

THE PHILIPPINES (1986-98) - NARRATIVE

In February 1986, the massive popular uprising later coined as “people’s power” ousted a dictatorial government in the Philippines. This collective effort of people from diverse walks of life brought together by common aspirations, conspired to bring about the downfall of a regime that enjoyed super-power support for nearly two decades of the cold war. It opened spaces for greater people’s participation hitherto absent in Philippine society.

But this period was not without its challenges. The new government that had assumed power on the shoulders of people’s power was confronted by forms of violent resistance on three fronts: rebellion from within the ranks of the armed forces manifested in six attempts at coup d’etats, the Moro National Liberation Front largely representing the Moro peoples in Mindanao and others in the southern Philippines, and the National Democratic Front representing the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA) which was engaged in armed struggle for nearly two decades. This brief section will discuss the efforts of people and their organisations to contribute to the peace process relating to the particular armed struggle waged by the Communist Party.

BACKGROUND

The period of Spanish colonial rule dating from the 1500s to the 1890s was characterised by periods of repression and insurrection, struggles around land and the imposition of taxes. In 1898 the Philippines witnessed the first revolution and a successful struggle for independence in Asia. But this victory was short-lived as the Philippines was ceded to the United States of America under the infamous Treaty of Paris in 1902.

The period 1902 to 1946 was the time of American colonial rule, characterised by the first armed struggle against the US in Asia. US Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act providing for Philippine independence after a ten year Commonwealth period, interrupted by the Japanese occupation from 1941-45. US rule eventually ended in 1946, although major US military bases remained in the country.

Between 1946 and the 1950s agrarian unrest in Central Luzon and in the sugar haciendas of the Visayas led to the armed struggle of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), the original Communist Party. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s successive Government attempted and, to a large extent, failed to address deep-seated causes of social unrest in a profound and durable manner. In 1965 Ferdinand Marcos assumed the presidency and won an unprecedented second term which he extended by the declaration of martial law, using the armed rebellion as a pretext for staying on in power.

Phase One 1969-72: Crisis

In 1969, the New People's Army, the armed wing of the new communist party was formed. Initially a small armed band in the plains of Luzon, it grew dramatically particularly after martial law was declared in 1972. Repressive rule spread considerably as government attempted to quell dissent over food and transport prices, poverty and inequality, and restrictions on the rights to freely organise and assemble.

Phase Two 1972-86: Escalation

Over the next 14 years, massive human rights violations, torture, extra-judicial killings, disappearances and internal displacement of people escalated dramatically. Corruption amongst the top ranking officials was endemic, while the majority of the population suffered marginalisation. On the eve of the declaration of the martial law, less than half of the country's families were poor. By the time Marcos was ousted from power, nearly two thirds of the population lived below the poverty line.

In 1983, Senator Benigno Aquino returning from exile, was assassinated on the Manila International Airport tarmac. His death resulted in mass popular protest in Manila. The 'parliaments of the streets' erupted into the scene. By February 1986, people's power had deposed a tyrant. Marcos and his inner circle were transported by US helicopters into exile. But by the time Marcos was toppled, the NPA had grown to over 25,000 regular fighters, deployed in 66 guerrilla fronts.ⁱ

Phase Three: Abatement, Exploring Negotiated Paths

Upon taking office, President Corazon Aquino demonstrated her willingness to take a path of compromise and negotiations by releasing 500 political prisoners. Among them were top leaders of the CPP, the NPA and the National Democratic Front (NDF). Preliminary talks with the NDF began in May 1986 as the Government of the Republic of the Philippines designated representatives to the negotiations. The NDF likewise appointed representatives to a full-time panel to engage in talks. Meanwhile, a Constitutional Commission was established to draft a new fundamental law to supersede the old Charter that had been designed during the period of martial rule.ⁱⁱ

The government's willingness to engage in dialogue with the revolutionary movement, however, seemed to have been undermined by pre-emptive actions taken by the still powerful armed forces. Nevertheless, despite numerous hurdles and initial setbacks, preliminary agreements to lay the ground for talks were reached on a 60-day cease-fire, and a guarantee of safety and immunity for rebel leaders, to be monitored by a National Cease-fire Committee (NCC) and seven sub-regional divisions.

To address popular expectations to end the violence - both structural and repressive - resulting from long term disputes over land and governance, formal negotiations were agreed upon. In January 1987 talks dealing with substantive issues commenced. Dispute over the framework for the talks was among the initial hurdles, and it appeared that the

process would stall. However, the negotiators overcame the hurdle by focusing on issues where they could find a minimum of consensus. The compromise framework for the negotiations entitled, "Food and Freedom, Justice and Jobs," expressed the principles that seemed to move the parties towards some common ground. The Government's chief negotiator, the respected former Senator Jose W. Diokno argued that despite ideological differences that separated the two sides, nevertheless, they were concerned with similar challenges and recognised that the solutions to major socio-economic problems were complex and inter-related. Moreover it was explicitly stated that since these problems were internal to the Philippines, solutions sought should serve Filipino, not foreign, interests.

Phase Four: Re-escalation, Formal Talks Break Down and Cease-fire Collapses

Yet despite the good will and intentions of both sides, the talks failed to address the substantive issues. With the military undertaking actions that seemed to undermine the civilian government and the communists pursuing a strategy of their own, soon the talks collapsed.

Events took a turn for the worse just weeks later. A peasant demonstration ended in the massacre of 18 people - mainly farmers. Reports and rumours of an impending military coup and threats to the security of the peace panel members undermined the confidence and trust in the talks process. The coup was unsuccessful, but the reservoir of goodwill that had been generated soon dissipated. The cease-fire agreement was broken and the formal talks collapsed.ⁱⁱⁱ

The attacks and counter-attacks by government and revolutionary forces intensified. The government was faulted for its military operations and human rights abuses. The CPP/NPA intensified their struggle after several top leaders were once again arrested. Military personnel and local politicians, and US servicemen in the military bases were targeted in urban areas. Within the CPP itself, internal mistrust was rife resulting in 'purges' against so-called 'deep penetration agents.' In effect, the cycle of violence had turned vicious, and the levels of mistrust between the two sides as well as within their ranks dramatically reduced the space for dialogue and peacemaking.

PREPARATION & PRE-NEGOTIATION: ENSURING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION^{iv}

As the violence escalated, major church groups renewed their call for a return to concerted peace efforts. Amongst them the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP), Protestant church groups such as the National Council Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) issued pastoral letters and national appeals for peace. From 1986 to 1987 they contributed to the talks by advocating land reform proposals and solidarity for the poor.

The Coalition for Peace, a citizens' group drawing together NGOs, community groups, academicians and eminent people, also continued their campaign, calling for humanitarian cease-fires, the observance of international humanitarian law, and supporting the formation of peace zones in selected rural areas of conflict. Local networks continued their collaboration with international NGOs and UN agencies such as UNICEF. Numerous conferences and conventions were organised to focus on the resumption of peace talks, with specific emphasis on political reform, economic dilemmas, the role of the military in a democratic society and people's participation in peacemaking.

In this period, for example, International Alert was also involved in helping to organise the first international conference on conflict resolution in the Philippines held in a university campus. It co-operated in setting up the workshops on electoral and political reforms, and on the role of the military in the period of transition to democracy.^v

In brief, even during the period when formal peace talks were recessed, thanks to a network of citizens and institutions, the peace *process* continued advancing. Their efforts were harnessed to ensure that communication continued on various levels including advocacy for a peace agenda, the support for peace issues, the efforts to catalyse new channels of communication to discuss issues such as human rights and humanitarian law. In other words, citizens and their organisations committed to maintaining and developing the spaces for dialogue sustained public pressure and placed peace issues high on the country's agenda.^{vi}

Building Networks of Peace in a Spiral of Violence

The President declared the 1990s as a "Decade of Peace". But the Government's words were not sufficiently backed by adequate and sustainable programmes. Amnesty International's 1990 report^{vii} indicated that "more than 200 real or suspected critics or opponents of government policies including human rights activists, church workers, trade unionists and peasants were killed in apparent extra-judicial executions by government or government-backed forces and dozens reportedly "disappeared." The following year, Amnesty International also reported: "The NPA was likewise held responsible for the killing of at least 80 people in 1990, reportedly committed by the urban-based assassination squads known as 'sparrow units'."^{viii}

Yet communication between the two sides did not break down completely. Discreet, unofficial and informal exploratory meetings between representatives of the Government and the NDF took place in Italy and the Netherlands in the presence of intermediaries as well as within the sanctuary of religious houses, facilitated by peace advocates. A number of more public gatherings also took place, giving rise to new peace efforts and greater public participation in addressing critical issues. These efforts contributed to the agenda of the negotiations.

In October 1990, the three-day National Peace Conference (NPC) brought together participants from 14 major sectors (such as farmers, workers, urban poor, indigenous people, women, among others) and three major religious faiths. Nearly a year of pre-

conference consultations reaching a broad cross-section of society resulted in a number of consensus documents which later formed the basis for “Basic Peace: Peace Agenda of Four Sectors”.^{ix}

The Multi-sectoral Peace Advocates (MSPA) brought together representatives from sectors of society and independent organisations focusing principally on putting the official peace negotiations back on track. With the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the MSPA participated in a joint technical committee with Cabinet representatives, and presented all parties to the conflict with a draft memorandum on upholding human rights and humanitarian laws. Parallel efforts were made through the organisation of a People’s Caucus composed of progressive people’s organisations and NGOs which together with the NPC generated national-level recommendations during the consultations held by the National Unification Commission in late 1992 to mid-1993.

The NDF and the Government launched tentative initiatives, but never simultaneously. In June 1991, for example, the National Democratic Front (NDF) announced the suspension of offensive military operations in the areas affected by the Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruptions. This humanitarian cessation of hostilities was seen as a confidence-building measure, but the Government’s response came belatedly a month later.

Another substantive breakthrough seemed possible in September 1991. The Philippine Senate voted to reject the extension of the Military Bases Agreement between the United States of America and the Philippine Government. This issue had been identified as a principal obstacle to any future peace agreement and the NDF had offered a unilateral truce if the bases agreement was terminated. The Senate’s rejection of the military bases was welcomed by a unilateral cease-fire declaration from the ranks of the CPP/NPA. It was short-lived. The NDF claimed that the Government supported efforts to undermine the Senate veto by recourse to a possible referendum on the issue.

As the 1992 national elections drew closer, a Peace Vote campaign was launched to raise public awareness on social justice and peace issues. Public fora involving the presidential candidates were organised, and peace organisations made efforts to evaluate the performance and platform of candidates according to certain criteria. The impact of the campaign was made manifest when newly-elected President Fidel Ramos focused on the need for a comprehensive peace in his first State of the Nation address in July 1992. Congress later took the initiative to repeal the Anti-Subversion Law which previously made the Communist Party of the Philippines illegal and penalised membership in the Party and similar organisations.

NEGOTIATIONS & TRANSFORMATION

Direct talks between the Government and NDF leaders in the Netherlands appeared to make gains towards substantive negotiations in September 1992. “The Hague Declaration” provided workable guidelines for the holding of formal negotiations without preconditions.^x It was however not vigorously followed up. Differences over

interpretation, and other procedural matters such as safety guarantees for NDF members and safe conduct passes for certain areas posed new obstacles.

It must be noted that no mediators nor facilitators were involved in these negotiations. Only observers were allowed at times. Although the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and NDF negotiations were held largely in private venues in the Netherlands, no international mediation was requested. In contrast, the Government Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) negotiations received international support provided by the Organisation of Islamic Conference while talks were hosted by the Foreign Minister of Indonesia.

Official talks which had been suspended several times due to procedural and political disagreements recommenced in June 1996. Nearly two years later in March 1998, a Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law^{xi} between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front was signed. This agreement paves the way ahead for other similar accords on socio-economic reforms, political, electoral and constitutional reforms, and disposition of armed forces. It also manifests the role that non-state actors can play addressing human rights and humanitarian laws, having been involved in earlier stages of tackling the difficult question of the monitoring of human rights abuses and the parties' compliance with international laws.

As a new government was elected to take office in July 1998, the talks were recessed. Non-governmental and people's organisations meanwhile continued their unceasing efforts to advance the peace process that has become "theirs" as much as the direct parties to the conflict. Following years of broad consultation since the 1990 National Peace Conference they have reformulated their peace agenda for the post-Ramos period, essentially proposing that social reform, poverty alleviation, a more equitable distribution of wealth and income, and broader political participation "form the core of governance"^{xii}. They have identified concrete legislative initiatives, executive policy directions and other "do-ables" within the context of a broad peace process to lay the solid foundations of peace that can be sustained.

Unlike the Sierra Leone or Mozambique cases discussed above, the Philippines conflict and peace process has not reached a point of significant resolution. The aim of this discussion has been to demonstrate the role of 'peoples' participation' in sustaining the '*process*' towards peace, even as the official negotiations between warring parties has reached an impasse.

ⁱ Military estimates also placed the figure at 23,200 regulars operating in 65 of the country's 74 provinces in the mid-eighties. Cf. M.C. Ferrer and A. Raquiza (eds.), Motions for Peace: A Summary of Events Related to Negotiating the Communist Insurgency in the Philippines 1986-92, (Quezon City: Coalition for Peace), 1993.

ⁱⁱ The Philippine Constitution was drafted from June - mid-October 1986, and ratified in a plebiscite on 2 February 1987 by more than two thirds of the electorate.

ⁱⁱⁱ An analysis of the 1986-87 talks has been written by Maris Diokno, herself a participant in the talks, and now director of the Third World Studies Center at the University of the Philippines.

^{iv} Ed Garcia, Participative Approaches to Peacemaking in the Philippines, (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1993).

^v The book Waging Peace in the Philippines records the proceedings of the international conference; other IA-related publications were Ed Garcia (ed), "Participation in Governance: The People's Rights" (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993); Back to the Barracks, The Military in Democratic Transition, National Institute for Policy Studies, (Quezon City: National Institute for Policy Studies, 1992).

^{vi} Cf. for example, "Basic Peace: Peace Agenda of Four Sectors," National Peace Conference, 1993.

^{vii} Amnesty International, "The Philippines: A Summary of AI's Concerns," (London: AIP, 1990).

^{viii} Amnesty International, "Report on the Philippines," (London: AIP, 1991).

^{ix} Cf. above-mentioned document entitled, "Basic Peace: Peace Agenda of Four Sectors." (Quezon City: Coalition for Peace, 1993).

^x Den Haag Declaration, September 1992.

^{xi} Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front, 16 March 1998.

^{xii} The 11-page document, "Social Reform Should Form the Core of Governance: The Basic Sectors' Agenda for the Post-Ramos Administration," National Peace Conference, February 1998.

THE PHILIPPINES - CHRONOLOGY*

PERIOD OF COLONIAL RULE

1500s-1890s - Period of Spanish colonial rule, characterised by periods of repression and insurrection, struggles around land and the imposition of taxes. Revolution resulted in the first experience of a successful struggle for independence in Asia in 1898. Victory was short-lived as the Philippines was ceded to the United States of America under the infamous Treaty of Paris.

1902-46 - Period of American colonial rule, characterised by the first armed struggle against the US in Asia. US Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act providing for Philippine independence after a ten year Commonwealth period, interrupted by the Japanese occupation from 1941-45. US rule eventually ended in 1946, although major US military bases remained in the country.

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

1946 to early 1950s - Agrarian unrest in Central Luzon and in the sugar haciendas of the Visayas led to the armed struggle of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), the original Communist Party which suffered serious setbacks in the early fifties.

1950s to mid-1965 - Successive Government attempted and, to a large extent, failed to address deep-seated causes of social unrest in a profound and durable manner.

1965-72 - Ferdinand Marcos assumed the presidency and won an unprecedented second term which he extended by the declaration of martial law, using the armed rebellion as a pretext for staying on in power.

ARMED STRUGGLE, MARTIAL LAW AND PEOPLE'S POWER

1972-86 - Martial Law regime resulted in massive human rights violations such as the imprisonment of over 70,000 people, the extra-judicial killings of over 2,500, the disappearance of 759 reported, the torture of thousands, the internal displacement of over 1.3 million people and the deep division of the country. On the eve of the imposition of martial law, one out of every two families was poor. By the time the dictator fell, three out of every five families were poor. Of the total number of 10 million families on the eve of the regime's demise, 5.8 million lived below the poverty line.

1968-86 - The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was founded in 1968 and its armed wing was organised on 29 March 1969. From an initial strength of 95 fighters at its onset, the New People's Army (NPA) reached an all-time high of over 25,000 NPA regulars deployed in 66 guerrilla fronts by the time of the peace talks in 1987. They were believed to be active in 20% of 41,818 barangays (village units) nationwide with a total mass base at that time of over 2 million people.

August 1983 - The assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino upon his arrival at the Manila International Airport resulted in prolonged popular protest and the emergence of the "parliament of the streets".

February 1986 - The People's Power Revolution ousted the Marcos dictatorship. Marcos' inner circle was transported by US helicopters to the U.S. military base for exile to Hawaii, U.S.A.

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, COUP ATTEMPTS, AND THE NEW CONSTITUTION

March 1986 - Among the first steps taken by the new President Corazon Aquino was the release of 500 political prisoners, among them the top leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed guerrillas, the New People's Army (NPA), and the National Democratic Front (NDF). At the graduation

rites at the University of the Philippines, the President publicly declared her intention to negotiate and to call for cease-fire.

May 1986 - Preliminary negotiations between the Government and the NDF began, focusing on a possible cessation of hostilities and the provision of safety guarantees for NDF representatives.

June 1986 - The Government of the Republic of the Philippines Peace Panel was designated, composed of the following: Senator Jose W. Diokno (later replaced by Ma. Serena Diokno, upon his illness), Teofisto Guingona and Ramon Mitra. Likewise, the NDF manifested its willingness to engage in negotiations, designating Antonio Zumel and Saturnino Ocampo (both former journalists) as NDF negotiators as well as Rafael Salas and Carolina Malay as panel members.

June-October 1986 - The Constitutional Commission was established, and on 2 June 1986 began its task to draft the new Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines to replace the old 1935 Constitution and the Freedom Constitution that was put in place after the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship. The final draft was completed on 15 October 1986, and an education campaign was launched nation-wide prior to a plebiscite that was called for 2 February 1987.

July 1986 - Destablization efforts were mounted by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the first years of the Aquino administration. A total of six major coup attempts took place, and among the issues advanced by the military insurgents to justify their actions was the Government's willingness to engage in talks with the revolutionary movement.

September/October 1986 - Talks were disrupted by the arrest of acting CPP Chairman Rodolfo Salas and the killing of KMU labor leader, Rolando Olalia.

November 1986 - Coup attempt codenamed "God Save the Queen" foiled, resulting in the dismissal of Secretary of Defence Juan Ponce Enrile.

27 November 1986 - Compromise 60-Day Cease-fire Agreement forged, with the signing of the "Memorandum of Agreement on a Preliminary Cease-fire" and the "Memorandum of Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees." National Cease-fire Committee (NCC) set up to monitor accord. Subsequently, seven regional and fourteen local cease-fire committees were established.

10 December 1986 - A nation-wide cease-fire took effect on human rights day.

January 1987 - Formal Peace Talks dealing with the substantive issues took place, but was short-lived. The differences between the frameworks presented by both sides to address socio-economic and political issues proved to be huge hurdles. The NDF submitted "The Proposal of the National Democratic Front for a Negotiated Settlement," on 23 December 1986, outlining basic premises and objectives. They defined the roots of the insurgency as poverty, violation of civil liberties, lack of participation of the working classes, and continued US domination. They sought the creation of a new coalition government and a constituent assembly.

At the same time, "The Proposal of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to the NDF," was presented with the general goals of alleviating poverty, generating productive employment, promoting equity and social justice. There was also a difference of opinion on the use of the proposed 1987 Constitution as a framework for the talks.

There was, however, an advance on the commitment to international humanitarian law as both parties to the conflict manifested their adherence to the Additional Protocol II of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

January 1987 - A compromise formula was proposed by Jose W. Diokno: "Food and Freedom, Jobs and Justice" as the key to peace. Within the framework, solutions can be sought as governed by the following principles: "a. despite ideological differences, all recognise these needs; b. the solutions are as inter-

related as the problems, and as each one is worked out, everyone is conscious of its relations to the rest; c. since the problem is internal, Filipinos should resolve it in a manner that answers Filipino, rather than foreign, concerns.” The two panels agreed to adopt the proposed Diokno framework.

January 1987 - Peasants demonstrating at the foot of the Bridge Mendiola near the Malacanang Palace were shot, resulting in the death of 18 victims. Combined with the reports of an impending military coup attempt and the threats to the security of the panel members of both sides, the NDF withdrew from the talks. Later that month, a coup attempt was launched with attacks on military installations and a siege at a television station. It was foiled after two days. This was also the period prior to the plebiscite on the ratification of a new Constitution.

February 1987 - The Constitution drafted from June to October 1996 was submitted to a plebiscite, and received overwhelming support from two thirds of the counted votes from a turnout of three fourths of the voting population.

PEACE TALKS BREAK DOWN AND CEASE-FIRE COLLAPSES

2 February 1987 - The cease-fire ended, and the formal talks collapsed.

28 February 1987 - An amnesty package for “rebel returnees” was announced. At the same time, a gradual shift to a more active counter-insurgency campaign took place. Likewise, the reliance on paramilitary or vigilante groups exposed the trend to “privatise” the counter-insurgency campaign.

The Government’s human rights commitment was faulted for its weak handling of the massacre of 17 farmers in Lupao, Nueva Ecija, during a military operation in the same period.

August 1987 - The military rebels launched a fifth coup attempt, one of the most serious in the Aquino Presidency. It was led by Col. Gregorio Honasan which led to the siege of the country’s premier financial district, Makati.

January 1988 - Gen. Fidel V. Ramos was appointed defence secretary with the mandate of dismantling the rebel insurgency during President Aquino’s term. Arrests of several top-ranking CPP leaders such as Rafael Baylosis and Rafael Vera and alleged NPA commander Romy Kintanar led military officials to predict perceived victory by 1992.

1987-88 - The CPP/NPA intensified the armed struggle with incursions to the capital city and urban centres characterised by “hit operations” against military and police personnel, U.S. servicemen and politicians. Likewise, the CPP experienced internal problems resulting in “purges” and the killing of suspected “deep penetration agents.”

CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES BECOME INVOLVED IN PEACE EFFORTS

1987-88 - As the spiral of violence escalated during the same period, citizens and peace groups renewed their call for a return to the paths toward peace, encouraging concerted peace efforts.

Traditionally, religious leaders from both the Catholic Church such as the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) and the Protestant Churches such as the National Council Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) have issued Pastoral Letters and National Appeals for Peace. “A Covenant Toward Peace” was issued by the CBCP in November 1986 and the “Fruit of Justice is Peace” in January 1987, advocating land reform and solidarity with the poor as paths to peace.

The Coalition for Peace bringing together non-governmental organisations, community groups, academicians, religious and other personages committed to a just peace. The coalition campaigned for

humanitarian cease-fires, the observance of international humanitarian law, and supported the formation of peace zones.

Among the communities that declared themselves “zones of peace” during this period were the following: Sagada Demilitarised Zone, the Kalinga “Zone of Life”, the Tinoc Ifugao Peace Zone -- all in northern Luzon. The Naga Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality and the Irosin Peace Zone in the Bicol region. The Cantomanyog Peace Zone in Negros Occidental, Visayas. The Barangay Bituan Zone of Life, the Miatub (Tuburan) Peace Zone, the Nabundasan Peace Zone and the New Alimodian Peace Zone -- all in Mindanao.

As the new post-Marcos Congress opened in 1987, the CfP helped to organise “A Tent City for Peace” creating a forum for ideas related to a legislative programme for peace in the aftermath of the breakdown of the talks between the Government and the NDF.

Together with the UNICEF and other organisations and institutions, the CfP helped to promote the 1990 “Immunisation for Peace” for children in 75 communities in the country.

1988 - International Alert collaborated with a consortium of peace organisations as well as academic and religious institutions to organise a landmark conference at year’s end, “The International Conference on Conflict Resolution in the Philippines.” This gathering brought together participants from different political persuasions and made significant recommendations. Subsequently, IA co-sponsored “The International Conference on the People’s Right to Governance” and a workshop on “The Role of the Military in Democratic Transition,” both in 1991, and the “International Colloquium on Peacemaking” in 1993.

November 1989 - The National Council of Churches in the Philippines resolved during its national convention to work towards the resumption of the peace talks and to help create a better climate of political tolerance and pluralism. It also founded a Special Programme Unit on Peace to help enhance its work on peace and improve its programmes as well as orient its institutions in related directions.

January 1990 - The CBCP issued an important document, “Seek Peace, Pursue It,” at the outset of the “Decade of Peace” declared by President Aquino. The document identified critical issues such as social justice, empowering people in law and in reality, and transforming values as part of the peace agenda.

March 1990 - Amnesty International published, “The Philippines: A Summary of AI’s Concerns” which reported: “More than 200 real or suspected critics or opponents of government policies including human rights activists, church workers, trade unionists and peasants were killed in apparent extra-judicial executions by government or government-backed forces and dozens reportedly “disappeared.” There were more than 600 political prisoners in acknowledged detention....”

In its 1991 Report, Amnesty International also cited: “The NPA was likewise held responsible for the killing of at least 80 people in 1990, reportedly committed by the urban-based assassination squads known as “sparrow units.” Asia Watch likewise published a report entitled appropriately, “The Philippines: Violations of the Laws of War by Both Sides,” documenting the Digos massacre perpetrated by the NPA in Davao del Sur in June 1989 and the military’s Operation Thunderbolt which “resulted in the largest displacement of people in Negros since World War II.”

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE

Mid-1990 - Exploratory, discreet and informal talks between a representative of the Aquino Government and the NDF took place in Italy to discuss a possible meeting between the two parties facilitated by International Alert assisted by the Coalition for Peace. A further planned meeting in Hong Kong with the participation of peace advocates and Church people failed to materialise at the last minute.

The meeting - which instead took place at the Ateneo de Manila University campus -- was then transformed into a small gathering of peace advocates (who later formed the core of the MSPA) discussing the idea of helping to facilitate the peace efforts as a third party. Before the meeting convened, Senator Bobby Tanada, together with Martin Ennals (then Secretary General of IA) and Prof. Ed Garcia talked with both the NDF representative and the Government to appeal for a humanitarian cease-fire in the earthquake-affected areas.

September 1990 - Likewise, meetings between Rep. Jose Yap (with the President's informal blessings) and the NDF leaders in the Netherlands manifested indications of willingness on the part of the NDF to resume talks.

October 1990 - The three-day National Peace Conference (NPC) brought together participants from 14 major sectors (such as farmers, workers, urban poor, indigenous people, women, among others) and three major religious faiths. After extensive pre-conference consultations that took nearly a year, the historic encounter resulted in consensus documents: "Towards a National Peace Vision" and "A Peace Agenda" which later formed the basis for "Basic Peace: Peace Agenda of Four Sectors." This outcome was the culmination of a series of focused consultations that tried to reach a broad spectrum of sectors of society who were affected by the armed conflict.

A parallel effort was the organisation of the People's Caucus composed of progressive people's organisations and NGOs which together with the NPC generated national-level recommendations during the consultations held by the National Unification Commission in late 1992 to mid-1993.

1990 - The Multisectoral Peace Advocates (MSPA) focused principally on getting the peace negotiations back on track by helping 1) to identify issues that could form part of the peace agenda, 2) to design processes that could help restore talks, and 3) to respond to humanitarian concerns brought about by the armed conflict. Since the citizens' group brought together people from different political persuasions, it had access to the parties to the conflict as well as significant sectors of society. With the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the MSPA participated in a joint technical committee from the Government's Cabinet Cluster on Political and Security Affairs to draw up "A Draft Memorandum on the Adoption of the Principles of Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Conduct of Armed Hostilities" presented to both parties to the conflict.

1991 - The Gaston Z Ortigas Peace Institute was formed to provide institutional support for the diverse work involved in promoting peace efforts in a sustained and systematic manner.

June 1991 - The NDF announced the suspension of offensive military operations in the areas affected by the Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruptions. This humanitarian cessation of hostilities was seen as a confidence-building measure. However, the Government's response came belatedly a month later.

August 1991 - President Aquino created the Office of the Peace Commissioner under Administrative Order No. 30, "Defining the Systematic Approach and Administrative Framework for the Government's Peace Effort." It also created the Joint Executive-Legislative Peace Council.

September 1991 - The Philippine Senate voted to reject the extension of the Military Bases Agreement between the United States of America and the Philippine Government. This issue was identified as a principal obstacle to any future peace agreement. The NDF had offered a unilateral truce if the bases agreement was terminated. The Senate rejection of the military bases was welcomed by a unilateral cease-fire declaration from the ranks of the CPP/NPA. It was however short-lived, as the NDF claimed that efforts to undermine the Senate veto by recourse to a possible referendum on the issue was Government-supported.

October 1991 - The MSPA represented by Sen. Tanada and Maris Diokno consulted with NDF officials in the Netherlands. Another Citizens' Peace Mission to the NDF took place on October 1993 with Sen.

Tanada and Prof. Ed Garcia discussing possible options with NDF representatives in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

February 1992 - A Peace Vote campaign was launched to raise public awareness on the critical issues related to a social justice and peace programme during the presidential and legislative campaigns of the 1992 national elections. Public fora with various candidates were organised, and peace organisations made efforts to evaluate the performance and platform of candidates which were publicly disseminated.

RENEWING PEACE INITIATIVES

July 1992 - Newly-elected President Fidel Ramos delivered his first State of the Nation address as Congress opened, identifying “peace and security as the first urgent problem.”

Non-governmental organisations presented “The First 100 Days People’s Alternative Agenda” drafted by the organisations convened by the People’s Congress. Prior to the address, peace advocates lobbied to ensure that the new government put priority on the issues related to peace and the peace process.

September 1992 - The National Unification Commission (NUC), an executive-legislative body with representation from the private sector, was formed under Commissioner Haydee Yorac as Chair. It was mandated to hold consultations with different sectors nation-wide and to formulate a viable amnesty programme as well as to make recommendations on the peace process dealing with the CPP/NPA/NDF as well as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Military Rebel groups.

In the same period, Congress passed R.A. 7637 which repealed the Anti-Subversion Law (Republic Act No. 1700) which made the Communist Party of the Philippines illegal and penalised membership in the Party and similar organisations.

September 1992 - A Government delegation led by Rep. Yap met with NDF leaders in Den Haag, the Netherlands, for exploratory talks which resulted in “The Hague Declaration.” This document provided workable guidelines for the holding of formal negotiations without preconditions based on mutually-acceptable principles including national sovereignty, democracy and social justice to resolve the armed conflict. It also identified the substantive agenda as follows: human rights and international humanitarian law, socio-economic reforms, political and constitutional reforms, and the disposition of armed forces. Its follow up, however, has been characterised by starts and stalemates, and differences over interpretation. It took another two and a half years, and four face-to-face meetings between Government and NDF abroad before formal talks commenced in Brussels on 26 June 1995, suspended after a day, and resumed on 19 June 1996.

15 September 1993 - Executive Order No. 125, “Defining the Approach and Administrative Structure for the Government’s Comprehensive Peace Efforts,” mandated the Government to pursue a comprehensive peace process along the National Unification Commission’s recommended paths to peace based on consultations held from the last quarter of 1992 to mid-1993. Moreover, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) was created. This Executive Order became a contentious issue seriously objected to by the NDF which for some time held back progress in the talks.

October 1993 onwards - While negotiations faltered, the efforts of people’s organisations to improve the lives of the basic sectors and to question national economic policy continued. Research, public fora, and protest actions were undertaken by militant organisations. At the same time, an alliance of non-governmental and people’s organisations engaged government policy makers in discussion and debate such as in the “Conference on the Peace Process and the Philippine Economic Agenda” where organisations representing basic sectors took positions and identified issues related to a just peace, presenting an alternative peace-related agenda. These efforts were followed up in June and September 1994 during the discussions related to the Social Reform Summit.

June 1994 - Negotiating Panels met in Breukelen, the Netherlands, with both sides reaffirming positions to enter into formal negotiations while recognising areas of agreement and disagreement. According to estimates made by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, NPA strength had gone down from the all-time high of over 25,000 in the mid-80s to some 7,670 rebels with 6,910 firearms -- due to some extent on the serious internal debates on the questions of ideology and strategy during this period. On the whole, estimates seem to reflect decreases in NPA strength, though the CPP claims that its forces equal the strength level in 1983-84.

October 1994 - Talks suspended in De Bilt, the Netherlands, with the issue of the status of belligerency becoming once again a point of contention exemplified in the discussions regarding the authority of the NDF to issue safe conduct passes in areas claimed to be under its control. It took four months and 17 drafts before a compromise formula was found.

February 1995 - In this last of the exploratory talks, an agreement on safety and immunity guarantees was forged in Neuwegein, the Netherlands together with an agreement to work towards the operationalisation of the reciprocal working committees provided for in the Hague Declaration.

June 1995 - An agreement on reciprocal working committees was signed during the opening of the formal talks in Brussels, Belgium on 26 June. The next day, however, the GRP-NDF formal negotiations were suspended once again over differences provoked by the arrest of NPA leader Sotero Llasa whom the NDF wanted to be present during the talks.

17-19 October 1995 and 18-20 March 1996 - Backroom talks between the GRP-NDF in the Netherlands. Additional implementing rules pertaining to documents of identification relative to a Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) initialled. Agenda items for the formal negotiations in the areas of human rights and international humanitarian law as well as socio-economic reforms likewise initialled.

17-18 March 1996 - A national pre-summit meeting of people's organisations and non-governmental organisation on social reform and poverty initiatives met to consolidate the result of regional and sectoral consultations and to come up with common positions on poverty alleviation as well as viable co-ordinating mechanisms at the regional, sectoral and national levels. This was in preparation for the 19 March 1996 National Anti-Poverty Summit which was attended by over a thousand representatives from grassroots organisations as well as another thousand officials of local government units and national agencies. Though the outcome of the efforts were mixed and ambiguous, the sense of solidarity among the sectors and their renewed advocacy were evident. The follow up to these peace-related socio-economic reforms have been identified by some as a parallel process that could lead to the desired just peace -- if implemented effectively with the participation of the disadvantaged basic sectors and their organisations.

May 1996 - Backroom talks held at Nieuwegein, the Netherlands dealing with the resumption of formal talks.

June 1996 - Formal talks resumed at Den Haag, the Netherlands. Additional implementing rules pertaining to documents of identification relative to JASIG signed. Preamble to the draft agreement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law agreed upon, and drafts exchanged.

September 1996 - Backroom talks held at Den Haag, the Netherlands.

October 1996 - The Chair of the Government Panel, Amb. H. Dee, announced the Government's Alternative Peace Plan (APP) as a possible back-up option if talks did not prosper. Its main components were: 1. rehabilitation and reintegration of former guerrillas; 2. acceleration of social reforms to address the causes of the conflict; 3. the setting up of peace advocacy programmes and the unilateral suspension of all military offensives, as well as general and unconditional amnesty. The NDF objected to the plan as an attempt to undermine the agreed negotiation process.

November 1996 - Amnesty International published the report entitled, "Not Forgotten: The Fate of the 'Disappeared'" where it documented the disappearance of some 1,600 people (759 during the Marcos Presidency from 1965-86, over 830 during the Aquino Presidency from 1986-92, and at least 46 since President Ramos assumed office in 1992).

21 November 1996 - Arrest of NDF Head of Propaganda in Bicol led to the suspension of the reciprocal working group meetings on human rights and humanitarian law.

1-8 February 1997 - Negotiating panels of the Government, chaired by Amb. Howard Dee, and the NDF, chaired by Luis Jalandoni, met in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Starting out as an informal meeting, the panels agreed on and initialled the supplementary agreement to the JASIG as well as an agreement to accelerate the work of the reciprocal working committees.

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS & HUMANITARIAN LAW

18-24 March 1997 - Negotiating panels of the Government and the NDF, together with their Reciprocal Working Committees on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law met in Amsterdam and Breukelen, the Netherlands, to discuss the possible comprehensive agreement on human rights and humanitarian law. A joint statement in support of socio-economic projects of private development organisations and institutions was also issued.

April 1997 - Formal talks resumed in the Netherlands, focusing principally on the human rights and humanitarian law draft agreement.

However, after a few days, the talks recessed as disagreement on the framework for the implementation of future agreements once again revealed deep differences in their framework and perspectives, manifesting their different appreciation of the strategic value of the talks.

During this period, an informal group of peace advocates with a long history of credible involvement in peace work had met initially in January 1997 to explore possible ways to help support the process and facilitate further efforts. At the same time, people's organisations and non-governmental organisations who had been involved in the Anti-Poverty Coalition and related organisations continued to explore ways to advance the substantive issues identified in their peace agenda.

Moreover, in this period there has been a convergence of concerns which saw the traditional social movements interface with the efforts of the peace movement. Social justice campaigners, development workers, human rights advocates, women activists, environmentalists, among others, have to a large extent contributed to the formulation of a vision and an alternative programme for a comprehensive and durable peace. Moreover, in working towards building a culture of peace, there have been notable advances in peace research and education, conflict resolution on community-level issues, the advocacy of an agenda geared towards empowering people and improving their lives on the national, regional and local levels.

16 March 1998 - After rounds of formal talks that experienced delays due to contentious political issues within and outside the negotiations, a Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law was signed by representatives from the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front on 16 March 1998. This breakthrough paves the way for possible accords on the other agenda items: socio-economic reforms, political, electoral, constitutional reforms, and disposition of armed forces.

May-June 1998 - National elections for President, members of both houses of Congress, and local officials take place nation-wide. A new president is elected, and talks are recessed till a new administration resumes efforts in July 1998.

*(The armed conflict and peace process in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines is the subject of another paper.)