



## **I.P.O. ONLINE PAPERS**

### **THE PEACE PROCESS AGENDA AS A MEASURE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE: Comments on the Philippine Comprehensive Peace Process**

by

Prof. Dr. Hans Koechler

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#### ***CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PEACE PROGRAM***

The Office of the Presidential Advisor for the Peace Process (OPAPP) has spearheaded the conduct of quarterly lecture-forums involving peace researchers, writers and educators to discuss the various aspects of peace, and the establishment of a peace partnership network involving academics, researchers and writers, thereby improving on the peace network profile under the Continuing Education for Peace Program (CEPP). The CEPP was launched on March 15, 2002 with a lecture-forum delivered by United Nations Observer Prof. Hans Koechler.

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Comments on the Philippine Comprehensive Peace Process**

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*NOTE: On March 11, 2002, the OPAPP launched a new program called Continuing Education for Peace. This primarily involves the conduct of a series of lectures-public forums on the Philippine comprehensive peace process and related issues. It is principally designed for peace advocates and peace workers from government and civil society. The launching ceremony also served as the occasion for the first lecture-forum titled "The Peace Process Agenda as a Measure of Good Governance." The guest speaker was Professor Dr. Hans Koechler, President of the International Progress Organization (IPO) and a UN International Observer. This article is based on the transcription of his lecture.*

**Introduction**

I have been invited to speak about the peace process in the Philippines. Before I make my detailed remarks, I have studied the documents related to the peace process. I have read with great interest the various executive orders and the official declarations of the President of the Philippines and I tried to collect information on the various initiatives going on here on the government and non-governmental level.

However, I have not yet been in a position to study the situation on the ground. I know the governmental policies and programs by having read the official documents, and I shall be pleased to present my remarks and comments on those policies. But I have not

yet visited the areas concerned. Hopefully that can be done at a later stage. (Incidentally, it was referred to in the introductory statement.) I have been made aware on the situation here in earlier years since the 80s, particularly on the various movements. So now, in this context of the launching of the Continuing Education for Peace Program, I am pleased to share some of my remarks and observations with you but I will also be very grateful if I will get information from you. I am looking forward to getting more details on the rather complex situation in the Philippines.

So what I would like to do now briefly is to make comments on the Philippine Government's Comprehensive Peace Program and in particular on what is known as the Six Paths to Peace.

### **Dealing with the Root Causes of Armed Conflict**

What I noticed from the materials I read and the research I did on the Internet was the kind of multiplicity of conflict situations in the Philippines. In my view, it is very important to adopt within this framework of a comprehensive approach to peace (of which I will speak later) strategies which are adapted to each specific situation and to the particular circumstances in the various regions of the country. But of course there are certain general principles or general maxims which may be applied in each particular case. The basic point I would like to refer to is that it is definitely not enough just to deal with the symptoms of the problem. It is of utmost importance that one addresses the root causes of conflict. It is also important that one should not isolate the specific problems as being just matters of military or security concern. One has to adopt a comprehensive approach. I think this is particularly relevant in the situation after the September 11, 2001. Although this is not related to the situation in the Philippines directly, the lesson

one has to learn is that security and military measures alone will not solve any of the disputes in progress. One has to deal with the roots.

### **On Negotiations**

Another remark that I would like to make is that if one tries to solve conflicts that lasted for many years, i.e. that rather have a long history here in the Philippines, it is especially important that one tries to avoid the vilification of one another, including the vilification of resistance groups. One should be committed to building a climate which is conducive to genuine negotiations, and this can only be carried out on the basis of mutual respect. If, at the outset, one group states that the other group is outside the boundaries of humanity, then it does not make any sense to try to enter into a dialogue. In this regard, I find very relevant what is stated as Principle Number 3 in Executive Order No. 3 issued by Pres. Macapagal-Arroyo on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February last year. In this E.O., the President emphasized that the resolution of armed conflict should be worked for with neither blame nor surrender but with dignity for all concerned. In my view, that is the basic approach that has to be followed for any meaningful peace effort.

Of course, the big issue is: how is that principle implemented on the ground? Because of the international situation since last year, my worry is that this constructive approach might be obstructed if a philosophy or a thinking evolves according to which one would establish an authoritative list of terrorist organizations, based on which certain groups are enumerated. If we work on the basis of such an official list, we may be shutting the door to peace negotiations. But I think this is a concern that is properly dealt with in the Philippines. I am rather optimistic that one will not follow a policy of shutting the door to future negotiations.

### **Coordination and Integration of Peace Policies and Initiatives**

I am very impressed by the establishment of the special function of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). I consider this as a very constructive step towards the implementation of the peace principles and the Six Paths to Peace. As far as I could see, there is a certain continuity since the civilian administration that took over in the Philippines. Anyhow, the decisive question about all the executive orders, peace initiatives, declarations, and so on would always be the details of their implementation and in particular the quality of coordination of these policies among the various governmental agencies and the integration of each of these initiatives at various levels into a general governmental policy.

The comprehensive approach -- which I would characterize as a political, social, economic, constitutional approach of the Government of the Philippines -- is to be commended particularly in so far as this is combined with general efforts towards reconciliation and rehabilitation. The first priority, of course, is how to resolve a conflict situation. Then the other issue is how to make the absence of conflict sustainable, and that requires particularly the rehabilitation programs.

### **Local Conflict Situation vs. Foreign Problems**

As far as the new international situation is concerned, the comprehensive approach of the Philippine government should be upheld even in the face of eventual pressures from a group for an eventually stricter military approach particularly since the forming of the International Anti-Terrorist Alliance last year. Generally, whether we speak about the problems in the Philippines, or in Indonesia or in any country, it is important that foreign problems and interests should not be brought into particular conflict situations because it will make things more and more complicated and worse. One should deal with problems country by country and should not allow certain situations to be exploited by other

countries whether they are neighbors or not. I would like to emphasize that the policy of the Philippine government is in line with the approach consistently advocated by the General Assembly of the United Nations on issues of peace and social justice.

### **Role of Civil Society**

The participation of civil society is of vital importance for the success of the comprehensive approach of the government. If the nongovernmental groups go along with the governmental policy, support it and bring in their specific expertise, only then will the peace process sponsored by the government be sustainable. I consider the input of civil society also of special importance in containing a merely military or police approach to the problem. Based on what I have read, there is a need of control of any kind of counter-insurgency activities by the constitutional or by the political authorities that have the competence according to the Constitution of the Philippines.

### **Respect for Rule of Law and Separation of Powers**

The respect for the rule of law even in a situation of eventual emergency is of utmost importance. Even in a crisis situation, there should be an observation of the separation of powers which is vital for the rule of law in any country. And this is the big achievement in the Philippines since the time when your people got rid of military rule. So the division of powers or separation of branches -- legislative, executive and judiciary -- should be upheld.

### **Dealing with Reality**

I have noticed with special interest Executive Order No. 125 where the basic causes of internal armed conflict are identified and acknowledged. This is of vital importance in dealing with any conflict: not to deny the realities but to portray the picture as it is,

without any illusion. Only then can one come up with efficient strategies. These would never be possibly formed on the basis of wishful thinking.

### **Maintaining Executive, Police and Military Powers**

I have studied briefly the history of the peace efforts in the Philippines particularly since the abolition of military rule and I would like to say that I have noticed with interest the political reforms instituted initially by former President Ramos, particularly the banning of political dynasties in the country, the measures undertaken and the control of private armies and so on. It is important that the government does not give away its responsibilities and its monopoly with regard to executive, police and military power and authority to various private sectors and groups because this may lead to the disintegration of the country. It would also reduce the credibility of the government as a potential negotiator with various insurgency movements.

### **Meaningful Democratic Participation within the Legal Framework**

As far as I have seen in my study of the peace process here, acceptance has developed gradually of the fact that the people in various regions of the country have legitimate grievances -- that may be expressed by rebel movements. It is important that this fact is not denied, that one openly speaks and admits the problems, and that one, for example, also starts to address the grievances of the indigenous peoples' problems related to ancestral land, and so on. In this connection, the policy to motivate the rebel groups to shift to the legal framework should be considered a priority. But it must be emphasized that, if one encourages the rebel groups to make that move, it is extremely important that the legal constitutional framework and the socio-economic conditions are such that democratic participation can be exercised in a meaningful way. If, for example, any of these movements are marginalized or have no access to the media and they are not able to bring their message over to the people, how then should they compete meaningfully in an

electoral process? And so, it is not enough just to emphasize certain principles but one has to create socio-economic conditions to make democratic participation meaningful.

### **Dealing with Amnesty**

Furthermore, I would like to refer to the importance of Path Four of the Six Paths to Peace, namely the measures related to reconciliation, rehabilitation, reintegration into society including amnesty to former insurgents. I understand that mechanisms have been set up in the National Amnesty Commission which deals with this issue in a comprehensive and legal manner. It is very important that these matters of rehabilitation and particularly of amnesty are not dealt with arbitrarily but in a precise legal framework.

### **Interreligious Understanding and Dialogue**

Apart from the legal and political conditions that are to be fulfilled in order to give hope to those people who believe in peace and the peace process, one should also pay attention or concentrate on the so-called inter-religious dialogue. I have come to know that a joint Secretariat of the Christian Bishops and the Ulama has been established. I consider this extremely important especially now, in view of the tragic and unfortunate event in September last year. One has to be cautious particularly in the Philippines that the local conflicts that exist in various parts of the country are not brought into this wider context of Islamic-Christian confrontation. What you need least here is a new spirit of the crusades from the Christian side or jihad from the Islamic side. This aspect should not be enforced now as a result of these events outside your country. These events outside your country have not been instigated here. They do not originate from the Philippines. If there is a sound basis for inter-religious dialogue and if the theologians and the clergymen are able to reach an understanding and appreciation of each other's religious convictions, that will be the best basis to prevent the conflict from getting these very dangerous dimensions of international confrontation and international tensions. I say this



because I am aware of the importance of real understanding between the religions. They are monotheistic religions, anyway. Christianity and Islam belong to one family.

More than twenty years ago, long before the world faced this critical situation, I organized in Rome a meeting of scholars, theologians and philosophers from the Muslim and Christian world about the concept of monotheism in Islam and Christianity. If there is such a basic understanding and if, through this understanding, you are able to remove the fear and hatred which may exist as a result of hundreds of years of prejudice from one part towards the other, then one has already created very important conditions for negotiations in the field of politics.

I say this also out of the experience we have lived through in Europe. Our encounter with Islam in Europe was quite traumatic. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, which considered itself at the time as the vanguard of the Christian world, had this well-known clash with the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. At this time, there was a lot of hatred and misconception of each others' religion, but in Europe we have been able to put this aside. Now, this is a thing of the past. As far as I can see, the spirit of the crusades cannot be revived so easily anymore -- although since the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, I have second thoughts about this matter. I would say that the Philippines will not become a victim of this situation as long as the Philippine peace process is not being sacrificed for a new political agenda on the global scale and for new enemy stereotypes that are being shaped up.

### **Socio-Economic Development**

In addition to these legal, political and religious aspects, we should not forget the importance of social and economic development in the comprehensive process, particularly the achievement of a minimum level of socio-economic stability. In this context, the program of sustainable development as propagated by the United Nations

should be brought in. The material basis for creating an atmosphere conducive to peaceful negotiations is economic development. If people live in misery -- if they do not know how to be able to live until the next day, we cannot expect them to be in the mood to peacefully negotiate. If they feel that they get a fair share of the economic resources of the country and that their material situation improves at least gradually, then this is another thing. This is just the basic material condition for a dialogue, even for a dialogue on the level of religion and belief.

### **Peace Concepts and Peace Education**

What I found also of special interest in the various discourses on peace initiatives and on the many reflections on how peace is to be achieved in the Philippines is the conceptual differentiation between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace is being understood as the absence of violent conflict and positive peace is understood as the absence of indirect structural violence. Achieving negative peace is just the first step to be able to restore a certain situation of calm in a particular region of the country. In the long term, what is to be achieved is peace in its positive sense so that there is no structural violence which is indirect violence. That means there is a kind of improvement in the economic conditions, social equality, and so on, including equal participation of citizens -- whichever ethnic group or religious community they belong to -- in the political process.

As far as this is concerned, the so-called citizens' initiatives for peace has to be strengthened and encouraged by the government. The citizens' initiatives should not be viewed with suspicion by the military but should be adequately evaluated by the military leadership in the country. It is very important in this regard, as one Filipino author stated in a book about the peace process, that one should overcome the so-called "martial law mindset." If one is able to do this, one will be more inclined to deal with the various governmental initiatives and citizens' initiatives. I think this is exactly the area where

peace education is coming into play and I am very glad that I have the opportunity to speak within the framework of the launching of this program for peace education.

As I understand, peace education is being undertaken on all the educational levels. What I would like to add is that one should also think of seminars or training programs for the opinion leaders in the country, which may be implemented in the framework of university courses. It is not enough just to educate the common population but there should be specialized seminars or courses for the people in the various sectors of the administration of the country with regard to the basics of the peace process, negotiations, and so on.

### **Lessons from the Palestinian Experience**

Generally speaking, it is not enough to aspire to achieve peace agreements. I am taking note that there is progress on some fronts while some of the negotiations are suspended. But even if an agreement has been signed, peacebuilding must continue after the reaching of such an agreement, and the various provisions of the agreement have to be implemented faithfully. If this is not the case, the situation could become worse later.

I do not want to be too negative but I would just like to refer to an experience in another part of the world, particularly to the efforts towards settling the Palestinian problem on the basis of the Oslo Agreement of 1993 between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The text is very nice but the result which we see now in the era of the Oslo Agreement is that there is much more violence and bloodshed than before. So something must have gone wrong about the whole process. I do not want to compare the situation in the Philippines with the situation there, but I would just like to refer to the general principle that if one is not implementing the provisions of any specific effort faithfully and in detail, this neglect may worsen the situation. This is exactly what the Arabs are facing now in Palestine concerning the Oslo efforts -- and such errors should not be made here in the Philippines.

### **Development Aggression**

There is another interesting aspect which I came across in reading the documentation on peace efforts in the Philippines. Maybe I can get some input from the participants here. This is about the so-called development aggression in some parts of the country. Some groups in certain areas, particularly indigenous groups, are not somehow in line with the government's development policies and they speak of "development aggression." In this regard, I would say that the peace process can only be successful if it is really integrated and coordinated with the various government agencies and if those measures that are intended to improve the economic situation and social condition of the population in a specific territory are acceptable to the people concerned. One cannot force them to be happy, so to speak. Coordinating the policies of economic development with the local people is also part of an integrated peace process. One cannot see the political negotiations in isolation.

### **Conclusion**

I conclude my presentation with some general -- or philosophical -- remarks. I assume that I am more or less in line with the spirit which I could read in the Executive Order of President Arroyo when I say that *real peace* can only be made with the *enemy*, so to speak. To reach a new qualitative stage of understanding, each side -- the governmental side and the side of the insurgents -- has to be prepared to give the other side at least a minimum of legitimacy or a minimal right to express its views. One has to accept the other side as a partner. This is the meaning of making peace with the enemy. There is no need to make peace with friends. If one understands this principle, then what is stated in the Executive Order of President Arroyo becomes clear: that one should not merely put the blame on the other side. This is what one can also learn from President Mandela of South Africa: he abolished *apartheid* in a way by which he avoided taking revenge. One

should indeed be able to put the past behind as President Mandela effectively did. For this reason, the work of the National Amnesty Commission is of such special importance, too.

Let me conclude with a very interesting remark made by Secretary Eduardo Ermita in September last year. He said that at this point in time we can no longer ignore the danger signs with regard to the peace process in the Philippines. It's either we act now in our own individual capacities to foster and promote peace or we will all be engulfed in the devastation of violence that is sure to escalate with the continued absence of peace. I can only subscribe to this very frank and open description of the situation and I would like to encourage the authorities of the Philippines, in cooperation with the citizens' groups and non-governmental groups, to continue their efforts towards establishing a comprehensive, lasting and sustainable peace in the Republic of the Philippines.

Thank you.