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**Beyond Numbers: Political Engagement of Muslim Women  
(Philippines)**

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*DRAFT: NOT FOR QUOTATION*

## **BEYOND NUMBERS: POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN (PHILIPPINES)**

Ms. Amina Rasul<sup>1</sup>

*“The empowerment of women is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty.  
Equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women.”*

BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

### **I. Introduction**

The Philippine Constitution states that it is a republican and democratic state. Our country is democratic because our system of government places the power of government in the hands of the people; principally through (although not limited to) elections. It is republican because ours is a representative government, i.e., different sectors of society, those who have a stake in the making of policy and especially those who are marginalized must have a voice in governance. That is the theory.

In practice, however, and despite significant gains in the past years, Filipino women still struggle to find their space in the political arena – in spite of having 2 women Presidents: Corazon C. Cojuangco and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. In particular, Muslim women in the Philippines are constrained by double jeopardy: not only are we women in a male-dominated Philippines, we are also Muslims in a Christian dominated political arena.

But let me start off by discussing the situation of women in the Philippines. Four United Nations Conferences on Women (Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995) began to raise the level of awareness and to prompt discussion of gender issues in the nation. Together with the accomplishments of the Decade on Women (1976-1985), other decades such as Environment and Development in Rio (1992), Human Rights in Vienna (1993), Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and Social Development in Copenhagen (1995), many triumphs have been gained in the Philippines.

### **II. Women and Politics: A Philippine Situationer**

Women in the Philippines have overcome tremendous hurdles to participate in politics and governance. We have had two women presidents: former President Corazon C. Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Mrs. Aquino, who led the peaceful “People Power Revolution” (now known as EDSA1) which forced former President Ferdinand Marcos to flee the country, is heralded as the leader who brought back democratic processes to the country. She initiated the

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peace process with separatist groups and still has a strong following among the so-called “middle forces” and the Catholic Church. She added her influence to the forces that finally drove then President Joseph Estrada, under attack for corruption, to step down, paving the way for his Vice-President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo to assume the Presidency. Since then, Mrs. Aquino has publicly called on Mrs. Arroyo to step down amidst allegations of wholesale corruption, manipulation of the 2004 presidential elections, among others.

Mrs. Arroyo, who suffers the lowest satisfaction rating among all Philippine presidents (including Ferdinand Marcos), has survived the impeachment hearings against her in the Philippine Congress. However, the impeachment process was nationally regarded as flawed, marred by allegations of bribery using government funds. Her administration faces daily accusations of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability. (It can therefore be said that Filipino women have proven they can be as capable as men in governance as well as dirty politics.)

Women have become notably significant in the political history of the Philippines, as well as in conflict resolution in Muslim Mindanao. And as such, it may be useful to look at the various situations and development actions where women have begun and continued to actively participate in. Filipino women have higher voter turnout rate and are winning in elections but still continue to have little participation in politics and governance. During the 2004 and 2007 national and local elections, women voters’ turnout rates were slightly higher.

In the national legislative bodies, the Philippines is ranked 55<sup>th</sup> in terms of women representation with 49 out of 239 seat in the House of Representatives (20.5%) and 4 out of 23 seats in the Senate occupied by women (17.4%)

Although the Philippines appears to be ahead of its neighboring countries by having 2 women presidents since 1986, major hurdles are still in place for women to gain a firmer foothold in politics. It is still basically an elite-male dominated political landscape. While there is a perceptible increase in the number of women elected into government posts, assumption to institutional leadership does not necessarily translate into the expected degree of political clout. The question of resources also affects women’s access to decision-making positions since women and men do not enjoy the same access to resources that yields power. The lack of economic power, similarly, deprives women of their rights and opportunities.

### **Legal Framework**

Despite its flaws and the attempt by some to mangle it, the Philippine Constitution is known for its very liberal and progressive provision that was formulated during the euphoria of People Power Revolution in 1986. Gender equality is a key element of this Charter and as enshrined in Article II Section 14 of the 1987 Constitution, “the State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men.” Considering the unequal gender relations in the country, the Constitution further provided for

women representation (as one of the 9 marginalized sectors) in the legislature through the party-list system.

This legal framework promoting gender equality is in turn elaborated in various enabling legislations and these include the following:

1. **Local Government Code of 1991.** Provides for the election of sectoral representation, including women, in local legislative councils.
2. **Party List Law.** Provides for the creation of women-oriented or women-based parties to compete under the party-list system. The women's sector is one of the 9 sectors identified in the law.
3. **Women in Nation Building Law.** Republic Act 7192 passed in 1991 (Annex A) is an act promoting the integration of women as full and equal partners of men in development and nation building. The law provides that a substantial portion of government resources be utilized to support programs and activities for women. The law also encourages the full participation and involvement of women in the development process and to remove gender bias in all government regulations and procedures. In relation to gender budgeting, the law specifically mandated all agencies to allocate a minimum of 5%, increasing to 30%, of all official development funds in mainstreaming gender concerns. Through executive directives however, this 5% allocation is further expanded to cover the total budget appropriations, not only development funds, of all government agencies and local government units in the country. This is known as the Gender and Development Budget or GAD. Further, it opened the doors of the Philippine Military Academy to women.

It is interesting to point out that 1 and 3 above were authored by the first and only Muslim woman elected to the Philippine Senate, Senator Santanina T. Rasul. She also authored the law making March 8, Women's Day, a working holiday in the country.

One can also find numerous projects, initiatives, and processes on the gender challenge that are corollary to gender-oriented legislations. This includes:

**Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025).** The National Plan for Women that consolidates the action commitments of the Philippines during the Beijing World Conference on Women. This is the over-all frame that is also the point of reference for the discussions and monitoring of gender mainstreaming.

**Gender and Development Budget (GAD).** Integral to the national plan, it is aimed at "institutionalizing gender concerns in the mainstream development process and agenda and not just peripheral programs and projects of the government". Concretely, it prescribes for the allocation of 5% of the government agency's/local government unit's budget on gender-responsive activities and projects. As a result, implementation of the development programs and

policies of government also means women partaking in a role in governance. As primarily stakeholders in the development process, women have the right to maximize their involvement in governance, be it at the local or national level

**Framework Plan for Women (FPW).** This is part of the Philippine Plan for Women which the current administration developed to focus on three thrust namely: promoting women's economic empowerment; advance and protect women human rights; and promote gender responsive governance. This plan identifies the concrete gender issues that will be addressed, pinpoint targets and indicators, name programs, formulates the implementation plan, and set-up tools for monitoring and evaluation.

It is obvious therefore that the Philippines have a well-developed legal framework for gender equality. This is even reinforced by the ratification of international instruments on women (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women or CEDAW) and clear commitments to the outputs of the UN Women Conferences.

### **Challenges**

However, these laws are not implemented in a vacuum. Visions of gender equality face serious obstacles in a political system characterized by patronage. More concerns of women still need to be addressed: low economic and political participation, the problems of the feminization of poverty, poor access to health and education, and human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> Invariably, these concerns are deeply entrenched in areas of conflict and have a direct bearing on regional security concerns.

Briefly, the challenges are as follows:

#### **Women in politics and governance:**

- Low representation in policy and administrative positions in both private and public sectors, less than critical mass of thirty percent government representation.
- Women participation in politics is circumscribed by the patronage that characterizes our political system. The democratization that the nation experienced in 1986 has not dislodged the traditional politics and elitist democracy that governed the country for many years. The "old boys" nature of political relations and transactions has persisted and put the role of women in the margins. This reduces the access to resources and decision-making thus diminishes their political clout.
- The Philippine country report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government, asserted that family connection is a major factor in political involvement. The study revealed that of their 17 women respondents "...15 had close relatives in either politics or government. Of the elected officials 8 had been encouraged by close family members to stand for election". Furthermore, "family political experience seems to be the main factor which make Filipino women who, while aware of their own influence from the sidelines,

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<sup>2</sup> "After Beijing + 10: The Road Ahead", Patricia B. Licuanan, Miriam College, Philippines

transcend the covert area of politics...to the overt political domain of elections" (UN-ESCAP Website, 2003). Their knowledge of campaign tactics and strategies and the family's political name contributed in their winning. Our 2 women presidents are actually illustrative of this phenomenon. Corazon Aquino is the widow of the assassinated opposition leader and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is the daughter of a former president -- both coming from the political and economic elite of the country.

- Another phenomenon is the so called "women benchwarmers". Due to term limits, wives and daughters have taken over the positions left by the husbands or fathers for one term and then the man makes a comeback.

### **Globalization:**

- The shift in agricultural production from traditional crops to cash or export crops limits women's access to and control of resources for food production leading to declining food security of households and disproportionately excessive cuts in food consumption for women and girls.
- negative impact of trade on women-owned businesses due to unequal access to productive resources and increased competition from imports;
- reduction in women's access to basic education, health, sanitation and other basic services due to privatization of social services;
- high tariffs leading to certain women-dominated industries in developing countries e.g. textile and garments to cut production costs or close down because of intense competition;
- Heightened commodification or objectification of women in media, the feminization of overseas employment and expansion in trafficking of women and girls.

### **Feminization of poverty:**

- Migrant, ethnic and older women require more protection
- unemployment or inadequate employment, unequal wages,
- Lack of access to social protection and public services concentrated in informal and seasonal work.

### **Others**

- Unilateralism of the U.S. (War on Terror) has undermined the democracy, human rights, peace and development agenda particularly in the Muslim areas where insurgencies have raged since the 70s.
- Rise of religious and ethnic fundamentalisms tend to weaken women's rights
- Increasing incidences of armed conflict and rise of terrorism. Since the breakdown of the peace process last August, over half a million Muslims have been displaced in Central Mindanao.
- Women and children victims of rape and other war crimes, refugees and displaced persons.

These challenges are particularly descriptive of the situation of Muslim women in the Philippines. The Muslim women's reality is one of disempowerment: marked by poverty, poor

education and high illiteracy, low political participation, high levels of violence and uncertainty, criminality.

### III. Political Engagement of Muslim Women in the Philippines

In the past, Muslims of Mindanao had no abhorrence of women in leadership roles. “Dayang-dayang” (Princess) Tarhata Kiram of the Sultanate of Sulu, educated in the United States, manipulated forces in the Sultanate so that her husband would be chosen Sultan thus creating a schism. Before her, Dayang-dayang Hadji Piandao similarly wielded tremendous influence over the Sulu Sultanate. In 1951, a Maguindanao Princess, Bai Matabai Plang, who was then wife of powerful Congressman and Speaker Pro-Tempore Salipada K. Pendatun, lobbied to establish the University of Southern Mindanao, today one of premiere agricultural schools of the Philippines. Before the imposition of Martial law in the early 70s, Lanao del Sur elected the first woman governor in Mindanao: Princess Tarhata Alonto-Lucman. She defeated the brother of a warlord who was a close ally of then President Ferdinand Marcos. Emily Marohombsar of Marawi City became the first Muslim woman President of the Mindanao State University in the 80s. After she retired, she was appointed to be on the government peace panel negotiating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Santanina T. Rasul was one of 2 Muslims elected to the Philippine Senate in 1987, becoming the first Muslim woman to become Senator. President Aquino campaigned heavily to ensure that the 2 Muslims would be elected. In 1992, she and Senator Leticia Shahani, sister of then Defense Secretary Fidel V. Ramos, joined as founding members of Ramos’ party, the LAKAS NUCD-UMDP which was a coalition of several parties including the United Muslim Democrats of the Philippines (UMDP). She was re-elected in 1992, becoming the first Muslim Senator to be re-elected. Unfortunately, she was also the last Muslim Senator of the Philippines.

In 2004, I was prevailed upon by the Opposition to run for Senate a week before the deadline for the filing of candidacy. At the time, I had been out of public office for 7 years. Also running were the incumbent ARMM Regional Governor Parouk Hussein and the Congressman Dilangalen from Maguindanao. We all lost. Although I received the most number of votes at the national level, in ARMM I was number 3. However, I did receive the most number of votes among the Muslim candidates in the provinces of Basilan and TawiTawi. The 2004 elections was tarnished by massive cheating in favor of the administration candidates led by Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a fact which has been accepted by more and more Filipinos.

#### 2007 SENATORIAL ELECTION RESULTS: MUSLIM CANDIDATES

NAME	TOTAL NATIONAL	TOTAL ARMM	BASILAN	LANAO SUR	MAGUINDANAO	COTABATO CITY	SULU	TAWI-TAWI
RASUL, Amina .	3,456,480	305,037	52,670	75,445	65,304	17,563	46,080	37,144
HUSSIN, Parouk	2,821,522	456,015	43,549	162,809	139,352	10,146	53,767	21,031
DILANGALEN, Didagen P.	2,222,069	420,520	16,095	114,243	205,085	46,495	8,329	9,159
USOP, Matuan A.	137,376	30,016	3,442	12,711	4,778	1,843	1,553	1,878
DECAMPONG,	94,713	44,150	470	27,214	1,804	619	757	869

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In the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, 3 women won Congressional seats in 2004: veteran political leader Fayza Dumarpa of Lanao del Sur, who is now in her 3<sup>rd</sup> term; the wife of Congressman Didagen Dilangalen of Maguindanao and the daughter of Congressman Nur Jaafar of TawiTawi. Didagen Dilangalen and Nur Jaafar have reclaimed their seats in 2007. Dumarpa also won, her last term in Congress. Her election is therefore the only one that can be credited to her prowess as a political leader.

1 out of 5 governors is female: Jum Akbar was the wife of the previous governor Wahab Akbar<sup>3</sup> who ran for congress. 2 out of 5 vice governors are female. The Vice-Governor of TawiTawi, however, is the daughter of the incumbent governor. Her sister represents the province at the Regional Legislative Assembly and is the incumbent Speaker.

In an area where the right of women to political participation is being squeezed out of the arena, whether benchwarmer or genuine political leader, the election of women is still good news. Unfortunately, Muslim Filipino women’s perceptions of their roles in society – outside of their traditional roles in the family – also act as a barrier to their active involvement in their communities. It is critical that awareness raising on women’s rights must begin with the Muslim women themselves.

While traditional patriarchal and feudal systems have curtailed genuine women’s political participation at the national level, the situation is much worse in Muslim Mindanao where the patriarchal system has been reinforced by support given by national politicians to warlords and feudal lords who can “deliver” the vote. In the areas of conflict, warlords and feudal lords who have excellent relationships with the police and the military in the “war on terror” have additional advantages during elections. The role of the police and the military in the fraudulent elections of 2004, for instance, has been brought to light but no action has been taken.

The participation of women in the judiciary is another area for improvement. In 1996, only 15.4% of the total incumbent judges were women, although it increased to 17.7% in 1999 and to 23.4% in 2002. As of December 31, 2006, 468 of the 1533 trial court judges in the country are female (31%).

Shari’a courts, special courts for Muslim law, have remained predominantly male, in spite of the fact that the courts focus on Muslim personal laws, which heavily affect women. In 1996 one (1) woman judge was appointed – Nurkarhati Sahibbil - in the Shari’a Circuit Court of Sulu. Today, there are only 2 women judges. Conservative ulama have lobbied against the appointment of women to the Shari’a courts.

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<sup>3</sup> Congressman Wahab Akbar was killed in a bombing incident in the House of Representatives 2 years ago.

In Muslim Mindanao and across the world, Muslim women continue to face obstacles from orthodox and ultra-conservative religious leaders, preventing them from fully realizing their rights as equal participants in society<sup>4</sup>. Resistance to gender equality has been the most challenging in Muslim communities, despite the adoption of constitutional reforms in some countries in recent years aimed at reaffirming the equality of all citizens before the law in rights and duties. Such reforms have the potential to trigger wide-ranging gains for women's rights. Thus, the historic move of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in appointing a woman Deputy Minister for Education last February 14 is a major break for Muslim women all over the world. If the heartland of Islam has recognized women's capacity to govern, then the barriers against women's participation in the Islamic world will weaken, Inshallah.

#### **IV. Beyond Politics**

While the number of women in parliaments and other formal political institutions are important indicators of political participation, I suggest that it is likewise important to go *beyond the numbers*. In fact, I believe that increasing the role of women in governance requires us to go beyond the traditional and formal political institutions. While we welcome women who have assumed political posts, the ultimate measure of political participation should not be limited to the quantity rather the quality of women representation.

The global explosion of civil society movements, a phenomenon that signifies a rejection of traditional politics and a shift to a more popular type of influencing public policy through people's organizations, has been welcomed by Muslim women. One of the forces that have animated global politics in the past decades has been the retreat of the power of traditional political institutions in favor of civil society movements. Civil society provides marginalized sectors an alternative to traditional political participation. In the Philippines, the people's movement has been responsible in removing a dictator in 1986, preventing the unscrupulous attempt to trample the Constitution and causing the passage of landmark legislation on the environment, social justice and women's rights. It is in this context that I wish to discuss the genuine political engagement of Muslim women in the Philippines.

#### **Muslim Women and Civil Society**

As early as the 60s, Muslim women had discovered the value of social mobilization, empowering themselves, and implementing literacy and livelihood training for marginalized and impoverished groups. The oldest nationally known Muslim women's organization is the Muslim Professional and Business Women's Association established by former Senator Santanina T. Rasul in 1968. The association implemented a literacy and livelihood training program nationally known as Magbassa Kita. The success of this program led to its adaption by the Department of Education as a national literacy program, under then Secretary Lourdes Quisumbing. The

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union study on "Women in Parliaments" Arab countries rank lower than any region in terms of membership in the national parliament.

Magbassa Kita success catapulted Mrs. Rasul into the limelight, and was responsible for her being chosen by then President Corazon Aquino as a senatorial candidate and eventually winning a seat in the historic first Philippine Senate after Martial law.

### **Muslim Women and Peace**

The Social Weather Stations in 2004 conducted a nationwide survey that found strong belief that **women are better peacemakers**, with both Filipino men and women sharing the same opinion. Nationwide support for women's participation in the peace process is equally high among both Filipino men and women (67% and 65%, respectively). Three out of five (62%) Filipinos agree that "women must be represented in the peace panel of the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front or MILF." Over half (58%) nationwide agree that "a woman has more talent than a man to find a way to settle a conflict without resorting to violence."

This survey is not surprising. This only confirms what many in the peace community know: given the skills and capacity for conflict prevention and peace-building women are better suited as peacemakers than men.

After the 1996 Peace Agreement<sup>5</sup>, MNLF women were vocal about their exclusion from the process. They have expressed their needs and hopes and lobbied that they should be allowed to decide which projects to carry out, as the men do. Since then, several Muslim women leaders have organized in order to develop a critical mass for support and to be heard. This has been the immediate challenge to our sisters.

After the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement, the Bangsa Moro Women's Foundation (BMWF) was founded by Rohayda Tan Misuari, wife of the MNLF Chairman and former ARMM Governor Nur Misuari. BMWF became the leading partner of the MNLF and the ARMM to implement training, livelihood and microcredit programs for women. Hundreds of women's co-operatives and mutual benefit associations were organized and federated with the BMWF. BMWF lobbied for the establishment of an ARMM government agency to focus on women's issues.

On July 9, 1997, the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly passed a law establishing the Regional Commission for BangsaMoro Women (RCBW). The regional counterpart of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, RCBW is led by a Chairperson and a board composed of representatives from the 5 ARMM provinces. RCBW has, with its meager resources, supported capacity building for Muslim women.

Today, more and more Muslim women are entering the realm of civil society and establishing leadership roles. This has become the venue for genuine political participation for Muslim women. They have become more vocal in expressing their disenchantment with the non-implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement. Some women leaders in the MILF communities

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<sup>5</sup> The 1996 Peace Agreement was forged between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the MNLF.

even believe they need to persist in the armed struggle in order to attain their goals. Muslim women's organizations are active in conflict resolution programs, in mass action to stop armed conflict, in establishing zones of peace, and they are some of the most active partners in interfaith dialogues. They have come together in conferences to find common ground and recommend actions which can strengthen peace, justice and development for all (See Annex B for some women's conference outputs).

In 2001, several Muslim women leaders organized a focus group discussion to find out if women could cut thru the enmities, which divided Muslims and Christians in the areas of conflict. Led by Senator Rasul, Muslim and Christian women directly involved or affected by the armed conflict came together. They were unanimous in concluding that it was time to move beyond hostilities and recrimination to reclaim their communities. The discussions led to the publication in 2002 of a methodology and a training manual for empowering women in conflict resolution.

Since then, the group has moved forward, trying to reach out to other women leaders to form a network of peace advocates. In December 2003, the group organized a conference in Zamboanga City which brought together over 30 Muslim women's organizations to develop a peace and development agenda. (Annex B1). International resource persons came from the United States, Bangladesh, and Indonesia to share their experiences with the Muslim women of Mindanao. Calling themselves the Muslim Women Peace Advocates Network, women from ARMM and conflict-influenced provinces have stepped up their interfaith and peacebuilding activities. In Sulu, they formed the Muslim Women Peace Advocates Council. Over the past 4 years, the council has conducted a radio program called "Women Talk Peace" and more training programs for capacity building in conflict resolution. In Lanao del Sur, two of the Maranao Muslim women leaders who participated in the Zamboanga conference organized their own Muslim Women Peace Council in Lanao del Sur.

This emerging women's activism is a direct response to the double burden women bear: although primarily responsible for the welfare of their families, they lack access to programs and support. And while they are not responsible for the armed conflict that has reduced their communities to refugee status, they bear the brunt of keeping the families and communities together. So much responsibility is laid on the shoulders of women and yet women are not heard but only seen. When seen, women are relegated to a minor sector, together with children and youth, as if to say that we are intrinsically powerless.

Given capabilities in accessing resources and in community organizing, many Muslim women's organizations could become effective partners of government. However, we will need to form strategic alliances to define our roles and approaches in peace building. Then we can join influential civil society groups like the church, media, and academe at the forefront of promoting a culture of peace.

Speaking of alliances and organizations, allow me to speak to you about an initiative we at the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy ([www.pcid.org.ph](http://www.pcid.org.ph)) are trying to pursue. Last January 2009, 212 of our leading Ulama (Muslim religious scholars) gathered and launched the

historic National Ulama Conference of the Philippines (NUCP). The NUCP is the first truly national organization for the Ulama. It is hoped that the NUCP will become the main vehicle for the Ulama to realize their potential in becoming catalysts for reform in Muslim Mindanao.

About 35 of the participants in that historic Ulama summit were Aleemat (Muslim women religious scholars) who, while appreciating their participation in that historic event, were suggesting putting up their own network that will complement not rival their male counterpart.

The aleemat are Muslim women religious scholars who have obtained formal training or education in Islamic studies. Most of the aleema of Mindanao have been educated in Islamic universities abroad (Al Azhar of Egypt and other Islamic universities in the Middle East as well as Islamic Institutes in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines). The Ulama and the Aleemat are influential forces in Muslim communities. The aleema pointed out that they have much to offer as group but that they have been largely overlooked by institutions that focus on providing capacity building for civil society organizations. With the seemingly intractable conflict in the Southern Philippines, this is a unique and creative approach to peace-building in Mindanao. (Annex B3)

### **Problems Faced by Muslim Women Organizations**

While women are eager to become active partners in government efforts to promote and sustain peace, we have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed and face barriers to the attainment of our goal of social transformation.

1. The growing conservatism among Muslim religious leaders has impinged on the development of Muslim women's organizations, especially when such organizations venture into the fields of politics and governance. For instance, an ordinance requiring women to veil has been imposed in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur and some municipalities in Maguindanao and Sulu provinces. Elected women officials have been hesitant to file complaints, even though these ordinances violate Philippine laws. The hesitance of women officials is due to the growing influence of ultra conservative religious groups such as the *Tableegh*.
2. The implementation of Shariah in the Philippines, which was codified by an all-male group during the Martial Law years, has features that violate women's rights. For instance, a woman cannot exercise her profession or occupation, engage in business, and acquire property without the consent of her husband.
3. The consequences of conflict especially on women and their children make it urgent for peace advocacy with Muslim women's participation to be pursued. Muslim women who have a keen understanding of the issues involved can make

peacebuilding effective and yet opportunities for the involvement of women in peacemaking initiatives are still limited. A major factor here is their lack of skills in leadership, conflict-resolution, and negotiation. Providing opportunities for training and skills-building particularly at the grassroots level should be prioritized.

Support and networking among women leaders, peace advocates, and organizations are also critical in effectively mobilizing the women sector.

Strengthening existing networks and facilitating linkages within the women sector is therefore necessary.

4. The effectiveness of women's organizing efforts in Mindanao is complicated by political alignments and ideologies, competition for "turf" and funding. The government and the donor community should directly support the peace building activities of Muslim women grassroots organizations, providing the means for diverse women's networks to coalesce into more potent and viable networks.
5. Many of the organizations, including women's organizations, operate with very limited financial resources, which affects to a significant degree the sustainability and effectiveness of their programs. More importantly, coordination and linkages between and among the various groups/networks is limited. There is thus little scope for the sharing of resources, technology, effective models, and success stories. There is also no comprehensive database of existing organizations and institutions, which only further hampers coordination and networking between the various groups and practitioners.
6. There is a sizable amount of programs and projects focused on communities in Mindanao. This focus is understandable given that direct experiences of the conflict and its effects are still largely confined to the south. However, a lion's share goes to infrastructure and education. Although there is strong support for delivery of basic services, – education, health, credit, and poverty alleviation – the support for women's capacity building is minute.

### **By Way of a Conclusion**

As seen in the various instances of nation-building and development that women have become involved in all over the region, and in case of the Philippines that I have presented, it is no mistake to acknowledge the potential influence women, especially Muslim women, have in conflict resolution, and therefore on human security.

Globalization, mass education and mass communication are forces that are beginning to change perceptions of women in the Muslim world. But our world must not continue to exist behind the

so-called divide described in the “clash of civilizations.” We need access to education, training and communications.

As we search for peace as equal partners, Muslim women face obstacles from within our own communities. By grounding human rights, and specifically women’s rights, in Islamic cultural traditions and religious teachings, our own local religious leaders will be able to accept our advocacies and not see these as unwelcome secular ideas. We need to refocus attention on the principles of *Hurriya* (liberty), *Adl* (justice), *Shura* (consultation): and *Ijtihad* (rational interpretation).

We encourage a discourse among all Muslims in which informed critical reasoning and cultural mediation can take place, particularly on the role women play. We need to confront the claim by violent and militant Islamist forces that their interpretation of Islam is “universal,” and that theirs is the only legitimate view for all Muslims at all times.

We need to exert sustained pressure on governments to allow more freedom, because it is to their own interest and of their constituents, as well as in the interest of peace and stability in the world. Repression, in the guise of a war on terrorism, must not be allowed to silence all opposition or to lump all “Islamists” together. Those who advocate violent extremism are the enemies of mankind and of Islam, and must be stopped before they bring havoc and mayhem to their own countries and to the world. With this, however, real and genuine reforms are needed. Progressive, liberal or moderate voices cannot be heard in an environment of fear and repression.

To promote peace and strengthen the voices of the silent majority, Muslim communities must gain experience with democratic institutions and practices. Years of military rule that supported authoritarianism in our communities have waylaid our democratic development. We need to reinforce civil society, respect for civilian authority and the rule of law, respect for the rights of all members of our communities to live according to our faith. We need to fight for our human rights, women’s rights.

Not only must we Muslim women engage the state elites, who usually largely consist of men wishing to retain the power that they currently enjoy, we must also stand firm against the predominating patriarchal values that continually oppress us. We must fight our exclusion from political and economic systems.

Agencies of government and the donor community need to strengthen the foundations for democracy as well as implement development and poverty alleviation programs more effectively. Without development and strong democratic institutions, the roots of terrorism will find fertile soil. Unless the deeply rooted grievances are addressed simultaneously, a military solution will only alienate the community.

In conclusion, as we all strive to maintain strong security presence in the region, we must stress that peace and progress of the region cannot rest on military victories alone. Economic growth and democratization of the region are keys to peace.

It is time to change the paradigm. Martin Luther King Jr. said “One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.”

Muslim women must join the war that global women are waging to defend their space here on earth. As women around the globe move to wage peace as they advance their position, Muslim women cannot allow their own situation – precarious to begin with –to be reduced. Women must not allow themselves to be silenced.

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**ANNEX A. REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7192**

Principal Author: Senator Santanina T. Rasul, Chair, Senate Committee on Women and Family

**AN ACT PROMOTING THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN AS FULL AND EQUAL PARTNERS OF MEN IN DEVELOPMENT AND NATION BUILDING AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

Section 1. Title. This Act shall be cited as the "Women in Development and Nation Building Act."

Sec. 2. Declaration of Policy. The State recognizes the role of women in nation building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men. The State shall provide women rights and opportunities equal to that of men.

To attain the foregoing policy:

(1) A substantial portion of official development assistance funds received from foreign governments and multilateral agencies and organizations shall be set aside and utilized by the agencies concerned to support programs and activities for women;

(2) All government departments shall ensure that women benefit equally and participate directly in the development programs and projects of said department, specifically those funded under official foreign development assistance, to ensure the full participation and involvement of women in the development process;

(3) All government departments and agencies shall review and revise all their regulations, circulars, issuances and procedures to remove gender bias therein.

Sec. 3. Responsible Agency. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) shall primarily be responsible for ensuring the participation of women as recipients in foreign aid, grants and loans. It shall determine and recommend the amount to be allocated for the development activity involving women.

Sec. 4. Mandate. The NEDA, with the assistance of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, shall ensure that the different government departments, including its agencies and instrumentalities which, directly or indirectly, affect the participation of women in national development and their integration therein:

(1) Formulate and prioritize rural or countryside development programs or projects, provide income and employment opportunities to women in the rural areas and thus, prevent their heavy migration from rural to urban or foreign countries;

(2) Include an assessment of the extent to which their programs and/or projects integrate women in the development process and of the impact of said programs or projects on women, including their implications in enhancing the self-reliance of women in improving their income;

(3) Ensure the active participation of women and women's organizations in the development programs and/or projects including their involvement in the planning, design, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation thereof;

(4) Collect sex-disaggregated data and include such data in its program/project paper, proposal or strategy;

(5) Ensure that programs and/or projects are designed so that the percentage of women who receive assistance is approximately proportionate to either their traditional participation in the targeted activities or their proportion of the population, whichever is higher. Otherwise, the following should be stated in the program/project paper, proposal or strategy;

(a) The obstacle in achieving the goal;  
(b) The steps being taken to overcome those obstacles; and  
(c) To the extent that steps are not being taken to overcome those obstacles, why they are not being taken.

(6) Assist women in activities that are of critical significance to their self-reliance and development.

Sec. 5. Equality in Capacity to Act. Women of legal age, regardless of civil status, shall have the capacity to act and enter into contracts which shall in every respect be equal to that of men under similar circumstances.

In all contractual situations where married men have the capacity to act, married women shall have equal rights.

To this end:

(1) Women shall have the capacity to borrow and obtain loans and execute security and credit arrangement under the same conditions as men;

(2) Women shall have equal access to all government and private sector programs granting agricultural credit, loans and non-material resources and shall enjoy equal treatment in agrarian reform and land resettlement programs;

(3) Women shall have equal rights to act as incorporators and enter into insurance contracts; and

(4) Married women shall have rights equal to those of married men in applying for passport, secure visas and other travel documents, without need to secure the consent of their spouses.

In all other similar contractual relations, women shall enjoy equal rights and shall have the capacity to act which shall in every respect be equal to those of men under similar circumstances.

Sec. 6. Equal Membership in Clubs. Women shall enjoy equal access to membership in all social, civic and recreational clubs, committees, associations and similar other organizations devoted to public purpose. They shall be entitled to the same rights and privileges accorded to their spouses if they belong to the same organization.

Sec. 7. Admission to Military Schools. Any provision of the law to the contrary notwithstanding, consistent with the needs of the services, women shall be accorded equal opportunities for appointment, admission, training, graduation and commissioning in all military or similar schools of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police not later than the fourth academic year following the

approval of this Act in accordance with the standards required for men except for those minimum essential adjustments required by physiological differences between sexes.

Sec. 8. Voluntary Pag-IBIG, GSIS and SSS Coverage. Married persons who devote full time to managing the household and family affairs shall, upon the working spouse's consent, be entitled to voluntary Pag-IBIG (Pagtutulungan — Ikaw, Bangko, Industriya at Gobyerno), Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) or Social Security System (SSS) coverage to the extent of one-half (1/2) of the salary and compensation of the working spouse. The contributions due thereon shall be deducted from the salary of the working spouse.

The GSIS or the SSS, as the case may be, shall issue rules and regulations necessary to effectively implement the provisions of this section.

Sec. 9. Implementing Rules. The NEDA, in consultation with the different government agencies concerned, shall issue rules and regulations as may be necessary for the effective implementation of Sections 2, 3 and 4, of this Act within six (6) months from its effectivity.

Sec. 10. Compliance Report. Within six (6) months from the effectivity of this Act and every six (6) months thereafter, all government departments, including its agencies and instrumentalities, shall submit a report to Congress on their compliance with this Act.

Sec. 11. Separability Clause. If for any reason any section or provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other sections or provisions hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

Sec. 12. Repealing Clause. The provisions of Republic Act No. 386, otherwise known as the Civil Code of the Philippines, as amended, and of Executive Order No. 209, otherwise known as the Family Code of the Philippines, and all laws, decrees, executive orders, proclamations, rules and regulations, or parts thereof, inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed.

Sec. 13. Effectivity Clause. The rights of women and all the provisions of this Act shall take effect immediately upon its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved: February 12, 1992

## **ANNEX B1. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MUSLIM WOMEN CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS**

### **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**

*Conference organized by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy and the Regional Commission for Bangsamoro Women, Pacific Heights Hotel, Cotabato City, January 23, 2005*

#### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **ADVOCACY**

- Women groups should make a stand that “Islam is not terrorism”
- Moro women should help protect and promote human rights
- Call to propagate the teachings of Islam and uphold *halal* standards
- Women should be treated by men as partners in the family and not to be treated as “slaves”
- Erase the notion that the culture of the Bangsamoro stagnates the development of their community
- Intensify dissemination of information on the role of women on peace and development
- Women should begin to question and ask about their role in the community and not just be submissive and conformist to tradition.
- Fight graft and corruption in the government and in all levels of society
- Help enhance the integrity and accountability of public officials in governance

##### **WOMEN REPRESENTATION**

- There is a need for women representation in the GRP-MILF negotiation to sit either as a member of the panel, the technical working group, or as an observer.
- Ensure Moro women representation in major decision-making bodies affecting the Bangsamoro.

##### **ORGANIZATION / CIVIL SOCIETY**

- There should be a concerted action among the Muslim religious leaders, academic institutions and civil society
- Involvement in conferences, fora and other consultative mechanisms explaining the teachings of Islam
- Organize a national body of Moro women or a women network with the purpose of coming up with a unified stand on issues affecting the Bangsamoro.
- Come up with a national comprehensive plan for all women organizations to follow
- Foster unity and not divisiveness in Moro women organizations
- Initiate continuous dialogue/fora and come up with an action plan as a concrete output of these initiatives
- Tap the expertise of local NGOs as partners in capacity building programs.

##### **FOREIGN INTERVENTION**

- Review the impact on the flow of foreign aid affecting the Bangsamoro community and check if foreign aid fosters “dependency syndrome”
- Pursue research into whether foreign aid worsens or alleviates poverty incidence in ARMM

##### **EDUCATION**

- Support education programs instilling Islamic values among the children and make them more responsible and accountable members of the community.
- Call for more resources to improve access of children, youth and women to formal and non-formal education which will develop their capacities/skills for productive endeavors
- Call for support of literacy programs for Muslim women

## ANNEX B2. OUTPUTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN CONFERENCES

### MUSLIM WOMEN PEACE ADVOCATES CONFERENCE

*Conference organized by the Magbassa Kita Foundation Inc., Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy in collaboration with Muslim women leaders, Zamboanga City, 10-12 December 2003*

#### WORKSHOP OUTPUTS

##### *Women and Poverty Alleviation*

Poverty continues to be a major development challenge for the country in general and for Muslim Mindanao in particular. As of 2000, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has the highest poverty incidence among all the regions. Four of the five provinces that comprise ARMM are among the top ten poorest provinces in the country. The discussions during the workshop brought out the following concerns:

- (1) Consult women at the local level to ensure that the government's development framework for Mindanao is truly responsive to the concerns of the region. Ultimately, a federal form of government is advocated which would give LGUs greater autonomy in deciding the direction and focus of their economic programs.
- (2) There must be closer monitoring and assessment of economic projects implemented in the region to give a clearer indication of the status of these projects and their impact on the communities. Women's involvement in this initiative is emphasized. To the extent that corruption at the local level is seen as a factor in the poor implementation of government initiatives in the region, advocacy for greater transparency and accountability among local government officials is crucial.
- (3) Entrepreneurship needs to be seriously promoted given the limited employment opportunities (especially among women) in the region. Given this, NGOs and other organizations involved in livelihood projects and micro-lending programs must be assured adequate financing. Towards this end, networks/federations of NGOs and POs can be established throughout Mindanao, which would serve as intermediaries between established financial institutions and people's organizations.
- (4) There is a need to strengthen the competitiveness of micro-enterprises and livelihood activities in the region. This would require intensive training and capability-building, which must be conducted throughout the region, including (or perhaps especially) in the remote areas. In addition, consultations with owners of successful micro-enterprises would provide beneficiaries with practical knowledge of 'best practices' in the region.
- (5) Inasmuch as the ongoing conflict in Mindanao is seen as major impediment to the development of Mindanao, the search for a peaceful resolution to the conflict is a necessary element in any development initiative.

##### *Women in Politics and Governance*

Despite the growing number of Muslim women holding public office, Muslim women's access to institutions of governance and their participation in the decision-making processes of their communities are still limited. The participants identified several factors. Chief among these is the belief (still held by many in the Muslim communities) that women's involvement in politics is forbidden in Islam. To counter this, there is need for greater advocacy of women's rights. To the extent that the Qur'an has been used to justify the argument against women's involvement, a closer

look at the Qur'an – and what it actually says of women's rights and their participation in public life – is warranted.

Another factor is the level of women's political skills and capabilities. This not only limits their chances to be elected into public office but also (and perhaps more importantly) affects their ability, when elected, to succeed as public servants. Muslim women must be provided more opportunities to develop their potentials through capability-building and training programs. Women's organizations can be mobilized towards this end. Beyond this, there is a need to fully implement Republic Act (RA) 7192, or the "Women in Nation Building Act," the landmark legislation passed in 1992 aimed at empowering women to become full and equal partners in development and nation-building. Among the many interventions set out under RA 7192 is the provision for a substantial portion of official development assistance funds to be used by concerned agencies to support programs and activities for women.

Finally, the Muslim women's perceptions of their roles in society – outside of their traditional roles in the family – also acts as a barrier to more active involvement in their communities. Awareness-raising on women's rights, the role they can play in society and the contributions they can make in nation-building must begin with the Muslim women themselves.

#### *Women and Education (Focus on Madrasah Education)*

The Madrasah is an important institution in the Muslim community; it is central to their efforts to preserve Islamic religion and culture. The Madrasah can also be a potent instrument for peace and development in Mindanao, particularly in ARMM. The system, however, first needs to be strengthened.

During the workshop, the participants underscored the need to mainstream Madrasah education. Part of this effort is the development of a unified curriculum that incorporates the basic subjects in the national curriculum with the core subjects of the madaris. At the same time, the teaching of Islamic Values must also be integrated in the public schools.

#### *Women and the Shariah Law*

The participants raised five major concerns with regard to the Shariah court system: (1) the lack of Shariah courts outside Muslim Mindanao which limits the access of Muslims living in other parts of the country, (2) the relatively small number of Shariah lawyers in the country, (3) the non-implementation of laws in support of the Shariah system, (4) the lack of support mechanisms for women within the ambit of the Shariah court system, and (5) the limited involvement of women in the Islamic justice system.

Their recommendations focused on measures intended to strengthen the Shariah court system. These included: (a) advocacy for the establishment of Shariah courts in major cities in the country, (b) the passage of enabling laws that will facilitate the full implementation of RA 9054, (c) a closer examination of the jurisdiction of Shariah courts with a view to expanding it, and (d) scholarships for Shariah law training for interested and qualified men and women.

In addition, their agenda for action included measures to guarantee that within the system, women are ensured greater participation and their rights are recognized and protected. These included: (a) the establishment of facilities that provide legal assistance, counseling services and other forms of services for women requiring legal aid, (b) the formation of a "Shariah Court Watch Group" to advocate for the appointment of gender-sensitive Shariah court judges, and (c) advocacy for the review and amendment of the qualifications used in appointing Shariah judges.

### **ANNEX B.3**

**2ND NATIONAL SUMMIT OF ULAMA IN THE PHILIPPINES  
Imperial Palace Suites, Quezon City, PHILIPPINES**

**January 26 to 29, 2009**

**The Declaration of Muslim Women Waging Peace  
(Workshop on Women's Rights and Issues)**

Bismillah Hirrahman Niraheem. In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

The demands of fast-paced changes in the 21st Century require the participation of women in addressing multi-dimensional problems. Women constitute more than half of the population. Thus, women are stakeholders and should therefore be key players and Partners in promoting sustainable development in a culture peace.

Peace and development are continuously threatened by ongoing armed conflict. When war happens, women take the lead in the protection and welfare of their families. Armed conflict and the violation of human rights in situations of armed conflict have long-term social, economic and psychological consequences. Further, women also suffer from other types of conflict, including "rido". We therefore assert the need to empower women to participate in conflict resolution, peace negotiations, and reconstruction activities toward reconciliation and healing.

We call for the immediate resumption of the peace process between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

We also call for the complete implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Accord, subject to the results of the Tripartite Review conducted by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Government and the Moro National Liberation Front.

Further, we call on government and development partners to:

**Peace**

Build the capacities of women as peace educators, both in their families and in their communities;

Support the aleemat to form and institutionalize a network of Muslim women peace builders and advocates;

Foster a culture of peace, through education, that upholds justice and tolerance for all peoples to include elements of conflict resolution, mediation, elimination of discrimination and respect for diversity, including educational programs for youth and children;

Integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts and aim for gender balance when nominating or promoting candidates for judicial and other position in all relevant justice and law enforcement bodies, as well as in other bodies related to the peaceful settlement of disputes;

Investigate and punish members of the police, security and armed forces and others who perpetrate acts of violence against women, violations of humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women in conflict situations;

Develop awareness of the human rights of women and provide, as appropriate, human rights education and training to military and police personnel operating in areas of armed conflict and areas where there are refugees;

Protect the rights of Muslim women detainees. The Commission on Human Rights has documented hundreds of cases of Muslim women illegally detained, subjected to humiliation, rape and other violations of rights;

Raise public awareness, as appropriate, through the mass media, education at all levels and special programmes to create a better understanding of the situation of women and children affected by conflict situations;

Advocate for the positive portrayal of Muslims in the media and other forms of cultural representation including entertainment;

### **Access to financial resources and economic development**

Ensure the actualization of enhanced and increased access of Muslim women to economic opportunities, capital and Islamic microcredit, information technology and technical assistance, livelihood opportunities including Halal production and food processing including packaging;

Build capacities to advocate, mentor and train women leaders, especially Muslims at the grassroots level, to develop livelihood skills for empowerment particularly in high value, adding industries and agricultural activities;

Provide adequate protection and allocate financial and other resources to displaced women and children and facilitate their return or resettlement including access to appropriate and adequate food, water and shelter, education, and social and health services including reproductive health care and maternity care;

Allocate a substantial portion of the GAD Budget to affirmative action for women victimized by the consequences of armed conflict and for peace building activities of the aleemat.

### **Education and Islamic values formation:**

Enable greater access especially of women to formal and non-formal education, acholarships for the aleemat;

Support literacy programs for Muslim women, who have the highest rate of illiteracy in the country;

Provide women with access to vocational/professional training programmes, including small-scale enterprise development and planning;

Support the aleemat to be effective teachers and administrators in all levels of the madaris system;

Support the establishment of women's resource centers for the aleemat for research, training, networking and other services such as English language training, computer education and Arabic language training; for health education and counseling on all forms of violence against women; for parenting skills and Islamic values formation for youth and families; for education on rights and duties;

Combat the prostitution of women thru Islamic values formation and education of young girls at risk and their families;

Support the aleemat in providing guidance, education and counseling for youth especially out of school youth and youth in conflict with the law;

### **Health**

Enable greater access especially of women to comprehensive primary health services that take into account their reproductive health from a gender perspective;

Provide resources for the aleemat to research, study and develop strategies to deal with the problems of youth such as drug addiction and other substance abuse, smoking, early pregnancy and others;

Establish drug rehabilitation centers and support anti-drug campaigns;

Provide access to potable drinking water;

Support the aleemat in cleanliness, environmental protection and sanitation campaigns;

**Clean and honest elections and governance**

Provide voter's education to women that will promote honest, orderly and peaceful elections;

Support the aleema to play an active role in voters' education and guarding of the vote;

Support the aleemat for training in participation in politics and governance;

Support the participation of the aleemat women in the practice of good governance including transparency, accountability and zero tolerance of corruption, cronyism and nepotism;

Advocate for PD 1083, CMPL (Code of Muslim Personal Law) to give access to women to legalize redress in a fast and inexpensive manner;

***Signed, 35 Participants of the Workshop on Women's Rights and Issues***