

Concept Paper

INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE ON TERRORISM IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN ASIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE (The Philippines as Case Study)

A. Background of the Conference

Dangerous trends towards more aggressive U.S. interventionism and resurgent militarism in the wake of the September 11 attacks have drawn critical attention. However, critical voices have largely been limited to groups with little direct influence on policies or on public opinion. This despite significant advances in the anti-war and anti-globalization movements worldwide. Moreover, little in-depth analysis and concerted international response has been undertaken on the Bush government's borderless war on terror and its implications for the interlinked issues of peace, security, human rights and the independence of states as well as its impact on the lives of vast numbers of people already being marginalized by globalization. The new U.S. national security doctrine focusing on terrorism is in itself a threat to global security. It enables the U.S. military to wage war against an undefined, faceless enemy and to target any state, nation, groups or individuals deemed threatening to U.S. national interests.

It is ironic that barely a year after the Catholic Pope, in celebration of the Christian Jubilee, implored forgiveness for the atrocities of the Crusades which had devastated much of the Arab world, the U.S. and its allies have declared a new crusade of equal ferocity and with greater capacity for death and destruction against the new heathens of the world. Asia is once again the battleground: Palestine and Afghanistan are all within the general vicinity of Asia.

The war on terror has exacerbated tensions in South Asia, pushing Pakistan and India—both countries possessing nuclear weapons—perilously close to war. The inclusion of North Korea in the “axis of evil” provides justification for reinforcing U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia, effectively sabotaging Kim Dae Jung's conciliatory “sunshine policy” and causing alarm in China whose growing economic and political clout has not been lost on U.S. policy strategists. Not surprisingly, as a declared U.S. ally in the war on terror, Japan is reactivating its military and throwing away its peace constitution. Tension is building as well in most of Southeast Asia where U.S. designs have so far been largely frustrated by growing anti-US sentiments among the Islamic nationalists. There is, moreover, growing restiveness among the people in the Asia region from discontent over inept and corrupt leadership to religious extremism to sheer economic desperation—disparate causes, but enough to threaten the stability of existing global arrangements and power structures.

In the Philippines, U.S. troops have been recently deployed to actual combat zones in the southern region of Mindanao where Muslim separatist movements are active and where

criminal gangs, coddled by military elements and local authorities, have likewise been sowing terror. Mindanao is seen as strategic to U.S. interests, given its own still-unexploited rich gas and oil deposits as well as proximity to oil-rich South China Sea and Southeast Asia's vital trade routes. Even more recently, a fresh contingent of American military engineers were deployed to reconstruct roads and air strips in the Mindanao province of Basilan, a project described by a Texas-based think-tank as "literally paving the way for a forward logistics and operations base to conduct regional counter-terrorism strikes." A likely first target, according to the think-tank, is neighboring Indonesia, believed to be an "attractive location for the al-Qaida to regroup." Furthermore, the Philippines is the main U.S. ally in the ASEAN, whose members are starting to show signs of an emerging independent foreign policy. Indeed, the Philippines' proximity to predominantly Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, tagged by Bush as harboring terrorists, has bolstered fears that the Philippines is being primed as springboard of aggression against neighboring countries deemed less friendly to the U.S. Related to this is the growing apprehension that the Philippines is becoming the new laboratory for wars against terrorism.

Also on the drawing board is a series of even larger-scale joint RP-U.S. military exercises in different parts of the country, where there are active and long-running non-Muslim insurgencies. This has stoked fears not only of intensifying Christian-Muslim conflicts but also of more flagrant U.S. interventionism—abetted by the Philippine government no less—with great potential for escalation of conflicts and violence.

In response to the increasingly critical situation in the Philippines and Asia as a whole, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), together with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), is convening the International Ecumenical Conference on Globalization and Terrorism in Manila on September 23-26, 2002. The four-day conference shall address the theme, "Prospects for Peace and Security in Asia and the Challenge of the Decade to Overcome Violence (The Philippines as Case Study)". The conference hopes to examine the interrelationships of war, terrorism, peace and development, and globalization. It also aims to strengthen the partnership of churches and people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies to forge a common front in the global campaign to expose the U.S.-led coalition on the war against terror. Also envisaged is a series of pre-conference activities as part of the build-up to the conference proper and post-conference programs to follow through the results of the international meeting.

B. Objectives of the International Conference

1. To gain a coherent understanding of the U.S. war on terror, its objectives and scope as well as its effects on human rights and the rights of states, including international conventions governing civilized conduct of war.
2. To share analysis on geopolitical trends in Asia in the wake of the U.S. war on terrorism and in the context of globalization.

3. To stimulate theological reflection on the intertwined issues of globalization, terrorism, peace and security amidst the reality of cultural pluralism and worsening religious tensions in Asia-Pacific.
4. To promote international advocacy, networking and lobbying against U.S. wars of aggression and more aggressive interventionism.
5. To draw up alternatives to violence and concrete programs on peace and conflict resolution in the light of the ecumenical challenge of the Decade to Overcome Violence.
6. To generate international awareness on and concerted response to escalating violence and the deteriorating peace as well as human-rights situation in the Philippines against the backdrop of growing U.S. military presence.

C. Proposed Program and Dates

1. As part of the build-up to the conference in the intermediate period, a women's international solidarity mission on the theme, "Voices of Women to Overcome Violence" (18-22 September), which shall investigate the impact of the military exercises and war effort on women, youth and children, indigenous peoples as well as the environment.
2. A pre-conference exposure program for two days (20-22 Sept.) in Mindanao and Central Luzon where joint military exercises are taking place.
3. Simultaneous with the exposure program, a half-day public forum featuring a panel of eminent persons who will grace the conference (Sept. 21); and another half-day roundtable discussion with Philippine church leaders and theologians (Sept. 22).
4. A 4-day conference (Sept. 23-26) involving sharing of analysis on the geopolitical situation in Asia-Pacific (covering the economic, politico-military, and religio-cultural aspects of globalization), theological reflection on the imperatives of the faith in the current geopolitical context, and drawing up strategies and concrete proposals for action. The reports of the women's international solidarity mission and the exposure visits shall likewise be received.
5. A post-conference audience with U.S. embassy officials (Sept. 27), during which the conference statement and letter of concern shall be handed to concerned parties by the conference leadership and team of eminent persons.
6. A post-conference audience with President Macapagal-Arroyo, Vice-President Guingona and also possibly other government officials, legislators and policymakers (Sept. 27).

7. Press conferences before and after the all-church women peace mission, the exposure visits, and the conference proper. There shall also be press coverage of the pre-conference public forum and roundtable discussion as well as the post-conference dialogues. Effective media projection shall be part of the build-up to the conference and shall be systematically planned and undertaken all throughout the 7-day program.

D. Program Content of the Conference Proper

Among the major elements of the program are:

1. A keynote speech setting the tone of the conference and exploring the theme, “Globalization and Terrorism: Prospects for Peace and Security in Asia and the Challenge of the Decade to Overcome Violence”;
2. A report of the women’s international solidarity mission on the social costs of the military exercises and the impact of the war effort on Filipino women, youth and children; also on the indigenous peoples and the environment;
3. Reports on exposure visits to areas in Mindanao and Luzon where joint R.P.-U.S. military exercises are being conducted.
4. An analysis of globalization, examining the nexus between globalization and terrorism as well as the linkages between globalization in general and global economic recession in particular, on the one hand, and the resurgence of militarism and more aggressive U.S. interventionism, on the other.
5. An exploration of globalization’s political and military dimensions, looking at the U.S. led coalition against terror, the impact of the war in Afghanistan as well as the worsening Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and changes in U.S. military strategy and foreign policy since the September 11 attacks;
6. An examination of dominant cultural and religious trends, dealing with the widespread backlash against homogenization of culture, the rise of religious fundamentalism, the resurgence of the religious right and the use of religion to foment violent conflicts;
7. Panel presentations on the adverse consequences of globalization and the prevailing geo-political realities in the sub-regions of Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and South Asia;
8. A reflection on the prospects for peace, security and human rights in Asia, highlighting the case of the Philippines—dubbed by the media as the new front of the war against terror—and reviewing the status of, and prospects for, peace negotiations;

9. Workshops to deepen sharing of analysis, firm up unities, explore alternatives and draw up common strategies; and,
10. A biblico-theological reflection summing up the issues raised in the conference and the imperatives of the Christian faith in the present geopolitical context.

E. Expected Results

1. A more coherent understanding of terrorism and an in-depth analysis of current geopolitical realities and trends in Southeast Asia and Asia as a whole in the context of ongoing globalization.
2. Closer cooperation between Protestants, Catholics, Muslims and people of other faiths and ideologies around programs aimed at conflict prevention or resolution and developing a culture of peace in line with the call of the Decade to Overcome Violence.
3. Concerted international campaigns to counter the negative effects of globalization and the resurgence of U.S. militarism, unilateralism and interventionism.
4. Renewed and broadened international ecumenical solidarity network on justice, peace and human rights.
5. More effective international projection of the people's movement against growing U.S. military presence in the Philippines with the end in view of forestalling U.S. armed aggression and strengthening international solidarity for peace based on justice.
6. A publication on the results of the conference (i.e., analytical studies, theological papers, and creative alternatives) for wider currency and awareness-building.

F. Mechanics of the Conference

1. A small planning committee shall be organized drawn from the staff of the WCC, CCA and NCCP. It shall meet in Hong Kong or Manila in June to finalize the details of the program, draw up the list of resource persons and participants, settle questions of accountability, and firm up financial commitments/budget.
2. A special task force, to be coordinated by NCCP's Consultant for International Ministry, shall be created to serve as conference secretariat and

to oversee the preparations, including preparatory international travel to drum up support for the conference, both in terms of funds and participation.

3. A host committee or list of local convenors in the Philippines shall be organized, drawing participation from Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and secular popular organizations.

G. Participants

Participants shall be drawn from church leaders around the world (specially in the U.S. Asia and the Philippines), and a broad range of international experts and analysts on geopolitical and economic realities in the Asia-Pacific region. A group of eminent persons, including parliamentarians, artists and writers, will also be invited. In addition, there shall be representatives from people's movements, NGOs and solidarity networks, both in the Philippines and abroad. Given the limited resources, a relatively modest and manageable number of around 50 to 60 participants (including those from the Philippines) is being envisaged. But depending on the interest generated from ecumenical partners and the international solidarity movement, the target number may well swell to eighty or a hundred. As a rough estimate, there shall be 20-25 participants from churches, partners and the solidarity movement in North America and Europe, 15-20 from Asia-Pacific, and 10-15 from the Philippines.

H. Conference Cost

The conference organizers will pay for all local expenses, i.e., hotels, food, local travels and conference kits. The organizers will also shoulder all expenses pertaining to pre- and post conference activities.

However, due to limited funds, participants as a general rule are expected to pay for the cost of international travel. Only participants from Third-World countries may qualify for full travel subsidy. The conference organizers will reimburse fares based on the cheapest and most direct route as indicated in the official receipts and vouchers from travel agencies or airline companies, not tickets.

A nominal amount of USD 20.00 or PHP1,000.00 will be collected from all delegates as registration fee.

###