

On the so-called "Moro Problem" and the Bounty Money for the Capture of the Top Leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

Recently, Secretary Alfredo S. Lim of the Department of Interior and Local Government offered a prize or bounty to anybody who can give information that will lead to the capture of the leadership of the MILF notably, *Ustaj* Salamat Hashim, Chairman of the Front; Al-Haj Murad, Vice Chairman for Military Affairs of the Front, and Eid Kabalu, the Front's Spokesman. Obviously, this action compliments Government's total war policy against insurgency.

Such a policy is anachronistic and it offends the very concept of the dignity of every human person enshrined in the Philippine Constitution as a state policy (Art. 2(11), Philippine Constitution).

Moreover, this policy pronouncement by Secretary Lim will only serve to dim any prospects for the early, peaceful resolution of the MILF insurgency in Mindanao. It gives the impression that Government's profession of willingness to sit down with the MILF for a peace talk is only a hollow show.

Furthermore, such policy trivializes the so-called "Moro Problem" or the problem of Moro insurgency as an ordinary law enforcement problem or an ordinary peace and order problem that can be considered as a "closed case" with the capture or even death of its perpetrators. The problem has been with us for four centuries and, like a cough virus, it has remained as a sore in the throat, at times mutating into its worst forms that threaten the very stability of the Philippine body politic as it is. The military solution to the problem did not work in the past and it will not work in the present and in the future.

In a Government White Paper issued on March 10, 1987, Emmanuel Pelaez, then chief peace negotiator of the Government Panel during the 1987 Peace Talks with the Moro National Liberation Front and former vice-president of the country and ambassador to the United States of America, acknowledged the human rights dimensions of the problem and declared that government is willing to admit the mistakes of the past relative to the Muslim population of the country, Thus:

"In all frankness, it is hightime that the Christian Filipino majority should rectify more vigorously its serious mistake in regarding the Muslim minority as being somehow inferior in their faith, culture and way of life. For this attitude and prejudice stem from our ignorance of Islam and of the great achievements of Islamic civilization and its contributions to the world as a whole. Moreover, until now many Filipinos do not appreciate the reality that poverty and underdevelopment in the Moro lands are traceable in part to the Moro's nationalistic resistance to Western imperialist powers, to defend freedom and to keep their faith and way of life as a distinctive ethno-religious minority. Similarly, after independence they expended great time and resources to fend off their continuance of universalistic policies of political integration, cultural assimilation and national development that were applied without due regard to the distinctive characteristics of the Islamic and Moro cultures in Mindanao.

With the massive migration to Mindanao of Christians from the Visayas and Luzon and their spread to areas originally settle by Muslim ethnic groups, which government encouraged and facilitated, the Moros felt the increasing loss of their ancestral lands to Christians. This led to the apprehension that their faith, culture and way of life may be endangered as they become outnumbered and as they fall behind economically, socially, and politically.

(Emmanuel Pelaez, *"The Empowerment of the Muslim Filipinos"*, M arch

10, 1987. In Aid Memoir on the Mindanao Peace Talks. The Philippine Information Agency, Manila, May 1987, pp 208-209).

It is therefore in such a context that the problem of Moro insurgency should be viewed and considered. And rightly so. In democratic constitutions the world over including that of the Philippines, the right to self-determination is a recognized human rights. The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights goes farther with its third preambular statements:

Whereas, it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by rule of law.

This is not to pontificate on such an issue in political philosophy. We just wish to bring home the point that the Commission feels in the neck the stricture of a wrong political policy towards the Moro insurgency such as the offering of a bounty money for the capture of the top leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, among other things.

Quezon City, 16 August 2000