

THE JOURNEY OF
THE MORO ISLAMIC
LIBERATION FRONT'S
FIRST EX-COMBATANTS



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CONTENTS

PREFACE	5
THIS IS WHO WE ARE	9
CHAPTER 1	
<i>“The conflict disturbed our lives”</i>	11
CHAPTER 2	
<i>“Talking about positive memories during the struggle is not easy”</i>	17
CHAPTER 3	
<i>“Everyone must have a personal commitment to the peace process”</i>	25
CHAPTER 4	
<i>“I believe that through the decommissioning process, the peace process will move forward”</i>	29
CHAPTER 5	
<i>“This is the time to go back to civilian life, to a peaceful, normal life”</i>	35
CHAPTER 6	
<i>“We are still waiting for the assistance to come, for our lives to change”</i>	41
CHAPTER 7	
<i>“It is peacetime now”</i>	47

PREFACE

On June 16, 2015 a Ceremonial Turnover of Weapons and Decommissioning of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatants was held at the old Capitol Building in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao. This ceremony marked the first phase of the Decommissioning Programme, which aims to put the arms and forces of the MILF beyond use¹, as agreed by the Parties under the Annex on Normalisation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). This ceremony showed the MILF commitment to the peace process.

On that day, 145 Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) combatants were registered and processed to formally commence their return to full civilian lives. These are not just words. These are people participating in conflict and in peace. How does one person who has spent decades on the frontline transition to a new way of life? What will he carry with him? What are his expectations for the future?

In late July 2015, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) was invited by the MILF to interview 10 of these men. We wanted to recognise their journey and provide them with a safe platform through which they could share their stories. In doing so, we wanted to help them move from a narrative of conflict to a narrative of peace. These are men of courage. It takes bravery to sit and reflect about one's own life during a moment of uncertainty, during a moment of transition from the "known" to the "unknown".

This publication is the result of those conversations. It brings out the voices of these 10 men who had just, a few weeks earlier, put their arms to rest. What these men's reflections show is that decommissioning is a tool for peace; that it is not an end in itself but a means to a different life.

We would like to thank the MILF leadership who understood the importance of listening to the voices and experiences of its ex-combatants. We would also like to thank the British Embassy in the Philippines for supporting the vision of this project. Finally, our heartfelt thanks are due to the 10 men who shared their stories with us.

This space is theirs.

Let's listen to what they have to say.

¹ "Beyond use" is the term used in the Annex of Normalisation to refer to the gradual programme for decommissioning MILF forces.





THIS IS WHO WE ARE

On that day, at four o'clock in the morning, all of us assembled in our fatigues, pants and a polo shirt. We were given some instructions and it was explained that the ceremony was part of the fulfilment of the MILF commitments. And then we were ready to go to the venue. My name is Michael Ragundo. I was born in 1972.

The day started very early for us. We met with the MILF leaders for a short briefing. They explained, "You are part of history now; be sure to show discipline when in the processing area. After that, we were already lining up, queuing, and then the bus took us to the ceremony. I am Tamanu Tunduk.

During the symbolic decommissioning ceremony, I was in tears. The first thing I remembered were my comrades who had died on the battlefield. And I wished they were with me to witness that moment. My name is Esrafil B. Sampayan. I am the son of Suleiman Sampayan and Thia Sampayan, native of Iligan. I was born in 1950. I am 65 years old.

My name is Abdulsamad, my family name is Ahmad. When I was in the struggle, full-time in the struggle, I always asked my family to continue their studies. Even my children are studying. My family also struggled, but the struggle has been in order to get an education. My family has seen how even the senior officers in the MILF Central Committee salute me. I am an "antique". My family is happy, they understand I am part of the first batch of the decommissioning process for all the services I have given to the struggle.

Any battle, any encounter is very sad and cruel. You can see the cruel consequences of war. I have seen a lot of killings, a lot of deaths on both sides. And I kept asking, "Why is this happening? This should not happen; this can't continue, this war is so cruel." My name is Ebrahim Amama. I am 54 years old.

There were no happy moments during our struggle in the jungle; we only experienced them now that there is a peace process. I am Goliart Sarif. I was born in 1954.

In total, I have spent 43 years in the struggle. A lifetime. I am Abdullah Mashod. I am a native from Maguindanao. I was born in 1954.

I am H. Abdulaziz Andik. When I was still a little boy I was supposed to go to school, but I had to help my parents on the farm, to do gardening. They were farmers. It was a very ordinary life, a very simple life. Most of us only had one dress. At that time there were very few schools. We could not go to school because in our municipality there was only one, and we lived too far from it. I had four brothers and four sisters. I am the second. At that time there was still no conflict. I was born in 1942. My dream at that time was becoming a lawyer so that I could help my family and my people.

We lived a simple life. There was no conflict at that time. I was going to school and I wanted to finish my studies. If I was able to finish my education, I wanted to serve the community. My name is Haron Panalo. I was born in 1957.

My name is Manap Butokan. I am 64 years old. I started working as a farmer with my family when I was a child. I was studying Arabic at the time; this is what my parents wanted because the first thing to study was Arabic in those days. As we were growing up we were told that we could not go anywhere far because the Christians were committing atrocities against the Muslims, so we basically stayed at home and avoided the Christians. We were very poor and we did not understand what was happening at that time very well.

CHAPTER 1

“The conflict disturbed our lives”

In my younger days I used to help my parents when they were fishing. We were a poor family. I have four brothers and four sisters. I am the eldest. When I was young I dreamt that my family would live peacefully; that my brothers and sisters would live in peace, a happy and normal life. My dream was to learn a lot so that I would be able to serve the community the best way I could. In those days we lived in a conflict situation. People were being bombarded. I always thought, "This is not a normal life, this is not good."

- *Esrafil B. Sampayan*

When I was still a small boy I studied at the Arabic school. But then the conflict started and the situation became very difficult. We lived in the marsh. All we were doing was fishing. I had one sister and one brother. I was only 15 years old when I joined the struggle. I am almost 80 years old now. I cannot remember exactly which year I was born.

- *Abdulsamad H. Ahmad*

During the time of Martial Law² I was studying Arabic. I saw many people being arrested by the government soldiers. There was heavy militarisation at the time and even the civilians were asked by the soldiers to show their Cedula³. Even I was told that by the soldiers. I was just a student. This is when I realised that even if you are a student, you will be arrested and, so, this prompted me to join the struggle.

- *Goliart Sarif*

In 1975 my village was heavily bombarded by air; civilians ran away until they reached the river. At that time I was four years old. We ran away. I was with my two sisters. There were hundreds of civilians fleeing. When the military saw us, they fired. The first person who was shot was a man riding his horse. It was the horse that took the bullet, so the man survived. The military kept firing. We were all civilians. Everyone ran for their lives and jumped into the river. But we were very little and we did not know how to swim. So the current carried us away

² On September 23, 1972 President Marcos placed the Philippines under Martial Law, a period that lasted until 1981.

³ ID Card.



and we were separated from our parents. It was only later that evening that we were reunited. My parents were crying. For days we were walking in the jungle. Some people in the nearby villages knew we were on the move and met us and escorted us. We were more than 100 people. We stayed in Lanao for more than a year.

- *Michael Ragundo*





Day Surfing

CHAPTER 2

“Talking about positive memories during the struggle is not easy”

I was 15 years old when I got involved with Ansar El Islam. Ansar El Islam was organised to counter the activities of ILAGA⁴ because they were grabbing the lands of the Moros, they were killing the Muslims, so the only thing we wanted to do was to defend ourselves, to have a united, collective organisation. This was the time of Martial Law. Most of us joined the clandestine operations. Sometimes we could not see our families for three months. Of course, that was a very difficult time, but during those days our parents were the ones who allowed us to join, to get involved in the struggle. We were doing it for the sake of Allah, to defend ourselves. To survive we ate what we could find. Normally, after three months I would come back home to see my family. Every time I saw them after three months in the jungle I would cry, but I had no choice. Afterwards there was a more organised group called the Black Shirts, and most of the leaders of Ansar El Islam joined the Black Shirts. So did I. This is when we received more advanced military training. I remained an ordinary Black Shirts member. The name “Black Shirt” came from our uniform. We wore black shirts and trousers.

- *Eshafil B. Sampayan*

In 1971 the military and the ILAGA attacked my community. Because of that I had to stop studying and joined the training with the Black Shirts. I was a teenager.

- *Haron Panalo*

The MNLF⁵ was organised from the Black Shirts. Ansar El Islam started as an immediate response, as a reaction to the atrocities and, as the situation worsened, we organised the Black Shirts. And then, out of the violence and the atrocities taking place the MNLF was formed.

- *Eshafil B. Sampayan*

The first group I joined was the Black Shirts; later on the MNLF was organised and I became a MNLF member. In 1975 there were already initiatives for negotiation, but they did not prosper.

- *Ebrahim Amama*

⁴ ILAGA (Ilongo Land Grabbers Association)

⁵ Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Founded in 1971 by Nur Misuari. In 1996 the MNLF signed a final peace agreement with the Government of the Philippines.

With the MNLF we were sent to the battlefield at the same time as we were receiving military training, so it was very difficult. When you are in the battle you have no choice. If you don't fight you will be killed. During the training we learnt to have discipline, to follow the leaders instead of taking our own initiative. I have been an Operation Officer of the 1st Brigade. I had more than 1,000 men under my command. Some of them died because of natural causes, others were killed. We were like brothers-in-arms. We vowed that whoever survived would take care of the other's family. In the battlefield the only source of power is above, in the sky, we owed all to Him, the mighty Allah, we always pray that we won't commit any violation of Islam in the battle. I have always been in the military wing.

- H. Abdulaziz Andik

After the training we were just sent to the field. Most of us were native from the area. We were sent to the communities, which were being very heavily attacked. So from 1974 to 1975 we were defending the communities from these attacks from ILAGA and the military. At that time there were no ranks. We were "staff", or "team leader", or "squad leader". That was it. We were continuously being bombarded by airplanes. We made holes on the ground where the children could hide. We also made them for us. Sometimes the operations would last for three days in a row and we would stay in these holes for those three days. The children were suffering so much. For us, leaving the community at that time was very difficult. We had to leave because there were many soldiers. We went to the jungle. The houses were burned. The farm animals were slaughtered; the crops were destroyed. We learnt that the forces that were attacking us were convicts; they had been recruited in jail and were promised that whoever survived would be freed and given some assistance. That group was called "the Imelda Battalion"; Imelda was President Marco's wife. I cannot forget that.

- Abdullah Mashod

One of the moments I cannot forget took place in Cotabato, very close to where we are now. That was the MNLF time. We were suddenly attacked by the military and paramilitaries. There were thousands of them, it was a very, very big force. They had tanks and planes; it was a conventional confrontation, a close encounter. Food, medicines, any help was being blocked. We managed to hold the ground. At that time there was Martial Law and the government instruction was to kill all the Moros. They said, "If there is one Moro that survives, we will turn him into an amulet."

- Manap Butokan

Afterwards, I went for further military training, but while we were undergoing training we also engaged in operations. What we were trying to do at that time was take the fight away from the civilians because the soldiers were indiscriminately attacking everybody. So what we were doing was protecting the civilians indirectly by going to areas where the civilians would not be hit in the crossfire. We became a guerrilla force. We always moved around. We had contact with our family very rarely. Every time the civilians gave us some food, some assistance, we made them messengers, couriers, we gave them letters for our families.

- *Ebrahim Amama*

When the MILF⁶ split from the MNLF I continued serving the organisation and became a Battalion Commander. As such I had 750 men under my authority. That was a very heavy responsibility, but it was also my obligation.

- *Manap Butokan*

When the MILF was organised I became Chairman for the military at the municipal level, and after that I became the Head of the municipal police force. Afterwards I started working with the Logistics and Transportation Department, and finally became Chief Operations Planner of BIAF⁷ Headquarters before being decommissioned. When I was assigned to the Logistics and Transportation Department, my main responsibility was to make sure that when our people moved they also had supplies to bring with them. As a military police force we were responsible for securing Camp Abubakar so that nobody could get inside unchecked. "Operation Plan" refers to our task to design how are we going to attack our enemy and submit the plans.

- *Haron Panalao*

I will never forget my comrades from the Elite Force. We were sent by the organisation to join many very fierce battles. We were more than brothers; we had been together during the training and at battle, always together. There were three of them I cannot forget. Every time I remember them I always cry. Two of them were martyred in the Abubakar encounter. They were so brave, so determined to fight for the cause. I cannot forget them. We were more than real brothers.

- *Michael Ragundo*

⁶ Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Founded by Hashim Salamat after he and his supporters split from the MNLF in 1978. After the MNLF ended its armed struggle in 1996 the MILF emerged as the government's main opponent and is considered the largest and best armed insurgent organisation in the Philippines.

⁷ MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF)



After the MILF was created I became a Platoon Leader. Later on I became a Company Commander, and then I was with the Training and Doctrine Department as one of the trainers. I finally became Operation Officer of the Training Department. I really liked my work as a trainer. The training was divided in four parts, I was assigned to the military aspect and I was also very much interested in the teaching about Islam and human relations. By “human relations” I mean brotherhood as one united body in Islam, as Muslims.

- Ebrahim Amama

Being an Operation Commander in a revolutionary organisation is actually one of the toughest, more challenging jobs because you have to ensure that nobody under your responsibility gets killed. You are not only taking care of the lives of those under your command, but also of their families. It is a very big responsibility

⁸ Declared by President Strada in March 2000.

because you are leading them and, as such, you always have to go first. I think one of my proudest moments was when I met the troops from a community very far away sent to reinforce the MILF troops at Camp Abubakar during the All Out War⁸. Our mission was to defend the main headquarters of the MILF and ensure that the founding Chairman would not be hurt, would be safe.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

Years later I volunteered and was chosen to provide close security for Chairman Murad because I wanted to protect the Chairman. I knew that whenever I die I will go to heaven and there will be no checkpoint, according to the Old Books. The Chairman saw that I was reliable, trustworthy. He is a very, very calm man. I have been Chairman Murad's guard for more than 40 years, until I was decommissioned.

- *Abdulsamad H. Ahmad*

We have all lived in a very abnormal family situation. Every time an order came we had to comply and report. Most of the time we left our families behind without any food. We always followed the orders and prayed that they could survive and that we would see each other again. And we lived like this for four decades; for 40 years this was our family situation. When we came back to our families, sometimes our children could not recognise us because we had been separated for six months, or one year. Imagine that situation. Every time I remember this, I always cry. Everywhere I saw this situation; it was the same for all of us. People suffered. But it also motivated us to keep fighting, it made us stronger.

- *Manap Butokan*

I joined the Moro struggle because the government destroyed all the communities; the Moros were being killed during that time. I was already 35 years old. I had my own family and what I can't forget is how my wife was pregnant and had to give birth in the forest alone because we were displaced. I left her and my little children in the jungle and she had to give birth alone. They had only one sack of rice that we had taken with us. I will never forget that. It was an inhuman situation. But I don't like to talk about this.

- *H. Abdulaziz Andik*



It's difficult to recall the hardship that we experienced when we were fighting; there were times that we had to be away from our families and sometimes we heard that our relatives had been killed. Sometimes it was reported to them that I had been killed. That was very hard. We lived in the mountains where we could not afford to sleep at night because we had to guard against our enemy and keep ourselves alive.

- Goliart Sarif

Talking about positive memories during the struggle is not easy because most of the time what comes to your mind are the difficulties; all the suffering, the casualties, the distractions. Whenever I am being told of the assurances that I will be rewarded by Allah with heaven, that makes me happy.

- Tamanu Tunduk

CHAPTER 3

“Everyone must have a personal commitment to the peace process”

Despite all the cruel memories of this conflict, what inspired me was the peace process between the government and the MILF. That was the way to solve this conflict.

- *Ebrahim Amama*

I believe that the peace process, the negotiation, is the only way to solve this problem. I believe that both the government and the MILF are fully committed to end this conflict peacefully. Otherwise what happened in the past will happen again.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

The immediate impact of the peace process on me, personally, is that it gave me time with my family and because of that, I was able to look after my children; I always emphasise to my children that they have to continue their education. This is a very good impact of the peace process. Before, I myself could not concentrate on making a livelihood because of my duties as a commander, but my wives took care of the family. In a very simple way they set up a small store where they could sell goods.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

After the ceasefire agreement was signed⁹ I came back to the farm. I remember the support from the community and I hope that this will continue and everybody will enjoy peace. The signing of the agreement is a big accomplishment and it could lead to a final resolution of the conflict and the achievement of peace.

- *H. Abdelaziz Andik*

For us in the military, the signing of the ceasefire agreement was positive. We have been able to do many things in our communities, including setting up initiatives to resolve local disputes within the communities.

- *Abdullah Mashod*

At a personal level, what I have realised with this peace process is that the aspirations of the Moro people are correct. It also inspires me because I can see how what we have been fighting for can become a reality. And third, during the negotiations I have had time to work on something more productive. Because

⁹ In 2003 the MILF and the Government of the Philippines signed a ceasefire agreement.

of the peace process we experience greater freedom of movement. Before we could not go outside to the civilian areas. Now we can live with our families, in our communities. We can also engage with more people and with more organisations in a productive way.

- Manap Butokan

The first positive impact of the ceasefire agreement is that it gave, to some extent, a feeling of normalisation in the community. It also showed that the MILF's BIAF are in control of their men. Everybody followed the orders from the Chief of Staff. They stayed in the communities or in the barracks. In terms of daily life, the benefit of the peace process is that I can be together with my family. Unlike before, I can see my family and concentrate on improving their lives.

- Esrafil B. Sampayan

A peace process is a very challenging undertaking. There have been lots of ups and downs. Naturally there have been lots of propositions on both sides. But the key is to be sincere, to negotiate with sincerity, to be true to all the agreements that have been signed, and to deliver the commitments. For example, those made under the decommissioning agreement; whatever the commitments, they must be delivered. I hope the BBL¹⁰ will be implemented according to the agreements. If so, it will succeed and everybody on both sides will realise that the peace process we have been undertaking was worth all the investment. Everyone must have a personal commitment to the peace process; everyone must support it. The peace process provides the opportunity to move from a war situation to a situation in which we have to avoid violence. We have to stop violence between the government and the MILF so that people can live a more peaceful life.

- Haron Panalao

The peace process has provided the MILF with the possibility to assert its rights, and I believe it will succeed in asserting the rights of the Bangsamoro people. At a personal level, aside from the opportunity to be with my family, the peace process provided us the opportunity to train our people and, of course, recently I was chosen to join the decommissioning and I am expecting that the services will be delivered in due time to us.

- Goliart Sarif

¹⁰ Currently in the form of a draft, the Bangsamoro Basic Law establishes the new Bangsamoro political entity and provides for its basic structure of government. The draft BBL enacts the agreements set forth in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which is the peace agreement signed between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF in 2014.

CHAPTER 4

“I believe that through the decommissioning process, the peace process will move forward”

It was my superiors who informed me that I had been selected to be part of the decommissioning process, and that this was part of the fulfilment of the MILF commitments to the peace process. That was the only time I learnt about “decommissioning”. I was happy because it meant I would be part of the fulfilment of the MILF commitments. I also believed that through the decommissioning, the peace process would move forward, because at that time the peace process was not moving well.

- Haron Panalao

What have I achieved? Perhaps I was chosen to be in the first batch of the decommissioning process because of all my experiences and all my service to the struggle. I am doing everything to comply with the decommissioning terms; to do our duty.

- Esrafil B. Sampayan

It was my first commander, who is also very close to me, who told me that I had been chosen for decommissioning and that I had to report immediately to Darapanan to understand the guidelines, the process. But I already had a fair understanding of what decommissioning was because I had attended some seminars where the decommissioning process was explained.

- Tamanu Tunduk

When I was informed that I was going to be part of the decommissioning process, the first thing I asked was if I could consult my men first to see if they would accept it. My men said, “Yes, if this is the decision of the leadership, we have to follow”, and then I said, “OK, I will join the decommissioning”. As a leader of the group, I could not decide on my own; that is why I asked for my men to be consulted first. I was very supportive of this decision by the leadership because I think it was the right thing to do. I hope that this will lead to the implementation of the peace agreement by the government and the MILF.

- H. Abdulaziz Andik

The moment I knew that I was going to be one of the MILF decommissioned combatants I was grateful because I knew the organisation would do that for our own good. Later on, when I learnt about the assistance package I was even more grateful. Hopefully this commitment will be fulfilled. Apart from what is already in the decommissioning package I wish we would be given a bus for the community that we could use to take the children to school.

- Abdullah Mashod



I was sleeping when I learnt that I would be part of the decommissioning process. I was the team leader in one of the outposts in Darapanan. Chairman Murad's Chief of Security was looking for me and finally found me at the outpost. And he told me I had to report to Headquarters. I asked, "What is going on?". Then Chairman Murad personally informed me that I was going to be part of the first decommissioned combatants. I asked, "What is this decommission about?" The Chairman said, "Just wait for the result". I knew it was an order but I did not want to do it because I did not understand what it meant. When they explained it to me, I said, "This is good, very good". It is not surrender and we are given some assistance (housing, livelihood). Although still nothing has arrived yet, it is good for me, because I am already alone. I am a widow. This is a good time for me to rest.

- *Abdulsamad H. Ahmad*





CHAPTER 5

*“This is the time to go back to civilian life,
to a peaceful, normal life”*

If I look back at the day when the decommissioning ceremony took place I was very happy at that time because I was thinking that the assistance would come so that I could concentrate on my livelihood. There were also promises of assistance for my children. I was happy about all that. The ceremony was, to me, a celebration of victory, of not having surrendered. I could see that all the MILF leaders were there, as were many important personalities, including the President. For me it was like a celebration of victory. When I arrived at the venue I had mixed feelings because I can always remember the suffering and the sacrifices of the past, but I also have hope that the peace process will move forward. We were informed by some of the staff that the processing would start immediately and that we would be given IDs. We followed the procedures and afterwards some government-related people told us that the assistance would be given to us later on. We received a health card issued by the government and were given 25,000 pesos; they said it was for Ramadan. That is all the assistance we received. Later on we came back to Camp Darapanan and the day ended. Yes, all our families were there. Mine too. I could see them among the crowd.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

During the decommissioning ceremony I was in tears. The first thing I remembered were my comrades who had died on the battlefield. I wished they were with me to witness that moment. I saw the government and the MILF together. The night before, whenever I saw a soldier, I wanted to kill him. But that feeling changed that day. The decommissioning process was part of the commitment by the MILF. Regardless of how difficult it was, we followed the orders. And hopefully the government will also fulfil its own commitments as we progress, as we move forward. I cannot be 100 per cent sure, but I trust President Aquino. I don't wish for more than what was promised as part of the assistance package.

- *Eswafil B. Sampayan*

For me, the day when the decommissioning ceremony took place was a very difficult moment, a very difficult time, but because it was an order, a manifestation of the sincerity of the MILF in this peace process, we had no other choice but to follow the decision of the leadership. When President Aquino said, "The government will also fulfil its commitment", we felt comfort and satisfaction.

- *Manap Butokan*



On the day of the decommissioning ceremony I felt very happy because I believed that decommissioning was a way forward for the peace process. My family also attended the ceremony. They were content, especially my children who learnt that there would be an educational package as part of the decommissioning agreement. They were happy because now they can go back to school, they can study again, because when their father was still in the struggle he could not provide for their education.

- Haron Panalao

During the ceremony I felt overwhelmed. I could not really understand what was happening. So many people were there, big people, personalities. I was overwhelmed. I saw the weapons and I started asking, "Why is this?". Then a lady came and handed me an envelope and I asked, "What is this?" and the lady said, "This is for your fasting; please count it" and I said, "No, I will not count it". When the ceremony finished, the decommissioning was explained to us, and we were told how the assistance was part of the commitment.

- *Abdulsamad H. Ahmad*

Honestly, the day of the symbolic decommissioning was a difficult day for me because I was being decommissioned after more than 40 years of duty in the jungle. I am inspired doing my job, but this decommissioning put me in an uncertain situation because I am not sure if the promises will be delivered. As a BIAF, whatever the instruction is, I will follow it.

- *Goliart Sarif*

The day of the decommissioning ceremony was a very emotional moment. At that time I always thought about those who have passed away; about the leaders, about my companions on the battlefield. When we arrived at the venue we saw a lot of people, big personalities. The messages from Chairman Murad and from President Aquino were so meaningful that I cannot forget them. They gave strong messages. We went inside and the processing started. The first thing that was given to us was an ID card; later on we received some financial assistance. The processing was completed at four in the afternoon and we came back to Camp Darapanan.

- *Michael Ragundo*

On June 16, 2015 I felt at peace. I felt that it is good to persevere. Because when there is perseverance you can receive what you want. Most importantly, the bigger aspirations of the Moro in the peace process will be realised.

- *Abdullah Mashod*

As a revolutionary you have to set an example, be a model. Decommissioning is not surrender; it is part of the MILF commitment. It gains support because the MILF has fulfilled its part, it has shown sincerity, and because we are revolutionaries we have to ensure that we are true to our word, to our commitments.

- *H. Abdulaziz Andik*



When we came back from the decommissioning ceremony the first thing that came to my mind was, “This is the time to go back to civilian life; it is time to go back to a peaceful, normal life.” I was very positive that the peace process would move forward.

- *Michael Ragundo*

CHAPTER 6

*“We are still waiting for the assistance to come,
for our lives to change”*

I have worked hard so that my family, my children can live a normal life and can finish their studies because I don't want them to have the same life I did. I don't want them to grow without knowledge, without education. I have five daughters and two sons. Six of them have already finished their education and only one did not finish because he married very young. My children fully understand that I have been in the struggle all these years; whenever I was on duty, away from my family, it was my relatives who supported my family.

- H. Abdelaziz Andik

During the early years of the struggle I was a bachelor; I never thought about getting married, I was too young. Later on I got my own family and every time I was on duty I tried to leave something for their livelihood; every time I was away I told them, "Please take care of each other". I told my children to go to school because I want them to finish their education. I have two children, both are boys. Both of them are BIAF, but they are also still studying because every time we could not sustain their education they had to stop; and when we had means, they continued. I hope that now both of them can finish their education.

- Abdullah Mashod

At this stage in my life I cannot do farming, I am too old, but if given a chance I would like to engage in a small/medium enterprise. If there were an opportunity I would focus on agricultural products. I also plan to help the community. I am looking forward to that because one of my children has finished a business course, so he could help me.

- H. Abdelaziz Andik

Basically, I want to go back to a normal life. I am hoping the government's commitments, like giving us shelter, housing and livelihood assistance, will be fulfilled so that we can really live a normal life. We are counting on these promises. To me, "normal life" is a life without conflict; the life we had before this conflict started many decades ago. It is a life in which we can freely work for what we want and we can freely move. A government for the Bangsamoro will be established and they will take care of the people and improve our lives. This is how I imagine the future. Peaceful.

- Abdullah Mashod

Not much has changed since I have returned to civilian life other than I have more time to think about what it is that I can do out of the promises that have been made. I hope that the assistance that has been promised will come so that we can return to normal life, so that we can start working on our new life. Since I am now a farmer I would like to receive assistance for farming so that my children can continue with the farm. I would like assistance for my children to go to school so that they can get a good education. Scholarships for our children was actually one of the government promises and I hope it will be delivered. But more importantly, I hope this assistance will be given to many so that we can have regular lives now. If the government cannot deliver this programme, what will happen to the rest of the other commitments?

- *Manap Butokan*

Because now I am back to civilian life I must not violate any of the terms of the decommissioning agreement. I am working on a small source of livelihood whilst waiting for the assistance to arrive so that my family and me can survive. I have set up a small store. I am selling rice, canned food... So far my daily life has not changed much.

- *Abdullah Mashod*

My life has not changed that much really after the decommissioning; we were promised that we would be given assistance but it has not arrived yet. But this has not discouraged me. I remain committed and I will continue to hope that we can sustain this peace process. Since the decommissioning I feel okay, my life is okay, but I will not be happy until the BBL is passed. That is the only way I can see how the decommissioning will become relevant.

- *Haron Panalao*

Nothing much has changed for me after the decommissioning. We are still waiting. For the future, first and foremost I hope to receive home assistance and some small capital that we can use for our livelihood, but most important of all is that there will be assistance for the education of my children.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

I expect that whatever assistance we were promised will be fulfilled as soon as possible; that is the only way we can live normal lives. I don't need much. As long as I can eat three times a day, send the children to school, have a little bit of income everyday... that is already a normal life for me. Now I am focusing on how can I live a normal life; before my focus was on how to defeat the enemy. Another change

is that I am not afraid of the military anymore. When the assistance is delivered to us, I will strongly call on the Bangsamoro Government to focus on educating the children and the youth, to really invest in education. The key to a good life and a good society is an educated community. Personally my main priority is to become a better Muslim and a better citizen.

- H. Abdelaziz Andik

My house is here in Darapanan. I sell fish. My children can support themselves now but my grandchildren always ask me for money to go to school. They say, "My father has given me 20 pesos", and they ask me for another 20 pesos. I only give them five, but it is okay because I am an old man. Everybody wants to give me some money because of my reputation, or part of their harvest; others want to share a moment with me, and as long as it is in accordance with Islam, it is fine.

- Abdulsamad H. Ahmad

I am now back into civilian life and I am very happy about it. I was one of the most wanted men by the military and now I am back to normal life. I can move freely and I am no longer on that list. My life is okay because during the time when I was still a combatant I started planning my own self-reliance, so my life is fine. I have four children, three boys and one girl. The oldest was born in 2003 and the youngest in 2011. Now I can spend time with my family. Before they always worried about me because I was a wanted man. Now I am a free man, they are relieved.

- Michael Ragundo

As of now, my life has not changed so much. I am now working in my farm with my children. I have nine children, six boys and three girls. If the assistance is delivered many things will happen; our children can have their education and I will have money for business capital. If the government implements its commitment to pass the BBL, then the Bangsamoro Government will be established.

- Goliart Sarif

When I thought about our situation in the communities before, I used to compare it to an old lady, a very lonely old lady, but these days I compare it to a young lady, there are lots of promises! The situation now is much better than before. Before we used to live a very difficult life.

- Abdulsamad H. Ahmad



CHAPTER 7

“It is peacetime now”

Everybody wants peace. Everybody is calling for peace. The Moro have been hoping for peace for our people. What always comes to my heart, to my mind is that we can liberate our people; we can fulfil our aspirations, in this life, or the next generation. I want this conflict to be solved peacefully so that we can live a peaceful life, on good terms with everybody, in a society where there is no violence, no corruption, where people can trust each other. One day there will be peace for everybody. Everybody wants peace. We don't want to fight. Both sides have suffered in this fighting.

- Abdulsamad H. Ahmad

I think what I can be proud of is that I can humbly say that I was able to help find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

- Haron Panalao

Ultimately, I want the Bangsamoro Government to be established. We, civilians, will support the government; will support the establishment of this new government through our civilian lives. I hope we can all live peacefully.

- Abdullah Mashod

A normal day in my life now is a very ordinary day without conflict; I just live a quiet, ordinary life. If I think about my future, I wish that there will be no more fighting, we can live a peaceful life with each other, we can exercise our religion freely, our families can live a normal life, and development will come. This is what I wish.

- Esrafil B. Sampayan

In the future, if the BBL is passed, I only wish that I can live a peaceful life with my family and we can have a more productive life together. I am planning to set up a small business because at my age you cannot be very active in farming much longer.

- Haron Panalao

If this peace process succeeds and the conflict ends there will be a lot of change; our lives will be transformed.

- Michael Ragundo

What I think I have achieved in joining the struggle is first, that my family is still okay in spite of all the challenging times; and second, I feel that I have contributed something to making the lives of the people in this community more peaceful, safer.

- *Ebrahim Amam*

If the peace process succeeds I believe that we can have sustainable peace and development in the future. People can see us living in peace.

- *Tamanu Tunduk*

In the next five years I hope the agreements will be signed. We will have peace, and life will change. There will be a lot of progress and development. This is what I want to see in the next five years. I hope the MILF will continue helping people, the lives of the people will improve and there will be no more poverty.

- *H. Abdulaziz Andik*

I think in 10 years from now we will have development in the area. I think maybe Maguindanao and Lanao will be connected by a road network. But even if this does not happen what is important is that there will be no conflict and we will live a peaceful life in our place.

- *Goliart Sarif*

When the time comes I hope the MILF will become part of mainstream society. If it joins the government we can have model communities where there is no corruption, where people live in harmony regardless of their religion, and everybody will see each other as friends and we will live a normal life. In this situation, we will all be proud. And when all this happens, I hope you can visit us again.

- *Manap Butokan*

I still visit my former men whenever I can. Most of them are farming now. The advice I give them is, "Continue with the farming, it is peace time now; try to help yourself and your family and pray for the time when you will be called for the next decommissioning batch and be ready."

- *H. Abdulaziz Andik*







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