

firearms.⁸² To this end, Muslims are reportedly "enjoined, obliged, commanded to arm themselves to prepare against oppression/injustices."⁸³ and the secessionist movement is premised, in part, on the grounds that "the Muslims have the duty and the obligation to wage *jihad* (holy war) physically and spiritually to change the Moro homeland to *Daral-Islam* (House of Islam)."⁸⁴ This view is expressed by MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat, who has stated that: "the achievement of a just peace is an objective which every individual or group with sound mind must pursue by all means even by means of war because a just war is better than an unjust peace."⁸⁵ In the same light, Christians are arming themselves for security reasons.

Hence, it is typical to see weapons in public places. For instance, in the Mindanao State University in Marawi City, security guards are heavily armed with among other weapons M14 and M16 firearms. The Office of the Regional Governor in Cotabato City is similarly secured with heavily armed men. For people in Mindanao, the general perception is that possession of weapons is an ordinary fact of life; they are used to it, and others have grown old with it. For them, not much has changed over the years.

The Secessionist Factor

As of June 1999, military intelligence statistics suggested that there were 11,777 firearms in the possession of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups alone (*i.e.*, MILF, Abu Sayyaf, and NICC/MILO), up from 4,300 in 1976 (prior to 1996 figures include the MNLF). Its peak number of 17,800 firearms in 1995, dropped to 7,230 in 1996 but is steadily rising since then. These statistics, however, do not include the firearms in the possession of communist insurgents, criminal syndicates, political clans or individuals.

To reiterate, the illegal arrival of arms became prevalent in Mindanao in the aftermath of World War II as politics turned violent and gunrunners took advantage of the island's geography. The influx of these weapons became even more prevalent with the rise of pro-independence movements for a Muslim Mindanao. With the common exception being that the greatest level of armament in the past of Muslim took place during the period of Martial Law⁸⁶ The experience of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina is commonly taken as an example of Muslims being killed because there were no "mujahideen"; hence, the logic maintains, they [the Muslims] have to prepare so it will

⁸² Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalidtod.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Mercado, "The Moro People's Struggle for Self-Determination".

⁸⁵ Malik Mantawil "First Ulama Summit: Bangsamoro Homeland" *Homeland*, March-April 1998, Cotabato City, 5(2), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalidtod.