



peace and reconciliation journal



Mennonite Church Canada
WITNESS

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MARCH 2011 SPECIAL EDITION

PCEC ENGAGES MILF PEACE PANEL IN A PEACE DIALOGUE



Dann Pantoja, PBCI President, facilitated the dialogue between PCEC and MILF

09 MARCH 2011. COTABATO CITY—The Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the Peace Panel of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) held an inter-faith dialogue on the newly-resumed peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF.



PCEC leaders and MILF Peace Panel having a peaceful chat with each other

Bishop Efraim Tendero (PCEC National Director), Bishop John Tayoto (Chairman, PCEC Peace and Reconciliation Commission), and Bishop Noel Pantoja (PCEC Board Member and General Director of the Conservative Baptist Association of the Philippines) led the 78 evangelical participants—pastors, church leaders, and mission workers—representing various Christian groups in Mindanao.



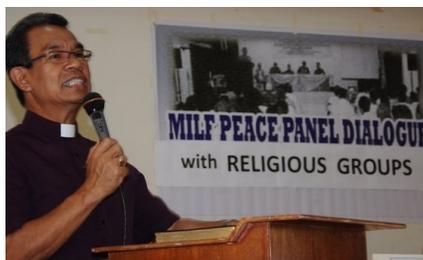
The facilitator and core dialogue participants from the PCEC and the MILF

The MILF Peace Panel were represented by Chairman Mohagher Iqbal, Attorney Michael Mastura, and Professor Abhoud Syed Lingga. They were assisted by Mr. Mike Pasigan, Head of the Secretariat, MILF Peace Panel.

Bishop Tendero, in his opening remarks, referred to the biblical concept of the *Image of God*—the view that humanity, as originally designed by God’s creative will, though fallen into imperfection, is a reflection of God. This biblical teaching, according to evangelical theology, is a healthy starting point for Christians to engage in these kinds of dialogue. Because evangelical Christians believe that all human beings are created in the Image of God, we are all equal before the eyes of our Creator—the God of justice and peace. [continued on page 2]



PBCI staff with Chairman Mohagher Iqbal and Datu Michael Mastura



Bishop Efraim Tendero, PCEC National Director, during his speech



Some of the 78 participants and core leaders of the PCEC-MILF Dialogue

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The PCEC bishop also quoted a couple of Scripture references emphasizing that peace and peacebuilding are crucial aspects of the Christian mandate because we follow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace:

"Matthew 5:9 says, 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.' In James 1:19-20, it says: 'My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.'"

MILF Peace Panel Chairman Mohagher Iqbal, during his opening statement, quoted Prophet Muhammad in his letter to the monks of St. Catherine Monastery at Mount Sinai in the year 628 CE:

"This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far: We are with them. Verily, I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah, I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything to the Muslim's houses... Their churches are to be respected..."

"Insha Allah (God willing)," Iqbal publicly declared, "the Moro Islamic Liberation Front will also honor this commitment in the same way the Muslims before us had honored this covenant once the Bangsamoro state will be emplaced in some parts of Mindanao."

Iqbal further explained their intention for having this dialogue with religious groups like the PCEC: "We, in the MILF Peace Panel, upon the expressed go-signal from our principal, get out of our way and conduct dialogues with church people, a very important sector in the society. While there is separation of Church and State in the Philippines... the truth remains that the Church is a very

powerful institution that holds the spiritual side of every Christian and, therefore, can influence their decisions, especially in relation to the cause of peace in Mindanao... On our part, it is a matter of necessity that we must leave no stone unturned if only to make the cause of peace succeed. This is also a sign of goodwill that we also reach out to groups other than those within the sphere of our responsibility... There is also need for other people or groups like you to understand the MILF proposal, whether what we want for ourselves signals the demise of other groups, or whether our proposal is framed on extremism that defies logic and moderation. Or we want to live and let others live in peace, love, and harmony. Please examine our proposal very closely."

Attorney Michael Mastura, explained the MILF draft on the comprehensive compact submitted to the GPH on January 27, 2010. He summarized the highly technical document in a very passionate way: "We are not getting out of the country, but the unitary form of arrangement is a thing of the past for the Moros... There is really a need for a separate Bangsamoro state without severing ties with the Philippines."

Professor Abhoud Syed Lingga, who is also Executive Director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS), shared the concept of "a united country in the form of an asymmetrical state-substate relationship." He expressed his anxiety that GPH might not even consider this new political way of relating between two peoples.

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We welcome your contributions for our support and invite you to send these to:
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During the question and answer period, majority of PCEC participants shared their concern about religious freedom, specifically the liberty of Christian minority to express their faith, under MILF governance in those parts of Mindanao where majority of the population are Muslims. Bishop Genesis Udang of Cagayan de Oro City best represented this concern: "Would there be genuine religious freedom in a Bangsamoro substate?"

"Yes, there will be religious freedom," Attorney Mastura answered.

Rev. Norman Naromal, Senior Pastor of Davao Bible Community Church, represented the second most asked question: "Would the Bangsamoro substate eventually lead to Bangsamoro independence?"

Attorney Mastura responded with another question: "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing's wrong with that," replied Pastor Naromal, "we just want to see transparency where this peace negotiation between the GPH and the MILF is eventually going."

After many more theological, historical, political, and economic discussions, the dialogue ended at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

The Mindanao People's Caucus, led by its Secretary General, Attorney Mary Ann Arnado, organized this event. Rev. Luis Daniel Pantoja, President and CEO of PeaceBuilders Community, facilitated the actual dialogue. 🌱

PBCI ICT Team

PRAY FOR THE PBCI STAFF



Dann Pantoja. Please pray that people would respond to the challenge of praying, giving, learning, and volunteering to establish one Peace and Reconciliation (PAR) Community in each of the 80 provinces in our country by December 31st, 2015.



Joji Pantoja. Please pray for faster healing of her bones which was broken due to her accident. Pray for God's miracle as her menopausal age causes lack of estrogen and calcium. Also pray for comfort as being constraint in her room and having limited mobility makes it hard for her.



Bennette Tenecio. Please pray for her as she spearheads the fundraising for the PAR 80 by 2015 vision of PBCI (see <http://peacebuilderscommunity.org/invitations/give/>).



Kriz Cruzado. Pray for more wisdom as she directs our Field Operations, patience as she deals with untoward events, good health so she could always function well, economic stability for her family so she does not have to worry for her finances, creativity and resourcefulness so she can continue innovating new approaches and strategies in achieving Field Ops goals.



Mei Solocasa. Please pray that God may equip PAR Healthcare Program to extend to urban communities such as Metro Davao and Iligan City.



Regina Mondex. Pray for wisdom and strength as she faces bigger challenges with her tasks in Luzon, such as coordinating upcoming activities of the Integrated Mennonite Churches in the Philippines.



Matt Tiessen. Praise God for his parents' wonderful visit in the Philippines! Pray that he will be able to focus and organize his tasks during his last four months in the country.



Keith Grubaugh. Keith is our new intern specializing in Technical Support—Accounting. Please pray for wisdom and strength.



Jenna Grubaugh. May God continue to lead her to people, places, and readings that will help her discover theater arts in the area. Also pray for confidence as she shares to others the gifts God has given her.



Arjay Freg Balabag. Please pray for wisdom and creativity as he continues working on PBCI's comic book about Fair Trade Coffee Farming.



Joy Betios. Please pray for renewed strength for her work from day to day, as she and her family also struggles from injustice in their local community.



Freddie Abelitado. Please pray for energy and strength as he continues to be a good member of PBCI family. Also pray for his health and his family's needs.

PBCI ADVANCES ITS VISION FOR THE PHILIPPINES

March has been a busy and exciting month for Peacebuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI). All the staff were launched to the field for exploratory meetings on Fair Trade Coffee Farming, Peace and Reconciliation (PAR) Seminar, Fact-Finding Mission, Drafting of Memorandum of Agreement, and Partnership Evaluation.

Mindanao

08 March 2011. PBCI team explored the possibility of Fair Trade Coffee Farming in Iligan City. We met with the local farmers, local leaders, and indigenous community leaders.

10 March 2011. PBCI drafted a Memorandum of Agreement with the Municipal Office of Kolambugan, Lanao Del Norte, which indicates partnering with the following programs: Peacebuilding Healthcare, Fair Trade Coffee Farming, Transitional Justice Initiative, and Peace and Reconciliation. The draft was finalized during the discussion, and will be submitted to the Municipal Council. The same day, PBCI also visited EcoWEB, and evaluated our partnership with them. This meeting will later on be followed with a Memorandum of Agreement.

11 March 2011. The team conducted a Fact-Finding Mission at Palalan Lumbia, Cagayan de Oro. This was due to the incident that happened last February 20, 2011, when armed men tore down the Building Bridges Place of Worship and the other structures in the agricultural land, including several nipa houses and huts. The plea of Palalan: *"We are hoping for all help we can get as many of the government agencies we've turned to have been slow to respond."*

12 March 2011. The team visited the Talaandig Community in Songko, Malaybalay, Bukidnon to assess the area's need for water system, and to visit the Arabica coffee farms in the area. After hiking approximately 14 kilometers, they were refreshed with clean mineral water, and delicious native delicacies offered by the community.

Reported by Mei Solocasa, Mindanao Peacebuilding Coordinator

Luzon

17-19 March 2011. With the coordination of Dr. Mar Apilado, PBCI was able to conduct Peace and Reconciliation (PAR) 1-3 Seminar Series among a diverse group of leaders and pastors from different church groups. The seminar was held inside the Union Christian College (UCC) Audio-Visual Room in San Fernando City, La Union.

Pastors, church leaders, educators, and public servants who were longing for peace attended this event. As a result, they committed to be a PAR Community in their province. They are ready to move forward and be more equipped as Peace and Reconciliation advocates in their province.

21 March 2011. PBCI met with Christine Abellon, who helped organizing the Cordillera Regional Arabica Coffee Council last 2008. We asked for her advice and listened to her experiences in able to give us an idea on how we could further expand Fair Trade Coffee Farming in Northern Luzon. We also learned from her how we could empower the Fair Trade coffee farmers in Mindanao, based on what they did in the Cordillera Region.

22-26 March 2011. We went to Tabuk, Kalinga and met farmers who are curious and interested about Fair Trade Coffee Farming. In this area, there are already farmers who have coffee trees that are taken for granted because of the low price in the market.

We gave them an orientation about who we are and what we do. On the first day, four farmers came and listened to us. The following day, 11 more farmers from Asibanglan, Pinukpuk, Kalinga arrived from a 6-hour hike and roller coaster ride just to sit down and listen to us. We were overwhelmed with their responses. They are very eager to start planting Arabica coffee. In fact, they already scheduled their first Fair Trade training/workshop on the last week of May.

Reported by Regina Mondez, Luzon Church Resourcing Coordinator.

**For photos of our latest activities, please visit our Facebook page at:
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Peacebuilders-Community/92496934865>**