

Agenda
GUARANTEEING MINORITY WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE:
TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Ironic but not strange that I should speak about this in a minority forum and as member of minority as shall speak about what maybe most people would rather not consider a human rights issue and impatiently dismiss as ideological debate.

Nevertheless, let me speak as one having not quite extricated herself from the incapacitating and disempowering fall-outs of history, vestiges left by colonialism. I speak of experiences of a colonized person albeit the colonizer is now in absentia. I shall also speak about experiences of one who is still struggling to locate her place in a national identity that is perpetually denied to be born and fulfilled, as a minority nationality. Surely, i can not consider myself to belong to these 'postmodernist' era as free people for as long as historical injustice is left undone.

But who am I to defend the wars and linger on the sadness and angry memories of violence and destruction? How can I tell a story about wars, whether of aggression or resistance, that I had no stake but were purportedly fought for my liberation, as my own story? The only way to tell about this story is about suffering, of how my kind as minority women suffered.

How unfortunate indeed that minority communities still have to grapple with these 'narrow' concerns of national ism and identity, and continue struggling to extricate themselves from vestiges of colonialism when privileged few reap the prosperities and are eager and ready to compete and buy-and-sell in the free market of global village, living in post modern societies when more than half of humanity, minorities many of them, have not even tasted of modern amenities. When majority now living in the 21st century seem to already enjoy the seamless, virtual, global societies rocket-propelled into modernity by booming technology, information society and socalled free market, minorities still talk about community and the village life and traditions.

Is it good or bad, I ask you, honorable and distinguished delegates.

But let me disabuse your minds, ladies and gentlemen. Ethnic and religious minorities are not against social changes. Minorities are not anti-modernity as most tend to believe. Only that they are critical of the processes and means that these social changes and modernity are being steadily built on. Minorities, on whose expense these prosperities were created remain in the margins and still are left with the fall-outs and rankling with deep wounds of past wars.

And how is it to be modern and urban? The fulfillment and satisfaction of modernity and urbanity is always measured at the expense of its opposite, the traditional and rural. Its capacity to satisfy needs and bring joy is always described vis-a-vis the lack and poverty of the traditional and rural. Is this the progress and development that humanity want to see? Certainly not.

In this supposed post colonial and post modern era, minorities are found living in frontiers and borderlands where 'culture' is constantly contested and negotiated. These frontiers and borderlands are also rich deposits of natural resources that are claimed and now risk exploitation of vested interests. In Southeast Asia, for example, the object of disputes by nation-states are rich deposits of natural gas in Sulu and Sulawesi seas. And these are homeland to a

variety and number of indigenous and ethno-religious minorities. Meanwhile the mountains and undergrounds in the entire archipelago of the Nusantara are being bulldozed and planed and burrowed and caved-in by corporate mining interests, and these are inhabited not by wild animals but by humans, people of ethnic origin and minorities mostly, who desperately hold on to what little of tradition and culture is left.

Global exploitation and expansionism encroaching into ancestral lands and resources are barring indigenous and ethno-religious minorities from their own progress and development. Deprivation and impoverishment have pushed women into becoming victims of contemporary forms of slavery in forced captivity as domestic servants and various forms of enslavement to overseas labor. Communities are being forced into mass migration and hundreds of thousands of ethnic and minority women continue to live in diaspora, undocumented citizens and stateless; making them at risk and vulnerable to trafficking and sexual abuse.

Yet in the transactions between national, international and inter-governmental bodies these minority communities are nowhere to be found nor represented in the formal talks, neither are they engaged even in informal dialogues. Are these to be interpreted as deliberate conscription between the said exclusive and elite circle?

These are among the stories of how we keep on suffering and are continually being marginalized and rendered invisible. Minority women's effective participation in political life can not be guaranteed by mere piecemeal interventions and unsustainable projects, programs or pieces of legislations, however well-meaning they are. It can not happen by mere and token representation of women or a few who advocate about women. The only guarantee is if the root causes of women's suffering and the main obstacles and deterrents to their participation are eliminated. And these are burdens of the past history and crucial determinants of present state of marginalization and discrimination. If we fail to tackle these decisively, we have failed altogether in all other recommendations that we have so painstakingly laid down here in these UN FMI Session which, from my vantage, are of less strategic remedies.

My last plea is a concrete call to action. I am addressing the Governments of Spain and the United States of America specifically to appeal for them to examine their conscience and once and for all end the colonization of the Bangsamoro minority nationality within the Philippine Republic. Be it within or outside the ambit of the U.N. I urge the Spanish government and the United States government urged to immediately undertake necessary and urgent geo-political diplomatic administrative complemented with international legal measures, specifically to unwrite the consequences of the Treaty of Paris it signed in August 21, 1898 that unilaterally and illegally ceded the Bangsamoro homeland to the Philippine Republic and unjustly trampling on the sovereignty of the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguidanao and undermined traditional governance in indigenous Moro and Lumad principalities in the rest of Mindanao. A decisive step towards this will once and for all DECOLONIZE our minds and imagination. And wake us up from the nightmare – we, national minorities, perennial nationalists dreaming of its own nation-state and self-determination at a time when, as late Arab leader Muammar Khadafy once said : a time no longer for nations, but for peoples.

This decisive step by Spain and United States of America with the witnessing of international community shall help the Bangsamoro people and the Filipino people heal and forgive and move on and believe again in justice and genuine peace.

Thank you and peace be upon us all...

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