

**Right to Self-Determination of Oppressed Nations
and the Indigenous Struggles**

The National Oppression in the Philippines Today

The Bangsamoro Revolution, a Struggle for National Liberation

By Jolly Lais*

The struggle for Right to Self-determination of the Bangsamoro is embodied in the provisions of the International Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights documents and covenants. However, to those more incline to classical point of view in a progressive sense this struggle can be more understood in various international articles regarding the national question of minority peoples.

The term Moro reflects the identity of 13 ethno-linguistic tribes in Mindanao who are basically Muslims. Long before the coming of Spaniards in the 16th century, sovereign Moro political structures dynamically governing Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan which were already in place and expanding control over the Visayas and Luzon Islands as early as the 14th century. The Sultanates being the popular form of government then also started enjoying flourishing trade with Asian neighbors like China and other southeast Asian countries.

It is worth to note that the sovereign Moro Sultanates withstood against Spanish attempts of conquest. For 377 years of war against Spanish invasion the Moros prevailed, unconquered and remained a sovereign nation.

Let me lay down in brief few of the basic historical proof. In his two-volume book, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Dr. Onofre D. Corpus (President of University of the Philippines System from 1975 to 1979) described that in the 1650s there existed three political dominions in this part of the world. He stated that:

“There were three political dominions in the archipelago in 1650s: Filipinas and the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu (The Maranao emerged as a power in the 18th century). The costly wars between Christians and Muslims, peaking in 1799, certainly shaped our political destiny.” (Source: Onofre D. Corpus, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Vol. 1, Quezon City, Aklahi Foundation, Inc., 1998)

Corpus affirmed his arguments and maintained that:

“There were no Muslim revolts against the colonial regime. This was so because revolt is the recourse of aggrieved subjects, which the Muslims were not. They did not submit to, nor were conquered by, the Spaniards... They were in a relation of permanent war, at least for as long as the latter wanted war. The barangays of Luzon and Visayas could submit to entradas composed of a squad or platoon of Spanish soldiers armed with muskets and arquebuses, usually supported by native auxiliaries and bearers. The

Muslims of Sulu and Maguindanao would fight off especially organized expeditions of conquest and pacification; the Spanish officers and soldiers on these expeditions would be enemies twice over, for they would be fighting for personal plunder and for their Spanish king – the Muslims would fight all of them. They would stand up to a Spanish invasion force composed of land troops, a fleet armed with artillery. They would win some and lose some of those engagements. If they lost and had to submit, their submission was never more than temporary, for it was only a tactical move, good only until a moment when the enemy fleet would have to sail away, or until they had regained strength.” (Corpus, 1998)

More weights should be afforded to the Royale Decree of February 26, 1886 issued by Queen Regent Maria Cristina de Habsburgo-Lorena stating that the Spanish Crown had effective control and administration only in 19 provinces in Luzon and the Visayas such as:

Province	Classification	Capital
1. Manila	First Class	Manila City
2. Albay	First Class	Albay
3. Batangas	First Class	Batangas
4. Bulacan	First Class	Bulacan
5. Ilocos Norte	First Class	Laoag
6. Ilocos Sur	First Class	Vigan
7. Laguna	First Class	Sta. Cruz
8. Pampanga	First Class	Bacolor
9. Pangasinan	First Class	Lingayen
10. Bataan	Second Class	Balanga
11. Camarines Norte	Second Class	Daet
12. Camarines Sur	Second Class	Naga
13. Mindoro	Second Class	Calapan
14. Nueva Ecija	Second Class	San Isidro
15. Tayabas	Second Class	Lucena
16. Zambales	Second Class	Iba
17. Cagayan	Second Class	Tuguegarao
18. Isabela	Second Class	Ilagan
19. Nueva Viscaya	Second Class	Bayombong

Another historical fact was the Maura Law of May 19, 1893 issued by Queen Regent Maria Cristina defining the scope and power of the local governments in the 19-province Las Islas Filipinas. Article I, section 2 of the Maura Law states:

“Section 2. There shall be a Municipal Tribunal in each town of Luzon and the Visayas which, not having constituted itself into a municipality, as prescribed by the Royal Decree of November 12, 1889, contributes to the State more than one thousand cedula a year.” (Note: Full text of the Maura Law of 1893 is found in Jose P. Laurel,

Local Government in the Philippine Islands, Manila: La Pilarica Press, 1926, pp 317-318.)

The Bangsamoro homeland (Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan) was illegally annexed in the US\$20,000,00 Treaty of Paris buy out between the US and Spain in 1898. Several historical archives showed proof of evidences including the details of communications between Commissioners of the Spanish and American Commissions working to realize the treaty of peace in 1898.

Showcasing the manipulation of the US and Philippines neo-colonial regimes after the Treaty of Paris, political and social exclusion/inclusion were imposed through US rubber stamp Philippine Legislature. These neo-colonial policies opened up the floodgate of migration. Influx of settlers from Northern and Central Philippines to Mindanao has resulted to the minoritization, exploitation and discrimination against the Bangsamoro which to this day forms part of the National Oppression of the Philippine capitalist state.

Right to Self-determination as a political paradigm to end the National Oppression should translate into a workable form to be considered as a concrete rallying tool of the Bangsamoro masses given the historical facts. The popular support of the masses for the Moro revolutionary forces up to this time is not only a living legacy but it is an overwhelming assertion of the Moro people's sovereignty. However, to keep the struggle for self-determination on track, there should be an active role of the masses. The dynamics of the 13 Moro ethno-linguistic tribes shall exceed their ethnicity. Popular support for the right to self-determination shall not be limited to revolutionary forces alone but, shall be expressed by the broad Moro mass movement across the Philippine archipelago and in the international community.

The significant missing element of the Bangsamoro struggle dating back to the 1960s up to the present was the absence of broad Moro mass movement that is rooted in the grassroots framework. The feudal and clannish Moro society has something to do with this missing element. Breaking the barrier of feudalism within the Moro society is undeniably a step forward to create a progressive mass movement who will put forward the genuine right to self-determination beyond the neo-liberal framework which is being peddled, brokered and subjected to the peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro revolutionary forces.

The progressive Islamic thoughts should complement to the molding of new paradigm. How would these Islamic tenets reflect in the expression of right to self-determination is a question that will be answered and practiced by scholars from different school of Islamic learnings abroad which carry varied social standpoint and outlook especially in its application considering the local geo-political settings. This phenomenon is becoming a significant part of the awareness elements and has to be studied well and anticipated especially that the Bangsamoro unity is deeply rooted in Islam.

The tri-people concept is a vague and empirical assertion. This is an outright undermining of the glorious centuries of sovereign Sultanates' defense against attempts

of Spanish conquest. This is detrimental to the historical claim of the Bangsamoro as history would reveal in concrete details. Historical evidences of claim will not be discussed right now but it is available upon request.

The vagueness of the tri-people concept is manifested by absence of historical basis of sovereignty and other elements of other “peoples” other than the Moro people to qualify as a people or nation. Claim for ancestral land ownership of non-Moro tribes does not necessarily a claim for sovereignty unlike the Moro sultanates whose powers and influence are express through external trades, external wars, treaties , foreign relations among others. This vagueness however is not an excuse for exclusion in the processes of social and political emancipation within Moroland. After all the Moro and non-Moro tribal masses carry the burden of the state neo-liberal policies where concept of citizenship was transformed and reduced to mere market forces of free trade global capital which is now wrecking havoc in the world grassroots communities and societies.

This claim of the Bangsamoro for sovereignty remained a challenge of the Moro generations before, today and it will be carried on years ahead. It is not surprising that this challenge will be highlighted from time to time within the Philippine body politics and in the international arena maybe through the international judicial bodies. This unquestionable claim for sovereignty is a solid ground of the Bangsamoro struggle for Right to Self-determination consistent with progressive and scientific literature and writings and experiences in other parts of the world.

The struggle for Right to Self-determination of the Bangsamoro is also a challenge to other political circle and blocks. Mind you friends, I do not have time to enumerate these political blocks as from time to time the Philippine progressive blocks are doubly multiplying since the 1990s.

To end my presentation, let me pose some maybe nuisance questions. How do other progressive parties and groups translate their support to the centuries-old Bangsamoro struggle for Self-determination? Or, do they have concrete and workable program how to support this struggle? Or, will they just wait and see after all it's the Moro struggle which the Moros should primarily stand for it? Or will they just provide rhetorical stand ?

Thank you and Wassalam. #

**Jolly Lais is the National Secretary General of ASSALAM Bangsamoro People's Party.*