

## FILIPINAS FOUNDATION AND THE MUSLIM AFFAIRS

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Since its organization in 1961, Filipinas Foundation, Inc., a non-stock, non-profit, non-political and non-sectarian organization devoted primarily to scientific research and development, has conducted studies and experiments intended to generate some basis for reforms and/or sound public policies. During the first decade of its existence, the Foundation either directly undertook or assisted in the conduct of studies mostly in the social sciences.

Way back in 1969, Filipinas Foundation commissioned a group of social scientists, economists and other experts, Muslim and non-Muslims alike (some of whom are now here), to look into the Muslim situation. The results came out in a volume called "An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs" which was widely circulated to policy makers in the government, to educators, businessmen, and even to others who simply wanted a better understanding and appreciation of the Muslim situation.

The research project was one of the reasons why we were invited to participate in this seminar. That project signaled the beginning of FFI's involvement in Muslim affairs and since 1970, the Foundation's involvement has grown, spurred by the active interest and concern of Mr. Enrique Zobel, FFI President. We received the invitation to this gathering with much enthusiasm as we regarded it as an opportunity to gain fresh insights into the Muslim situation. We hope to return to Makati with a better understanding of the situation which can help us immensely to better evaluate and implement the Foundation's program of action. Through this forum, we likewise hope to be able to explain what the Filipinas Foundation is trying to do for our Muslim brothers.

Back in 1968, when the Muslim independence movement was organized, the nation was jolted from a state of complacency. Five years later, we are still confronted with this same dilemma of trying

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to resolve our differences as a people belonging to one nation. And we are paying a price we can ill afford. The lives lost, the properties destroyed, and the general confusion only serve to emphasize the need for unity, understanding, empathy and cooperation.

However, long before the renewed rumblings in the South started, Filipinas Foundation felt that the time was ripe for an intensive in-depth and inter-disciplinary study of the Muslims who presently constitute a sizeable segment of our population. The study was prompted by a growing awareness on our part that despite the size of the Muslim Filipino population, then estimated at 5 million, there were, up until 1969, no seriously implemented program to fully understand, much less help the Muslims, socially and economically. In 1969, we felt that the most advanced and organized Philippine civilization prior to colonization five centuries ago has become a neglected sector. We wanted to know the causes that led to that situation: we wanted to identify the problems and recommend solutions; we wanted to present a program that would touch upon the socio-economic, political and religious aspects of the problem.

Some remedies offered in the study are by no means the solution. If at all, they merely serve as guides to a solution because, as it plainly appears, the Muslim question is of such a magnitude that no single approach can adequately cope with it. We sincerely believe, however, that modest contributions from every quarter, properly coordinated and integrated, can become the seed of a lasting solution.

One of the salient recommendations to come out of this study was the proposed establishment of a financial institution that would cater primarily to the needs of small Muslim entrepreneurs. Preferably, it was suggested, that the bank be composed of Muslims, for Muslims and by Muslims. According to the study, out of the 29 private development banks operating in the Philippines at the beginning of 1971, only one is located in the Mindanao-Sulu area. Another bank was being planned to operate in Iligan City, another predominantly non-Muslim city. The study pointed out that while indeed the Muslims have invariably been extended loans by existing financial institutions, these loans constitute a very small fraction of the total amount that has been extended in the Mindanao area, the large majority of the loans going to non-Muslims, hence, the need for a Muslim bank. Filipinas Foundation conducted a more detailed feasibility study on the establishment of such an institution the results of which were likewise circulated to policy-makers.

Realizing our own limitations, both in terms of manpower and financial resources, Filipinas Foundation limited its activities to what we call our areas of "comparative advantage." We feel that an organization should seek out the sphere of activity where it can function best and concentrate its efforts there. The main thrust of the Filipinas Foundation has thus been limited to only a few chosen fields, hoping that other areas will be taken care of by other agencies, either public or private, either singly or collectively.

Our Muslim Affairs study indicated that there can be no meaningful change among the Muslims unless the corresponding economic opportunities are introduced and made available to them. In the field of economic development, Filipinas Foundation is presently exploring two areas. One is the encouragement of small scale industries designed to provide supplementary income for many Muslim families and the other is the possibility of accelerating economic growth through tourism.

About two months ago, Filipinas Foundation signed a memorandum of agreement with Mindanao State University to create a Ceramics Center complete with building, laboratory equipment, and scholarship. This was prompted by our findings that the Maranaos were once engaged in a thriving ceramics industry. We believe that this industry is worth reviving. Rich clay deposits abound at Lake Lanao, waiting to be tapped. Through the ceramics center, we hope to infuse this Maranao craft with new technology and new designs that will make them competitive.

In collaboration with the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Society, we hope to introduce modern methodology in duck-raising to upgrade and revitalize another promising cottage industry. Duck eggs, especially *balut*, are quite nutritious while duck meat is valued for both its succulent and keeping qualities. While *balut* is not popular among Muslims, local export to the other parts of the island presents income possibilities that cannot be overlooked.

Muslim areas, especially those around Lake Lanao, abound in natural scenic spots. With the present upward trend in the tourism industry, efforts should be exerted in improving the tourist facilities in these areas, the lack of which has caused many a tourist to by-pass Marawi. It might be of interest to mention at this juncture that a first class resort hotel will soon come up in the area.

In the field of education, the Foundation is very much involved. As the wise Confucius once said: "If you want to provide for a man

for one day, feed him; if you want to help him for one year, plant rice; if you want to help him for five years, plant trees; if you want to provide for him forever, educate him."

Our current efforts are concentrated on two levels: vocational and graduate education. Since 1971, we have been offering scholarships to indigent but talented Muslims in Marawi, Jolo, and Kidapawan, Cotabato. These scholarships are part of a nationwide Vocational Education Program through which we hope to create a reservoir of skilled manpower. On the graduate level, we offer two scholarships yearly to Muslim graduates at the University of the Philippines. While our first scholars were trained in public administration, we have redesigned the program to be able to offer scholarships in fields which would be most relevant to the needs of the Muslim regions.

A more ambitious project in the field of education is currently under study. We are looking at the possibility of a boarding school for young Asian Muslims based on the Madrasah system using the best of the world's standards and techniques of teaching as well as leadership training.

Corollary to this, we have joined the Research and Development Committee of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines in its study on projections of the Filipino youth in the year 2000. While the BSP is interested in visualizing Muslim youth participation in its movement, Filipinas Foundation is concerned in an in-depth study of attitudes between Christians and Muslim groups in all their facets.

In the field of history and culture, we hope to make some small contributions. Filipinas Foundation is implementing, albeit slowly, its concept of regional museums to enhance the ethnic and cultural histories of our people. We are working on a museum for the Ilocos region; we are helping the Museo de Iloilo for the Western Visayas and, in the Mindanao areas, studies are being made for separate museums in Jolo, Marawi, Lanao, Davao. The overall intention is to preserve an enriched culture of the regions and enhance their historical significance.

Who can blame those who feel that the Muslims have not been given their rightful place in our society, when they claim discrimination against Muslims as evidenced in our literature and history books? It has been said that our history books glorify the Spanish and American expeditions sent against the Muslims, but their battles to protect their families and homes were downgraded as mere piratical and barbaric raids.

During the unfortunate troubles that erupted in the Muslim areas, a number of Muslim mosques have been reported burned or destroyed. Would it then be surprising if some of our Muslim brothers feel that the Christian majority is out to annihilate the Muslims culturally?

Indeed, much is wanting before a genuine understanding on both sides can be achieved. Errors committed over centuries cannot be rectified overnight. But at least, we know now that there are sectors who recognize the problem and are seeking out meaningful solutions.

Perhaps if we all join hands, the significant strides now taking place could be the real beginning of the lasting solution we all seek. Let us hope that beyond the cloud of doubt and confusion lies the unity and genuine understanding we are looking for.

The Foundation has felt the winds of change. The challenge of the times has been thrown. And we accept it with our meager resources and limited influence.