

(NLECC) has intercepted 334 assorted firearms.⁷⁰ In 1992, a big shipment of 5.56 mm US made rifles (originating from Vietnam) were unloaded in Mindanao and reportedly purchased by local officials.⁷¹ From 1992 to March 1998, the Philippine Navy conducted 142 anti-gunrunning operations that resulted into the apprehension of 55 vessels, 52 persons and the seizure of P 5.7 million worth of firearms.⁷²

The Mindanao Situation

Why Arms Proliferate?

Various reasons contribute to the accumulation of firearms in Mindanao. The armed groups attributes this accumulation to their long history of fighting [please see the foregoing discussion on the 'secessionist factor'].

On an individual level, possession of firearms offers security, power and prestige. A belief common with many communities is that the more arms one possesses, the braver he becomes.⁷³

The prestige lent to firearms possession is considerable, such that it is used as a political tool should a person runs for political office. A "show of force" affords one candidate a high chance to be elected in public office.⁷⁴

It is also suggested that the "culture" among Muslims necessitate the possession of firearms. The acquisition of a firearm is likened to someone living in a city and the need to buy a car [as a luxury item] - attributing such acquisition of a firearm is associated with the prestige and power that goes with it.⁷⁵ The possession of a newer or better version of a firearm or firearms allegedly increases the chances of a suitor trying to win a girl's hand as such would lend him more prestige and a "macho" image. The acquisition of a new firearm[s] is even made known in the entire neighbourhood in order to increase one's "respectability" in his community.

⁷⁰ PNP Firearms and Explosives Division as cited in Jose Olaivar, "Proliferation of Firearms and its Impact on Regional Security: A Perspective from the Philippines," Paper presented at the *Third CSCAP Meeting on Transnational Crime*, Pasig City, 23-24 May 1998, p. 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷³ Interview with Supt. Abdelgardan Indanan Alih, Battalion Commander, Special Mobile Group, Camp SK Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, Provincial Regional Office, ARMM, 27 October 1999.

⁷⁴ Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalitod, Mindanao State University, Marawi City, 29 October 1999.

⁷⁵ Interview with an MNLF Integree, Camp SK Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, 27 October 1999.