



The Philippine National Situationer

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INTRODUCTION

In her Christmas and New Year messages, President Arroyo assured the general public that life would be better in 2005 provided government improves revenue collection to bankroll her 10-point economic legacy program and fight the culture of corruption that continues to devour tax payers' money.

The President said urgent reform is imperative requiring the support of the different sectors to be able to **"BEAT THE ODDS"** an acronym which supports her 10-point legacy program:

Balanced budget
Education for all
Automated elections
Transport

Termination of the peace
process with all armed
rebels
Healing the wounds of the
Edsa uprisings
Electricity across the country

Opportunities for employment
Decentralize development
Decongestion of Metro Manila
Subic Bay and Clark Field as
economics and logistics hubs



PRESIDENT ARROYO gives the thumbs up to supporters on her visit to the urban poor in Quezon City on Feb.1, 2005 as part of her dialogue with them, while demonstrators march to the Senate to support the rise in the value-added tax. *AFP Photos*

Aside from the 8 proposed revenue measures expected to generate Php 80 billion pesos to address the fiscal crisis, President Arroyo intend to utilize the Php 2.23 trillion worth of programs and projects under the newly approved Medium Term Public Investment Program (MTPIP). This will serve as President Arroyo's treasure-house in fighting poverty in the next five and a half years of her administration.

Driven by telecom and service sectors, the country's economy grew from 4.7% (2003) to 6.1% (2004). The President expressed her delight because the growth exceeded forecasts of 4.9% to 5.8%. She thanked the Congress for putting fiscal house in order and the farmers who maintained high productivity despite the typhoons and floods that devastated large areas in central and northern Luzon last year. She also praised the young professionals manning our calling centers and outsourcing firms, which were praised by investors. And while overseas remittances were adding fuel to country's "growth engine", the industry and services were gaining momentum because of higher farm incomes.

President Arroyo claimed that the Philippine economy remains resilient despite the current political turmoil and the oil crisis, which resulted in the spiraling prices of basic commodities and services. She said that our economic growth rate registered close to 5% in August this year. The tax revenue collection has reached 1.75 billion-peso (31.12 million-dollar) which indicates a national budget surplus for 2005. The Expanded Value Added Tax (E-VAT) has been approved by the Supreme Court and is expected to generate more revenues and savings to support the basic social services and infrastructure projects of the government. President Arroyo claimed that sound economic fundamentals are already in place. She is calling the different sectors to unite and work together for the realization of her 10-point agenda.

PGMA 10-point agenda:

1. Creation of 6-10 million jobs
2. Support for 3 million entrepreneurs
3. 100% enrolment of school-age children
4. Provision of a computer in every school
5. Provision of electricity and clean water in every barangay
6. A balanced budget
7. Decongestion of Metro Manila and surrounding areas
8. Development of 1-2 million hectares of agricultural business lands
9. Peace settlement with Muslim and communist rebels
10. Computerized election

Editorial

Déjà vu derived from two French words, “already seen”. It also refers to an experience that causes you to remember something such as the **déjà vu** of the tabloid headlines showing images of mass protesters and student activists being water cannoned, clubbed, mauled, illegally arrested and detained by the policemen and military. News reporters and radio commentators denounced the acts of violence and the imposition of martial law in the pretext of national security. It reminded us of the late President Ferdinand Marcos manipulating the national elections in 1986 to prove to the international community that he still enjoyed the popular support of the Filipinos. A dictator championing the cause of democracy yet, disregarded the check-and-balance of powers in the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches of the Philippine government. Recall how the dictator converted Batasang Pambansa into a rubber stamp. President Marcos controlled the military and ordered the arrest of his political detractors and enemies. He prolonged his stay in power for 20 years in cahoots with his cronies and the US government.

Today, we are reliving the nightmares of martial law under the Arroyo regime. The butchering of the impeachment case against PGMA in the House of Representatives only proved that we couldn’t rely on traditional politicians to unravel the truth behind the Goriagate and jueteng scandals. Elitism, loyalty to the party (numbers game) and political patronage (pork barrel) persist in the Congress and Senate. Indeed, nothing has changed in our Philippine political system.

President Arroyo is determined to prolong her stay in power using the policemen and military to suppress the protest of the Filipino masses against her government marred with graft and corruption. The policy shift of the Arroyo administration from “maximum tolerance” to “calibrated preemptive response” grossly violates human rights. Mass media exposed to us how human rights workers, social activists and peace advocates were physically harassed and violently dispersed by the policemen invoking the calibrated preemptive response as their mantra to justify their acts of violence.

President Arroyo’s signing of Executive Order 464 states that all government officials and employees must have her permission before appearing in any congressional inquiry. Many viewed EO 464 as unconstitutional and illegal. The united opposition, member-lawyers of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines and civil society groups strongly denounced EO 464 because it prohibits the Legislative to check-and-balance the Executive and Judiciary branches of government. Under EO 464, the Executive undermines the power of the Legislative to hold hearings and receive vital information useful for investigation in aid of legislation.

EO 464 is illegal because under the revised administration code, any law or executive order must be published in official national newspapers to inform the general public before it takes effect in 15 days after publication. Amb. Ernesto Maceda is right in his column that without publication, EO 464 becomes secret decrees of the late President Marcos under Presidential Decree No. 6.

Political analysts and columnists believe that President Arroyo in cahoots with her allies is gradually retaliating at her political foes and detractors. Just imagine former President Cory Aquino and Senator Franklin Drilon accused of masterminding the alleged assassination plot against PGMA. Brig. General Francisco Gudani and Colonel Alexander who testified on massive electoral fraud are now facing court martial. Those people who stand for truth and social justice become targets of character assassination and political harassment.

Aside from the crisis of Presidency, our nation suffers from a crisis of sovereignty. The signs are very clear. First, the IMF-WB and WTO are using loans as their leverage to push for greater privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization at the expense of the Filipino poor. Secondly, PGMA has forged allegiance with other nations under the ‘*Coalition-of-the-Willing*’ to promote US policy on the “war on terror” in the pretext of *Balikatan Exercises* in the Philippines. The Arroyo administration must realize that terrorist rhetoric and intensified militarization in Mindanao and in other parts of the country will not solve the escalating peace and order problem of our nation. It delays and jeopardizes the peace negotiation between the Philippine government with the New People’s Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

In the spirit of *Bayanihan* and *Damayan*, we’ve learned from our Philippine history that real crisis brings out the best in every Filipino like what had happened during the 1986 People Power uprising. God will not abandon the suffering of His people who are repenting from their sins. God will be sending again martyrs and prophets to heal our land. Recall the martyrdom of Senator Benigno Aquino on August 21, 1983 and many other unsung heroes who died in the pursuit of peace and social justice. Recall the important roles played by the Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino (KoMPil) to arouse, organize and mobilize the Filipino masses. We fondly remember the prophetic role of Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin in the 1986 People Power uprising that led to the downfall of a dictator.

With former President Cory Aquino, Br. Armin Luistro FSC along with citizens who have genuine concern for this country, we shall overcome all these adversities. If we want peace, let us fight for the truth and social justice under the Bukluran Para sa Katotohanan. Let us always remember that our Philippine history is full with inspiring stories of exemplary Filipinos who stood up and died for freedom, social justice and love of country.

Real change must begin within us now. Concretely, we can showcase the **Gawad Kalinga** program to our Filipino youth in teaching minds, touching hearts and building homes for a brighter future to help the needy.

... The Philippine National Situationer

National Treasurer Omar Cruz said the picture looks good for the Philippines. The fiscal approach is on a very sound basis. Our country posts budget surplus for August at 530.2 billion pesos, or higher than the target of 521.8 billion pesos. The government spending was kept at 610.9 billion pesos, well below the target of 642.8 billion pesos. It shall limit budget deficit to 180 billion pesos or less this year.

(A) ECONOMIC

Economic Growth for Whom?

In spite of the 6.1% economic growth rate in 2004, the country is still in deep crisis. More than 80% of Filipino families today are living below the daily cost of living pegged at Php 513.20 per day for an average family of six nationwide or Php 620.01 per day in the National Capital Region (as of May 2005, NSO). There are 4.8 million jobless and 8.4 million Filipinos underemployed amidst low wages. Almost 3,000 OFWs leave the country daily in order to survive and keep our economy afloat. Many are wondering if the 6.1% economic growth is sustainable. Perhaps, we should ask the question: Economic growth for whom?



http://www.dmfund.org/street_children_photos/child-eatin.jpg

Based on the Social Weather Survey (SWS), 11.5 % of our Filipino households today are experiencing massive hunger. IBON Foundation revealed that there has been a declining share in food expenditures by the Filipinos to meet other necessities such as the rising costs of electricity, water, fuel, personal care, medical care, clothing and footwear, furniture and equipment plus miscellaneous fee. And when families go hungry, the mother suffers the most, says Mr. Dong Calmada of the PEACE Foundation, who also cited the following reasons why families go hungry:

1. **Low family income:** Considering inflation, family income increases at an annual average of 1.1% since 1997. But savings decreased by 5.8% since 1997.
2. **Income equality:** Gini coefficient in 2000 was 0.4507, down by 7.5% from 0.4872.
3. **Poverty threshold.** In 2002, a family of five must earn at least P59,530 to live a decent life. A member must earn a monthly income of P992 or daily income of P33.
4. **Food insecurity.** Eight out of 10 households lack food to eat. More than one third of children in food-insecure households are underweight and underheight.
5. **Poverty and agrarian reform.** Most provinces topping the list of high poverty incidences are where backlogs for land redistribution are considered substantial.
6. **Income distribution skewed.** According to World Bank, the bottom 10% of the country corners a meager 2.3% of the total incomes, while the top 10% takes 36.6%.
7. **Fiscal crisis.** Every year, the national government suffers from a budget deficit of over P200 billion. Worse, government allocates almost 40 % of the budget in payment of foreign debts.



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Poverty creates pressures to have 1 or 2 breadwinners in order to survive. The rising prices of water, power, oil and basic commodities put so much pressure to the already impoverished Filipinos that force some parents allow their children to work in hazardous situations. The DOLE estimates 2.4 million working children are already exposed to hazardous environment. If the 2.4% population growth rate continues there will be 160 million Filipinos by 2030. Overpopulation will put pressure on the social services and infrastructure already considered by government as lacking in overcrowded cities. In effect, overpopulation itself increases government expenditures and therefore, negates economic growth. If the government fails to provide the option and accessibility to family planning, we can expect more street children working in hazardous situations in the near future.

Worsening Fiscal Crisis and Foreign Debt

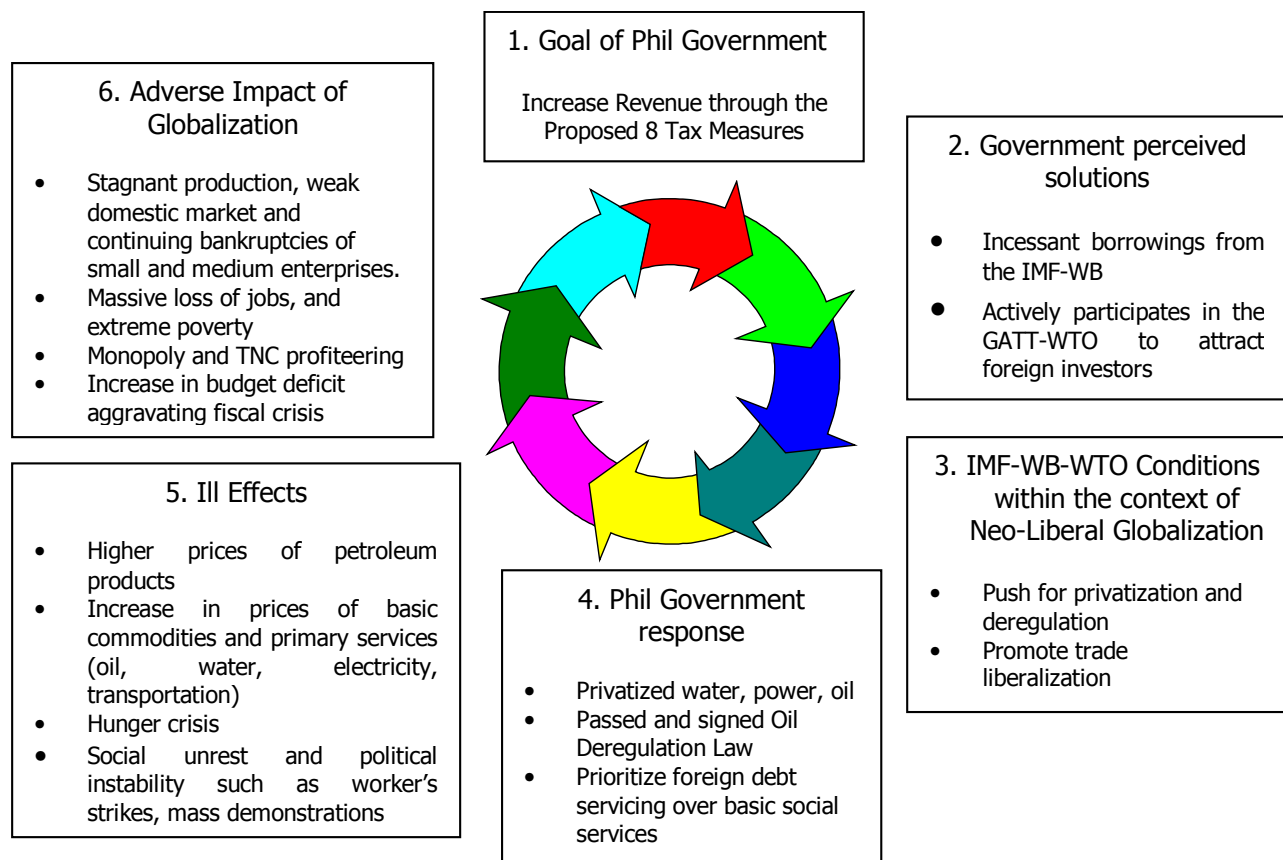
Nationalist economists believe that privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization policies have exacerbated our huge budget deficit today. Hence a fiscal crisis - a situation where government could not sufficiently generate revenues to cover public expenditures. Given insufficient funds, the government keeps borrowing heavily from the IMF-WB while faithfully adherent to the GATT-WTO agreement since 1993.

The Arroyo administration's incessant borrowings have caused the country's total foreign debt to grow steadily. This year, our government will be paying 1.48 Billion pesos a day, or 62 Million pesos an hour, or 1.03 Million pesos a minute (FDC 2005). In the final analysis, our Philippine government is caught into the vicious cycle of a debt trap subject to the terms and conditions dictated by the IMF-WB and the GATT-WTO hailed as the 3 pillars of neo-liberal globalization (see Figure 1)

"The continuing plight of the third world was caused directly by people and groups who wanted to keep developing countries poor... I am fully convinced that certain forms of modern imperialism, which appear to be inspired by economics and politics, are in fact real forms of idolatry: the worship of money, ideology, class or technology."

Pope John Paul II
1989 in Denmark

Figure 1. Debt-Trap Cycle in the Context of Globalization



Debt servicing eats up a significant portion of the national government total budget while a smaller portion of it is allocated for basic social services at the expense of the poor. Taken as a whole, the borrowings of government owned controlled corporations (GOCCs), government financial institutions (GFIs), local government units (LGUs), contingent debt plus the national government debt have exacerbated the worsening fiscal crisis (IBON Foundation, 2004)

In the midst of fiscal crisis, it is foolish for government leaders and officials to depend on foreign investments for development. Quick fix solutions will not save our ailing economy. And so is "instant loan mentality" which has become a bad habit of past administrations, inherited and sustained by the Arroyo administration with Php 1.3 trillion in borrowings from the period 2001-2004.

Through the leverage of their loans, the IMF-WB has already forced the Philippines to open up its national economy to foreign investors espousing five deadly policies:

1. The constant devaluation of the Philippine currency;
2. Import liberalization;
3. Fiscal and monetary austerity;
4. A minimal role for government in the economy; and
5. A maximum role for foreign investments in the economy.

Professor Alejandro Lichauco has identified the crisis of sovereignty as the root cause of our difficulties as a nation. He said that we have foreign institutions strongly influencing the policies of our country. The IMF-WB can tell the government how much money it can issue. What state industries should be privatized, what laws should be passed and what additional taxes the government should charge for power and water. We should understand that the loss of sovereignty and the national condition are interrelated. And the major problem of our nation today is our government's failure to assert the nation's independence and sovereignty in dealing with external factors, Prof. Lichauco concluded.



http://www.vivelecanada.ca/images/articles/20030315174304391_1.jpg

Experience shows that the outcome of the Debt-Trap Cycle is disastrous. Foreign investors enrich themselves as they exploit cheap labor without developing the productive capacities of the Filipinos. Foreign investors extract more capital than what they invest into. Some foreign investors don't even bring in capital but merely borrow from our local banks and the money market. In cahoots with local elite, they destroy local competitors and prevent our country to industrialize with a strong agricultural base towards national progress and development. Apparently, the ill effects are the continuing prices of petroleum products, which have chain reactions to the spiraling prices of basic commodities and services such as oil, water, electricity and transportation. In the final analysis, the IMF-WB prescribed economic solutions of attracting foreign capital and investments, privatization, liberalizing imports have hardly trickle-down to benefit the Filipino masses.

Painstakingly, the Filipinos especially the marginalized sectors of society are now feeling the brunt of maldevelopment as adverse impacts of neo-liberal globalization. The monopoly and profiteering of transnational corporations and multi-national corporations have worsened poverty and intensified the marginalization of domestic industry and agriculture. It resulted in stagnant production, weak domestic market and the closure of small and medium enterprises (IBON, 2004). Hence we have massive displacement of the workforce and the exodus of overseas Filipino workers in search for greener pasture. The band-aid solution of waging war against insurgency and terrorism has only widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Ms. Sony Africa of Ibon Foundation cited at least 146,000 jobs were lost displacing peasants and government workers in agriculture, hunting, forestry sub-sectors. They suffered from trade liberalization policies, lack of genuine agrarian reform and government neglect. Due to fiscal austerity measures, around 126,000 public administration jobs were lost with total sub sector employment failing to 1.5 million.

Under the Arroyo administration, the jobs created were low paying, low earning sub-sectors of uncertain and insecure employment. The number of wholesale and retail trade jobs increased by 424,000 jobs to a total of 6.4 million and the number of real estates, renting and business activity employment rose by 107,000 to a total of 776,000 (Africa, 2005).

Meanwhile the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) has been conducting regular sidewalk clearing operations that constantly threatened the livelihood of urban poor aside from the demolition of squatter communities displacing thousands of families in Marikina, Tacloban, Bacolod and the CAMANAVA area due to the North Rail project.

Taken as a whole, the Filipinos residing in urban and rural poor communities are suffering from abject poverty, massive hunger, unemployment and underemployment. There is now a growing consciousness among the Filipino poor that real change is not in the hands of the traditional politicians but through their collective actions. This is true in the case of Hacienda Luisita farmworkers who were asking a little daily wage increase of Php 199.50 to feed their families but were met with truncheons, tear gas and bullets killing some of their leaders and dependents. This is also true when 158 congressmen butchered the impeachment complaint against President Arroyo.

According to the Kilusang Makabansang Ekonomiya (KME), real crisis is not poverty but mass hunger requiring immediate solution or face a possible social unrest where the mob rules the streets until a US backed-up military junta would prevail along with civil society groups to bring social order. There is a need to craft a nationalist development agenda for survival to be truly liberated from countervailing forces impeding the progress of our nation.

(B) POLITICAL

The Crisis of the Presidency and the Nation

According to Mr. Peter Wallace, politics is at the heart of the problem. He said that politicians nowadays are driven by their own personal agenda and cited the Martial law experience, seven coup d'état attempts, the rebellion at Oakwood as extreme examples of politicians wanting personal power. The millions of pesos spent and cheating reported in the 2001 elections (and suspected in this one) are actions of people desperate for power, not actions of people genuinely wishing to serve. No society is perfect in this regard, but the Philippines is at the bottom end of the scale. The author shared his insights that if politicians do seriously care for their country, they should start considering what's best for the country, not what's best for them. And Filipinos have to vote more wisely and demand honesty and competence from their leaders. In retrospect, we painstakingly learned in EDSA 2 the result of not voting wisely. We experienced the negative impacts of various rebellion attempts by power-hungry politicians uncaring for their country



<http://www.liberal-philippines.com/issue08152003/images/oakwood4.jpg>

Wallace emphasized in his report that today is a time of national crisis. It is a time to pull together and not pull everything apart. The Filipino today is depressed, disaffected, disillusioned and needs some major morale boosting to regain confidence and pride. The Philippines needs a President whose leadership is vital to lead the nation. The role of the President is to listen, to lead, to encourage and to bring confidence to the people already losing hope particularly the businessmen, whose investment is needed to create jobs and national wealth. Leadership is defined as having a passion, a dedication to a vision while working unceasingly at it regardless of the roadblocks encountered and doing it in such a way that others want to follow. The President needs the support of the opposition in formulating policy reform agenda. Lastly, Mr. Wallace stressed that media should be more responsible in news reporting and not misleading the public in the search for truth.

Unfortunately, all surveys conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS), Pulse Asia, Inc., Ibon Foundation, Inc., and the Makati Business Club along with the American Chamber of Commerce revealed the President's consistently declining popularity rating since last year. It reflects the general public's dissatisfaction by the way she's running the government and the economy. The issue of fiscal crisis amidst tax leakages, corruption in government and the accusation of election overspending are only some of the issues that breed political instability. President Arroyo is experiencing political instability because the opposition parties, a portion of the ruling elite and the masses are questioning her legitimacy and credibility in winning the May 2004 national election (Tujan, 2005).



<http://opseuhrcregion2.com/>

Many believe that the foundation of genuine democracy rests on clean election. An election is clean, honest and meaningful when it is the expression of the sovereign will of the Filipino people who have supreme authority, free, independent and in no way limited by external authority or influence. It is in this light that the sanctity of the ballot must be preserved and protected at all times in a manner consistent with the Philippine Constitution. It is only through an honest election that every Filipino is given a chance to cast his/her vote equally whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated.

Ideally, clean elections should never be an expression of the power of money, arms and propaganda or the abuse of authority. Fraudulent and dishonest elections will undermine the honesty and ability of the government to be truly oriented towards public service. For this reason, President Arroyo's public apology on June 27 that she called a Comelec official (referring to Commissioner Virgilio Garcilliano) to allegedly rig the presidential election in 2004 against close rival FPJ was a serious crime that cannot be ignored. The circumstances and evidences have made us to realize that President Arroyo lost her moral ascendancy to lead the nation because her credibility and integrity have been tarnished.



http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/images/news/newspics/06-27-2005/gma_specials.jpg



<http://usera.imagecave.com/ps0322/deviations/gloria.jpg>

President Arroyo may have survived an impeachment attempt but her governance would not be far from political and economic crisis. The opposition and the Filipino masses still perceive her to be part of the nation's major problem, and debates about the junked impeachment complaints persist. The impeachment process is viewed as a legal process to know the truth behind the Gloriagate and jueteng scandals, including the real turnout of the 2004 national elections. The House has 60 days to decide whether to impeach President Arroyo, but it took only 14 days for 158 lawmakers to vote "yes" in favor of the Justice Committee's decision to dismiss all 3 complaints to impeach President Arroyo.

Meanwhile, business leaders and movers of the economy and from over 600 top independent women in civil society believe that the house impeachment was transparent, fair and viewed over nationwide TV. They believe that the outcome of the impeachment process must be respected. They disagree with the continuing efforts of a noisy minority to discredit the process of institutional adjudication. To them, it is the nation that will suffer the final cost of this malicious partisan effort. It is the people's future that will ultimately sacrificed on the altar of personal ambitions and destructive ideological obsessions. The future must be won. The nation must move on.

According to Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., the President Arroyo impeachment did not die, it was killed premeditatedly. Impeachment in congress is a numbers game, which is part of democracy we inherited from American jurisprudence. But can the impeachment case of President Arroyo be revived in the Supreme Court considering that two cases were already filed asking for the Court to intervene? Fr. Bernas strongly doubt that the Supreme Court will intervene because a judgment on substance is on the merits.

Yet, the junking of the impeachment complaint will not extinguish the desire of the Filipino people to know the truth. Protesters from broad coalitions grow in numbers everyday as they conduct public discussions and march on the streets demanding President Arroyo's resignation. They still believe President Arroyo used all means, including public funds, to secure the votes she needed. Her power to appoint officials for key government posts (the reward for political patronage) and the Iglesia Ni Cristo factor tipped the Congress' balance of power in favor of President Arroyo.

The Truth Shall Set Us Free

The influential Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) will retain its position on the impeachment case of President Arroyo. However, Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, the incoming president of the 85-member CBCP stressed the need to unravel the truth. "Did the President cheat or not? Was the 2004 election rigged in her favor or not?" Apparently, only President Arroyo and missing COMELEC Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano can answer all questions concerning the Gloriagate scandal.

The Unity Statement of the *Bukluran Para sa Katotohanan* is calling everyone to unite for the truth and not to be divided in these critical times. The organizers of the Bukluran ng Katotohanan in unison say, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo must go for the sake of our nation's future. And for the preservation of hope as a motive force in our national life, she must go.

The *Bukluran Para sa Katotohanan* is a multi-sectoral coalition coming from all walks of life, from different political, cultural and economic persuasions and views but in diversity, find a cause for unity in search for truth and social justice.



PDI front page dated Sept 7, 2005

Meanwhile, the unity message of YesArms composed of 286,000 retired military and police generals and servicemen is calling the President to resign. President Arroyo has caused the death of the impeachment complaints in Congress through the tyranny of numbers. It was a clear indication of her continued refusal to submit to an impeachment trial. Spokesman retired Commodore Ismael Aparri told the Tribune that, they were giving the President and VP Noli de Castro enough time to step down or face being ousted. They should peacefully give way to a caretaker civilian military leadership. They believe they have the support of idealistic military and police junior officers. The armed service of our AFP and PNP including the veterans are called upon by the people to intervene, to put an absolute stop to the continuously hemorrhaging Philippine economy and the extreme sufferings of Filipino nation.

Consequently, the worsening fiscal and economic crisis provided the seeds for political instability to thrive. It has created a climate of fear and uncertainty over our deeply troubled nation. The Gloriagate scandal has intensified the conflicts between power blocks. The military is slowly becoming restless. If left unchecked, the country is heading either towards a civil war or possibly a dictatorship. The threats to national security and social disorder are real. There are elite groups whose vested economic interests and ideological forces will exploit the maturing political instability already near in fruition. The power play among the ruling elite and political parties is contributing to political instability and its hurting our national economy badly. But the Gloriagate scandal and gambling payola are only symptoms and microcosm of a bigger, complex social reality.

Considering the growing dissatisfaction within the military and the faltering peace talk with the insurgents, the embattled President must prove that she's truly serving the interests of the greater majority in order to survive and finish her term. As good and responsible citizens, it is our moral obligation to defend our nation against countervailing forces that will bring down our national economy into catastrophic proportion. It is imperative to restore faith in democracy and strengthen the democratic institutions so that a constitutional process of succession may proceed in a peaceful and orderly manner.

Shall We Pave the Way for a Transition Council?

According to Dr. Carol Arraulo, many Filipinos are hesitant to join the protest movement to oust the Arroyo government. There is a wide perception that the reason people are not yet pouring out into the streets is not so much the lack of disgust for the GMA regime but the lack of clarity or consensus on who should lead the new government, or the lack of an immediately palatable or generally acceptable successor.

Unlike in 1986 and 2001 where a consensus had been reached on who should lead the new government, it seems that the constitutional succession is unacceptable to many. Dr. Araullo said that many are asking: "Why go through all the trouble, risk and hardship of people power just so VP Noli will replace President Gloria?"

Learning from history, PEOPLE POWER should result in the people being empowered to put in place a new government that they fully trust and support. But if PEOPLE POWER can oust the PGMA regime it may not be able to immediately decide who shall lead or constitute the new, regular government that should take its place. This is the reason why the Gloria Step Down Movement (GSM) and a growing number of other anti-GMA forces are advocating to create a "Transition Council" which shall pave the way for democratic elections – clean, fair and with real choices of platforms and candidates -- where the people can decide who should lead the new government.

Dr. Araullo clarified that the "Transition Council" is not yet the new government. Those who constitute the Transition Council must be barred from seeking the presidency or have an important position, apart from advisory, in the new government in order to remove all suspicions that they are pursuing vested interests. It will lead the country for a relatively short period of time, i.e. from six months to one year.

The "Transition Council" will undertake the necessary reforms of the electoral system as well as massive voter education to lay the ground for the special elections for those who will lead the new government.

The stabilization of the general economic and political situation will be the immediate concern of the "Transition Council". It must undertake measures to provide immediate economic relief and rehabilitation while laying the groundwork for a strong, self-reliant economy as well as measures upholding the people's democratic rights and national sovereignty. Dr. Araullo cited the following actions that the "Transition Council" can and should pursue:

- *a pro-people fiscal policy that will include the scrapping of taxes that place an intolerable burden on the people such as the expanded VAT*
- *a cap on debt repayments and the renegotiation of the terms of previous debts up to and including the cancellation and repudiation of onerous debts*
- *a stop to runaway price increases of all basic commodities and services, especially fuel, water and electrical power*
- *a stop to the curtailment of the people's freedom of speech, assembly and association*
- *rendering justice to the victims of human rights violations*
- *the resumption of formal peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).*

Dr. Araullo reiterated that the extra-constitutional ouster of the Arroyo administration is not a recipe for disorder and uncertainty. It is looked upon by patriotic and democratic Filipinos everywhere as a golden opportunity to truly empower the people and lay the ground for a new government of unity, reform and all-round progress via a "Transition Council."

(C) SOCIO-CULTURAL

According to Mr. Nicanor Perlas, the Philippines is already known worldwide for a significant number of sterling qualities. These include its spirituality, its ingenuity in group dynamics and processes, its sensitivity to the welfare of others, its highly developed cooperative spirits, its non-violent people power revolution and its vibrant civil society, considered to be one of the most innovative and effective in the world, among others.

It is a challenge for the government, civil society groups, the Church and Academe to rekindle the traditional spirits of bayanihan and damayan in every Filipino youth like what Gawad Kalinga members are doing to help poor people build their homes and dreams for a brighter future.

Many believe that we have already tried to change our Philippine government, constitutions and by-laws including national leaders. And yet, we still remain poor as a nation. Perhaps, the time has come for Cultural Revolution beginning within our true selves. The time has come to examine closely the economic policies, values, norms and cultures that permeate the social consciousness of Filipinos especially the youth of today.

Consumerist Culture



wp.rutgers.edu/courses/201/.../index.shtml

With the advent of cultural globalization, Asian countries including Philippines are rapidly being drawn into a single global culture marked by materialism, consumerism, secularism and individualism. There is a danger for a consumerist culture to place little value on the poor and the vulnerable. Oftentimes, it prioritizes the maximization of profit over the welfare and dignity of persons. The influx of radically diverse ideas and influences especially through TV, films and internet occurs with such rapidity that there is little time to discern what is true and authentically life-enhancing (LAFT).

It wouldn't be surprising if children and youth of today can recognize Ronald Mc Donald, the Jolibee mascot and Wendy's freckled mascot on sight but unfamiliar with Fernando Amorsolo or Atang de la Rama. In this light, Prof. Ambeth Ocampo explained that the reason why culture is quite often misunderstood is because it is not fully integrated into our basic education curriculum. Culture is usually associated with arts such as drawing, music and dancing. It is usually lumped into **HeKaSi**, an acronym for **He**ograpiya (Geography), **Ka**saysayan (History) and **Si**bika (Civics).



http://www.hundredspoons.com/i/bee_v_ronald.gif



SLB Power point on Understanding the Culture of Corruption

Ideally, culture should be taught across disciplines. Prof. Ocampo cited the prose and poetry of Nick Joaquin, Amado Hernandez, Virgilio Almario and other national artists in literature. For colors and arts, teachers can guide children to the works of Amorsolo and Jose Joya. To teach children geometric shapes, the abstract works of Hernado Ocampo and Arturo Luz are good examples.

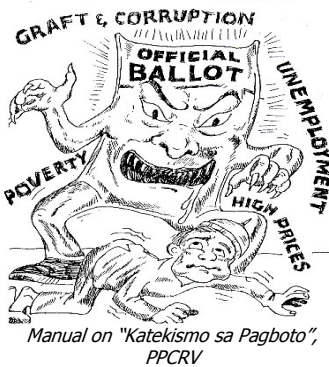
Prof. Ocampo stressed that culture is that which defines who we are and who we want to be. Culture can provide Filipinos with a context in which we see ourselves as a nation and people we fail to be. Culture will give us roots, to balance an education that gives us wings to soar and enables us to work abroad. It allows us to help our ailing economy but not to the point of tolerating brain drain. Lastly, culture should provide us an appreciation for heritage and to care for our environment.

Poor Quality of Education

Education plays a vital role in harnessing the talents and unleashing the creative energies of the students and youth, which comprise 63% of the voting population today. They contribute to national development by sharing their time, money, talents and abilities to help poor communities through community service programs. Hence they become responsible and useful citizens of this nation.

Unfortunately, quality education becomes inaccessible to many students, especially poor families spending 2% of their meager income on each child enrolled in a public elementary school. Commercialization, privatization and the lack of government support make education more inaccessible for the poor. Admission requirements, entrance exams, high tuition fees are some of the factors why students discontinue studies. In 2002, it was reported that 9% of families with 6-12 year old children do not send their children to elementary school. While 13% of families with 13-16 year old do not send their children to high school (NSO Data).

DAMBUHALANG SALOT PAG BUMUWELTA !



According to Mr. Peter Wallace, the Philippines which used to be at the forefront in Asia with the University of the Philippines (UP) among the top schools in the 60's through the 70's is now struggling to keep its place in the lower half of the Top 50. Ateneo de Manila University and De La Salle University – Manila are even lower, near the bottom of the Top 80 (number 71 and 72).

Due to fiscal crisis and corruption in government, the budget for education is insufficient for the construction of more schools, increase the salaries of good teachers, purchase of books, equipment and facilities to enhance the learning process of Filipino students. In fact, 13,000 barangays in the country do not have elementary schools and about 13 municipalities in 4 regions do not have a secondary school. The Department of Education (DepEd) revealed that the budget of Php110 billion for education for SY 2004-2005 is below P10 billion to fully meet the requirements of 9,000 teachers and 11,000 classrooms.

Wallace reported that 25 years ago, the primary and secondary education teachers are earning Php 600 per month when the minimum wage was equivalent to a monthly rate of Php 300. Today, the teachers are earning Php 9,000 compared to a minimum wage of Php 7,000. In other words, teachers now earn only 29% more than a minimum wage earner where before they are earning double. You don't get the best people as teachers if you don't pay them well, Wallace argued.

Mr. Wallace added many public school classrooms are turned over twice in a day, and classes are held on weekends, especially in urban areas because of the lack of classrooms. Some schools hold classes in schoolyards. The average number of students per class today has doubled compared from two decades ago. Remote barangays, on the other hand, have no schools at all. The reform in basic education curricula, emphasizing maths and sciences, is a welcome change. But it should only be considered as the start of a comprehensive overhaul of the education system as more reforms are needed. Development of English language proficiency in public schools must be restored if children are to benefit in this English-speaking world.

For over 2 decades, Wallace observed a shift in the education budget favoring tertiary or college education at the expense of basic elementary and high school education. Ironically, it is the government support for basic education that provides the most significant impact on poverty alleviation, and this is where government should focus its limited funds. It is imperative to improve the present Philippine educational system to harness the full potentials of the Filipino youth for the sake of our future generations.

Culture of Apathy and Indifference

In the midst of the current economic and political crisis, many citizens especially the youth are confused what the TRUTH is. Hence there is a growing culture of apathy and indifference among the students and youth. They are not exactly sure who is telling the truth. Is it the PGMA camp or the opposition groups? If cheating at the national elections is the issue, who will cast the first stone? If it is true that the 158 congressmen were bought or convinced by other means, what moral standard is the opposition offering the country to replace those of President Arroyo? Because of these questions, they are unsure whom to trust among the country's leaders today.

Aside from leadership crisis, the Filipinos in general, are divided in their opinions concerning the issues of charter change, federalism, E-VAT, oil deregulation law, among other things.

Professor Randy David believes there is nothing wrong with politicians having personal motives. But for these to have social validity, such interests have to be fused with the wider interests of the community. For him, leaders are supposed to personify the aspirations of the entire nation or community. He emphasized in his article that cheating in elections must bother every citizen who values democracy. Democracy is meaningless if it is not trustworthy. That's why it is important to know the truth whether President Arroyo and Commissioner Garcilliano manipulated the 2004 elections. He challenged his readers especially the youth to fight against cynicism, fear, despair and the pull of blind affinities. It is important to start visualizing a self-reliant nation, capable of governing itself and being run by leaders who inspire trust in their people, who in turn, have a reason to be proud of their identity and heritage and fully embrace their responsibilities as citizens. If such vision has any value at all, it should show us the way past President Arroyo.

Culture of Corruption

According to Mr. Alejandro Lichauco, the reason why corruption in government goes unabated is because of the absence of an informed critical and independent mass electorate. Poverty makes the marginalized dependent economically on the very people they elect to office and who have sworn to function and behave as their public servants. Ironically, the public servants they voted have become their bosses. In this regard, democracy doesn't work when a majority of the citizens are marginalized. Elections don't mean anything to the marginalized except for the cash for their votes. Election boils down to organized and massive bribery. Mr. Lichauco concluded that we simply never had democracy in the Philippines. What we have is a plutocracy, a political system that produces a government of the moneyed, by the moneyed and for the moneyed.



Dona Victorina Syndrome

Professor Felipe de Leon explained that the underdevelopment of Philippine society is fundamentally rooted in this chronic loss of Filipino self-esteem due to centuries of colonization and miseducation. It is a social malady which he called the "**Dona Victorina**" Syndrome, a pathetic character in the 19th century written by Dr. Jose Rizal in his famous novel, "**Noli Me Tangere**." Dona Victorina despises her own race that she has to marry a white man, a Spaniard scoundrel just to raise her social stature. Instead of proudly wearing her brown skin and appreciate its rich dignity and beauty, Dona Victorina hid it under a thick paste of white powdering. In the same way, some Filipino elites despise their own **kababayan** and prefer to live with the Joneses just to raise their own social status. Filipinos tend to pull each other down, to get ahead at the expense of others. Some Filipinos are highly abusive and exploitative to each other.

Today, we have Filipino elites taking advantage of their own people in connivance with foreign interests. Several factors have contributed to the lack of national unity among Filipinos. These are:

1. External interference by the US in our Philippine economic, political, social and religious life;
2. Adoption of alien concepts and faulty development models;
3. Application of inappropriate management style mismatched to our Filipino culture & social institutions;
4. Lack of cultural awareness and education,
5. Great divide between the elite and common people, and lastly,
6. Lack of pride in being Filipino results in lack of commitment to the nation.

Professor de Leon challenges us today stating, "*Instead of harnessing our culture as vast resource of knowledge and wisdom for sustainable development, we squander it by wallowing instead in a negative self-image that is tantamount to a self-fulfilling prophecy... The key to Filipino social transformation is rooted in Filipino social psychology, in discovering, understanding and harnessing the strengths of our most profound values as a people.*" In a nutshell, knowing the way Filipino think, feel and perceive the world will always make for effective governance.

The author concluded that the best kind of governance is culturally rooted governance because Filipinos by nature, are highly trusting people. Trust, cooperation, goodwill and harmony, which are all manifestations of **kapwa**, always bring out the best in us. This makes Filipinos a highly relational and essentially non-confrontational people as demonstrated in the peaceful "EDSA Revolution". The foreigners around the globe were baffled because it occurred outside of the known parameters of any formal political and legal framework but capitalized on the outpouring of faith, trust and goodwill made possible by the **tulay** principle or tradition of mediation in our culture.

Culture of Gambling and Drugs

President Arroyo launched a nationwide campaign to stop illegal jueteng to prove that her family is not involved in the gambling payola. She has also categorically denied accepting jueteng bribe to support her electoral campaign. Just recently, the Arroyo administration claimed in public that more than 90% of the jueteng operations have been stopped nationwide except in some stronghold insurgency provinces.

During government crackdowns, *jueteng* operators like drug dealers, have long resorted to "kangaroo-style" mobile operations because they are harder to detect, especially when there are corrupt government officials and anti-narcotics agents who can tip them off about police surveillance and impending drug bust. The lack of funds to finance patrol vessels and cars to conduct surveillance operations, insufficient gasoline allowances and salaries of personnel are some of the hindering factors for a successful drug bust operations.



news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3040026.stm

Based on government intelligence reports, drug traffickers have started manufacturing prohibited drugs particularly shabu in laboratories set up on ships and in trailer trucks. Illegal drugs are unloaded from ships anchored offshore and smuggled through the country's coastal areas. We know for a fact that, the Philippine archipelago is one of the most extensive coastlines in the world. Patrolled by poorly equipped military and police forces, the country's borders are among the most porous in the region, providing sanctuary to all types of crooks, from drug dealers to smugglers and terrorists.

Culture of Violence

Prof. Manuel Dy of Ateneo de Manila University said that one of the negative impacts of globalization is characterized by the homogenization of cultures that resulted in dismantling of social diversity and pluralism of culture. Religion gives meaning and distinct identity to a culture. But because of the global process with a centralized culture strongly identified with the West, it undermines our cultures' self-reliance and identity and attacks the religious values that hold the community together. Hence there is a new resurgence of religious traditions, reasserting themselves in groups, even *"polarizing peoples, creating enemy images, and using religious identity as one of the powerful forces to mobilize faith communities against each other."* (Arlarajah, op cit).

It is quite ironic that there are many kinds of religion preaching about love and brotherhood. Yet instead of bringing peace and development, these religious groups account for most of the bloodshed. Human histories are filled with bloodshed from wars and endless conflicts between Muslim Fundamentalist and the Christians called the Crusaders in the earliest times. It is sad to note that until today, war and conflict persist.

Different groups define CONFLICT as a result of the pursuit of incompatible goals. It is usually manifested through outward violence such as terrorism, civil war, severe forms of political oppression, increasing violations of human rights, or socio-political instability. Conflict may also take in different forms like discrimination, inequitable access to resources, exploitation, injustice, political oppression, and non-representative democracy.

Basically, four preconditions are necessary for a violent conflict: (1) interdependent parties; (2) who experience the interdependence as negative; (3) who have the opportunity to use armed violence; and (4) who consider the use of violence as the most cost-effective policy option. Once a conflict becomes violent, violence begets violence and the cycle continues.

The National Unification Commission (NUC) has identified at least five major causes of conflict in the Philippines, namely: (1) Massive poverty and economic inequity, (2) Political inequity, (3) Injustice and abuse of power, (4) Poor governance, and (5) Exploitation and marginalization of indigenous cultural communities.

Under the Philippine Comprehensive Peace Process, the government has been pursuing the *"Six Paths to Peace"* which can be concretely translated through the following policies and programs:

1. Pursuit of social, economic and political reforms
2. Consensus building and empowerment for peace
3. Peaceful, negotiated settlement with the different rebel groups
4. Programs for reconciliation, reintegration into mainstream of society and rehabilitation
5. Addressing concerns arising from continuing armed hostilities
6. Building and nurturing a climate conducive to peace



In support to the Six Paths to Peace, President Arroyo's Cabinet members approved Agenda No.9, which refers to National Peace Plan (2005-2010)

1. Completion of comprehensive peace agreements with rebel groups resulting in the permanent cessation of armed hostilities by 2010;
2. Completion of implementation of all final peace agreements signed since 1986;
3. Mainstreaming the rebel groups through an enhanced amnesty, reintegration and reconciliation program;
4. Rehabilitation, development and healing of conflict-affected areas; and
5. Strengthening the peace constituency and citizens' participation in the peace process on the ground.

Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP) is tasked to coordinate and carry out the following mandates together with local government units, civil society groups, and other sectors of Philippine society including support from international communities.

1. **Peacemaking and peacekeeping** to permanently end all insurgency-related armed conflicts through peace negotiations and reduce the level of violence in the area with the support from local and civil society initiatives;
2. **Conflict prevention and peace building** by means of eliminating sources of grievances, transforming conflict-affected communities into peace development areas and healing the social wounds as a direct result of armed conflicts.

Basically, the Philippines adheres to the UN human security framework which according to the personal definition of UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan as "*freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom from future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment.*" In its broadest sense, human security embraces far more than the absence of violence and conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that every individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potentials.⁶⁷

Ms. Alma R. Evangelista of UNDP-Philippines defined Human Security "*to protect vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment.*" It implies protecting people and communities against critical and pervasive threats beyond their control such as financial crisis, disease, crime, terrorism, human rights violation, violence and conflicts, among others.

Human security and peacekeeping efforts will continue to prevail in the Asian region. That's why the *Balikatan Exercises* will continue to prosper promoting the presence of US troops in the Philippines with 28 'war games' scheduled this year. Needless to say, the Philippines will play a crucial role in safeguarding US economic interests in the Asian region.

Just recently, President Macapagal-Arroyo arrived from her weeklong sortie to the United Nations. The President joined 170 world leaders, including US President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chinese President Hu Jintao, in the UN World Leaders Summit at the UN headquarters in New York. It is noteworthy that President Arroyo is the first woman, the first Philippine president, and the first Asian leader ever to address the 60th session of the UN general assembly and to preside over the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting.



http://www.filipinoexpress.com/19/38_gma.jpg

Presiding over the 15-nation UNSC, PGMA was able to facilitate dialogue among the attendees that led to the following important resolutions:

- (a) endorsed the United States Proliferation Security Initiative,
- (b) called on the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee to coordinate with the US in the areas of intelligence and information-sharing to reduce, if not eliminate, the threat of terrorism,



http://www.apan-info.net/exercises/bk06/image/s/BK06_big_logo.jpg

- (c) called for global cooperation in addressing the problems of terrorism, the worsening debt burden of poor countries, widespread poverty and conflict in poor and developing nations,
- (d) called for collective action to address and ease the effects of the unprecedented oil price increases in the global market through the use of alternative, indigenous, and renewable sources of energy; and
- (e) met, encouraged, and reassured the international financial community that the Philippines remains investor-friendly.

Faltering Peace Talks

Peace talks and negotiations did not improve between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the New People's Army (NPA) along with other dissident groups aimed at ending (if not reducing) the armed conflicts involving concerned groups.

Given its strong ties with the US promoting "war on terror," the Arroyo administration cannot avoid fighting on three fronts, namely:

1. **The Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA)** has been actively operating in 128 guerilla fronts that cover 823 municipalities and 8,500 barrios nationwide (Liwang, PIF 2003). It envisions seizure of state power within 10 years. Since 2003, armed confrontations between the government forces and the NPA did not improve.

To date, the negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms did not prosper due to the inclusion of the names of Mr. Jose Ma Sison, founding chair of CPP and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) under the Terrorist List. The NDFP rejected the ceasefire agreement offered by the Arroyo administration. Due to the failure of peace talk, the Philippine government is using "backchannelling" negotiations for a temporary ceasefire as an instrument for pacification. (Tujan, 2005)



www.bagiw.com/current_news/baguio_news/npa_trains_guns

2. **Jamaiah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayaff** remain to be a force to contend with in the Southern Philippines including Abu Sofia, a newly organized kidnap group. The Philippine government failed to annihilate these groups in spite of the US military support in the pretext of Balikatan Exercises. IBON reported sixteen (16) armed conflicts from July-December 2004 involving the Abu Sayyaf and the combined government forces of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police (PNP) and the CAFGU. The encounters resulted in the capture of 6 Abu Sayaff leaders and killing 10 of its members plus undetermined number of casualties. The military has 11 death casualties, 11 military and 2 civilians were reportedly wounded during the crossfire.
3. **The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)** is a secessionist movement with 12,500 Muslims fighting for the past 25 years in order to establish an independent Islamic State in Southern Philippines. During the term of former President Estrada, the peace pact was shattered when the Philippine military attacked a key MILF enclave in 2001 to flush out alleged kidnappers plus other lawless elements sheltered by the secessionist group.



http://www.kapanlagi.com/p/abu_sayyaf.jpg



<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/09/28/1096137238338.html>

Professor Guiam in her paper entitled, *"People-Centered Development Framework on Peace and Development: Some Lessons from Conflict-Affected Communities in Mindanao,"* shared that most government officials have been invoking peace and development nexus as a precondition for economic growth and total human development in Mindanao. But the continued militarization and intensified bombings in the rural areas of Mindanao have withered rural economies and made the poor even poorer, particularly Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur (see Table 1).

Table 1. Some Selected Socio-Economic Indicators of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur (2002)

Province	Population	Land Area	Life Expectancy	Per Capita Income
Maguindanao	801,102	547,410 has.	52.6 years	P 19,967
Lanao del Sur	669,072	385,000 has.	56.9 years	P 15, 936

In spite of rich natural resources, the table shows that the per capita income among families in Maguindano and Lanao del Sur are way below the poverty line. It also shows that the people in the two provinces do not grow old simply because they die young. Since most of its upland towns are known lairs of the MILF, they became the target of heavy shelling and bombardment of the AFP. Hence, many innocent victims were killed while thousands of families displaced as a result of an "all-out war" by the government against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from 1998-2003.

In Mindanao, the prevailing socio-economic and political systems favored the middle and upper crust of society and do not work in favor of the poor. In some ARMM provinces, local bodies are not yet fully functional while the presence of "warlord" supported by national government leadership perpetuates the interests of local ruling elite. The poor people in Mindanao are informed about the government programs. No genuine dialogue is taking place for people's maximum participation. The existing mechanisms and opportunities for citizen's participation are usually available for prominent NGOs and civil society groups. Other developmental groups with 'no legal personality' are excluded from local bodies such as the Local Development Council and the Local Peace and Order Council.

With a long history of periodic armed conflicts, the communities severely affected by war have been expressing "war fatigue". The national government and its functionaries are implementing peace-building efforts in Mindanao. There are national and international NGOs which are filling the gaps of the "democracy deficits". They are implementing relief and rehabilitation work, organizing and capacity building, providing credit funds for grassroots organizations and cooperatives development. Development programs are designed to promote sustainable peace and development in the different regions in Mindanao. Indeed, there can be no oversupply in civil society for peace and development. They serve as the rays of hope in Mindanao, which is anchored on the building blocks of human security.

Indeed, terrorist rhetoric and continued militarization by the government in Mindanao and in other parts of the country are jeopardizing the peace process. Peace will remain elusive in the country unless the government fully realized that the solution to the "peace and order" problem was a confluence of economic, political and socio-cultural reforms. One of the pervading issues today is the implementation of genuine agrarian reform program. The issue of "access to land" is particularly compelling since our colonial past has been marked by over a hundred uprisings, many of them peasant-led and rooted in agrarian discontent.

Until today, several insurgencies persist, fueled in large measures by land and territorial dispute considering that the poor heavily depends on access to land for their livelihood and welfare. About three-fourths of the poor make a living from agriculture and fisheries. While the urban poor comprising 25% of the total poor population are also dependent on land, as housing provides them not only access to the urban economy but equally important, it serves as base for income-generating activities (e.g. vending, services, processing of recyclable materials).

For indigenous people (IP) communities, the right to land signifies the right to self-determination, cultural integrity and autonomy. At higher levels of community and society, the need to improve access to land has been cited as an important step in reducing poverty and unemployment, increasing farm productivity to ensure food security and most importantly, improving peace for greater economic and political stability. Hence, there is no peace without development neither is development possible without peace. (Quizon, et. al)



The continuing struggle of the Hacienda Luisita Farmers

Photo taken from
c.indymedia.org/?theme=1

(D) ENVIRONMENT

The Philippine Archipelago is known to be naturally rich in biodiversity, the sum total of living organisms on earth and the habitat they are part of. Our country belongs to megadiversity countries in the world that claims 2/3 of the Earth's biological resources. There are 17 countries found in the tropics that enjoy the richest variety of animals and plant species, habitat and ecosystems. These countries are China, USA, Brazil, Australia, India, DRC, Mexico, Indonesia, Peru, South Africa, Columbia, Venezuela, Madagascar, PNG, Malaysia, Philippines and Ecuador.

The Philippines is blessed with bountiful natural and cultural resources. According to DENR, there are 13,500 species of plants found in the Philippine forests, which represents 5% of the world's flora. There are 558 species of birds recorded of which, 171, are known to be found only in the Philippines. There are 4,951 species of marine plants and animals located in the coastal and marine areas.

Philippine Biodiversity in Peril

The Philippines is one of the top 25-biodiversity hot spots in the world. It is where many species of plants and animals co-exist. It is in this country where an extraordinarily high percentage of plants and animals are endemic but many are threatened by extinction. The threats to biodiversity remain unabated given the following problems:



The Tapan Pit, Marcopper mine on Marinduque Island in the Philippines in 1989

Photograph by Catherine Coumans/MiningWatch Canada

1. Over-exploitation due to increase in population, poverty and limited livelihood opportunities;
2. Habitat destruction and loss as a result of illegal logging, *kaingin* or slash-and-burn, land conversions, destructive fishing, encroachment and occupancy of protected areas;
3. Chemical Pollution because of mine tailings, hazardous waste from industries, factory discharge/effluent and household wastes;
4. Biological pollution with the introduction of alien species; and
5. Weak institutional and legal capacities that resulted in inappropriate, overlapping, conflicting and obsolete policies and institutions, limited funds, shortage of technical expertise, inadequate research studies and the lack of information campaign.

Moreover, the rapid population growth and development have constantly threatened the Philippine biodiversity. Consider the following statistics:

- ✓ Forest cover has been reduced from more than 50% to less than 24% from 1948-1987
- ✓ Only 5% of the coastal reefs remains in excellent condition
- ✓ 30-50% of seagrass beds have been lost in the last 50 years
- ✓ 80% of mangrove areas have been lost in the last 75 years
- ✓ 50% of national parks are no longer biologically important



PDI, December 2004

In this light, the Haribon Foundation and civil society groups are not only against illegal logging but likewise denounced large scale corporate mining in the Philippines. It can be noted that several mining firms, which have notorious records in environmental and social damages, are among those endorsed by President Arroyo to be accorded with an array of incentives as Investment Priority Projects (IPPs). Below are some mining firms included in the IPP list:

1. **Marcopper Mining Corporation**, owned by Canadian company Placer Dome, which plans to open the San Antonio Copper Project in Sta. Cruz, Marinduque despite failures to rehabilitate its old mines and provide just compensation for hundreds of families that were victimized by the 1996 mine spill.
2. **Canadian firm Toronto Ventures Inc. (TVI)**, which operates the Canatuan Gold Project in Zamboanga del Norte. The local Subanon tribes have complained of deceptive tactics by the company to avail of its consent, as well as harassment from military and paramilitary elements stationed to guard TVI premises.

3. **Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corporation and Philex Mining Corporation**, two of the country's biggest mining corporations, which until now have not answered to reports of environmental destruction and community displacement in Benguet.



Photograph by Catherine Coumans/MiningWatch Canada

Instead of rewarding these mining firms with more incentives such as six-year tax holiday and exemption from import duties and corporate taxes, the IBON Foundation is urging the Arroyo administration to make notorious mining firms fully accountable for their environmental and social crimes committed against local communities. In practice, most mining firms are employing the method of open-pit mining. Recall in 1998 when the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued the following statements:

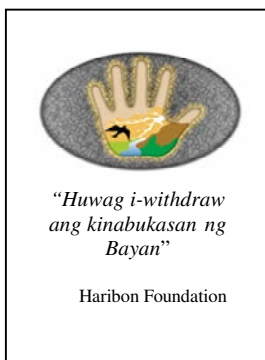
"We have seen the devastating effects of some of the mining operations: the spillages of mine tailings in Boac, Marinduque, in Sipalay and Hinuboon, in Negros Occidental, in Itogon, Benguet, and mudflows in Sibutad, Zamboanga del Norte. The adverse social impact on the affected communities, especially on our indigenous brothers and sisters, far outweigh the gains promised by large-scale mining corporations. Our people living in the mountains and along the affected shorelines can no longer avail of the bounty of nature"⁸⁷

Incidentally, environmentalist groups and civil society groups have temporarily neutralized the 1995 Philippine Mining Act (PMA) - a prelude for the globalization of the local mining industry. But in the light of the fiscal crisis, the Supreme Court recently reversed its decision that the Financial and/or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) provision of PMA '95 is unconstitutional. There are efforts to revitalize the mining industry sector through the National Minerals Policy (NMP), a comprehensive legal document aimed at reviving the mining industry and its sustainability. The Arroyo government believes it's a compromise for the government to appease public protests, on one hand, and facilitate more foreign investments and export remittances, on the other hand.

The Arroyo government hopes to generate around \$US 242 million in investments from 12 mining projects in the next 17 months. Former DENR Secretary Elisea Gozun in her report estimated \$147 million in potential revenues annually that could be generated from these projects.

The Mineral Action Plan (MAP) effectively amended the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Mining Act to simplify and fast track the procedures of processing mining applications and issuance of permits to mining companies. It also aims to harmonize conflicting laws towards the Mining Act and downgrade the authority of local government units.

The government has already set the MAP into motion, purportedly to help stave off the fiscal crisis. A concrete example is the operation of TVI Pacific Inc. in Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte which bulldozed the tip of Mt. Canatuan, home to Subanons, to extract gold even with widespread opposition of the people and without the permit of the local government. Mining permits have been granted in Eastern and Western Samar in spite of a moratorium on mining by the provincial governments. The continued operation and expansion of Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company even if the people of Mankayan, Benguet are united in opposition is another case.



The Arroyo's administration justifies its aggressive promotion of large-scale mining as a means to generate more revenues for the government. Through DENR, the government is advocating that there has been a paradigm shift in its development framework and orientation from unsustainable to sustainable and responsible mining act.

The KALIKASAN-People's Network for the Environment (KALIKASAN-PNE), the Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) and their partner networks are currently developing alternative mining policies truly beneficial to the Filipino people. The Church People's Conference on Mining Industry conducted last February this year hopes to refine the current mining policies. It is imperative to gather the broadest ranks of civil society groups and Church people who can lead in the national and international campaign against the further liberalization of the mining industry

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The country's 6.1% economic growth rate in 2004 was met with wide skepticism as it hardly trickles down to benefit the Filipino poor. Our country is still in deep crisis given abject poverty and mass hunger affecting 11.5% of our Filipino households (SWS). Millions of Filipinos are jobless and underemployed today amidst low wages and the spiraling prices of basic commodities. Close to 3,000 OFWs leave the country daily depriving us with much needed human resources to help rebuild our national economy. Many are wondering if the 6.1% economic growth is really sustainable. Perhaps, we should ask the question: Economic growth for whom?

Contrary to what President Arroyo assured the public that life would be better in 2005, there will be more destabilization for 2005. The worsening fiscal and economic crisis provided the seeds for political instability to thrive in a nation greatly divided by various issues ranging from charter change, federalism, E-VAT, etc. With the death of the impeachment complaint in Congress, corruption unchecked and peace talks with the insurgents faltering, the embattled President must prove that she's truly serving the interests of the greater majority in order to survive and finish her term.

Given the surging tide of globalization marked by materialism, consumerism and individualism, it is imperative to develop a strong sense of nationalism to our youth of today. We should rekindle in them the traditional spirits of our *bayanihan* and *damayan*, which are deeply rooted in our Philippine culture. We should instill in them the power of hope and faith that as one Filipino people, we shall overcome all these trials and adversities. In the final analysis, the Filipino youth's creative talents and energies are what will sustain us to build a brighter future for our nation.

CALL TO ACTION

The Center for Social Concern and Action (COSCA) joins civil society groups and other sectors in inviting everyone with a genuine concern for the country to do the following:

1. Unite and work actively in search for the truth under the **Bukluran Para sa Katotohanan**;
2. Engage in three modes of advocacy, namely:
 - a. (*Short term*): (1) Support the Signature Campaign for Truth, (2) Organize Inter-Faith prayer rallies and candle lighting in various schools, and (3) Organize the youth and the student sector for mass mobilizations in collaboration with like-minded persons and/or organizations;
 - b. (*Mid term*): Provide venues for dialogue in solidarity with the poor to demand transparency and accountability in the government that will put an end to graft and corruption; and
 - c. (*Long term*): advocate for a truly nationalist development agenda that will address the perennial problems of poverty and unemployment, poor governance and environmental destruction.

In pursuit of the above objectives, we believe that it is imperative to address not only the current political crisis in leadership but more importantly, **formulate a blueprint for national development** in light of the impending oil crisis and the adverse impact of globalization. **We believe that the current political and economic crisis can be resolved in a peaceful and democratic manner.** If we want peace, then we should work for truth and social justice. Honesty, integrity and public service continue to be the essence of good governance.

Unite for the Truth.

Demand the Truth.

Defend the Truth.

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Prayer for Peace and Justice

*Almighty and eternal God,
May your grace enkindle in all of us a love
For the many unfortunate people
whom poverty and misery reduce
to a condition of life unworthy of human beings.*



*Arouse in the hearts of those who call you Father
A hunger and thirst for justice and peace
and for fraternal charity in deeds and in truth.*

*Grant, O Lord, peace in our days,
peace to souls, peace to families,
peace to our country, and peace among nations.
Amen.*

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever.



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