



# PEACE IS FOR EVERYONE

BANGSAMORO STORIES OF HOPE,  
SURVIVAL, PAIN AND RESILIENCE

INSTITUTE OF BANGSAMORO STUDIES



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**Layout:** Boonruang Song-ngarm

**Published:** The Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS), 2016  
The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), 2016

**Funding support:** MISEREOR

**ISBN:** 13:978-9924-9044-0-3

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## FOREWORD

*Peace is for everyone* is a collection of personal testimonies by survivors of massacres perpetrated during the Mindanao conflict. A historical narrative with a common theme emerges from the victims' accounts. The authors, adopting a 'peace history' approach, gradually piece together a historical puzzle composed of brief snapshots of individual stories, transporting us from person to person and historical period to historical period. The result is a global narrative shared by all the survivors.

First the past: in chapter 1, those interviewed remember a time when they welcomed settlers, lived in peace with them, and showed them respect and shared hospitality. Some recall nostalgic images of a kind of paradise lost; others of a fast-developing society, with fertile land, booming trade and prosperous cities. Then came the ruthless Ilagas and their allies, the anti-Moro ideology, martial law and a protracted war that would plague several generations. They describe a gradual descent into hell, incessant enforced displacements, the loss of their homes and lands, and severed ties with their ancestral homeland. They speak of humiliation and fear, of going into hiding, of making themselves invisible. They also speak, with evident difficulty, of lost opportunities: some say that had it not been for what befell them, they would now have an education or even perhaps be wealthy. What becomes clear from their accounts is that the goal of these atrocities was not just to kill but also to dehumanise them to make them an 'other', to grind them down to a sub-human level; which is why women and children in particular, were specifically targeted as victims.

Some survivors became internally displaced persons, driven into extremely precarious living conditions. Shame and fear were their daily companions. Others decided to stay, but went through massacres carried out in their villages. Some, on the strength of their education and charisma, became politically involved in social movements and the democratic defence of human rights and their own rights as a minority, in the hope that the government would react and protect them... because they too were Filipinos! Others joined the armed opposition for a variety of reason, one important being to protect their families and their community against violence.

As the text progresses the victims speak of values associated with peace: Their vision of peace combines education, development, good governance, respect for minorities, integration, and respect for different cultures and identities. Above all, they stress how vitally important it is for their children and grandchildren to live a better life, to enjoy a real right to their homeland, to have their rights as citizens recognised and respected, and to be given a guarantee that “it will never happen again”. Several of the victims said how happy and relieved they were that the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro had been signed. They believe that autonomy and self-government would enable them to regain dignity and respect, to pursue a path to development and to tackle in their own way and in accordance with their own cultural and social values the issues that arise in their own communities. This would allow them to find their own models to govern their communities, administer justice, deal with difficult issues such as horizontal violence, blood feuds (*ridos*), and combat organised crime. In short, they want to become a peaceful society that manages its own development and interacts in a peaceful, constructive and respectful manner with the Philippine government and society.

This book clearly reflects subjective and narrative truth; the memory of the events as experienced by the victims and witnesses. After the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission proposed four different types of truth which are indispensable to any effort of historical memory or truth telling: factual and forensic truth; personal and narrative truth; social and dialogue truth; and healing and restorative truth. Factual and forensic truth is concerned with the establishment of the facts in the strict sense of the term (*What happened to whom? When and in which context? Who did it? Who witnessed it? What were the consequences?*). Facts, memories and perceptions often differ, and can sometimes even contradict one another. That is why it is imperative for any historical memory initiatives to combine subjective memory, the establishment of facts and a historical contextualisation. That is why it becomes so important to engage in dialogue and in joint efforts to interpret the past, and thereby lay the foundations for a new era when different communities can live together in peace.

In order to lay the groundwork for a lasting peace, the creation of a historical commission of historical memory seems to be therefore imperative for the Philippine nation and the Moro community. It shall enable the Philippine nation at large and the Moro community to listen to the multiplicity of

accounts and narratives, to take full measure of what happened. Such a process would create conducive conditions to envisage, in dialogue with the victims, the best ways forward to rebuild society and to provide guarantees that it will never happen again.

At the time I am writing this preface, no decision has as yet been reached on the Basic Law For Bangsamoro and more broadly on the peace agreements; neither the Senate nor the House of Representatives has ruled on this matter. In light of this underlying uncertainty, this book takes on particular significance. It is to be hoped that the political decision-makers will listen to the personal stories it contains. It is to be hoped that the report of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission established by the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as part of the Bangsamoro peace agreements will be read and that its recommendations – in particular the establishment of a historical commission of historical memory – will be put into practice. Indeed, coming to terms with the past is essential to building the foundations for a just and lasting future peace. Peace is needed now. Peace cannot wait any longer. This book bears witness to the urgent and essential need and obligation to build a lasting peace for the Moro community and the entire Philippine nation.

January 2016

Mô Bleeker, Chair Transitional justice and Reconciliation Commission of the Bangsamoro Peace Agreement - TJRC, Special envoy on Dealing With the Past and Prevention of Atrocities, Swiss Foreign Ministry.



# INTRODUCTION

Some stories can't be left out. They need to be told; and they need to be listened to. Many, if not all, among the millions of Bangsamoro men and women have stories to tell about their experiences of injustice, exploitation, human rights violations and discrimination during the Mindanao conflict. And they need mechanisms to address these grievances.

This publication brings the stories of almost 300 of these men and women in the provinces of Maguindanao, Cotabato Province, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and the cities of Marawi, Iligan, Cotabato and Isabela<sup>1</sup>.

Stories of the past, of life before conflict.  
Stories of suffering, pain, dispossession and dislocation.  
Stories of resilience and resistance.  
Stories of the reaction to the events around them.  
Stories of hope, generosity and longing for peace.

In this book ordinary men and women share their experiences from the last decades of conflict in Southern Philippines. They also voice their hopes for a peaceful, better and more harmonious future.

This publication uses a "Peace History" approach. This methodology looks at the intersections between personal experiences and collective accounts. By weaving together individual stories, we aim to present a complex, nuanced, rich description of shared experiences. We also aim to share the diversity of opinions and sentiments in regards to the future of this part of the world following the signing of the peace agreement between the MILF and the Government of the Philippines in 2014.

By reading this book, we hope that you will accompany the Bangsamoro people in their journey through the past decades; in their journey to peace. And in journeying with them in the following pages, we ask you to pay attention to what they have to say to all of us.

Listen.  
Feel.  
Be with them.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of names of the people interviewed for this book are available at the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies upon request



# *Chapter*

*“We used to live together  
in harmony”*

1



My parents were farmers. We were peacefully and harmoniously living in a barangay<sup>2</sup>. After school, I used to help my parents with the household chores. When I didn't have a class, I used to go along with my parents to the field.

My family did not have high standard of living but we were able to live a comfortable life in Palimbang. Back then, vehicles could not traverse this road and the mode of transportation was only by boat. My father had three boats, one was small. We also owned carabaos<sup>3</sup>. He studied agriculture while my mother took a business course. Sometimes they engaged in buying and selling coconuts.

In those days, the price of carabao was less than 100 pesos. If you had 40 pesos you could buy one carabao. The price of two and a half kilos of rice amounted to 15 centavos only. For one person, two and a half kilos, which was equivalent to ten glasses of rice, could last for approximately three days. However, money was very hard to earn. The majority of us possessed only a few things. In fact, most of us had only one pair of dresses.

In 1970, I was among those recruited to work as a logger in Carmen, North Cotabato, which was a forest back then. We used to cut big lawaan trees into logs to be sold to logging companies. It was a dangerous work, but because of poverty, we had to do it to survive.

The first batch of immigrants who arrived here were the Cebuanos. Afterwards, the Ilocanos came. The guards of the late General Salipada K. Pendatun were Ilonggos. After the Ilonggos came, different tribal groups followed. I thought it was an initiative of the late General Salipada. I did not pay much attention to their arrival because I understood well that the datu<sup>4</sup> were already informed and aware of their coming. They kept coming here.

When they arrived, the people voluntarily gave them land. In our case, I don't know exactly the number of hectares, maybe eight. There was no payment mentioned or discussed because during that time the old folks established a harmonious relationship with the settlers. The families were very close to each other. They were kind-hearted people.

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<sup>2</sup> Barangay is the Filipino term for village or district. It is the smallest administrative division

<sup>3</sup> Domestic water buffalo

<sup>4</sup> Datu is a traditional title for a Moro chieftain, who is usually a member of the "Royal Family." Royal families claim to be the descendants of the first sultan of Sulu and Maguindanao.

Lands were distributed. I can no longer remember though because I was just a small boy, but some of the recipients, the Bisaya, that received a parcel of land from my father, voluntarily offered to raise and take care of me. You know anytime I visited the area, once they noticed my presence they would not allow me to leave until they had given me a toy because they loved me so much.

Before, Muslims and Christians had a very smooth relationship. The Christians were very honest; there were no secrets between us. The majority of our elderly folks supported each other. For instance, it was customary practice that if someone asked me to provide funds for his marriage, and gave enough time to provide the finances, I would be very willing to give full support for the occasion, and this practice was applicable for both Muslims and Christians.

Despite problems with communication, the Moros understood the situation of the migrants and they helped them to start a new life. The hospitality of the Moros and the abundance of fish and fertile soil in our village in Buug



attracted more migrants from the Visayas areas. In addition, the operations of the ore and logging companies in our village contributed to an influx of migrants. The migrants introduced new skills and techniques in farming and fishing which the Moros were thankful for.

Our lives were good. Even the Christians and Muslims here in Basilan were on good terms. My other side is also Christian. In those times, during occasions, the Christians and Muslims socialised together. For example, during Hariraya, they joined us and we got along very well. There are still many of us who remain friends today.

The relationship between Muslims and Christians here was very amicable. Christians here were good people. They spoke Tausug instead of their own dialect. They were the ones engaged in business enterprises, including with the Chinese. They had bakeries and other businesses. Back then the Muslims were not yet so much involved in trade. They were more interested in education and farming. In those days, people from Zamboanga and Basilan came here for education and not the other way around. There were many establishments here like hotels. Jolo was like a proper city. It was quite successful. Imported goods from Sabah were brought here. Barter trade<sup>5</sup> started in our area. Before Martial Law<sup>6</sup>, it was peaceful here.

When I was young, my place was peaceful. I did not see soldiers, only policemen.

Our area was good during times when it was peaceful. Everything started during the Martial Law. People knew that if you were a Muslim, soldiers would harm you. So the people prepared themselves because whether you fight or not, the soldiers will harm you anyway.

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<sup>5</sup> The Zamboanga Barter Trade was created in 1973 through P.D. No. 93 liberalising traditional trade with the Sulu Archipelago and adjacent areas. Traders from these places may sell, buy, barter or trade any merchandise, goods or articles from Sabah, Malaysia except those which are contraband or prohibited by law.

<sup>6</sup> On September 23rd, 1972 President Marcos placed the Philippines under Martial Law, a period that lasted until 1981.

## Chapter

*“I was old enough when  
we left our place, so I  
remember everything”*

2

***“I cannot describe what I felt at that time.”***

I was in elementary grade when a group of armed men called ILAGA<sup>7</sup> attacked our village, murdered Moros, looted their belongings and burned their houses. That was the first time I heard the word ILAGA. When I grew up, I learned that the ILAGA was a fanatical group from the Cotabato region who came to our village and recruited settlers to kill Moros in order to take their lands. They were backed up by the military, who suspected all Moros to be members of the MNLF fighting against the government, and therefore their common enemy.

Marcos<sup>8</sup> created ILAGA in order to justify his declaration of Martial Law.

It originated in Upi, Maguindanao, formerly part of North Cotabato Province before it was sub-divided into three provinces. The number of ILAGA members grew and news about their brutality rapidly spread.

ILAGA members were said to be prisoners. Almost 10,000 of them were freed by the government. All Muslim convicts were left in prison. The government's condition for their freedom was to fight against the MNLF. Their incentive was that they could own whatever they could grab from the Muslims.

The ILAGA started attacking the Moros in 1969. A certain Rajah Muda Gulano of Kabuntalan led a large group in a Muslim populated area. They were mercilessly attacked by the ILAGA commanded by Alon de Pedro and a certain 'Blackly'. Our Moro brothers were suddenly scattered like the kernels of corn. They escaped in various directions; some went to Bagumbayan, Kalamansig and others went as far as Palimbang to evade the attack. The ILAGA committed atrocities to drive away the Moros and then grab their lands and other valuable property.

I was 16 or 17 at the time. It was Eid el Adha and the ILAGA group ambushed us on land owned by my father and uncles. I was brought to Buluan because my ears were bleeding and I could no longer hear. For a week I was unconscious; I couldn't open my eyes. It was only after over a week that I recovered, and it was only then that I found out that my mother had already died. My father was wounded but he was not really harmed; I don't know how that happened.

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<sup>7</sup> ILAGA is the Christian militia group organised by leaders of Christian settlers in Central Mindanao and allegedly supported by the Philippine Government. Ilaga is a Bisayan term for rat. The real meaning as an organisation is not known. Some say it is an acronym for Ilongo land grabbers association.

<sup>8</sup> President Ferdinand E. Marcos (1965-1986)



The ILAGA members were the ones who massacred civilians in Kauswagan and my relatives in Bacolod. In Bacolod 18 people died, including women whose breasts and ears were mutilated. There was this kid, Said, whose hands, feet and ears were mutilated; he is still alive. Even people from foreign countries saw him. In Kauswagan, a resident, accompanied by a Sergeant from the Philippine Constabulary, killed a civilian.

ILAGA entered Barangay Baliangao in Palimbang. This happened during Ramadan in the early morning. If they captured a lady, they sliced off her breasts. If they saw a young or old man, they cut off their ears or tongue. People rushed to the mountain to save their lives. Those who were unable to escape were captured by the armed men. Some victims were killed in a firing squad and some were left alive. We fought with homemade pistols to defend ourselves. The community fought against them but they were so many. The Philippine Constabulary backed up the ILAGA; they were really strong.

Our good relationships with the migrants suddenly changed during Martial Law. There were many soldiers in our area. Many of them were cruel. I remember when a soldier suddenly grabbed me without reason while I



was sitting on a jeep going home from the Poblacion. The jeep was full of passengers. He dragged me to the street, slapped and humiliated me in front of many people. Not yet satisfied by what he had done, he dragged me to the market where he left me in the hands of the bystanders, all Bisayan migrants, who boxed me and made fun of me. I cannot describe what I felt at that time. I was angry and ashamed, I do not know; I wanted to explode. A friend of mine was there. He did nothing but he did not leave me. When the bystanders left, he took me to the jeep and we went home. The presence of the military in our village virtually took our freedom away.

***“I was a good citizen but after what I experienced and witnessed, I lost my trust in the government”***

As a Filipino I uphold the Constitution of the Philippines because I believe that it protects the welfare of the people, regardless of the tribe they belong to or the religion they profess. The problem is the people in authority who abused the helpless Moros. Soldiers in our village apprehended innocent Moros without an arrest warrant, manufacturing false accusations and using excuses such as ‘ongoing operations’ and ‘pursuing suspected criminals’.





Those who questioned the legality of their activities were charged with obstruction of justice.

The soldiers, the ones who were in power, captured me and placed me in jail. It was 1976. While I was inside prison, the soldiers beat me. One reason why civilians were fearful was because we didn't know where to run and we knew once they caught you, you would surely be harmed. We had no tranquillity then. Even after I was released from prison, the military would still follow us.

There was a small occasion before January 10, 1979. Soldiers were wandering the streets to carry out their operation in Liguasan Marsh. At the time, men and civilians were in our house and they killed 10 of the men. Tawgan Lubalang, Sebangsan Usman, Kamlon Bukol, Mastura Abdulbayan, Sindatun Kulas, Magidsul Lampukan, Samaytar Lampukan and Semawla Batik were the ones killed. They were my in-laws, cousins and nephews. The latter were under age, 12 years old, nine and six - still very young.

They also burned my house and slaughtered our animals. We were forced to evacuate. They also captured me, but I was eventually released. They hit me in the head several times. They even wanted to shoot me, but one of them said no. I suffered a lot. They made me carry a lot of baggage. They kicked me and aimed their guns at me. It was a tormenting experience. I didn't understand why they were coercing people. It was a wicked thing to do. Even the innocent civilians and children were maltreated and killed.

My mother asked me to accompany her to the market. We were hiding but the soldiers saw us, so we were also among those who were exposed in Buluan for more than six hours in the heat of the sun.

An old man was forced to be naked and dance like a mad man. I was crying but I was afraid that I might get involved. They thought I was a Christian. That is how I know the Muslims suffered during that time. We were in fear.

During the time of Marcos, my son, who was a new graduate from high school, was shot by the soldiers. My plan was to send him to college either in Davao or Dadiangas. The only reason why he wasn't awarded the highest academic ranking was because he was competing with another student who bribed their teacher. I witnessed how he was shot. I was also the one who buried him. His life cannot be repaid. He had just finished high school.



We feel very mad or bad against them because our plantation, our property, everything, was destroyed by them.

During the military operations in Tawi-Tawi, Banaran was one of the hot spots due to the presence of the MNLF commanders. The Philippine Marines launched a military operation in our area. They took many Moros as captives, two of whom were teachers. I witnessed a civilian named Abdul Muhammad get severely beaten. About 36 Moros were taken captive by the marines and brought to a school ground. There they were treated like animals. Marines walked on to their backs. Then they were ordered to crawl and roll and were punched and slapped one by one. My family and few other Moros had the chance to slip away from the marines and managed to get to a safer place on Mantabuan Island. The following day a neighbour of ours tried to escape, but unfortunately the marines apprehended him. He was almost tortured to death by the military. I was so disgusted by the plight of the Moros at the hands of their own government. I was a good citizen but, after what I experienced and witnessed, I lost my trust in the government.

They watched over us. All the lovely houses were surrounded including that of our captain, the house of my father's nephew. So both our house and the captain's barangay, including five other houses, were cordoned off by the soldiers. They put up tents around their houses, so we found it difficult to go out. They shot our goats and ate them. They even shot a dog that was in front of my little brother. He shouted and we honestly thought it was him who had been hit by the bullet. He cried so much and the soldier who fired the gun was reprimanded by an officer for shooting the dog in front of my brother, who was nearly hit. We didn't have rights back then -they would just do whatever they wanted. They summoned my father to butcher our goat and from it they gave us a very small portion of meat. When the time came for them to leave, they confiscated my mother's beautiful dresses and our horses were used to transport their ammunitions. My father's horse, which was really huge, was never returned and our belongings such as platters, a wooden chest and clothes were not given back.

There was gunfire. I can hardly talk about it because it was then that my father and siblings were killed. Every time I recount this incident, I can't



help but cry because of what happened to us. On my mother's side, all her siblings were killed. Her father and mother also died on the third day of Ramadan, but my grandparent died from illness and not from the shooting. I'm very melancholic because of it. My father survived. He did not die from the massacre but from the depression it brought about. He became ill.

I was three months pregnant. It was about three in the afternoon and he told me to come to him. I asked him why? He said we would be riding in the Navy boat so he needed clothes to wear. I gave him clothes. I vividly remember that he wore a pink top with tiny striped pants. He told me that we would be separated. It was around three and I was worried. Slowly I began to think of the separation ahead. He even asked for forgiveness. I couldn't take it. He asked me to forgive him and asked himself for forgiveness as well. We then cried together. We were parted afterwards because he was then brought to the mosque. It was then that we rode in the Navy boat with me bringing a small bag. We were newlyweds and that was our last time together. I always remember him. No matter how many times I remarry, I will still remember him. When I am asked about him, I cry because I can hardly talk about him. Later, I married his brother.

Those who had reached 15 years old were taken to the mosque, while those who were below 15 were taken to the Navy boat. I was around 13 years old, so I was one of the kids taken to the boat. The Navy boat departed at five o'clock in the afternoon. That entire night was really hard for us because we weren't able to eat anything. It was also very hot; the children could hardly take it. They grumbled with pain.

There were 1,000 individuals inside the mosque in Barangay Malisbung, Palimbang<sup>9</sup>. Four hundred were taken out and brought to another place. Those who were left behind were the ones massacred. If you visit the mosque you can still see the evidence of the brutal event.

The Philippine soldiers starved the Moro people in the mosque; three days with no food to eat nor water to drink. They put individuals still alive inside a sack and then shot to kill or threw them into the sea. I do not want to recall those days. It really hurts. I am emotionally and physically disturbed every time I remember the killings by soldiers. Do you know that they also wounded those who were caught escaping? Many of the wounds caused death.

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<sup>9</sup> These passages refer to the killing of Bangsamoro civilians inside the Malisbung Mosque in Barangay Malisbung, Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat Province on September 25, 1974.





In the mosque, they were asked by Col. Tiongco, who are the people from Tran? Go out and make a circle. The armed men killed males who were over 10 years old. Afterwards the datus, the leaders of the community, were told to raise their hands and proceed outside; they were apart from the crowd in the mosque and suddenly sounds of shots were heard. We could not fight back, we were out-numbered and we had no guns.

My father, among others, cleaned up the masjid. We came down from the mountain because we were told that the soldiers were gone. My father poured water on those sacks of bones, which emitted a foul smell. Some hands were nailed on the masjid's walls, if you could only see the bloodstains... They were tortured. The history here is too much to take.

Inside the mosque<sup>10</sup>, I was so afraid because two doors were full of soldiers and ILAGA. They kept asking my father where his machine gun was. My father denied ownership of any machine gun because, he said, he did not have any enemies, and that was true. He was a very kind person. My father's drivers were even Christians named Morales and his son. But they

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<sup>10</sup> These passages refer to the incident where 72 civilians were killed inside the Manili Mosque in Barangsay Manili, Carmen municipality in the province of North Cotabato.

killed my father. My mother saw it and uttered, “La ilaha illa-Allah” (there is no god but Allah), Hadji Usop got wet”. What happened to my father is difficult to tell. When father died, I was 13 years old, I was lost; I could not carry the pain.

After firing at Hadji Usop Amella, the ILAGA, together with the members of the Philippine Constabulary, fired towards the civilians who scrambled in different directions - some towards the main door of the Manili Mosque. I was among those who ran towards the main door and escaped the merciless firing of the ILAGA and Philippine Constabulary. They kept firing at me while I tried my best to run as fast as I could. When I sensed that I was safe, I tried to stop running. I wanted revenge, but I had no weapon to fight back and so, I just left the incident to the mercy of Allah.

The grenades exploded, which created different sounds of individuals in agony. They were not satisfied with what they’ve done, so they stabbed some men in the mosque to death. I uttered a prayer and said “La ilaha illa-Allah, Muhammadur Rasulallah”. This gave me strength. Prayer keeps me going and so does my faith in the Almighty Allah.

My husband pretended to be dead and he heard armed men saying “maadtu na ta kay namatay na sila tanan” (let’s go, they are all dead). After that, he put some clothes on his wife and parent in-law and left the mosque. He still felt the fear after they had left and he ran and ran and felt like he was flying out of fear.

After the mosque, soldiers went to the school and shot people they met. Two of my uncles died there. Fortunately, the armed group failed to enter the main room; maybe that is the reason why only a few were hit and killed in the school. People kept screaming until the firing stopped. When we observed that the armed groups had left, we opened the door.

They went away and then we run. We were afraid that if they returned we would die and nobody would be left to say what happened. We had a nephew, he was hit by a bullet, but he managed to hide for a day. He was psychologically affected; he ran and ran after the incident.

Running was so difficult because the field was not clean and smooth. Farming was not as intensive as today. During those times, directions were not clear and there were many pits, but fear will force you to run. The



mosque became dark due to the smoke coming from blasted grenades and gunshots. The smoke saved many lives as it hid those who were then able to run. It was indeed help from God.

After the incident, when the armed group fled, we went to the mosque. We saw my nephew still sucking at the breast of his dead mother. I am referring to my nephew Abdulkadir Nagli who was a three-term Barangay Captain of Manili. The child was not killed by the ILAGA, who thought he was already dead because he was covered in blood oozing from his dead mother's body. And so the child kept on sucking the breast of his dead mother until finally we arrived at the mosque.

They stabbed my father and left the knife in his body. It was eventually removed by our brother. Dead girls were placed between the legs of dead older women. Dead boys were placed between the legs of dead men. They were aligned, and then my grandparent said, "We will not wash them one by one", so they just threw water on the dead bodies. Individual rituals could not be done because there were many dead bodies. We used wood from our houses to bury them until we ran out of wood.





I knew it was against the will of my father, but to save not only his life but also ours, he knelt down trembling. I was so young at that time and I know that there was a problem between the Moros and the Christians, but I did not understand why. What was more puzzling to me was the sudden change of behaviour by the Christians towards the Moros, who used to be friends. Commander Virac of ILAGA and his men were from a neighbouring village. They destroyed the village and killed people. They killed my father-in-law, my mother-in-law Salasia Abo, and my wife's sister Nor-aina Basaluddin. They beheaded Ustadj Maksud Abunawas and burned houses and the mosque. My aunt was burned inside her house.

***“We evacuated because we had no more places to hide”***

The lesson I learned before and after the massacre was that there is a need to be always be ready so that when disaster occurs, you are ready for whatever calamities you may encounter.

During the burning of Jolo, I was in the mountain so I went down to save some of my relatives who were left behind. I did not fight that day, I just watched. My only mission was to help my relatives get out of trouble.



It was really difficult because during those times we slept on the road. Sometimes you could only eat if somebody gave you food. It was that hard then. The civilians were the ones suffering from the situation. I believe that there really is psychological damage from the physical effects of war. You could not sleep at night. The traumatic effects of war are still here.

I don't know who suffered worst. We struggled and spent nights lying under the trees but we did not give up. If we did not escape, perhaps I would no longer have a father.

During the time of Marcos, there were no evacuation centres for the Muslims. Some were forced to sell their lands at a very cheap price.

When Marcos declared Martial Law and the massive evacuation happened, we moved to Shariff Aguak. It was so difficult because we did not have anything for living. We only carried ourselves and the rest of our things were left behind. There was a Christian who talked to my father and offered to loan him 500 pesos. Because we did not have anything to eat, my father borrowed the money with an agreement that they would use our house and land. Due to illiteracy, my father signed a document without understanding it. He signed a waiver. It happened when I was in grade six. Unfortunately, we still have not been able to recover our house and land to this day.

The Muslims were driven out by the joint elements of the Philippine Army and ILAGA. So, they took my houses and after using them as their camp, they stole all the valuable things and burned the houses. And they took one carabao and 30 goats from my farm. We fled to another place for the safety of my family. I had planted rice and corn on my farm. I spent more than 150,000 pesos on expenses for that plantation, but the value of the houses and appliances and many other valuable items was 1.6 million pesos because there were two houses, one house in Mamaon and one in San Amoran. All those properties were used as camps by the joint elements of the Philippine Army and the ILAGA. So, I am now claiming my rights from the government. As far as that situation was concerned, the Philippine Army and the ILAGA has violated some provisions of the Philippine Constitution. We did not have any rights at that time. There were no rights for Muslims. Only the Philippine Army, police and ILAGA had rights while the Muslims had no rights. And that is why we were driven to safe places.







Before, this place was called Sagabayn. During those times when the ILAGA, supported by the government, started to attack, we were forced to leave our place. We went to Poblacion of Maganoy (now Shariff Aguak) and stayed there. We left the place because of the chaos. We left all our things. Aside from our house, I left another house that was under construction but about to be finished. It measured about 16 by 24 metres. Aside from those properties, I had five cows; two were males and three were females intended to be slaughtered for commercial purposes. There were also about 20 cows owned by my grandfather and brother-in-law. Because I was in a hurry, I told them to mix my cows with theirs thinking that I could still get them. So, I mixed mine with their animals and left. My agricultural lot, about 12 hectares, was left with corn planted in it. Actually it was not only me who tilled those fields. I also had people who worked with me. Yes, I owned the lot. If they could get 300 sacks during the harvest, 100 sacks would be mine. They financed it. That was the arrangement of farming before. So that was the lot and livelihood I left. Today that lot, Praise be to Allah, was not taken from me by the Christians, I still own it until now. But due to displacement, I had to sell 1.5 hectares at a cheaper price. Alhamdulillah, my children manage them now because today we have been able to return to our place. Today I work in the government and am assigned to Kabacan.

Even those Maranaos who were innocent were included. Their houses and chickens were taken. The cows were killed. They would strike down even those who were innocent. Then they would say that we were rebels even if they did not find any weapons. We were mad with the government because we, the innocents, were included. There was no help. We were just farmers who planted corn and rice. Then we had to evacuate because the soldiers were arriving. They would grab everything, including our clothes. It was terrible. Even my cousins were killed. The women were placed in one house so that they could not leave.

When the number of the ILAGA increased, our parents decided to leave our village and we went to a village where there were many Moros because we felt safe there. It was really very difficult to live in an evacuation centre because of problems with shelter, water, sanitation and food. Those who had nothing to serve to their hungry families were forced to sneak to our village and take anything useful, ignoring the danger of being caught and killed by the ILAGA. Many resorted to fishing using a rowboat and jigger for it was the only way to survive.

We evacuated again because the ILAGA group was onto us. All our houses, lands and properties were not retrieved. Our cousins also died. I didn't understand it then because I was only 14 years old. What I saw though was that they wanted to seize our place. We then evacuated to Paglas in barrio Katyal. That was in 1970. But we had to leave again in 1973 because the place was bombed until the soldiers undergoing an operation reached us.

We were at Colombio when the ILAGA reached us. I didn't know. I didn't understand it but it was frightening to the extent that we fled - that's how fearful we were. We were forced to abandon our house in the mountain where we worked, a piece of land with a house, and another house in Poblacion. All of those places were burned and we didn't know who had done it. We thought it wouldn't take long. Even our daily sustenance was really hard. I learned patience.

We stayed in the place for longer because the residents were friendly and allowed us to till their lands. However, we experienced hardships; we ate only once a day most of the times. We had to share among us whatever food my parents brought home, frequently root crops. Our suffering increased when my father was arrested by the Navy and turned over to the Army where he was detained at the military camp for almost two months. He suffered the maltreatment the military gave to suspects. When my father was released from prison and we had harvested our crops, I was sent to school to finish my elementary and secondary education. Then I enrolled in college but I did not finish a course due to financial difficulties and the security situation in our area.

We evacuated because we had no more places to hide. Everytime I remember the war I feel like dying. At that time I did not know where to look for food for my pitiful children. We were already in a very different place located on a mountain ridge. The bombs served as our lights at night. There were so many bombs and explosions. They said there were 31 cannons. We were so afraid. My friends told me to be careful because there were many soldiers. Even schoolgirls were killed. I was a driver in the municipality when I had to bring six dead bodies to the office. The engineer complained and said, "Why did you bring them here, why did you not just bury them and why did you not bring them to their relatives?" They easily got mad. So I was the one who brought them to the morgue. I was both afraid and annoyed. I was the driver and I carried those cadavers in my truck. I did it because the corpse smelt very bad and I was afraid people might get sick.







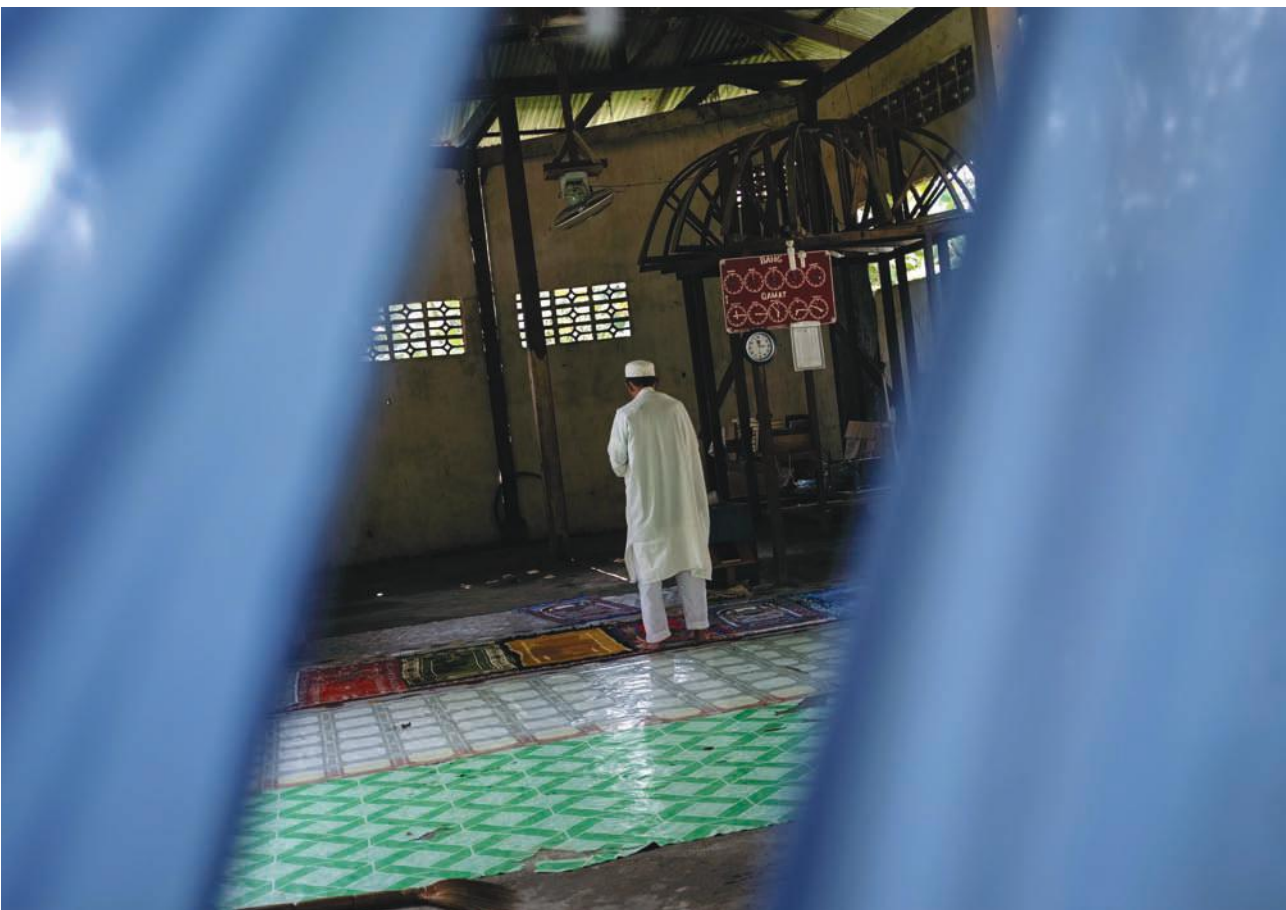
The Chief of Police interrogated me. He asked me why I was there. I replied that I had come to earn a living. Then he asked me why I transferred to Cebu when there was still a conflict in my hometown. I replied, "That is why I transferred to Cebu - because of the conflict". He said to me, "You are a coward!" I replied, "Why sir?". He then told me, "Your relatives are being killed and here you are." That's what he said. I replied, "You can call me a coward, but if the ones killing my relatives were from other countries, I would have fought them. Unfortunately, the ones killing them are also Filipinos. That I do not like." The Chief was so glad he clapped his hands. He then shouted, "Long live the Philippines! Long live the Philippines!" He told me that he was already convinced that I was a good person, and therefore he issued me an ID. He then told me not to go outside while my friends were still in prison. Those were terrible times. I was really nervous during that time. I was alone and a simple mistake could send me to prison. Nobody knew me there. Nobody could help me.

Had it not been for that massacre, we would have all been professionals by now. We feel sorry for those who did not finish their studies because of what happened to our properties. That was what we experienced but, God willing, we got scholarships and I ended up graduating from Magsaysay College because of my perseverance and the support of my siblings. Even if there was nothing more to eat, we were still determined. I even became a vendor in General Santos City while I was still wearing my school uniform. What was important was to continue my education, because every time I remembered my father, it drove me crazy. It is really difficult to acquire wealth that is not inherited; wealth obtained from hard work will, in the end, disappear in a snap. Anyone would be driven insane. My father did not die from the massacre but from the depression it brought about. He became ill. Allah will take care of the families involved.

### ***“The unity of Muslims started to grow”***

In the early 1970s rumours were spreading that Muslim-dominated regions were in chaos. Stories circulated that Muslims were persecuted by government troops and that the ILAGA massacred Muslims in remote areas. I heard stories that there were Muslims from Tawi-Tawi massacred by the military in Corregidor, Bataan. I also learned that the Muslims organised armed groups, such as the Black Shirts in Cotabato, the Barracuda in Lanao, and the Green Berets in Jolo, and civic organisations such as the Ansar El Islam and others in defence of their community and religion. These groups would later unite under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Between 1971-1972, we were the very first individuals recruited by an organised group here; we were first batch to graduate from basic training under the supervision of the so-called “Top 90”. We were more than 40; to be exact, there were 46 of us. At that time we were asked individually if we would be able to control ourselves not to divulge our top-secret mission



to undergo rigid training to our parents, relatives, best friends, even to our own family. Our training was branded as “Black Shirt”. During that time we had no further knowledge about the organisation we had affiliated with. We were instructed to take an oath, swearing 11 guiding principles. First: to defend the Bangsamoro homeland and our religion Islam. Second: to never surrender our aspirations till death. Third: not to participate in gambling activities. Fourth: not to commit adultery. Fifth: not to commit robbery. Sixth: if captured, not to betray the leaders of our organisation. Seventh: not to put anybody’s life at risk. Eighth: anyone harming our organisation (even our own parents or close ones) will be executed. Ninth: not to be controlled, commanded or hired to kill the leaders of our organisation, not even to identify them, by any Datu, any leader or any wealthy individuals. Tenth: to never divulge the location of our training ground. I am sorry I have already forgotten number eleven, the last one.

After this training, thousands of Muslim men enlisted themselves in the organisation and went through military training. It started in 1971. In 1972, the organisation had become completely operationalised and we received our rigid training. It was also the year when the Philippine Constabulary started offensives. Their front line groups were the ILAGA. Their leaders came from Isulan, Marbel, South and North Cotabato.

It was not called MNLF yet. The Muslims founded an association known as “Ansar el Islam”. More or less, there were 77 members who attended the first meeting. Ansar el Islam means “Defenders of Islam”. Many believed that it was the alliance of ulama<sup>11</sup> and scholars who helped each other in the name of Islam. The unity of Muslims started to grow. When we arrived here in Basilan, we held a meeting because it was insinuated that we should fight against the government. For many, the problem was how to carry out the fighting when we did not even have firearms. But for others, fighting could be done anytime, even without weapons. The plan was to conduct training in Basilan without the knowledge of the government. Later, the training started to widen its circle.

The MNLF was a result of the Jabitah Massacre. Young men from Jolo were assembled in Simunul and they were brought to Corregidor Island to be trained as soldiers. The objective of the Marcos Government was to bring these men to Sabah and claim Borneo. These men objected, so they were

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<sup>11</sup> The term “Ulama” refers to a body of Muslim scholars or religious leaders. In its singular form Aleem refers to a person who has graduated in Arabic education.

massacred by officials from Major Martilino's programme. Those young men were our relatives.

Since there was a match in the purposes of the groups Nur Misuari and Ansar el Islam, they united and the organisation was called the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Eventually, Nur Misuari arrived in 1972. He introduced himself as Abdulaziz from Jolo. Eventually, in the course of several months of him staying here we finally established a mother camp and over 100 routine forces steadily secured the area. The influential personalities that served as pillars of the organisation were Salipada K. Pendatun, Datu Udtog Matalam, Rashid Lucman, Domocao Alonto and a governor of Jolo, but I forgot his name. At that time, the Top 90 batch settled here. They continuously organised the masses and actively supervised military trainings among the Muslim constituents. The recruitment intensified and spread rapidly. Afterwards, those locally trained members who belonged to the adult category and had attained higher education were selected to undergo training abroad; they were called the "Top 300 batch". They departed here between 1972-1973 led by Nur Misuari and they returned in 1974. The ILAGA seldom attacked us because they always experienced heavy losses but they were continuously burning houses when they had a chance.

Chairman Nur Misuari declared our official name to be the Moro National Liberation Front on June 15, 1972. This historical event was held in a place named Gadungan, located on the opposite side of the Kran River. The night after the declaration, the Chairman decisively pulled out the troops, boarding pump boats with weapons. The Top 90 batch officers were deployed and assigned to different areas with armed forces. They were assigned to their own respective communities in Davao, South Cotabato, Cotabato, Maguindanao and other parts of the Mindanao islands.





## Chapter

*“The saying ‘better fighting than  
being oppressed’ became popular  
in our village”*

3



***“If I moved alone, I could not do it, so I joined the group”***

In 1979, I learned that some members of the MNLF broke away and established the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) under the leadership of Ustadz Salamat Hashim. I was attracted to the new faction because it carried the name of Islam, thus, right after my graduation from secondary education in 1981, I immediately joined the group. I underwent re-training for the basic military course. My first engagement with the enemy was so frightening.

I learned from those experiences that the maltreated are forced to fight back.

One day in our fishing village at Panglima Sugala, five fishermen were apprehended and alleged to be members of the MNLF by the Philippine marines. I personally knew these men were only poor fishermen. But the soldiers insisted that these men were rebels. They were pushed, punched and kicked. They were slapped, spat upon and humiliated in public. It was a terrible, disgusting; the most inhuman treatment of human beings I have ever witnessed in my life. It was so painful for me to watch fellow Moros treated like animals by men supposed to be protectors of the people. It was a disheartening for me that I could not do anything to help these fellow Moros. I felt so helpless. That moment was inscribed in my mind and I was easily persuaded to join the MNLF, believing that this group would emancipate the Moros from the abuses of the Philippine military.

There was no respect for human rights at that time. When they arrived at our barangay, they saw me and interviewed me. They asked me my name, and so I gave them my name. They asked me if I was a rebel and I told them that I was not a rebel because only those who rebelled against the word of Allah or God are rebels. I told them they were the ones who should be labelled as rebels because they did not follow the laws of God. Then they asked me, “Why would you want to be separated from the Philippines?” I told them that I was not an MNLF member. Unfortunately, they found my bag where I hid my uniform and they saw patches of the MNLF. The soldiers surrounded me and told me that I was going to die. They took turns in punching and kicking me, left and right. Then they saw a copy of the Tripoli Agreement. They forced the first three pages into my mouth. After that, they poured a gallon of water down my throat until I was not able to speak. With Allah’s mercy, I managed to swallow the three pages of the Tripoli Agreement. They forced me to come with them to the boundary of Munai and Kauswagan, Lanao del



Norte. Even the women and children were harmed. There was this instance when an old lady was forced to go naked and wear some objects on her body. Then they laughed at her. She was treated worse than a doll. I told them I own a small cow and we could roast it so he allowed me to return as long as I would get my uncle to deliver the cow when I got home. When I arrived near our barangay, I lost consciousness and was rushed to Mapandi Hospital. I can still feel the damage they did to me. Whenever I defecate, it takes quite some time before I can finish. In fact, it usually takes me around one hour to go to the toilet. Everyone of us knows what happened during Martial Law.

The ILAGA from Cotabato came and recruited settlers in our community who were our friends. At the same time the military were very strict, especially to Muslims because the country was placed under Martial Law. The ILAGA were armed and scary. We felt the tension, which caused some families to seek safer places. For me, before the situation became worse, I took heed of the advice of the elders to take shelter before the rain comes. Therefore I joined the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as a sort of protection from the ruthlessness of the ILAGA and the abuses of the military. I was trained as combatant in the nearest MNLF training camp, but because I was very young at the time, I was not assigned to the combat field. My

assignment was to transport combatants with my motorized boat. In 1976 I heard that the MNLF, under the leadership of Prof. Nur Misuari, signed a peace agreement with the Government of the Philippines. It was my assumption that after the signing of the agreement, peace would prevail, thus I continued my studies until I completed secondary education, though I still continued to do my assigned tasks. However, I was disappointed to find that years after the truce nothing good happened to the Moros. Instead their plight actually got worse, which caused some men with arms to do un-Islamic activities. I was dismayed about how events turned out and I lost my enthusiasm to serve on the frontlines.

It was the government's fault that the number of MNLF members continued to grow. People were prompted to join by the wrongdoings committed by the soldiers such as burning houses and taking belongings. These acts were all committed against civilians in different towns here and resulted in retaliation.

My niece, a cousin's daughter and a teenager, were studying and were shot to death by the soldiers. They were not rebels, she was a student. I witnessed it. After that event, I changed my mind and wanted to be recruited. I thought, "This is what these soldiers are doing; we can not get revenge if we're not part of a group, if we don't have any weapons." I thought that if I tried alone, I could not do it, so I joined the group. We had no problem when it came to ammunition. We had trouble over food and sleep. I ate cassava with its leaves and banana was served as vegetables. I learned what poverty is.

I joined the MNLF to achieve peace in Mindanao. We want Mindanao to enjoy the same resources being enjoyed by people in Luzon; to get what is due to the people of Mindanao.

In 1979 they came to my school and seized me. They interrogated me about the whereabouts of Usman Sali, of which I had no idea since there were many people with our surname. They wanted me to point out any MNLF member I saw. I did not know even one member. I told them I was a student. That's how it all started. My uncle told me to change my surname. They made me their bellboy and assaulted me physically. I told myself, "When I grow up, I will become a rebel."

On August 26, 1971, they massacred people in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat. My brother and his wife were killed and my cousins were hit but survived. I

was seven or eight years old then. Despite being young, I also felt what they feared. I knew how to be frightened at that time. When I learned how to grip a firearm, I opted to join the organisation to avenge my relatives.

They reached my father, decapitated him and burned our house. His body was retrieved, and looking at his corpse I had only one thing on my mind, "When I grow up, I will avenge him." Yes, that was the reason I joined. I didn't study secular education because every time the thought of my father entered my mind and I couldn't think well. What I want is the restoration of our house that was burned and compensation for the 40 sacks of rice inside.

Many young men in our village joined the Moro National Liberation Front. I went with them during training, but one of the MNLF leaders who knew me and my family advised me to go home and continue my studies because, according to him, we needed not only combatants but also educated Moros. Because of my interest in education, I followed his advice and managed to study despite the danger of being killed by the ILAGA. For me, I still believe that education for the Moros is the answer to the problems. However, the situation worsened; fishermen were afraid to go out fishing, many farmers abandoned their farms and businesses failed. We experienced economic difficulties; many heads of families did not know where to get the next meal for their families. The situation forced me to quit school because I had to help my parents.

I joined the MNLF because my father was a member. At first I was afraid, especially during the first encounter. I was also afraid of being apprehended, tortured and savaged like what happened to some of my companions. Another reason I was scared was my limited skills in warfare. I was very young at the time. But I still continued as an active member of the front and learned a lot.

When I was young I saw the conflict with my very own eyes. So when I grew up, I questioned why Muslims in the Philippines do not have power and political positions in the national government. I was in my second year of college when they invited me to join. I started to be a part of it. That was how I started to become part of the struggle. We had a series of rallies and forums, and also trained at the same time in preparation for our activities. I was trained in the jungle with the MILF fighters. I saw the plight of our people, the children dying in the evacuation centres, the houses and

properties burned, the animals killed, and the combatants killed by the armed forces. The orphans and widows were crying; they were helpless, and that's the main thing that convinced me that this must not happen again to our people. This conflict in Mindanao must be resolved as soon as possible and peacefully because if we go farther than that, I do not know if our people can survive such hardship.

When I was in college, I still continued my studies despite my engagements with the MILF. I was supposed to complete my studies in four years, but I finished college in 10 years.

Engaging in Jihad was my own decision. I spent my own money on it and my own property that I acquired from a small business.

It took too long. Those people I left thought that I was already dead. All the captives were beaten with firearms. I don't know how but it was Allah who helped me survive. I am now uneducated since we were always evacuating. Just imagine - I started engaging in Jihad in 1978.

In 1983 I got married and began working in small buy and sell enterprise. Unfortunately, I was imprisoned at one stage because of a false accusation by a non-Moro competitor. In jail, I realised that Moro people should be knowledgeable about their basic rights so that they are not exploited by the non-Moro oppressors. When I was released from jail, I enrolled in college. I was not comfortable anymore in school. I was disturbed by the suffering of my relatives and fellow villagers. The saying "it is better to fight than being oppressed" became popular in our village.

On May 13, 2001 a naval boat docked at Pangutaran Island supported by the Air Force. After three days of 'clearing', the Marines landed on the island and killed anyone they met and burned down the houses. Stores were ransacked by the soldiers. After that incident, the media came but their findings were not reported. I learned later that the soldiers told the media not to release any report for six months. We were allowed to bury the dead. Some were burned inside their houses. We found the body of a girl hanged. People suspected that she was raped before being killed. Skeletons of children were found in burned houses. The truth is I cannot describe my feelings. I can never imagine Filipinos treating other Filipinos like that. I was young at the time but the memories are engraved in my mind. Those memories haunted me until I decided to join Jihad.





***“It is very difficult to become a mujahidin”***

A mujahidin's life is difficult. Lack of food, sleep and fear of encountering the enemy. I learned how to be resourceful. It's heavy and when you are engaged in battle, you no longer think that you can still return to your family. It's both sad and difficult, especially because I have kids. It's difficult to leave loved ones but the will of Allah will prevail. To Him we shall return.

Throughout my life, I was involved in 86 hard fought encounters. In one fight, I was hit with 18 bullets in my legs and could not move. Fortunately our commanding officer helped me and kept our morale high, even though he was also hit.

What was really surprising were the bees that dwelled in the branches of the trees. By the grace and will of Allah they were strategically located on the boundaries where the armies were positioned. Every time they fired at our position the bees were disturbed and they scattered and swarmed in the direction of the army and stung them. They never came to our location.



Indeed, it was by the grace of Allah they only stung those ILAGA and Philippine Constabulary. When the soldiers tried to escape, who numbered more than a battalion, they were chased by the bees.

I was the number one warrior. During those times, we did not care about our lives. If it's war, it's war! There were times that we ambushed. There were also times that we were the ones being ambushed. My nephew was killed and that affected me. Had it not been for that, the fight meant nothing to me. I recovered my dead nephew 10 metres away from a military ambush. Two others were also killed. I tried to recover their bodies even though I was wounded in the fight.

At Camp Al Barka in August 22, 1999, I witnessed high-powered arms used by the military during their attack on us. This was repeated in 2007. After the attack, when the marines left their assets, they beheaded the dead soldiers so that it would appear like it was a MILF act. I suspected that it was intended to derail the ongoing peace negotiations.

The most unforgettable battle I was involved in was in Solon. Four more days and it would have been a month long fight. I was engaged in gunfire in a swamp during Ustadz Salamat's time. There were more than 40 men with me. I suffered broken bones, but I survived. It was Allah's will.

I am sharing these experiences so that people will appreciate the values of discipline, determination and perseverance in pursuit of one's goals in life. The MILF made me a better person, a more religious, disciplined and determined person.

The first thing that comes to you during your first experience in battle is fear, especially when you are being shot at and you see casualties and blood being spilled. So, there was a certain degree of fear there. But eventually, after shots have been fired and you have already used your gun, the fear goes away and how to survive becomes the first thing on your mind. Once you have overcome the fear and your will to survive, what comes next is how to fight back at the enemy.

Following many encounters between the armed forces and the MNLF in Tawi-Tawi, the province was declared no man's land for about three months in 1981. During those months any vessel or boat detected by the navy or

air force in Tawi-Tawi Sea was shot. People in Tawi-Tawi were isolated. They suffered because no one could go fishing or go to other places for food.

I grew up in a society where Moros experience injustices. I felt and witnessed how they were been oppressed and discriminated. My feelings and observations persuaded me to join the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the belief that this group was fighting to free the Moros from the injustices they were experiencing. The worst days in my life while I was in the MILF was during the “all-out war against the MILF” declared by President Estrada<sup>12</sup>. Many died during that war; properties were destroyed and civilians were displaced. I saw the cruelty of the war. It was fortunate that the next two presidents after Estrada believed in the advantage of negotiations over the use of arms.

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<sup>12</sup> President Estrada's (1998-2001) “all-out war” was declared in 2000









# *Chapter*

*“We don’t wish for anything  
but peace”*

4



### ***“After 10 years, I want to be able to sleep in peace”***

I don't want to remember anymore because I feel something terrible in my nerves. We evacuated and looked for our destiny in Cotabato City. However, we were not used to being street vendors. Our life became so miserable.

That was not a good time to live in. Earning a livelihood during those times was really hard. We could not go outside because of fear. Sometimes we prayed in the mosque. Only a few of us would do so, since most of us were afraid. I would like the youth to read this book. I would like them to know our experience. It is still best to prevent this kind of scenario from happening again because if it happens again, then the people will suffer. Let us support the solution to this problem so that it does not happen again.

While riding a bus, I got acquainted with a Christian sister. She refused to answer all of my questions. She told me her reasons. I said she should not be scared because according to Islamic faith we are obliged to protect her while she is here in our place.

All our properties were damaged; our livelihood was lost. We left the place without anything and at the height of the harvest period, but we could not do anything. Corn was abandoned, some was already in a sack; some was still in the field. That was our fate. If I was not asked for this story, I would not tell it again because it is so emotional. We wish for peace in our place and our livelihood. We don't wish for anything but peace.

After 10 years, I want to be able to sleep in peace. I want these areas to be peaceful and people to be employed. The younger generation should not experience what we have gone through. The concept of peace is attained if Muslims adhere to the laws of Islam, the hadith of Prophet Muhammad, SAW.

After everything happened I thought that perhaps there would also come a time when I would be able to avenge what happened to us, Allah willing. But now that an agreement has been signed between the government and the MILF I'm very grateful to Allah because I am still alive and I will be able to experience being governed by the Bangsamoro Government.

I am very grateful that I am still alive, Alhamdulillah. I witnessed the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). I am looking forward to living with peace in the Bangsamoro.

If the government is sincere in their actions, if the MILF and the government cooperate, then we can be peaceful. As of now, only non-government organisations (NGOs) provide help. They became pacifiers and educators of the people. They told the people not to fight because we are of one blood. All of us are Filipinos. Some understood, others did not. That is what happened here. The NGOs help us. The government provided relief, but it did not reach the civilians. I do not know how that happened.

Hopefully, the Filipino people and their leaders, as well as the Bangsamoro people and their leaders, will reach a stage of political maturity to resolve this through democratic means. You cannot curtail the aspirations of people for freedom because doing so would mean depriving them of their human rights. Ten years from now I would like to see that choice has been returned to the people, meaning they will have the choice to determine their future political status.

We want people to know that this conflict in Mindanao has very deep roots. It has historical roots. This conflict is about justice. It is about the Bangsamoro people reasserting their right to self-determination. It is about correcting the historical as well as current injustices done to the Bangsamoro people by the Philippine state. We want people to understand the struggle of the Bangsamoro people. Unless there is understanding, people will always look at it from different angles. The only way to resolve this conflict is to compromise.

The signed peace agreement was aimed at alleviating the hardship faced by those of us who were left with nothing; those of us who have nothing to eat, who are living on the outskirts, those whose lands were taken from them. There are still many who are suffering from poverty.









Look at us. We have been trying to endure everything. I want compensation. Let's not mind the dead because they cannot be resurrected anymore. What is important is for our rights to be reinstated for the sake of our people. We were not educated because we had no means to go to school. Our homeland was taken away from us by those who were deceitful.

I hope that with the coming of the Bangsamoro Government, the life of the people of Manili will change to a more progressive life.

With the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, peace and order in Barangay Malisbong has become more stable today compared to the past. The Christians here are now are very supportive of the peace process.



The majority of the non-Moros in our municipality are sceptical about the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro<sup>13</sup>. For them, the CAB will not work. I engaged in active advocacy regarding this, explaining the content and essence of the CAB. I also tell people the adverse consequences if Congress rejected the CAB. We hope that Congress will give peace a chance.

If you are a Muslim, a Bangsamoro, you cannot say negative things about the signing of the peace agreement. Even the Christians are into it. The reality is that we want to recover what have been taken from us. We want to go home. They asked to buy our house and land but we refused because that is our only property left. We want to use our house and land. We want to go home. We consider it our ancestral house because all of us were born there. There was a time when I touched the beam of our house. The Christians asked me why. I told them that this is our house. They told me that they have already bought it, but I told them that we did not sell it. They have a son who is an engineer in Saudi Arabia. He asked if we needed money; I said, "No. What we want is to return back to our house." A judge asked me to go home; he told me that he is going to call me, but up to now I received no call. I want our house back in our possession.

There was a seminar in Camp Darapanan. We met the soldiers. They waved their hands at us; they said we are at peace. They conveyed a greeting of peace. They said peace, and we were like friends. Nowadays, the soldiers are no longer scary. It's very far from how it was.

Before, we were always evacuating from one place to another. I went through 18 different evacuation areas. It is almost peaceful now. Probably it begun from the time the MILF started negotiations with the government. At least we enjoy the effects of the concerted effort of the Bangsamoro. I am praying to Allah that our hopes will materialise, and that the negotiations will succeed so our objectives will be peacefully settled. Consequently, we can practice our religious rites freely and worshipped Allah without disturbance.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was signed by the Government of the Philippines and the MILF on March 27, 2014 at the Malacañang Palace.*

***“Everybody in the next generation should experience peace”***

As commander, I was invited to witness the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro on March 27, 2014 at the Malacañang Palace. During the signing, the ladies seated near me shed tears and I understood why because it was really a touching moment. I remembered our sacrifices, my comrades who were martyred, the civilians who were caught in the crossfire, and the difficulties experienced by the displaced families in the evacuation centres, especially the children and the old people. I prayed at that moment that the CAB shall end all these bad memories and bring a new beginning of a brighter future for the Bangsamoro people.

I am happy and content about the developments in the negotiations between the MILF and the government. I am confident that the Philippine Congress will pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) that will govern the Bangsamoro. For me, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro is the best agreement signed between the Moros and the Philippine Government, and the last hope to bring peace and development in Mindanao. My optimism supports my vision that after 10 years I will become a businessman in the progressive and peaceful Bangsamoro.

I am very optimistic that the CAB will be successful because President Aquino is very supportive. Thus, I am hopeful that 10 years from now the Bangsamoro people will be on par with the settlers in terms of socio-economic conditions. I know that the Zamboanga Peninsula is not part of the Bangsamoro to be established, but I believe that the Moros living in this area shall receive the same benefits received by people within the Bangsamoro territory.

Actually, I am very positive about the peace agreement. I am expecting good things to happen because wars in Muslim communities destroy our opportunities. I am expecting that our Muslim brothers will be educated, enjoy an elevation of status and be independent. When it will happen, our Muslim brothers can conduct their spiritual obligations freely without fear. Without fear of poverty, being shot, discrimination, or fooled by non-Muslim brothers.

The only thing that we can do as civilians is to encourage people to participate. If they don't participate, then they should accept whatever plan this government and the MILF can come up with. We have to help



convince people that are against this situation. We cannot deny that there are so many antagonists because there are divisions among us Muslims. What we can do is to explain to the ordinary people that this agreement can help us get our opportunities back.

I think this agreement is good. It will help solve the problem in Mindanao. Unfortunately, I can't say anything about it since it has not started yet. We still don't know what will happen in the future. All we can do is pray for a better future.

Ten years from now I will still be very active in advocacy. We do not know the future of the MILF. As far as we know, the MILF will be transformed into a political party. I'm not a political man. I'm more of a social activist, maybe not in the armed struggle, but in the political struggle. I think that 10 years from now we will have a progressive government and enjoy and be thankful for our blessings.

The peace agreement itself is a great contribution to peace and reconciliation in Mindanao. If we do not have the peace agreement, I don't see any possibility of having peace and reconciliation. I'm referring now to the

two assertions. This peace agreement is a compromise and the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) are products of this compromise. I think these agreements are the best contributions we can participate in to restore peace and justice in our homeland.

The laws of Islam should not be superseded. If they are bypassed, then there will be conflict. It's like Muslims were given candy to stop crying, just like children. They were promised something but it was not given. What is important is that they should fulfil their promise. If they fulfil their promise then we don't need to use our guns anymore. We need to become peaceful. I don't want any conflict. I want peace. For me, what I want is that my fellow countrymen, both Muslims and Christians, be united so that there is peace. Like siblings. There should be no gap. We are all Filipino. You cannot call me Japanese. You cannot call me an American. We are all the same. We only differ in religion. There are plenty of religions here in the Philippines. What is important is we all strive to be better. The Qur'an favours none. Oppression is forbidden.

My message would be to give thanks. To give thanks to our government, especially President Noyon Aquino for his sincerity.

Christians or Muslims, I believe the war during the Martial Law period is enough. It is better to have an agreement that is good for the benefit of the future generations. Everybody in the next generation should experience peace.

I am not so sure why politicians have different views; for example at the senate level. They really do not want to grant us our rights. Let us just pray that the peace process will continue.

I hope and pray that Allah will grant us our aim to have peace in Mindanao, because it is the last card of the Bangsamoro. We cannot wait another 17 years.

I was so delighted when I heard that finally the right formula to resolve the Moro quest for self-determination has been found. Although I was not in Manila at that time, I watched the event on television. I understand that signing the CAB does not solve everything for there are still many things to do. I will continue to do advocacy to educate the Moros on the necessity of being united and firm in our commitment to work for our freedom. Jihad is



not only an armed struggle, but can also be a peaceful existence. Ten years from now I see a developed and united Bangsamoro people. Tawi-Tawi will not be left behind in terms of social and economic development.

If the peace process continues, Praise be to Allah, I believe Mindanao will become more peaceful, not only for Muslims but also for other tribes.

The peace process, for me, is good. The conflicts in Mindanao are mitigated because of it. My dream is simple. I wish for no more conflict, I wish for a better livelihood and I wish that my children finish their education. I really hope there will be no more conflict in our area and I want to help the poor people. I just want a normal life, a life of a civilian without problems. I want to stay with my family in a normal situation because nowadays when duty calls, I have to leave them. We still have problems at the moment. We have not yet attained a better tomorrow and we are still aspiring for genuine peace. If ever peace is achieved, I want all the Muslims and other tribes to be equal. For instance, if there is foreign aid, I hope everyone benefits, including the ones here in Basilan. If we do not pursue equality, maybe in the future people from other religions might say that Muslims are not capable of being





leaders. I want to see equality between Muslims and Christians so that we can convince them. If we cannot convince them to support Bangsamoro, we can at least show them that the help we are getting should be extended to them. I want equal footing because if they don't see us as paragon of virtues, we won't be able to convince them to be one with us.

I would like to tell to every Moro that wherever you are, be proud of your identity as a Moro, and always put forward the importance of Islam in your daily life. Seek knowledge, for it will set you free.

The situation now seems to be favourable. There is no reason you can't focus on your daily livelihood activities because there are no disturbances and conflicts happening in our areas. But you know, despite the peaceful situation we are enjoying now, if you do not work hard, naturally you will not have harvests and in effect, you will remain poor throughout your life. Now, I want to perhaps try corn production.

With regards to peace and order before and now, if I have to compare, I am confident in the present situation because I have peace of mind.

Because of the signed agreement we will not evacuate anymore. We are happy with the peace process, especially those coming from Kauswagan. My wife is there and she told me that we can build a house and sleep peacefully because of the peace process.

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement for Bangsamoro is very nice. Whether it materialises or not, it is the will of Almighty Allah. My children and grandchildren will benefit from this agreement. I hope that what I have experienced will not be experienced by my grandchildren. A school should be avenue for learning, not an evacuation centre for evacuees.

Many were killed without justice, like animals. That is why Misuari organised the MNLF. Now the MILF have separated and have become independent from the MNLF. During those times, our children could not go to school because of the conflict. The ILAGA killed a lot of people. In return the Barakudas killed the Christians here in our area. That is why only a few of our children were educated. So, our livelihood was affected during Martial Law. Right now, the situation has slightly improved. Our people now have money and we never lose hope that our government will provide a solution to the problems of the Muslims, even if the results of this are still being anticipated. This is our history.

*Chapter*  
*“Peace means...”*

5

*... to surrender to the will of Allah. People should now realise that the only way to have the kind of peace we want is to have this peace based on justice. This is also a universal definition. Peace can and will only be possible if there is justice. Without justice there can never be peace.*

*... clarity. In Islam, there is no oppression, whoever you are. This should be the basis of the law. If you have committed a crime, then you are a criminal. It is just, whether you are rich or poor. That is real justice. Peace means unity. Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim, let's help each other in achieving peace.*

*... something that is so nice and beautiful. Nobody will be in trouble because there will be no conflict. People will understand each other and live harmoniously as neighbours in a community.*

*... development. People will be free to do what they want. They will enjoy their rights as human beings. If peace is lacking, like here in our place, soldiers who come here only see us like animals, especially if they are in power.*

*... serving justice to the oppressed. Authorities should respect the rights of the poor. Peace can be attained when people in authority serve the people and not abuse them. As Barangay Chairman, I experienced resolving family feuds between Moros and non-Moros. In the process, I maintained the utmost fairness and I was able to convince them to restore their previous relationships. Any place in the world can be peaceful when all the people observe the teachings of their religion because all religions teach respect, love, justice and understanding and abhor exploitation, oppression and injustice.*

*... unity, so we can achieve our goals and support our relatives and children who stand for Islam. Let us hope and pray to Allah that we will achieve what is destined for us today through unity. For that, I believe the best thing we can do together with my kith and kin, men and women alike, especially the chieftains, is to support the Bangsamoro Basic Law and unite to achieve our goal.*

*... unity and understanding. As days passed by, the previous good relationship between the Muslims and Christians in our village was restored. One of my children married a Bisaya. Some of my relatives were against it but for me intermarriage is one way of restoring and improving good relationships. I hope my experience with the ILAGA will not be repeated. I have already forgiven them. However, we must learn a lesson from it. We must be cautious all the times. I am praying that the CAB shall bring peace to us and to our children's children. Arms create troubles, thus, it is better to have no arms.*

*... good relationships with other people, regardless of religion, tribal affiliation and status in life. Everybody respects the rights of others and everybody has access to justice.*

*... respect for freedom and justice. There must be mutual respect between Christians and Muslims in the community. This means an absence of violence, and justice - especially for the poor.*

*... sincerity. If the government will not grant sincere peace to Bangsamoro then we will not achieve harmony. Peace is when the government grants us our rights according to what Islam says. Peace will then reign in our place, killings will cease and in turn, the Bangsamoro will live harmoniously in our homeland.*

*... tranquillity of the heart. When you are able to smile and go around without fear; when you can be with your family without any fear; when there will be respect between Muslims and the Christians.*

*... everybody's concern. If we return to being religious, then we can achieve complete peace. There will be no drugs, no looting, no killings. Public officials, both national and local, will stop stealing money from our country.*

*... "Kalilintad"<sup>14</sup>. This means you can sleep without disturbance, you earn a good living and there is justice. That is how I understand peace. Peace is when those who do not accept the agreement see the benefits of its implementation and understand what it means.*

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<sup>14</sup> Kalilintad is a Maguindanaoan word for peace

*... happiness. Happiness will come if there are better relationships between Muslims and Christians as well as the indigenous people.*

*... no wars. This means clean politics. Peace means a true government.*

*... no conflict. If ever someone would commit a crime, the MILF would run after them. It also means those who do not have a job will have a job. Especially if the Muslim countries in the world would help, then Mindanao would prosper.*

*... that you will be given what is rightfully yours. As a whole, it means the absence of war, the absence of conflict. I will have peace when my life becomes progressive, when I no longer have financial difficulties and when there's no more conflict around me. That's the time I'll have peace.*

*... it is not just the absence of war. Peace is comprehensive. It could be inner peace, spiritual peace, meaning when you are with your Creator, and peace with oneself, that you are content with what you have now. Not necessarily with all the material benefits from life, but to attain what you desire in life. For me, my contentment is to give our people justice after they have been oppressed by the colonial government. So, that is how I achieve my contentment. That is peace for me. In a larger context, peace means a solution to the political struggle of our people. If this perceived solution cannot give justice to the quest for self-determination, then there will be no peace. So, it is political. Peace also means security; that you can walk the streets without fear, without fear of reprisal from rido<sup>15</sup>, or drug addicts and criminals.*

*... control over our family members. Nothing will be lost, no kidnappings, no stealing. If there is no peace, then there would be no improvement in the economy. We need peace.*

*... justice. There can be no peace if there is injustice. With injustice, there is no longer peace. Peace with justice is true peace.*

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<sup>15</sup> Feuding between families and clans characterized by sporadic outbursts of retaliatory violence between families and kinship groups, as well as between communities.



*... no more rido, a better economy and the spread of Islam. We want the peace process between the MILF and the government to continue so we can end the conflict. The reason why we are staying here in Cagayan de Oro is to provide for our families. In Lanao it's really hard. We want to feel safe in Mindanao and that there will be change.*

*... good leadership - just like in the past, during the times of our ancestors. Before, if my grandmother gave an order it would be followed immediately. If she commanded that her men clean the surroundings, they would immediately get to work. Now, try calling your companions for help and they do not help you. That is the difference between our leaders in the past and now. For me, if rido is removed from our society, then we will be happy. Because that is the biggest problem, especially in Marawi City and Lanao del Sur, when you are always afraid that somebody might attack you because of your name.*

*... the absence of war, conflict and kidnapping.*

*... the absence of barbaric attitudes in people and the presence of strong faith in God Almighty among all citizens in a community.*

*... the absence of firearms in Basilan.*

*... the absence of injustice.*

*... the absence of illegal and immoral activities.*

*... mercy not only to people but to animals. When we slaughter animals, we don't use a stone, we do it in the name of Allah. Salam, which means peace, is one of the names of Allah. If I say as-salamu'alaykum, I say peace be with you, I offer you something great, because it's the name of God.*

*... those Bangsamoro. People without jobs will be employed, and those who did wrong doings will be given another chance. It is called Bangsamoro because it is for everyone. Peace is for everyone.*

*... a normal life for Bangsamoro. If there's no more war, peace will come and then we can live normal lives without conflicts. Nowadays, there are a lot of conflicts and many of the casualties are civilians, which I hope can be avoided. We should pray for those in the mountains, so that they will be given what's rightfully theirs and provided away to get an education.*

*... livelihood and education for our people who did not finish their studies.*

*... not having anyone else own what is yours and not own what others have. Peace is not letting anyone dictate to us except our own Bangsamoro Government.*

*... work, because during war there are no jobs.*

*... doing what we desire, going to places without fear.*

*... Kahanungan. Kasangyangan is peace but Kahanungan is complete order. Peace without order will lead to disarray. Kahanungan is an overall peace, peace of mind included. You actually lead peace. With peace comes better livelihoods for people. They will no longer have to fight each other. With Kahanungan, everything is incorporated, justice is there.*

*... minimised poverty. A man whose family members have nothing to eat in a day surely will do anything, even illegal or immoral activities, to feed his family.*

*... the absence of corruption and criminal elements.*

*... the implementation of the CAB.*

*... Basilan free of terrorists.*

*... education. If I didn't finish my studies, I could have been issued an arrest warrant by now. Despite of what happened to me before, I pursued my education and struggled to finish it. Another thing that motivated me is the embarrassment I would feel had I not*

*brought home a diploma. Sometimes, I was absent from my classes to volunteer in MNLF when there were battles but I always went back to school. The war I've been through is still on my mind now because the wounds I suffered then are still visible on my face.*

*... the pre-requisite to millions of livelihoods. In Sulu, livelihood without peace is useless. There should be peace first.*

*... financial assistance for the people.*

*... the implementation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. The Basic Law will show how we can achieve peace through better a government and justice system.*



## STORIES WE CANNOT FORGET

### ***If we flee, we will become evacuees and we will not be able to eat***

*On January 1, 1971, we were attacked by the ILAGA together with the Philippine Constabulary. We were at Barangay Napuk, Bunawan, Damakling. I was then 32 years old. I was already married and had my own family. They started firing their guns towards us in the afternoon, at four o'clock, and stopped at five o'clock in the morning. It was a long battle. We fought back during the gunfire. Our opponents withdrew because they saw that we were also armed, with weak weapons though. My father was hit and died. He was not brought to the hospital because there was no hospital nearby during that time. I witnessed my father's death.*

*When they withdrew, relatives of mine, both far and near from me, even those not related to me and my neighbours, all fled. There were only few of us left. I didn't leave because my father told me not to. He said, "If we flee, we will become evacuees and we will not be able to eat." But in the end we were also forced to run away because they burned our houses. They burnt my concrete house, which cost me approximately 800,000 pesos. Before burning it they confiscated our beddings and some belongings from the kitchen. They also burnt my bakeshop that was still under construction. Also, the third house where I used to stock palay for consumption and seedlings was burnt down. When they burned it, there were 300 bags of rice there and 3,000 pesos worth of high-breed palay seeds. When we fled to Damakling my 10-hectare coconut plantation was abandoned. My abandoned plantation would have earned 10,000 pesos at that time. These were not the only houses burned down. I have a nephew whose house was also included in the arson attacks. All the houses in the vicinity were burnt when they attacked us.*

*It was raining hard when we reached Damakling. The soldiers' aircraft kept bombing us, so I dug a pit, placed my child there and covered it with coconut lumber. I was already panicking and left the place for Kalyan, Buluan, just over there. The aircraft bombed us again.*



***My daughter was breastfeeding and I had no milk.***

*I was home when the soldiers took my husband. They captured him and told him to come with them. I told him not to go with them because if he did, he'd surely die but he said it wasn't possible to resist, and so he went with them. I insisted that he shouldn't go, but one soldier told me to let him go. He was brought to the masjid.*

*I did not go with them because I was still breastfeeding my baby. I had just given birth. She was a female who died from starvation in Palimbang during the time of massacre. We suffered a lot from the Navy. My daughter was breastfeeding and I had no milk. The heat emitted by the sun was too much, and the boat was made of iron. My daughter died in Palimbang due to starvation. My daughter died because she had nothing to eat; there was no milk. She died after we climbed off the boat, when we were on the shore. She got sick and died because she starved and there was no milk. She was only 20 days old. I had had complications, but I went to my grandmother and my aunt there gave me a medicine to counter the problems brought about by childbirth and so I took it.*

*I could move around a little. Besides, my older son could already stand if he gripped on something for support. He was one year old at the time. I wasn't able to bring clothes. We were forced to leave our house and the soldiers told us to leave our belongings behind. We were taken by force. I remember how we suffered due to a lack of food. She was starved of milk and was buried by a man. They prayed over her corpse. They were two young boys who prayed for her because back in those days, all the grown up men were already seized. They were my grandchildren. I told them to utter Bismillah (in the name of Allah).*

*I could not believe what happened to my daughter. After two days when we finally got back home, each of us bought one kilogram of rice. It was the only supply we had. I was consumed with self-pity. I felt like dying too. I wanted to die. But thinking about Allah, where else would our children go but to meet their death in the end.*

*Every time it crosses my mind, I cry. During that time, when I lie down, I cry almost not believing that my daughter died and thinking that it would be a lot worse if her father also died.*

*It was only two days after they were brought to the masjid when I heard explosions and I thought all the men had been killed. Two days later we went when I heard gunfire. Yes, he was gone. Yes, my husband died in the masjid. The last time we met was when the soldiers took him. He would have been taken pity on our child who died from starvation.*

*For me, it taught me to be calm because the best person is a patient one. I was told to bury our bad experience because it is better to be patient. But every time I lay down, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't sleep because I always remember my daughter who died from hunger. Sometimes I prayed that it doesn't happen again.*

***If I go into details, I won't be able to recount to you what we went through***

*I can only tell you the outline of the story because if I go into details, I won't be able to recount to you what we went through.*

*At around three o'clock in the afternoon in Barangay Maguling, we were told to flee because the soldiers were conducting an operation and they would kill whomever they capture. So we ran away to Kran and stayed there for one day.*

*At four o'clock in the morning the next day after taking our "saul"<sup>16</sup>, we packed our belongings and ate some food. There were more than 30 of us in the house who weren't able to eat for "saul". Our food was scattered because the cannon exploded and dispersed us. It was already morning and while my father was trying to leave my grandparent in Kamalan, he was hit by a cannon. Myself and two other relatives lost sight of my father while we were running away. He looked for us because we were also separated from my mother. He was bleeding while searching for us. He found us in a place where not even a dog could enter. We descended from the mountain because the explosions ceased after the people finally surrendered. My father immediately brought us to my mother.*

*The men and women were segregated from one another. My father was brought to the masjid. He was seated on a table; he did not receive medical aid and was not fed, even though he was bleeding the time. I just fetched coconut juice to give to my husband. The next morning, the soldiers brought us to the shore and afterwards let us board a boat. Later on, we got off and gathered together. Some of us were left behind because the boat was already full. The soldier told me that they'd come back for us. We stayed with the soldiers. They were looking for female relatives who were unmarried but couldn't find them because we hid them and made them look like pillows. I don't know why they were looking for them. They did not find our cousin because we made her look like a pillow.*

<sup>16</sup> Meal eaten at dawn before the observance of fasting of the day during the month of Ramadhan

*So we rode in the naval boat and the soldiers carried me. I felt like my ribs were fractured because of the way they gripped me. We were placed above on the deck. We were very thirsty the next morning and couldn't take the heat of the sun. There was water available mixed with flour and we had no choice but to drink it. It was contaminated but we still drank it. My younger siblings drank from it, too. Many children and women died because of drinking that water. We didn't eat anything and when we came ashore their plan was to capsize our boat. They disembarked us around noon. We raised our hands because the soldiers wanted to sweep us up and make it appear that the women committed suicide. When they swept us up, this is what we went through. That's what I can tell you about what happened. We intended to retrieve the jewellery owned by my mother but failed to do so because we were scared to death. My mother had a lot of gold that she never got back. We hurried home and did not bother getting our four carabaos. All the houses were burnt and nothing was left in our store, which was really huge. The five-hectare sugarcane plantation owned of my father was gone. My elder sibling and I heard explosions that we never thought were gunfire shooting people.*

*Every time I remember it, I couldn't believe they were my uncle and cousins. That's the story I can tell you. Our experience was filled with such suffering that it will make you cry every time you tell the story. We were still very young the time they stepped on us, those soldiers stepped on our bodies.*

### ***They must have killed our brothers***

*Every time someone arrived, they would summon that person to enter the mosque. The soldiers let me enter the mosque. Women were placed inside the barangay hall.*

*Every morning from then on, they would pick 15, seven, sometimes 20 of us. A man wearing a mask would choose whom to get. I asked myself why they were doing that. The selected men were gathered together. My brother, who once went to Dubai, was also selected. I wanted to accompany him but the soldier refused. The soldier told me to go to a corner because I was too young. Ten minutes later, we heard an explosion on the east side of the mosque. They must have killed our brothers.*

*They made us eat coconut that was put in a drum in a heartless manner. Sometimes, even copra was offered to the people who would grab and eat it fast because they had not eaten well for five days. Even getting drinking water was so difficult for us because they did not allow people to go out. The two doorways were guarded by men holding machine guns. I was thinking that the soldiers would end up killing all of us. I did not go out because I was waiting and observing the adults who conspired to steal the soldiers' firearms and escape but many days passed by and their plan did not happen.*

*I decided to leave because if I didn't, I would end up dead as well. I was determined to leave with my two cousins. I led the group and we were able to escape.*

*I was able to move away from the mosque. I saw a horse but it ran off. I passed by the graveyards and on to the swamp. I stayed in the graveyard for a while because I couldn't pass it. The soldiers built a fence beside the rice mill of Kagi Nacional. The road was about 10 to 20 kilometres. Around one o'clock, I was sitting at the graveyard and watching the soldiers face every direction. I didn't lose hope that I'd still be able to escape. When I was crossing, they saw me*



*and fired their guns in my direction. I went through the foxhole beside a house but they were below the foxhole. I managed to get through. I crawled and came across a foxhole beneath a mango tree the soldiers digged. They immediately found out that I was there and shot me. I moved to one side and was hit. I ran fast trying to avoid being hit again, I crawled to a swampy area which had a lot of bombs. They stopped pursuing me then. They didn't care about me after I reached grassy land. I went to Kabuling as the sun rose. I observed the houses in Kabuling and noticed that none of them were destroyed yet. I went to the woods and caught up with Chairman Kimboy and others in Lamitan. We're relatives and found one another there.*

*They asked me where the others were, our brothers and elders. I told them that the soldiers placed the women in the barangay hall while the men were detained in the large masjid of Malisbung. I added that they select 10 of us every morning, sometimes 15, 20 or 30. My cousins arrived and we saw each other.*

*I went back to Kibling and saw soldiers from afar. I think some of them were Christian civilians because I saw one of them wearing civilian clothes and not a soldier's uniform.*

### ***The effect of it all on our lives was huge***

*I live in Barrio Karawan, Indanan, Sulu. I was born and raised there. After graduating from elementary school in 1986, I came to Jolo town to continue my studies. Even though there were patrols, we sacrificed and still attended our school. Sometimes, we came across soldiers. They did not harm us, but we were frightened because we were still under Martial Law.*

*I was old enough when we left our place so I remember everything. I remember the cannons, mortar and the gunfire. When the soldiers conducted their operations, we vacated our area and went with the MNLF combatants because other barrios did not accept us, knowing we were outsiders. Before there was 'Bagong Lipunan'<sup>17</sup> in our neighbouring barrio and if the area was under their control, we could not settle there as they wouldn't accept us for their security. So, instead we joined the MNLF.*

*We got our income from our land, so we opted to stay, even though the cannons were everywhere. When soldiers left, we went back. If operations took place, we left again. We just went to and fro. After the soldiers were gone, we would go back again.*

*Our livelihood was mainly based on crops and copra. My father planted cassava. He was also an imam so whenever someone summoned him to pray, they offered him sadaqah (charity). That was how we got by. During the evacuation period, my father had his savings. At that time 100 pesos was already considered a big amount. I was still young so I didn't know how he allocated his savings in the midst of conflict. We only engaged in copra activities at night to avoid soldiers seeing the smoke because it would alert them. We heated the copra at night.*

*Cooking food doesn't generate so much smoke. We would hear the helicopters and jet planes of the soldiers when they assembled*

<sup>17</sup> Bagong Lipunan here refers to former MNLF members who during Marcos presidency integrated as part of the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (the New Society Movement), which was formed as an umbrella coalition of parties supporting then-President Ferdinand Marcos for the Interim Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly), and was his political vehicle during his rule.

*in town to bomb our place. My mother would then immediately extinguish the fire even if our food was barely cooked. We would put out our fire by pouring water onto it because if a soldier saw it, they would eventually bomb the place, even though the targets were civilians.*

*There were many of us whose homes were burnt to ashes. Even cats were slaughtered. Children, including my siblings, were also killed. I can still recall those helicopters, jet planes and cannons. I was old enough to remember everything. There was still war until 1986. It only ended during Cory Aquino's presidency*

*The effect of it all on our lives was huge. My siblings, even though they could read, could not proceed to a higher level of education. They could not be hired for jobs that required higher education. I finished studying, but my other siblings did not. Only one of my other brothers graduated because he left and studied in Cotabato, where my uncle resided. One of our siblings had a gunshot wound while another one, a girl, died. They were part of the MNLF Medical Team. When there was a battle, they would join, but not on the frontline. They helped and treated wounded members. She was killed by a mortar.*

*At that time evacuation was really tough. Evacuation centres in those days were so much different from what we have now. Nowadays, there's food and better accommodation. During that time, it was very different. Nobody helped us.*

*We no longer had hope. It seemed like there was no negotiations and we had no idea when the war would be over. We felt that our lives would soon come to an end and we would die as casualties in the war because cannons were firing at us almost every day.*

*This town of Jolo was burnt and the MLNF attacked the military camp in Jolo. It was really not clear who instigated the fire in Jolo because there was much commotion brought about by the fighting. During Martial Law, people were seized even in their own homes or on the streets and no one knew where they were taken. Then*

*Sulu became wild because the MNLF combatants attacked outside while the uproar was ongoing in town.*

*When I finally understood why the war was happening, I felt that there was discrimination between Christians and Muslims. It's as if they didn't want us to be happy, and even if they let us be, our religion is very much discriminated against. They do not perceive us fairly.*

*The government views Islam in a different light. For instance, when a Muslim kills another person, they emphasize his religion whereas when a Christian kills, his religious affiliation is not mentioned.*

***Peace, by my definition, is an absence of fear***

*I was with the MNLF for more than 12 years and I then I joined the government in 1984.*

*It was my belief that I could find my own peace, if not for Mindanao, at least for the province of Basilan. It was through those efforts that I managed to change the political and economic landscapes of Basilan province. When I say political landscape, I mean that finally our people could become masters of their own political destiny. We were always governed and ruled by people from outside. It was only when I joined the government that we finally got the political power to lead our people, which is still the case.*

*I was only recruited locally to become part of the MNLF. I was a foot soldier that rose through the ranks. I was appointed as a local commander because of my good performance. For 22 long hours I fought in Tuburan during the siege. That was the first major military offensive of the Philippine Government here in the islands, particularly in the province of Basilan. All the naval, air and ground forces of the government were used to, supposedly, extinguish the revolution of the Moro National Liberation Front during the stewardship of the South Com Commander Commodore Gil Fernandez. He had promised to President Marcos that in two months time he could eliminate the Moro rebellion. They placed several divisions of troops in Tuburan. They used 12 naval boats and other land forces there, and the forces that landed were among the troops that we fought against. That was where I got wounded.*

*It was then, after I recovered, that I was recruited as one of the trainees for mortar training. At that time we realized that we needed more firepower to support our troops, as we were only using small firearms in our encounters with government forces. I was part of the Third Batch, 90 people comprised the First Batch. Much of the First Batch, more than 40 of them, were from Lanao, because this is where the recruiting officer in this first batch was*



*from. Even Misuari is just one of the recruits. Chairman Hj. Murad was part of the Second Batch, which numbered 300. The Third Batch was made up of 70 men.*

*I was first inspired to join the Moro struggle because of the views of a Magindanaun, or Iranun Ustadz, named Ahmad Salamat, incidentally the namesake of Ustadz Salamat Hashim.*

*Ansar el Islam was founded by former Senator Domocao Alonto. I think it was a forerunner to the MNLF because when the MNLF started, there was still no name but they needed one to get recognition and go out and lobby Muslim countries. The first name was invented by ParkAI - an acronym for a Tausug name (Parhimpunan Kamardikahan Agama Islam). But later on they realized that they needed an English name, since that one could be hardly understood because it was in local dialect. So, when the Central Committee met they realised the name had to come from the history of our people. As a former professor of the University of the Philippines, Nur Misuari was inspired by the writings of Dr. Cesar Adib Majul who wrote a book about the Moro people and its resistance to all foreign colonisers. It was decided to use the word "Moro", and, therefore, the name Moro National Liberation Front became the name of the Moro struggle.*

*In those days, we never thought of the difficulties, because we were fired up by Islamic ideals and principles. We believed that our political rights had been stolen from us, that we were a sovereign country but we were being annexed by imperial Manila without consultation, and without the benefits of a referendum or a plebiscite. We were also told that the ILAGA was raiding some mosques or masjids in the Cotabato area and Lanao. During those times there were already ILAGA in the province of Basilan. So, it was the confluence of these events that convinced us that there really was truth to the fact that an effort was being made to exterminate the Muslims, to disposed us of our lands. Furthermore, the majority of our people's land is not titled because that was the system under our sultanate, but we noticed that many immigrants from Luzon and Bisayas were applying for ownership of our lands.*

*That compounded the issue and made us believe even more that we were being dispossessed and there was really an attempt to exterminate our people.*

*The life of Prophet Mohammad was also our inspiration. There is one verse in the Qur'an that explicitly says if there is oppression you have to fight until there is no oppression. If we die, we were told, we will die as a sahid, who are the most privileged residents of paradise. All of these Islamic orientations really strengthened our faith and made us not fear death.*

*My joining the government did not alter my ideals and principles. I still believe until now that the Philippine Government, no matter who is president, no matter who is in congress, will always try to fool us around, will always try to discriminate against us, though not openly. They will always try to take advantage of us, our land and our natural resources. This is why even if I was with the MNLF, I immediately accepted an invitation from the MILF to help them in their BBL information campaign (this was before the Mamasapano incident) because I believe it is a continuation of the MNLF struggle; a continuation of my struggle.*

*I have learned that if you want change you should be one of the players in the game. If you are not a player, just a bystander, there is nothing you can do - you cannot take as hot with the ball, they will not listen to you. You can only clap your hands, make noise but you cannot score. This was also a guiding principle that led me to join the government because I believe if I join the government I will be heard, meaning change can only be realised from within. Change from outside is not really felt so much.*

*We set up the Basilan State College, which we did not have before, and through it we managed to educate our people. Before, Basilan had one of the highest illiteracy rates among the Muslim provinces, but through the Basilan State College we have already succeeded in educating many of our people, reduced illiteracy and created a community of literate people. To me, that's the number one thing I am so proud of, the education of our people.*

*We can see that there are too many spoilers wanting to derail the peace process, not only from within members of congress, but even from outside congress. There is a confluence and convergence of opposition to the BBL and opposition to the President. For them, if there is any legacy or accomplishments of the Aquino administration, it is the peace agreement. So they are making the BBL a convenient hostage to their political agenda. They do not mind if the BBL has something to do with trying to correct centuries of injustice and historical errors that they have committed against our people. I do hope that the Almighty Allah Subhanahu Wa Taala will guide and enlighten members of congress to pass the BBL and extend the term of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).*

*Peace, by my definition, is an absence of fear. An absence of fear of being dislocated because suddenly there is going to be war; fear of being discriminated; fear of being dispossessed of your lands; fear of being ridiculed and downgraded to a second-class citizen. Peace for me is having the power and ability to do anything you want, provided it is within the bounds and limits of the law. For now we have temporary peace, not permanent, because anytime that peace can be broken by a bomb that explodes here or there, by an encounter here or there, by an assassination here or there. There is still that continuing fear that anytime, anybody can become a victim.*

## TIMELINE

- 1565 –1571: Arrival of the Spanish conquistadores. Manila (under the rule of Rajah Sulaiman) attacked.
- 1596 –1898: The Spaniards attempt to colonize Mindanao. During the fighting, which lasts for more than 300 years, Muslims and Indios develop a bitter relationship. The term “Moros”, which bears negative connotations, is adopted to refer to the Muslims of Mindanao.
- 1898 –1946: The USA takes over the Philippines and occupies Mindanao. In 1899, a peace treaty is signed with Sultan Jamalul Kiram II of Sulu, which is later abrogated by the USA. A Moro province is created, a movement felt by the authorities of the sultans and other datu as a step towards undermining their authority. Fighting between Moros, who do not recognise American sovereignty, and the American troops follows in subsequent years.
- July 4, 1946: The USA grants independence to the Philippines and includes Mindanao as part and parcel of the new Republic. This sparks a feeling of frustration among many Moros.
- 1968: “Jabidah Massacre” in Corregidor, Bataan. 180 trainees, mostly Moros, are killed.
- 1969: Foundation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) by young secular minded students and professionals.
- 1970 – 1972: March 22, 1970: First attack on an isolated Moro village in Upi, Maguindanao by ILAGA (in tandem with the defunct Philippine Constabulary).  
Over the next two years 21 massacres take place, including:
- January 17, 1971: Alamada, Cotabato (73 casualties)
  - June 19, 1971: Manili, Carmen, Cotabato (70 casualties)
  - October 23, 1971: Kisulan, Bukidnon (67 casualties)

- October 24, 1971: Magsaysay, Lanao del Norte (66 casualties)
- August 9, 1971: Buldon, Cotabato (60 casualties)

In response to these massacres, the “Blackshirts” are formed at the end of 1971.

1972 – 1974: September 23, 1972: President Marcos places the entire country under Martial Law.

November 14, 1972: Clashes between the MNLF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) start on the island of Jolo and simultaneously spread throughout the islands of Mindanao.

1975 – 1989: The Government of the Philippines and the MNLF start peace talks through the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

December 23, 1976: A covenant between the MNLF and the Government of the Philippines is signed in Tripoli, Libya. The most salient feature of the agreement is the MNLF promises to stop hostilities against the AFP, and the government promises to establish an autonomous government within the 13 provinces and nine cities of Mindanao and Sulu.

The Tripoli Agreement is not implemented by the Marcos Government, angering many MLNF members, many of whom break away from the group and organise the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) with Ustadz Hashim Salamat as the Chairman.

February 26, 1986: President Marcos is ousted from power and Corazon Aquino installed as President of the Philippines.

August 1, 1989: Corazon Aquino’s Government establishes the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).



- 1996: September 2, 1996: Final Peace Agreement signed between the MNLF and the Philippine Government under the Presidency of Fidel Ramos.
- 2000: April 27, 2000: President Estrada orders an attack on Camp Abubakar (MILF headquarters) declaring all-out war against the MILF.
- 2008: Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) is signed by the MILF and the President Arroyo administration negotiating panels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- 2009: The Supreme Court strikes down the MOA-AD.
- 2011: The Supreme Court confirms that the ARMM is not really an autonomous but an administrative unit of the government.
- 2012 – 2015: October 15, 2012: The Aquino Government and the MILF sign the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) which paves the way for the signing the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014. The CAB is designed to replace the ARMM and create genuine autonomy. Subsequently, opposition lawmakers block the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), a prerequisite for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Government.

*“The best option that the Philippine Government and liberation fronts can do to resolve the war peacefully is to agree to a referendum. It will be an act of statesmanship on the part of the leadership of government. The statesmanship of leaders is not measured by how bloody and how long they can suppress people’s right to self-determination but how they can see this fundamental human right realised. History is never kind to leaders who do not hesitate to use military might to suppress people’s aspiration to be free. On the part of the liberation fronts, it will be an opportunity to show to the whole world that they truly represent the Bangsamoro people and their interests.”*

(Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, July 17, 2002)











The Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS) is a Mindanao based, non-government institution registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission on September 29, 1999. It started its operation on January 1, 2001. IBS undertakes independent and collaborative research on Bangsamoro society, history, education, culture, politics, economic and contemporary affairs; conducts trainings; and provides community services.



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