

# WEBSITE ON MUSLIM MINDANAO FOR JOURNALISTS AND OTHER COMMUNICATORS

*A Proposal Prepared by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication*

## I. Introduction

The power of mass media is derived from its omnipresence especially with the advent of new information and communication technologies. As the most credible among communication channels, mass media have the widest reach and penetration and are regarded as primary sources of news and information.

Media functions and effects are diverse as cited by several media scholars. Our view of reality is influenced by exposure to the cultural industries of news and advertising (C. Wright Mills, 1959). Very little of what we think and know of the social realities around us have been found out first-hand. Most of the pictures in our minds have been put there by the mass media.

Media are also recognized as a force for social cohesion and cultural homogeneity (Meyrowitz, 1985) (Dayan and Katz, 1992). They have distinct effects on the structure and exercise of political power. Several critical communication theories refer to media as a major player in the ideological struggle (McQuail, 1987). Media are also seen as actors in the policymaking process, playing a role in agenda setting. "The mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are successful in telling us what to think about." (Shaw and McCombs, 1997)

One of the earliest communication theorists, Harold Laswell, identified three functions of mass media (Laswell, 1948). These functions are providing information about the environment (surveillance), presenting options for problem solving (correlation) and socialization and education. The "educative" power of media has been extensively discussed in several cognitive and behavioral theories.

In addition to the traditional mass media (eg television, radio, newspapers), we now have to contend with the so-called new media that are becoming the media of choice especially by the young generation. These new media refer to computers especially the various Internet applications, ie e-mail, chatting, blogging, social networking through Friendsters, video, audio, and text exchanges through YouTube, and similar peer-to-peer file sharing applications (*BitTorrent*, *Limewire* and *KaZaA*). New media also include cellular mobile telephone system (CMTS) and Ipods, among others.

Amidst the recognition of media power is the realization that OBJECTIVITY, which until recently was an unquestioned aphorism in the journalism profession, has no empirical referent. As one Filipino social scientist explained:

*“Every observer, whether a journalist or a (social) scientist, observes and reports on the basis of a prism or a schema in his/her mind which is used as a screen or as a first sieve for everything that we see or report.*

*“Every observer, whether journalist or a social scientist, already has a mind-set or mechanism in his mind which he utilizes in reporting. There is no such thing as blind observation because every observation is based on a particular bed of values, beliefs, orientations and attitudes engendered by many years of socialization of both the journalist and the social scientist.*

*“The choice, therefore, of what to report, or what to write about is dependent on the journalist’s perception of what is relevant, what is important, what is right and what is wrong (Carlos, C., 2003). “*

Given the foregoing discussion, it is extremely important to examine the competence and tools of the Filipino journalist whose “crafted” images and messages influence or dictate to us “what to think about.”

Indeed, both traditional mass media and new media have taken center stage in our lives. We must be in control of these “tools” before they control the way we think, act and behave.

## **II. Rationale**

The issue of the Muslim-Christian divide has been with us for decades but there does not seem to be much progress in improving understanding and working out solutions to the critical issues affecting the decades-old conflict. Past peace processes have made short shrift of the importance of mass media in establishing consensus among protagonists.

The media have primarily functioned as a purveyor of events. Thus, they have neglected the more important role of investigating facts and issues, providing a forum for dialogue, examining processes, and providing needed information for problem-solving.

More significantly, media have perpetuated the negative stereotypes, biases and limited view of Muslim Filipinos and the issues involved in Muslim Mindanao.

A recent study prepared by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication, “Prejudice and Pride: News Media’s Role in Promoting Tolerance” (2007), illustrated the manifest and latent biases of the print media in portraying the “Muslim” conflict and the way these biases contribute to further discrimination by one party against another. It also showed how media have been remiss in serving as a forum for discussing or reducing such conflict.

Based on the study, manifest bias of the print media included stereotyping, labelling, inaccurate, imbalanced, or distorted reporting, and negative reporting or “demonizing.” Latent bias included a lack or absence of coverage of certain news, “context avoidance” by ignoring, obscuring or trivializing events and issues, and a lack of Moro perspective in news and public affairs reporting, referred to as “excising” or “sanitizing”

While media can breed prejudice, however, they can also be a potent force in counteracting this mindset. Today, media needs to take up its problem-solving function seriously. It must proactively serve as a powerful medium and forum in constructing ways toward achieving a more lasting solution to the conflict in Mindanao and in reducing further bias and discrimination, rather than pitting personalities and cultures against each other.

Mass media’s inability or difficulty in performing these desired roles can be largely attributed to a lack, or even absence, of knowledge of the Muslim Filipino’s history, religion, and culture, among others. Some journalists, especially those who are Manila-based, write or produce news stories even without understanding the socio-cultural and political context of Mindanao issues. Their information sources are often limited to “traditional” mainstream opinion leaders.

Veteran journalists and journalism professors interviewed for the 2007 AIJC study on prejudice strongly recommended the creation of a website which could facilitate access to information and thereby help journalists, especially those outside of Mindanao, write more accurate, comprehensive and contextual articles. The envisioned website will also feature a directory of resource persons who can provide substantial information and perspectives on diverse issues affecting Mindanao, *ie* the peace process, ancestral domain, and the environment, among others.

The website is also be useful for other communicators – advertisers, film makers, communication teachers and scholars – and those who would like to contribute in building a peaceful Mindanao through genuine dialogue.

The website does not feature news stories or opinion columns (including blogs). Rather, it will provide information which would enable journalists and other communicators to adequately and accurately do their job.

### III. Project Objectives

#### **General Objective:**

The project aims to build the competence of print, broadcast or online journalists and other communicators covering or writing about Muslim affairs by providing them with a website that will enable them to provide context and present broad and diverse perspectives on the issues and concerns of Muslim Filipinos and Muslim Mindanao.

#### **Specific Objectives:**

1. To manage and maintain a website that caters to the information needs of journalists and other communicators covering Muslim Mindanao affairs
2. To provide an online resource that features essential and explanatory information on the history, culture, religion, political setup and socio-economic profile of Muslim Filipinos
3. To serve as a medium for dialogue and public discourse toward developing a common understanding and consensus on critical issues concerning Muslim Mindanao.

### IV. Project Description

*It (Muslim Mindanao website) was such a strong recommendation from all the participants (of MediaNation 5.2) that I hope they (journalists) will all make use of it often. I hope it becomes a roaring success.*

**Rebecca Zimmerman**  
The RAND Corporation  
Arlington, VA 22202-5050

*The website is exceptionally good.*

**Dr. Susanne Ornager**  
UNESCO Communication and Information  
Adviser for Asia

*I am happy that there is a website of this kind. I hope that many Filipinos will browse it. May Allah bless you with your efforts.*

**Gandhi Kinjo**  
gandhikinjiyo@yahoo.com

*This is indeed a valuable resource not only for information and research to journalists, peace advocates and communication educators. More importantly, you have just provided an online tool that will help raise the level of awareness and foster proper attitudes towards our Muslim brothers and sisters.*

**Dr. Rose M. Baseleres**

Dean, College of Mass Communication  
Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Phils.

*The website can greatly illuminate those who have never set foot in Mindanao and have not been as fortunate to mingle with our brothers and sisters there... It is my wish that the website will not just serve as an archive for Muslim Mindanao.... it could be their VOICE too.*

**Prof. Liz Abanto**

Chair, Mass Communication Department  
St. Scholastica's College, Manila  
President, Philippine Association of  
Communication Educators

The Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication has developed and maintains the website that serves as a ready tool for journalists and communicators writing or covering Muslim Filipinos and Muslim Mindanao.

In implementing the project, AIJC draws from its rich experience not only in training journalists and communicators but also in consultancy work on Muslim issues. In 2002, the Institute published the book, *Muslim and Christian Cultures: In Search of Commonalities*. This was the result of more than a year of research and forums focusing on “discovering” commonalities between Muslim and Christian Filipinos in such areas as religion, family life, education, environment (resource management), and laws.

In 2006, the AIJC completed a research on the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Shari'a Courts) prior to the design of a Comprehensive Information-Education-Communication Plan and development of print IEC materials on CMPL/Shari'a Courts.

In early 2007 the AIJC completed the research-cum-policy paper “Prejudice and Pride: News Media's Role in Promoting Tolerance.” This was followed by a related study on prejudice that focused on Filipino movies with Muslim themes.

Meanwhile, AIJC officials and faculty members continue to write articles on Mindanao issues through columns, research and policy papers, and the like. They also serve as consultants to development programs and projects situated in Mindanao in such areas as access to justice, fisheries (coastal) resource management, renewable and rural energy, and education and literacy.

## ***Website Content***

### **Ancestral Domain**

- Whose Ancestral Domain is Mindanao-Sulu and Palawan?
- Full Text of the Draft Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
- Supreme Court Ruling on the MOA-AD
- Comments on the MOA-AD Supreme Court Decision

### **Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao**

- Geographic Coverage & Population Statistics
- Republic Act 6734 & Republic Act 9054
- Directory of ARMM Officials

### **Culture and Arts**

- Heritage of Philippine Muslims
- Muslim Figurative Painting
- The Jawi Script of Mindanao
- Rameer Tawasil and his Art

### **Directory of Resource Persons**

### **Glossary of Terms**

### **Interfaith Initiatives**

- Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Building in Mindanao
- UNESCO Interfaith Projects

### **Islam in the Philippines**

- History of Islam in the Philippines
- Moro Heroes
- Muslim Communities

### **Islam the Religion**

- The Noble Qur'an & Other Sources of Islamic law
- Articles of Faith & Pillars of Islam

## **Madrasah Educational System**

### **Maps of Mindanao** (interactive maps)

### **Mass Media & Muslim Mindanao**

- The Moro Times (past issues)
- Research Studies on Media Coverage on Mindanao
- Directory of Community Newspapers in Mindanao

### **Mindanao Conflict**

- Understanding the Mindanao Conflict
- Constitutional Accommodation of a Bangsamoro Islamic Region
- Some Advantages of Federalism and Parliamentary Government

### **Office of Muslim Affairs**

- Directory of National and Regional Officials

### **Peace Process**

- Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front
- Historical Documents (Treaty of Paris of 1898, Tripoli Agreement of 1976, 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement)
- Directory of GRP-MILF & GRP-MNLF Peace Panel Members
- Ongoing Peace Initiatives

### **Shari'a Court System and CMPL**

- Philippine Shari'a Court System
- Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines (CMPL) – P.D.1083
- IEC Materials on the Shari'a Courts
- Directory of Shari'a Court Judges
- List of Shari'a Counselors in the Philippines

## **V. Areas for Enhancement**

The Muslim Mindanao website will add two new webpages, e.g., Business and Economic Opportunities in Mindanao and Social Development Issues (focus on education, health and nutrition).

Business and economic opportunities will include current macro economic indicators in Mindanao, major industries, BIMP-EAGA updates, foreign and local investment opportunities (including incentives), trade performance and agreements, among others.

In terms of social development, education page (distinct from Madrasah) will include latest education indicators, education issues and concerns, innovative programs and projects, best practices in teaching-learning, list of schools and their respective officials, etc. On the other hand, health and nutrition will cover latest health and nutrition indicators, health issues and concerns, innovative and indigenous health and nutrition programs and projects, etc.

The interactive maps will be enhanced to include locations of educational institutions and health services in Muslim Mindanao areas.

## VI. Organization and Management

The Website on Muslim Mindanao for Journalists and Other Communicators is a precursor to and an initial project under AIJC's initiative to consolidate past and ongoing research studies on Muslim Mindanao into a regular program through a proposed **Center for Peace Communication and Advocacy**. The envisioned thrust of the Center includes policy research, policy advocacy, policy forums, capability building, and action projects.

The website's **Editorial Advisory Board** is composed of respected scholars and journalists, both Muslim and Christian, namely: Dr. Florangel Rosario-Braid, Eric Canoy, Carlos H. Conde, William M. Esposito, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Datu Michael O. Mastura, Jose L. Pavia, Amina T. Rasul, Dr. Chito B. Salazar, Atty. Soliman M. Santos Jr., and Dr. Samuel K. Tan; **Editorial Consultant**, Samira Ali Gutoc-Tomawis.

**Project and Editorial Staff** include: Project Director, Ramon R. Tuazon; Project Manager and Editor in Chief, Ann Lourdes C. Lopez; Assistant Project Manager, Loregene M. Macapugay; Contributing Editor, Nimfa D. Camua; Researcher-Writer, Sowaib M. Benasing; Editorial Assistant, May M. Lubid; Webmaster, Zandro Espolong.

## VII. Additional Resource Requirements

To expand/enhance the content of the website, an additional amount of P100,000.00 is requested to cover the following expenses:

- Research
- Web writing, editing and proofreading
- Web programming
- Software acquisition/upgrading
- Transportation (local travel and airfare)
- Supplies and materials.