago and Palawan.⁵⁴ Under the Tripoli Agreement of 1976,⁵⁵ it was reduced to regional autonomy comprising of 13 provinces and 9 cities. However, differences in the interpretation of the implementation of the accord became a stumbling block and the fighting continued.

On 3 January 1987, the Philippine Government and the MNLF signed a Joint Statement (known as the Jeddah Accord) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In this statement, "both parties agreed to continue discussion of the proposal for the grant of full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan subject to the democratic processes."⁵⁶ The document also stated that the Philippine panel would convey to then President Corazon C. Aquino, the MNLF's request for the suspension of provisions on autonomy as contained in the draft 1987 Constitution. By 15 January 1987, Aquino turned down the request citing the opinion of the Constitutional Commission that the Constitution should be submitted as a whole for approval in the 2 February 1987 plebiscite. In Mindanao, some 70 % voted for the Constitution while Sulu garnered the highest votes at 95 %.⁵⁷

One of the contentious issues within the MNLF demands was that of autonomy for the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Palawan and Tawi-Tawi, as allegedly agreed during the Jeddah Accord. Such agreement would have expanded the area of autonomy from 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement to 23 provinces. The MNLF later announced its decision to settle for the 13 provinces including all cities and villages in these provinces. In 1994, the 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement were composed of approximately 19.79 % Muslims and 80.21 % non-Muslims, while the entire Mindanao population was 13.09 % Muslim and 86.91 % non-Muslim.⁵⁸

The Republic Act 6734 or the Organic Act for the Creation of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was approved by then President Aquino on 1 August 1989. However, only 4 out of the 13 provinces voted to join the ARMM during the 19 November 1989 plebiscite in a similar exercise on 17 April 1977, only 5 out of the 13 provinces voted favorably, namely Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Misuari thus refused to recognize the ARMM

⁵⁴ Ismael Z. Villareal, "Conflict Resolution in Mindanao", *OSS Forum*, Nr. 2, s-96, p. 1.

⁵⁵ The Tripoli Agreement was a compromise agreement based on autonomy within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines. This was signed by then Deputy Minister for National Defence Carmelo Barbero for the Philippines, Chairman Nur Misuari for the MNLF, Dr. Ali Abdsalam Treki of Libya, and Dr. Amadou Karim Gaye, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). This became the common denominator for all Moro factional demands until the Aquino administration adopted the stand to use the 1987 Constitution as a basis for negotiations and settlement, with the Tripoli Agreement as a secondary frame of reference.

⁵⁶ Signed by Philippine Panel Chairman Senator Aquilino Pimente, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari and OIC Secretary General Shariffudin Pirzada (as witness) as cited in Fidel V. Ramos, *Break Not the Peace* (Manila: Friends of Steady Eddie, November 1996), p. 127.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *AFP Briefing Paper on the Secessionist Movement in Southern Philippines*, unpublished, August 1994.