JustPeace in MinSuBaTaPa: THE 4TH MINDANAO PEOPLE’S PEACE SUMMIT

MORE THAN five years ago, Lamitan, Basilan was seemingly a “ghost town.” The lair of the Abu Sayyaf Group which had just kidnapped some 21 tourists, Lamitan in 2001 was the backdrop to some of the bloodiest combat operations ever waged by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). It was practically a “war zone”; even the parish priest packed a .45 pistol while celebrating mass. Its residents fled from the town, especially after the infamous – and catastrophic – siege staged by the AFP.

The carnage in Lamitan illustrated, in goriest terms, how the government’s own “peace efforts” in the southern part of the Philippines have failed – and failed horribly. Instead of solving the peace problem, the “war in Mindanao” has only brought untold suffering to its population. In its wake, it left behind virtual no-man’s lands like Lamitan.

From ‘ghost town’ to Peace Summit host

It was only fitting that in December 2006, Lamitan hosted more than 500 peace advocates from all over Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan (MinSuBaTaPa), as well as personalities from the rest of the country and foreign observers, for a week-long gathering “to celebrate, deliberate and concretize plans for the building of a truly just and peaceful society,” and to intensify efforts for the realization of the Right to Self-Determination of the tri-people of MinSuBaTaPa.

According to Summit organizers, the tri-people approach intends to find specific solutions to problems peculiar to each people; however, these efforts should contribute to the overarching goal of uniting all Mindanaoans in the attainment of justpeace (peace based on justice) within and outside MinSuBaTaPa.

The 4th Mindanao People’s Peace Summit, held December 12-17, 2006 at the Datu Dizal

While leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the biggest separatist group in Mindanao, expressed optimism that the stalled peace talks with the government would be back in track by 2007, and even welcomed the US government’s promise “to speed up development aid in Mindanao once the government and the rebel group sign a peace deal,” peace advocates gathered in Lamitan, Basilan for a week-long peace summit.
The Tri-People of MinSuBaTaPa

IN NO other area of the Philippines is heterogeneity and diversity of peoples, cultures and traditions most evident than in the MinSuBaTaPa territory, where three general groupings co-exist:
1. Katawhang Lumad (or Indigenous Peoples)
2. Bangsamoro
3. Mindanao Migrants and their Descendants (MMDs)

Cultural Center in Lamitan, gathered representatives of civil society groups who want to build justpeace in a region wracked by centuries-long conflicts.

The peace summit is organized every two years by the Mindanao People’s Peace Movement (MPPM).

Making peace possible

This is the first time that the Peace Summit is being held within the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

According to Al Senturias, Jr., MPPM chairperson, they chose Lamitan to host the Peace Summit because they want to show that every place in Mindanao is safe when all sectors unite and work together to make it possible.

My Journey for Peace

I AM a first year BS Social Work student of the Southern Christian College, which is one of the sponsors of the Peace Summit.

On December 9, 2006, we had a forum on Human Rights and the Right to Self-Determination at our school. The forum speakers came from the tri-people of Mindanao.

That evening, we had an orientation, in preparation for our trip to Basilan for the Summit. Early the following day, our group start on a journey for peace.

Our first stopover was in Pagadian City, where we attended a peace rally at the Western Mindanao State University. There, we met other delegates to the peace summit, coming from other areas of Mindanao.

Our group, which had now grown considerably in number, stopped for the night at the Zamboanga National High School. Then early the next morning, December 11, we trooped to the Zamboanga City Pier, for our sea crossing to island-province of Basilan. It was a 3-hour trip to Lamitan.

Upon arrival, we took our lunch, then joined all the other delegates for a parade around the town of Lamitan.

The next days were hectic, but very fruitful. I participated in several discussions. Among them were: the Philippine human rights situation, the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement, the history of Mindanao, the right to self-determination (from UN, Bangsamoro and Katawhang Lumad perspectives). I also took part in several workshops, all on topics affecting peace and human rights in Mindanao.

But it was not all “heavy” mental activities. Our serious pursuit of peace in Mindanao was enlivened now and then with cultural performances, including presentations from AKMK and the SCC Peace Band. We also visited some of Lamitan’s tourist spots, like the Bulingan Falls. I was glad that, despite the tragedy that happened in Lamitan a few years ago, its attractive spots have not been much affected.

On December 15, our final night, all the participants got together for a night of solidarity.

Then the following day, December 16, we cheerfully helped clean the Datu Dizal Cultural Center, the venue of all the Summit activities. Then we gathered all the little souvenirs we accumulated, zipped up our bags and bid farewell to the other peace advocates who had come to Lamitan, Basilan to take part in building peace in Mindanao.

I felt honored that I was given the opportunity to take part in the 4th Mindanao People’s Peace Summit, and contribute to building a peaceful and prosperous Mindanao.
THE THINGS that I learned during the week-long peace caravan and summit would enrich my role as a public school teacher and a member of my community.

One of the key factors in our quest for peace in Mindanao is solidarity among the tri-people. Peace can only be achieved through peaceful means, not through war.

Basilia C. Canarejo
Bagobilbas, Aleosan, North Cotabato

The proposed referendum would be supervised/managed by the United Nations.

The summit participants want the referendum to be held within the next ten years. This would give affected tri-people sufficient time to thoroughly discuss the options being presented.

Because of concerns raised by representatives of the Katawhang Lumad, a series of discussions were held, aimed at clarifying the nature and intent of the referendum. These discussions culminated at the 3rd Summit held in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato in December 2004, during which, the summit participants reiterated the call for the conduct of the referendum. During the 3rd Peace Summit, the participants also decided to submit once again to the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace panels a slightly-revised proposal for adoption by both panels as part of the peace agreement.

Resuming the peace talks

Aside from reiterating the call for a referendum, the Summit called for the immediate resumption of peace negotiations between the GRP and the MILF, which have been stalled because of contentious issues involving ancestral domain.

The peace advocates also welcomed the forthcoming review of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the GRP and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This review will be done by a tripartite body coming from the GRP, the MNLF and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Summit participants called for the immediate release of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, so he can lead the MNLF delegation to the discussions scheduled in early 2007 in Saudi Arabia.

No to cha-cha

Even as justpeace in MinSuBaTaPa was the core concern during the Summit, participants kept the national agenda at the front. They denounced what they called “the brazen attempt” of the administration-aligned members of the House of Representatives to change the 1987 Philippine Constitution sans Senate participation.

The Summit participants were one in opposing “any move to change the present Constitution especially to favor personal and foreign interests.”

The Ancestral Domain Issue

PEACETALKS between the GRP and the MILF ground to a standstill in September 2006 because both panels could not yet come to an agreement over ancestral lands. The MILF wanted some 1,000 villages as part of the Bangsamoro homeland, without having to go through a referendum. The GRP rejected this demand, maintaining that this would be against the Constitution. It offered some 600 Moro-dominated villages and pressed for the holding of a plebiscite to comply with the Constitution.

Jun Mantawil, head of the MILF peace panel secretariat, expressed optimism that the peace talks would resume by January 2007 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Participants renewed the call for the holding of a Referendum on Political Options in the Bangsamoro (Muslim) Areas of Mindanao and Palawan and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

Through this referendum, the Bangsamoro people will decide whether to remain with the Philippines either as a genuinely autonomous government or a federal state, or to form an entirely separate and independent state.

Referendum on political options

The referendum being proposed would be held in the Bangsamoro Areas of Mindanao and Palawan and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi – that is, the territory now belonging to the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the contiguous areas predominantly occupied by the Bangsamoro people.

The Peace Summit participants see the holding of this referendum as the best way of addressing the historical root of the strife in Mindanao: an alternative to war and a peaceful and democratic way of resolving conflicts as is done in other parts of the world.

This proposal was first articulated in the Midsayap Declaration, the result of the 2nd Peace Summit held in Midsayap, Cotabato in 2002. (Please see page 16 for complete text.)
The BIENNIAL peace summits are sponsored by the Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Movement (MPPM). MPPM is a venue by which the grassroots tri-people of Mindanao forge unity and campaign for a lasting peace in the Mindanao-Sulu-Basilan-Tawi-Tawi-Palawan region (MinSuBaTaPa). Its multi-sectoral strength comes from more than a hundred human rights and peace groups, non-government and people’s organizations, religious groups and academic institutions.

MPPM had its beginnings in 1999 when several groups met at Southern Christian College (SCC) in Midsayap, Cotabato to plan a Mindanao-wide caravan for human rights and peace. These groups then formed the KASAMAKA, later dubbed the Mindanao Peace Movement or MPM, which organized the 1st Mindanao Peace Summit on June 26-28, 2000 at Brokenshire Resource Center in Davao City.

In that Summit, MPM officially became the Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Movement. The tri-people character of the organization was highlighted.

MPPM is a convener of the Mindanao PeaceWeavers (MPW), an alliance of major coalitions and groupings of human rights and peace groups in Mindanao. According to its chair, Al Senturias Jr., MPPM relates with and is open to work with all groups from all political persuasions and is committed to peaceful ways of resolving conflicts in Mindanao, Sulu and elsewhere.

As an alliance/network/coalition (ANC), MPPM conducts its own activities such as summits, conferences, seminars and forums on various human rights and peace subjects. It also engages in lobbying and advocacy work. The main bulk of the work of MPPM is carried out by its member-organizations, which do various types of work but carry them out on behalf of MPPM as well. This enables MPPM to work in practically all areas of MinSuBaTaPa.

MPPM is beginning to relate with and build groups in Asia, Europe and North America.

The Three Challenges and the Five-Fold Task of MPPM

MPPM has to meet three challenges in order to strategically address the issue of peace in Mindanao:

• to mold a core of leaders to do human rights and peace work for and with the tri-people of Mindanao;
• to popularize the various strategic political options for peace; and
• to build a culture of peace by infusing the values of human rights, peace and mutual understanding in the school curricula, in the church and mosque study programs, in the various professions, in business, the military and the police, and in the communities.

MPPM has to pursue five tasks: awareness-building, empowering, influencing, organizing and uniting (AEIOU) the people for the common work of building a just and lasting peace within and outside MinSuBaTaPa.

MPPM calls on all peoples to help build a new future.

They emphasized that any Constitutional change should “guarantee the sovereign right of any oppressed people to secede or separate from the state if conditions so warrant.”

Nicole’s case

Other calls issued were the review and eventual abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the Philippines and the United States, noting that it has become a constant irritant in US-GRP relations. The case of a US Marine convicted for the rape of a Filipina (who happens to come from Zamboanga) was constantly on the minds of the summit participants.

The peace advocates believe that allowing American forces to be stationed in many parts of the country goes even beyond the terms of the Military Bases Agreement that was terminated in 1991.

The Summit also called for “the immediate pull-out” of American forces in Sulu.

Out with the AFP

Having known through bitter experience that continued militarization has only worsened the vortex of violence and instability in Mindanao, the Summit participants also demanded “the gradual reduction and eventual pull-out of the entire Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) contingent from Sulu.” They proposed that the AFP be replaced either by MNLF troops integrated to the AFP or by MNLF and other Bangsamoro elements belonging to the Philippine National Police.

The Summit asked that these troops be given better training and equipment to help them effectively deal with the peace

A teacher learns lessons in peace-building

IT WAS an unforgettable experience for me. For one, it was the first time for me to go to Basilan. Also, it was my first time to be involved in such an undertaking. In fact, I was quite apprehensive at first.

But I wanted to understand the concepts that the summit organizers were presenting, specifically the Right to Self-Determination.

Going out at night in Basilan was a scary thing for me at first, even talking to Basileños. I thought I’d have a hard time communicating with them. But people in Lamitan are very friendly and hospitable. They told us about their experiences during the “Lamitan siege.” These were the same people who accompanied us to their very beautiful, white sand beaches and water falls.

I was heartened at the passionate participation of the youth sector during the summit. I hope more young people will let their voices be heard regarding the quest for peace in Mindanao.

I realized that Mindanao is a very vast and rich island, and it belongs to the tri-people. The tri-people must determine their own future. Also, diversity is not a hindrance to progress. A nation will thrive despite differences in beliefs, religions, traditions and aspirations, if the right to self-determination is respected.

MARY JEAN J. CLARITO
Bagolbicas, Aleosan, North Cotabato
DURING THE Spanish colonial period, “Moro” was a derogatory term referring to the Islamized population of Mindanao and the nearby islands. In the past decades, the Moros themselves have recuperated the term and now use it to refer to themselves with pride and to call attention to their distinctive history of resistance to foreign subjugation.

Once the dominant group in the country, the Bangsamoro boasts of a 500-year political experience of any group in the Philippines. The Bangsamoro culture is a fusion of Islam and adat, the latter referring to the synthesis of pre-Islamic culture and the interpretation of Islamic teachings.

Eleven ethnic groups compose the Bangsamoro people, each with its own language. Few of these groups control a specific political unit (province or town).

1. **The Maranaos**, literally, ‘people of the lake,’ because their homeland is Lanao (which means ‘lake’).

2. **The Maguindanaos**. Derived from the name of the family that once ruled almost the entire island of Mindanao, the Maguindanaos live in the Pulangi Valley, in the southwestern part of Mindanao. Maguindanaos are called ‘people of the plain.’

3. **The Irayans** inhabit the area between Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao province. The Irayans claim to be the origin of the two previously-mentioned ethnic groups. The Maranao and Maguindanao languages are strongly rooted in the Irayan tongue.

4. **The Tausug**. According to one Moro scholar, Tausug is a blend of the words tau (people) and ma-Isug (brave). They are mainly in Sulu, but there are Tausug communities in Tawi-Tawi, Palawan, Basilan, Zamboanga, and Sabah.

5. **The Yakan**. The Spanish colonizers were fond of naming communities, places and things with mispronounced local words. Yakan is from the word “yakal,” a local hardwood variety that overran Basilan ages ago.

6. **The Sama**. The Sama identity derived from the term “sama-sama” which loosely means ‘togetherness’ or ‘collective effort.’ However, the Sama are highly dispersed and scattered in the Sulu Archipelago. Among the five sub-clusters that make up the Sama people are the Badjaos.

7. **The Sangile** came from Sangile, an archipelago in the Celebes Sea, in the southern reach of the Mindanao Sea. They migrated to Saronang Province and to the coastal areas of Davao del Sur and South Cotabato before Islam spread to Southeast Asia.

8. **The Kaagans** are found mostly in the Davao areas.

9. **The Kolibugans** (a Sama word which means “half-breed,” because of intermarriage with other groups) were originally part of the Subanun tribe that inhabited the interior of the Zamboanga peninsula. At present, the term Kolibugan refers to all Subanuns who moved to coastal areas and intermarried with the Muslims, and finally embraced Islam.

10. **The Palawan**. The Panimusan were the earliest Muslim inhabitants in mainland Palawan. They were Islamized through close contacts with the Sulu Sultanate.

11. **The Molbologs** are mainly in the Balabac islands, at the southern tip of Palawan.

It has been noted that these diverse Moro groups, highly dispersed, have “no social cohesion or regional unity.” A Maranao scholar, Mamitua Saber, pointed out that “the minimal social interaction was in fact due to the physical isolation of the different Moro ethnic groups even within the Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan areas.”

Yet, even if socially diverse and geographically dispersed, all the Moro groups are united by their belief that “they all belong to the ummah, the world Islamic community so distinct from all the other world religious communities.”

Another Moro scholar, Prof. Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, also noted that “there are among the Taduray, Manobo, Bla-an, Higaonon, Subanen, T’boli, and other indigenous people who identify themselves as Bangsamoro” even if they do not necessarily practice the Islamic faith.

A Referendum to End War: The Midsayap Declaration

The Midsayap 2002 Declaration
Declaration of the Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Movement (MPPM)
On the occasion of the 2nd Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Summit,
December 17-20, 2002
Southern Christian College
Midsayap, Cotabato, Mindanao, Philippines

PREAMBLE
We, the members and the participating organizations of the Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Movement (MPPM), have gathered at this 2nd Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Summit as diverse representatives of all the Tri-peoples – Indigenous Peoples (Lumad), Bangsamoro and Mindanao Settlers and their Descendants (MSDs) – to discuss alternatives for attaining a just and lasting peace in Mindanao.

For several decades, the Bangsamoro people of Mindanao have waged war against colonization and subjugation. For many centuries, they have relentlessly struggled for their Right to Self-Determination (RSD). Now, the Bangsamoro people themselves have proposed an alternative way to solve the raging conflict: a United Nations-Supervised Referendum on Political Options in the Bangsamoro areas of Mindanao (ARMM and contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the Bangsamoro). 1

The Bangsamoro collectively hold a long-cherished dream of Self-Determination, a situation where the people themselves decide and conduct their own affairs in accordance with their aspirations. At the same time, they do not wish to violate the other peoples’ Right to Self-Determination (RSD) and the right to self-governance. Accordingly, all must recognize the inherent rights of our Lumad brothers and sisters as embodied in but not limited to the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA, R.A. 8371 of 1997).

In all processes that the Bangsamoro will undertake, the Mindanao Settlers and their Descendants (MSDs) and the Lumad brothers and sisters living in Mindanao should be actively involved. The regular consultations with and the participation of all the Tri-people at the grassroots level is imperative, since our vision of a just and lasting peace includes all of the Tri-people living and working together in harmony and trust. While peace negotiations must be held among the designated representatives of contending parties, they must be linked to the initiatives of and grounded in the enlightened participations by the masses of the Tri-people, so that all may be unified in their cry for human rights, self-determination, justice, and peace for all peoples.

Based on this understanding, THE 2nd MINDANO PEOPLES’ PEACE SUMMIT IN SESSION ASSEMBLED,

Mindful that Mindanao has three distinct Peoples: the Lumad, the Bangsamoro, and the Mindanao Settlers and their Descendants (MSDs);

Conscious of the diversity of the Tri-people in terms of their unique traditions, cultures and distinct struggles for self-determination;

Acknowledging the important role of each of the Tri-people in solving the conflict and in building a just and peaceful society in Mindanao;

Recognizing that the peoples of Mindanao ardently desire a final end to the long strife that continually engenders animosities, divides them and depletes their resources;

Considering that several strategies have been attempted in the past in order to solve the Bangsamoro problem, including armed struggle which has led to prolonged war with massive death and suffering; supporting the peace process and linking – openly and directly – with the contending parties become an urgent necessity.

Also, the mission of strengthening the organizational capacity of the tri-people to equip them in the pursuit of their right to self-determination has become a guiding principle for the MPPM.

While pursuing normal activities of peace education and advocacy as well as providing relief to war victims, MPPM decided to focus on finding a strategic solution to the war in Mindanao by concentrating on the so-called “Bangsamoro problem.”

In consultation with the Bangsamoro civil society, particularly the Bangsamoro Consultative Peoples’ Assembly headed by Prof. Abhound Syed M. Lingga, MPPM decided to adopt the Bangsamoro call for the holding of a “United Nations-Supervised Referendum on Political Options in the Bangsamoro Areas of Mindanao” as a “Platform of Hope” for lasting peace in Mindanao.

During the 3rd Peace Summit in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato in December 2004, the area of coverage was made more precise by adding the words “and Palawan and the entire Island Provinces of Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan” or MinSuBaTaPa.

At the 3rd Peace Summit, MSD became MMD or Mindanao Migrants or their Descendants as the word Migrants can cover Settlers or those officially “settled” by the Philippine government in Mindanao, as well as other Migrants who came to Mindanao not only from Visayas and Luzon but also from China and other lands. Lumad is also made more precise by calling them “Katawhang” Lumad or Indigenous Peoples. These terms are acceptable at the moment to each of the tri-people, but may still be changed once a better designation can be found.

1 At the 3rd Peace Summit, the term “Supervised” was changed to “Managed” to ensure international acceptability of the results. There are discussions in the 45-Member Council of Peoples’ Representatives (MPPM’s governing body in between Summits when the MPPM General Assembly is held) that any other internationally-credible body may do the supervising/managing or facilitating work.

Looking Back: Events Leading to the First Peace Summit

MPPM developed as a response to the 1997 and 1999 wars and especially then-President Estrada’s Total War against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in June 2000. The 1st Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Summit held in Davao City on June 25-28 was convened to try to find ways of responding to the terrible consequences of the devastating wars in Mindanao.

In addition to the normal responses such as providing food, clothing and shelter for the displaced families and communities being done by MPPM’s member-organizations (such as the Tri-people Organization against Disasters (TRIPOD)), as well as human rights and peace education and advocacy (such as those done by Sumpay Mindanao and Southern Christian College), the idea of supporting the peace process and linking – openly and directly – with the contending parties became an urgent necessity.

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The formal launch of the campaign was the adoption of a Declaration calling for such a Referendum during the 2nd Mindanao Peoples’ Peace Summit held at the Southern Christian College in December 2002. The 3rd Summit was held on December 19-22 at Lake Sebu, South Cotabato.
Edged Out

ACCORDING TO Muslim and Cagoco-Guiam, in the early 1900s, the Indigenous Peoples “controlled an area which now covers 17 of Mindanao’s 24 provinces.” But by the 1980 census, Lumads “constituted less than 6% of the population of Mindanao and Sulu.”

The heavy influx of migrants from the Visayas and even from Luzon, “spurred by government-sponsored resettlement programmes,” turned the Lumads into minorities in their homeland. “The Bukidnon province population grew from 63,470 in 1948 to 194,368 in 1960 and 414,762 in 1970, with the proportion of indigenous Bukidnons falling from 64% to 33% to 14%.” (Source: http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/philippines-mindanao/promised-land.php)

Shrinking

IN 1903, the Moros comprised 76% of the estimated population in Mindanao. By 1990, they were reduced to a mere 19% of the population. The non-Moro population (largely migrant Christians) comprised 81% of Mindanao’s population.

The 2000 census shows that 20.44% of the household population in Mindanao belong to the Islamic faith (See Figure 1). On a national tally, 5% of the country’s population are affiliated with the Islamic faith (See Table 1).

Before the 1900s, 98% of the lands in Mindanao and Sulu belonged to the Moros. By the 1980s, less than 17% belonged to the Moros. What lands were left to them were mostly in remote and infertile mountain areas, “which lacked marketing and infrastructure facilities. More than 80% of the Muslims have become landless tenants.” (Source: The struggle of the Bangsamoro people. http://www.bangsamoro.info/modules/wfsection/article.php?articleid=11)

TABLE 1. PHILIPPINE HOUSEHOLD POPULATION OF TOP 8 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS, 2000

<table>
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<th>RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD POPULATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Filipinos</td>
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<td>Roman Catholic</td>
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<td>Islam</td>
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<td>Evangelicals</td>
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<td>Iglesia ni Cristo</td>
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<td>Aglipayan</td>
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<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
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<td>United Church of Christ in the Philippines</td>
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<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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</table>


FIGURE 1. HOUSEHOLD POPULATION BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, MINDANAO, 2000

(See Figure 1). On a national tally, 5% of the country’s population are affiliated with the Islamic faith (See Table 1).

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SOURCES:

Documents provided by Alvaro O. Senturias, Jr., chair of the Mindanao People’s Peace Summit
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