

ABSTRACT

Conflict Cycles and Spoiler Problems in the Southern Philippines

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Muslim Mindanao's contemporary history has been a history of recurring conflicts and peace time that started in the latter part of 1971 when the flames of secession started to conflagrate in the Southern Philippines. Along historical lines, relative peace had always preceded new wars, and that new wars have been triggered by events or behaviors of certain groups of actors in both the local and national landscapes. Since the early 1970's, the struggle has transformed in time from a predominantly secessionist struggle fought by a single rebel group into a web of complex conflict that saw the emergence of various Moro rebel, terrorist and criminal groups [i.e. MNLF, MILF, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Islamiyah (J.I.), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), etc.] that exist for different reasons such as the fight for genuine regional autonomy, the creation of an independent Islamic state in Mindanao by way of jihad, or involvement in criminal activities like kidnap-for-ransom and carnapping to eke out a living.

Meanwhile, in the wake of seemingly never-ending wars, socio-economic development in the Southern Philippines has become static for so long. Notwithstanding the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that was institutionalized

in 1991 to bestow regional autonomy and self-governance to the Moro people, the war-ravaged region instead found itself placed at the doldrums of all socio-economic development rankings among all the regions of the country. Despite having been richly endowed with natural resources that the rest of the Philippines can only dream of, a great majority of today's Bangsamoro people project the faces of untold miseries, the harshness of poverty, malnutrition and poor health conditions, the inaccessibility of basic social services, and the backwardness of education.

Posing the question, "Why does the Mindanao conflict persist despite the signing of two major peace agreements between the Philippine Government and the Moro rebels?" this dissertation explores the factors that obstruct settlement of the disputes in the southern Philippines. It primarily examines why Muslim Mindanao has been mired in a quandary of complex, multi-layered and cyclical conflicts in spite of the constant inducement of peace processes during the past 37 years.