



**Peaceful Transformation: A Narrative Analysis of the Challenges and Opportunities of Moro Islamic Liberation Front- Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces Decommissioned Combatants**  
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**Abstract**

This study conducted a narrative analysis of the challenges and opportunities of MILF-BIAF decommissioned combatants in the municipalities of Sultan Kudarat and Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte. The research method used in this study is the Qualitative- narrative research design. It presented a narrative of real-life challenges and details of opportunities that await the MILF-BIAF decommissioned combatants. It utilized Self-constructed Key Informant Interview Guide Questions among the participants, taking into consideration the subjective and flexible responses of the participants. The Interview Guide Questions included the demographic profile of the respondents, the challenges they encountered during the decommissioning process and the opportunities that await them. Based on the analysis of data, the transformation of MILF-BIAF decommissioned combatants involves various processes, starting from identifying the combatants to be decommissioned, validation of combatants and weapons. The verification, registration, validation and inventory of forces and weapons was conducted by the International Decommissioning Body (IDB). The process of validation includes the establishment of a pre-Assembly and Processing Area (APA). The majority of the respondents stated that the decommissioning process was a long-drawn-out process. The outstretched and tedious process made them feel weary and impatient.

Furthermore, there is a Socio-economic Program that each successfully decommissioned combatants received 100,00Php as transitional cash assistance. The cash aid comprises the 80,000Php Bangsamoro Transitory Family Support Package and 20,000Php Livelihood Settlement Grant. The so-called 1 million worth of package are actually in a form of non-cash benefits such as Study Grants/Scholarships, Skills training and Social Protection.

*Keywords:* Peaceful Transformation, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces Decommissioning Combatants

**INTRODUCTION**

The vision of achieving every Bangsamoro people's dream of an improved quality of life, that also includes sustainable livelihood and political participation in a peaceful society, is slowly turning into reality. The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) signed on March 27, 2014, signaled to end the decades of armed conflict and struggle in Mindanao. The creation of the

Bangsamoro Government, with funding from the Philippine Central Government, shall intensify and put into action the development efforts. Along with these developments are the E.O. 79, known as “Implementing the Annex on Normalization under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro”. An integral part of the CAB, the Annex on Normalization, signed on January 25, 2014, provides for a process to ensure human security in the Bangsamoro and enable the communities to achieve their desired quality of life through the pursuit of sustainable livelihood and political participation within a peaceful and deliberative society. (MindaNews 2021)

In the E.O. 79, Section 7 Aspects of Normalization, under the Socio – Economic Development. Government agencies are hereby directed to prioritize, intensify and accelerate implementation of development efforts for the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of the BARMM, and address the needs of the BIAF members, internally displaced persons, and poverty-stricken communities as part of the Normalization process. These programs shall be community-based and shall reinforce social cohesion, and strengthen and preserve the unity of the communities. (MindaNews 2021)

Under the normalization aspect of the CAB, MILF combatants will be decommissioned as key milestones of the Peace agreement are achieved. The phase 1 of the decommissioning process took place in June 2015, in the presence of President Benigno Simeon Aquino III. It involved 145 MILF fighters and 75 high-powered weapons. Phase 2 commenced in September 2019 with President Rodrigo Duterte gracing the event. It was completed in March 2020 with the decommissioning of 12,000 MILF combatants, along with at least 2,100 assorted weapons and at least 500 ammunition. (Bong S. Sarmiento, MindaNews 2021)

The Phase 3 of the decommissioning process will cover 14,000 former MILF fighters. About 7,200 combatants underwent the initial decommissioning phase on Nov. 8, 2021. And at least 5,500 combatants are scheduled to be decommissioned until the end of 2022. (MindaNews 2021)

Since the start of decommissioning in 2015, a total of 19,345 or 48.36% of the target 40,000 MILF combatants have successfully undergone the process, while 2,175 weapons were put beyond use.

The key ingredient in preventing extremism is the genuine effort of the Philippine government to ensure adequate resources for the basic needs of its people. The rest of Muslim Mindanao, manifesting itself at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid, thirst for equal opportunities and improved quality of life. The Philippine government will extend assistance to the decommissioning process so that the former combatants become “productive members of the community”. (Philippine Daily Inquirer, E. Quitariano, 2015)

### Theoretical Framework

The study used the “Theory of Peace” by Johan Galtung, which defines Peace as a relation between two or more parties, and the parties are inside or between two persons, groups, states or nations, and regions or civilizations. And the relation defies into negative, disharmonious, indifferent and positive and harmonious dimensions. The relation further focuses toward the negative peace which is the absence of violence, like a cease-fire, like keeping them apart, no more negative but indifferent relations and positive peace relies on the presence

of harmony, intended or not. Relation characterizes structural peace which initiates along with equity, reciprocity and integration. Peace intends to fulfill the suffering from sukkha and dukha which is used as a generic term for negative and positive goals. (Galtung, Johan 2013)

The opportunity to work and build a tangible and lasting Peace relies on the same hands that have fought the war for decades. The MILF combatants have fought decades-long for self-determination, injustices, oppression, and in defense of their families and communities. The historic decommissioning process will pave the way for the MILF-BIAF combatants to return to being civilians, to reintegrate into the society. Furthermore, it will signify the commitment of both the GPH and the MILF-BIAF members to work for a lasting Peace.

Transformation from a revolutionary group to being civilians is the first challenge that the decommissioned MILF combatants have to face. They have to ditch their “nom de guerre” or aliases, and register legal identities in order to benefit from social services as part of meaningful transformation.

Another theory used in this study is the Hierarchy of Needs by Psychologist Abraham Maslow. It is a motivational theory in Psychology. It comprises a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchy levels within a pyramid. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: PHYSIOLOGICAL (food and clothing), SAFETY (job security, social welfare), LOVE and BELONGING needs (friendship), ESTEEM and SELF-ACTUALIZATION. He initially stated that individuals must satisfy lower level deficit needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. However, he later clarified that satisfaction of needs is not an “all-or-none” phenomenon. When a deficit need has been more or less satisfied, it will go away, and our activities become habitually directed towards meeting the next set of needs that we have yet to satisfy. These then become our salient needs. However, growth needs continue to be felt and may even become stronger once they have been engaged. (S. Mcleod 2023)

Maslow's theory has given rise to a new way to look at people's needs. Problems or difficult circumstances at one point in a person's life can cause them to fixate on a particular set of needs, and this can affect their future happiness. For example, a person who lived through a period of extreme deprivation and lack of security in early years of his life may fixate on physiological and safety needs. These remain salient even if they are satisfied. ([www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html))

For the combatants, no amount of money could pay for the sacrifices they had made for the MILF struggle. But the Bangsamoro Family Support Package and the Livelihood Settlement Grant would give the Decommissioned Combatants and their families a good and promising start. (Rappler. C. Fonbuena, 2019)

## METHOD

The research method used in this study is the Qualitative-narrative research design. It aims to present a narrative of real-life challenges and details of opportunities that awaits the MILF Decommissioned combatants. It utilized Key Informant Interview Guides taking into consideration the subjective and

flexible responses of the participants. The Interview Guide Questions included questions about the Profile of the participants, the challenges they encountered during the decommissioning process. Furthermore, helping them realize the importance of the opportunities that awaits all MILF decommissioned combatants.

The study was conducted in the municipalities of Datu Odin Sinsuat and Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Del Norte, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Datu Odin Sinsuat (formerly known as Dinaig) was officially changed to Municipality of Datu Odin Sinsuat in 1994 by virtue of Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 29. The town was part of the province of Shariff Kabunsuan and served as its capital from October 2006 until its nullification by the Supreme Court in July 2008. It is a 2<sup>nd</sup> class municipality and now capital of the province of Maguindanao del Norte.

The Municipality of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao del Norte (formerly known as Nuling) is a coastal municipality in the province of Maguindanao. Camp Darapanan is situated in barangay Darapanan and is nearby the villages of Crossing Simuay and Dalumangcob, Municipality of Sultan Kudarat. The sprawling Camp Darapanan is considered as the main headquarters of MILF, and it traverses six villages.

The participants of the study were twelve (12) male MILF Decommissioned Combatants from the Municipalities of Datu Odin Sinsuat and Sultan Kudarat, Province of Maguindanao Del Norte. The 6 (six) MILF-BIAF Decommissioned combatants are residents of Barangay, Kurintem, D.O.S. and had been actively reporting for duties at Camp Badar, Barangay Kinebeka, D.O.S., Maguindanao del Norte before the decommissioning process. Furthermore, 6 (six) MILF-BIAF Decommissioned combatants are residents of Barangay Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao del Norte. They had been actively reporting for duties at Camp Darapanan in the said barangay before the decommissioning process.

The participants were determined according to their age brackets: the 61 above age bracket, the 40 to 60 age bracket, the 40 and below age bracket.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1**

Demographic Profile of the Participants

N =12

No.	Profile	Number of Participants	Percentage
1.	Age: 40 years old and below	1	1%
	41 – 60 years old	6	50%
	61 years old and above	5	49%
2.	Civil Status:		

	Single	1	1%
	Married	10	98
	Widower	1	1%
3.	No. of years as MILF Combatants	Participant 1 = 41 Participant 2 = 24 Participant 3 = 34 Participant 4 = 17 Participant 5 = 53 Participant 6 = 40 Participant 7 = 50 Participant 8 = 50 Participant 9 = 48 Participant 10 = 44 Participant 11 = 39 Participant 12 = 41	
4.	Area of assignment	Camp Darapanan Camp Badr	
5.	Educational Attainment:		
	High School Graduate	1	
	High School Level	1	
	Elementary Graduate	3	
	Elementary Level	2	
	Madrasah	4	

Based on the table shown above, six (6) participants belong to the 41-60 years old age bracket. It represents one half of the total number of participants. The other 5 (five) participants belong to the 61 years old and above age bracket. While 1 (one) participant belongs to the 40 years old and below age bracket.

With regards to the participants' civil statuses. There were 10 (ten) participants who are married and have children, 1 (one) participant remains single and 1 (one) participant who is a widower.

As shown in the table, participant 5 had been an active member of the MILF-BIAF for 53 years. Followed by participants 7 and 8 who had been active members for 50 years. Meanwhile, participant 9 have served the MILF-BIAF for 48 years. Followed by participant 10 who have been with the forces for 44 years. Furthermore, participants 1 and 12 had both served the forces for 41 years. Participant 6 had been an active member for 40 years, while participants 11, 3, 2 and 4 had been active members for 39, 34, 24 and 17 years respectively.

In terms of their areas of assignment, participants 1,2,3,4,5,6 had been assigned at Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao del Norte. And

participants 7,8,9,10,11,12 had been assigned at Camp Badr, Barangay Kinebeka, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte.

In terms of their educational attainment, only 1 (one) participant was able to graduate from high school, and also 1 (one) participant had reach high school level. Furthermore, 3 (three) participants were able to graduate in elementary but have not continued studying. Meanwhile, 2 (two) participants were in elementary level and 4 (four) participants have studied Arabic in Madrasah.

**Table 2**

Major Themes and Thematic Statements on the Challenges of MILF-BIAF Decommissioned Combatants

Major Themes	Thematic Statements
Reluctance	We are being chosen to undergo the decommissioning process, that as a combatant, we should follow what our leaders in the (MILF-BIAF) will tell us to do.
	I am still reluctant because I do not know what will be the process that we have to go through.
	I feel like I have surrendered.
	I understand that the decommissioning process is an agreement between the national government and us, the MILF.
Acceptance and Obedience	I have accepted the fact that this decommissioning process will contribute to attaining peace in our land.
	Most of us, combatants, submitted ourselves to the decommissioning process because we highly respect what our leaders in the (MILF) front have decided.
Uncertainty	We have felt mixed emotions of reluctance, oblivion and fear. My experience during the APA (Assembly and Processing Area) was the feeling of uncertainty, I cannot fully understand the process.
Health Conditions	I cannot stand up for a long time during the process because I feel dizzy. I am an old man, and I have ailments. I am already taking maintenance medicines for my high blood pressure that is why I find

	the process challenging to my health and body.
Life during arms struggle	We overheard from some of our comrades that the decommissioning process is like surrendering. Our struggle will not be forgotten, we have fought for it for decades.
A peaceful community	We have always wished for a peaceful life in our small community. I have always prayed for a lasting peace. We have decided to go back to our community as civilians so that we can attain peace. I am getting old and tired, my only wish is for my children to experience a good life in the future.

### Challenges of the Participants during the Decommissioning Process

The first set of data gathered were the challenges of the participants who have undergone the process of decommissioning.

#### **Theme 1: Initial thoughts about the decommissioning process**

Based on the coded statements extracted from the actual narratives of the participants, it expressed their feeling of reluctance. In a psychological point of view, Sigmund Freud, an Austrian Neurologist and the founder of Psychoanalytic Theory, made a telling statement about people's reluctance to change, he said "people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even when a substitute is beckoning to them". The first thing to consider about our reluctance to change, is that the cognitive structure in the mind is "hard wired" by many years of beliefs, habits and assumptions. It shapes and distorts the way that we conceive of what needs to change. Our own set of blinkers, or "schemas" as the psychologists call it. Additionally, the core dimensions of our personality are fully formed no later than thirty years of age and it is only profound interventions such as depth psychotherapy which can change the cognitive structure and neural pathways of the mind. (T. Conlon 2015)

The great German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin, one of the modern pioneers of social, organizational and applied psychology in the United States. He wrote in the late 1940s that if any part of the core cognitive structure needed to change in more than a minor way, it must first experience enough disequilibrium to force a coping process that disrupts the habits and assumptions currently in place. He called this process one of like "unfreezing" and it requires an individual or members of a group to believe that unless we do something different, our survival might be at stake. (T. Conlon 2015)

**Participant 1.** "Brod" (not his real name) is 58 years old, married and has 3 children. His source of livelihood is through farming and at the same time performing his duty as inner guard in the camp. According to him, he can vividly remember the moment that he was informed that he is one of the first batch that

would undergo the decommissioning process. He felt oblivious of the fact that they still do not know what will be the process. When asked about his challenges during the decommissioning process. He readily shared this:

*“Assalamu alaikum. Pedsukol sukol kami sa na-aden i decommissioning process ba niya. Sekami a mga MILF combatants, upama niya nengka paka-idsa su laki a experience, sa niya ba a decommissioning process ba niya. Bale ika isa a na-experience nami lu na su kinatalima nami sa kanu inienggay sa lekami a 100 thousand pesos, na actually na masakit ged sa lekami Ma'am, udi bun kagina siya sa kanu front na na-aden i niya ba pedtalun a decommissioning process. (Greetings of Peace. We are all thankful for the implementation of this decommissioning process. We, the MILF combatants, if you will ask me regarding my experiences in this decommissioning process. The first thing that we experience in accepting the 100,000 pesos (Socio-economic package). Actually it hurts us Ma'am. But since our front should undergo the decommissioning process.)*

## **Theme 2: Acceptance and Obedience**

Acceptance in human psychology is a person's assent to the reality of the situation, recognizing a process or condition (often a negative or uncomfortable situation) without attempting to change it or protest against it. The concept is close in meaning to acquiescence, derived from the Latin acquiescere (to find rest in). (Wikipedia.org)

**Participant 2.** *Sekami a mga combatants, na labag sa kalooban nami i mana kami binayadan. Entu ba i una ged a nagedam ku. Udi bu ka kagina sabap kanu palityala sa mga mapulo nami sa mukiit tanu sa proseso. Su 40,000 plus MILF combatants. Ikaisa na midsukol kami sa masampay nami i niya ba, makaamong kami sa decommissioning process ba niya. Bale, entu bu Ma'am i malu haqq sa lekami na aden antu na niya kapegkailay na mid-surrender kami. Kena niya nin mana i minukit kami sa decommissioning, na mid-surrender kami. Dili maawa i Jihad a niya, sa mga mujahideen ba niya. Uway na sabap kanu proseso, proseso nu normalization annex, na makapangaden sa decommissioning. Entu ba i nakaamong kami sa decommissioning. Atulan na ngin i kapirman na national government a niya endu MILF panel a niya. (For us combatants, it is against our will, that we are like being paid. But since we are obliged to follow what our heads say, we should undergo the process. The 40,000plus MILF combatants. One thing more, we are thankful that we have reached this, that we are included in this decommissioning process. And also, the truth is we are being mistakenly looked at, that we have surrendered. This struggle will never disappear, for us Mujahideens. But because of the process, the normalization annex, that there should be decommissioning. That we will undergo this decommissioning. An agreement between the national government and the MILF panel.)*

Obedience is a form of social influence that involves performing an action under the orders of an authority figure. It differs from compliance (which involves changing your behavior at the request of another person) and conformity (which involves altering your behavior in order to go along with the rest of the group. (verywellmind.com/2020)

The participant number 2 have stated that “We are obliged to follow what our heads say, that we should undergo the (decommissioning process)”. Obedience simply means to obey. It is a tendency to accept and agree to the



orders of persons of authority. In a society of mutual trust and respect, juniors obey seniors, students obey their teachers, employees obey employers and subordinates obey the superior. (psychologydiscussion.net)

**Participant 3.** When asked about his source of livelihood, he proudly shared that he is into farming and herding farm animals. He also talked about his life as a combatant, the word Jihad and the struggle.

*“Kinaludso nami sa decommissioning process ba niya, na minukit kami sa malendu a proseso. Limudso kanu proseso na kinakuwa sa profile nami, taman sa inenggan kami sa id. na samaya na, aden den pe-monitor sa lekami na nakabpun sa IDB. apiya endaw kami semangul na naka-monitor kami. Uway na aden bun malu nakagkapiya nin, kagina su mga duty nami siya sa kampo, na malo kami nakasengaw. Kena kami den ged pakan-duty. Amayka bu ipapedtawag kami, na paka-report kami. Sabap kanu kuyug kanu Jihad. Amayka sa uyag-uyag, na siya sa lekami na kena nami niya pinangagyan, i kape-negosyo. Uway na aden padsa nin, aden pangilayan na monitoring.”* (When we started the decommissioning, we went through a long process. It started with getting our profiles, until such time that we were given id. We were being monitored by the IDB, wherever we went. But it also has an advantage, our duty hours in the camp become less. We seldom perform our duty, only if we were being called to report. Because of our struggle. When we talk about livelihood, we never learned business. Yes, it has setback, it can be monitored.)

But what really is “Jihad”? Does it mean violence, as many perceived it to be. To some, Jihad is the essence of radical Islamist ideology, synonym for terrorism, and even proof of Islam’s innate violence. To others, Jihad means a peaceful, individual, and internal spiritual striving. Bonner (2008), however, shows that those who argue that jihad means only violence or only peace are both wrong. Jihad is a complex set of doctrines and principles that have changed over time and continue to evolve today. (Bonner, 2008)

**Participant 4.** *“Assalamu alaikum. Magidsan sa mga suled ko ba niya, bale minukit kami sa proseso na decommissioning. Sabap kanu napagayunan na umpungan endu su gobyerno na Pilipinas. Tinalima nami su proseso a napagukitan nami. Dikena malemu su proseso, kagina niya nami malo nagedam na mana kami ped-surrender. Ugayd na kagina su kapalityala nami sa mapulo nami siya sa kampo, bale minamomg kami sa decommissioning. Kinapasad nami sa proseso na aden nakuwa nami a financial. Niya bu laki a madtalo Maam na su nakuwa ko na inipamasa ku sa payong-payong. Niya bun temu i dili kebped i inenggay na gobyerno a niya. Bale inenggay ku bun su pamilya ko endu initambil, repair sa walay.”* (Greetings of Peace. The same as my fellow brothers here, we have gone through the process of decommissioning. Because of the agreement between the front and the Philippine government. We accepted the process that we are going through at that time. The process is not easy, because we felt that we have surrendered. But because of our obedience to our front officials here in our camp, we joined the decommissioning. After the process, we received a financial (money). All I can say Maam is, the money that I have received, I used it to buy “payong-payong” (sidecar). I also gave some money to my family, and used some to repair our house.

The Department of Social Welfare (DSWD) distributed Cash assistance to the decommissioned combatants (DCs) in Sultan Kudarat. Each beneficiary

received outright cash aid worth 100,000 Php which comprises the Bangsamoro Transitory Family Support Package and Livelihood Settlement Grant. As stated by DSWD Undersecretary for Inclusive and Sustainable Peace Mr. Alan A. Tanjusay, "This money is a seed of new hope, a key to new opportunities and an investment to a new future for our MILF brothers and their families. I hope they find their way and succeed." (dswd.gov.ph)

**Participant 5.** *Assalamu Alaikum. Di kena malemu I napagukitan name a proseso, kagina su nagedam name antu. Mana kami mid-surrender. Ugayd na sabap kanu umpungan, a napangaden i decommissioning ba anya. Na minukit kami sa proseso.* (Greetings of Peace. The process that we have gone through is not easy, because we felt that we have surrendered. But because of the MILF front have entered into an agreement about decommissioning. We followed the process.)

In a psychological point of view, What does it mean to surrender?. Surrender is at the heart of all spiritual paths; no practice is more powerful or profound. Surrender is too often misunderstood, boiled down to a few affirmations about "letting go" and then misused as self-help instruction. Every one of us at some point encounters a situation that rocks the foundation of who we are and what we think we can bear- something that pushes us past our limits. Sometimes it is a situation we've lived with for a long time and sometimes it's a sudden event that overwhelms us and for which our usual coping strategies are useless.

When we surrender- we give up, but not in the way we think giving up means. We don't give up to or on the situation, but rather, we give up the notion that we should be able to or can manage the situation, that we can control any of it. We give up the belief that we can make reality different than what it is. As much as we are conditioned to never give up, in the case of surrender giving up the mistaken belief that we are in charge offers a profound relief. (N. Colier LCSW, Rev., 2016)

**Participant 6.** *Bismillah Ihrahman Irahim. Amayka paka-idsa nengka Maam, ngin I benal a napagukitan nami sa kina-decommission sa lekami. Na su bantang nin na dikena kami pan ready sa mga timpo ba antu. Dili name pan ged kaimamanan I panun I kapagukitan nami a proseso. Malu kami nakagedam sa pinadsimbul a gilek endu kapagalanganin kagina di nami katawan I mga penggulan amayka decommissioning I pembityalan. Niya nami kakineg sa mga tagapeda nami na mana kami kun ped-surrender. Malu nakapagitong kami sa malibpes u benal a metu ba I proseso.* (In the name of Allah (S.A.W). the Merciful and Compassionate. If you will be asking me Maam, what we really went through during our decommissioning. The truth is, we are not yet ready during those times. We are not fully aware of the process. We have felt mixed emotions of fear and reluctance because we do not know what to do if we are talking about decommissioning. What we over heard from our comrades was that, it can be viewed as a form of surrender. We have thought about it for a few times, if that is what (decommissioning) process is all about.)

### **Theme 3: Health Conditions**

Old age is one of the most difficult phases of human life. Life itself, from birth to death, is full of sufferings and challenges. That suffering multiplies in old age as one grows physically and mentally weak and loses the ability to

maintain youthful strength and attitude. In old age, people feel as if they are losing control over themselves and over the changes which old age brings. (Hinduwebsite.com)

**Participant 7.** *Assalamu Alaikum. Pantag sa niya ba a proseso na decommissioning ba a niya a naaden. Su first step na su kinalu nami sa OPPAP, niya ku nadsuliman na aden lamisan a para sa kanu mga media, aden lamisan a para kanu mga medical workers endu lamisan menem para sa lekami a pagukit sa decommissioning process. Malu di nami pan ged kaimamanan su proseso, bale niya name kapagitong kanu entu ba a gay na malu kami naadenan na gilek. Kagina saki na malu matuwa ako den, na di ko den ged kasabutan I mga pedtalun endu penggulan sa kanu entu ba a gay. Di ako den makagaga temindeg sa moget kagina aden den sakit ko. Aden diabetes ko, aden sakit ko sa sinus endu high blood.* (Greetings of Peace. With regards to the process of decommissioning that had been implemented. The first step that we have been through was going to the office of OPPAP. I noticed that there are (assigned) receiving tables for the media people, another receiving table for the medical workers and another receiving table for us who will be undergoing the decommissioning process. We are still not aware of the process, what comes to our mind during that time was a feeling of fear. I am already old, I cannot fully understand the (instructions) and what to do during that time. I cannot stand (queue) for a long time because I have ailments. I have diabetes, I have problems in my sinus and I have high blood (pressure).)

#### **Theme 4: Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is a state of doubt about the future or about what is the right thing to do. Personal uncertainty has been described as the aversive feeling that is experienced when one is uncertain about oneself or one's worldviews. A central premise is that humans engage in a fundamental process of "sense-making" to understand their lives. (van den Bos, 2009)

**Participant 8.** *Mapiya mapita. Su laki a napagukitan kanu gay na kina-decommissioning sa lekami na malu mapasang. Nadtalun ku I malu mapasang kagina dili nami samayto kaimamanan I pedtalun a decommissioning. Sabap kanu napagumpungan na mga mapulo name endu sekami den ba a niya a mga combatants, na sekami I napamili a mukit sa proseso. Kanu year 2019 ba antu, na pinaangay kami sa OPPAP kagina para sa kapeb-fill up sa form na scholarship na mga wata nami. Na iganat kanu entu ban a, kapanadeng ko den I scholarship ba antu a nambityalan lu sa OPPAP. Kagina su wata kun a pakapasad kanu entu ba 2019 sa senior highschool, na saguna na second year college den sekanin. Dala den nakinegan nami sa entu ba a scholarship program. Na niya ba na niya tabu manggula na su kapanadeng sa langun nu nabpasadan. Niya ko basa sa lekami ba niya na mana su saging na kalubukan. Sampay saguna na metu bun ba I kanggula, panadeng taden.* (Good morning. My personal experience during the day of decommissioning is quite hard. I can say that I have experienced hardship because we cannot fully understand what decommissioning is all about. But because of what have been decided by our (MILF) officials and us, combatants. We are being chosen to go through the (decommissioning) process. During the year 2019, we were told to go to the (office) of OPPAP, to fill up forms for the scholarship of our children. But we have not heard anything from them after that. My child during that year (2019) is about to finish Senior High School.

Now, he is already in his second year in college. We have not heard anything from them about the scholarship.)

According to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU), the children of around 7,000 decommissioned MILF combatants and members of their family, as well as selected beneficiaries from six government-acknowledged MILF camps will largely benefit from a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE) of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and OPAPRU. Through a special scholarship program soon to be implemented by CHED, decommissioned MILF combatants who wish to continue their education can enroll in short-term courses that will enable them to learn new livelihood skills. (peace.gov.ph/2019)

**Participant 9.** *Assalamu Alaikum Maam. Saki samaya na matuwa den I umol ko. Niya ko kapangingarap na masot pan na umol ko I nadtalo ba niya a tabang a pakabpun sa gobyerno na Pilipinas. Amayka niya nengka menem makaidsa sa laki I mga natala name kanu kinaukit name sa decommissioning, na niya ko ged muna mapanudtol sa leka Maam na benal a malu natekawan kami. Mana malangkas ged I kinapamili sa lekami endu su kinaukit name sa (pakabelay) a proseso. Niya nin mana na, di nami ged kasabutan ngin I decommissioning, kagina niya pedtalun na kadakelan sa mga brother ko ba niya sa umpungan na mana kami kun pedsurrender. Bale nagitong ako a benal sa tidto, niya mauli na sekami den ba I napamili a mokit sa proseso na decommissioning. Penduwa-duwa su kanggiginawa ko, kagina dikena ku pan ready. Entu ba I tidto a nagedam ko sa entu ba a timpo. Alhamdullilah, pedsukor sukor ako kagina madakel kami bun a minukit sa proseso lu sa opisina na OPPAP, endu lu sa Darapanan, kanu kina-release sa magatos ngibo a kulta. Na da ko bun ged magedam su kapangandam endu su kaugat na ginawa. Niya ko bu ipangeni ngeni sa Allahu Taalah (SAW) na enggan kami pan sa malu malendu pan a umol.* (Greetings of Peace) to you Maam. I am already nearing old age. What I just hope is for me to still reach the time that the assistance coming from the Philippine government will arrive. If you will ask me what are our experiences during the decommissioning. The first thing that I will narrate to you Maam is how we felt, we are like being swiftly brought and undergo the tedious process. It means that we do not fully understand what decommissioning is all about, because what most of our brothers in the front (MILF) told us that we are like surrendering. So I think hard, and there came the time that we are being chosen to undergo the decommissioning process. I have hesitations because I feel that I am not yet ready. That is the real feelings that I have felt during those time. I thank ALLAH (SAW), because I am not alone, I have many companions during the process at the office of OPPAP, and also at Darapanan during the release of the 100 thousand pesos. I have not really felt the fear. What I am praying for is that ALLAH(SAW) will still extend our life.

Emotional readiness encompasses the fundamental, foundational emotional skills that will help an individual flourish and succeed. This skill set is often collectively referred to as resilience, or the ability to handle life's challenges and still find ways to thrive. (K.J. Igoe,2017/blog.collegevine.com)

**Participant 10.** *Assalamu alaikum warahmatullahi Wabarakatuhu. Panginsukor ako, labi den kanu Allahu wataalah (SAW), kagina niya ko kapegkagedam na mapiya bun I talaguy na decommissioning ba niya. Dili ako bun kaawan na pagasa na makuwa tanu bun I langun na kahanda tanu. Su kinaukit name sa proseso na decommissioning na niya ko madtalo na niya den ba I inindalasaya tanu. Niya den ba I unga nin, ugaid na malu ako pakagedam sa lido na ginawa. Pakalido sa ginawa amayka peludep sa itungan ko I panun den amayka makasot pan sa pila lagon bago nami makuwa I langon na nambitiyalan ba niya a mga tabang. Ugaid na kagina niya pan su mga mapulo name sa front, a tidto a minggelbek sa makuwa tanu su kambayabaya.* (Greetings of Peace. I am grateful, most especially to ALLAH (SAW), because I felt that the decommissioning process will run smoothly. I do not lose hope that we will get whatever we are wishing for. Going through the process, what I can say is that, this is what we have sacrificed for. This is the fruit, although I felt a slight feeling of worry. I am worried that whenever it crosses my mind the uncertainty when it will take years, for us to receive the said support. But because our MILF officials are still here, they have worked hard to attain the peace gains.)

According to Bhavik Sarkhedi (2020), a positive attitude is not just about sporting that smile on your face every time, it is more than that. It is about maintaining that optimistic mindset and attitude even when things are in utter chaos.

**Participant 11.** *“Bismillah ihramanir Rahim. Assalamu alaikum. Niya ko mapanudtol sa leka Maam, na kanu timpo na Covid, na napasangan kami.. Entu bas u timpo a pinangay kami lu sa camp Darapanan, kagina lu kabaton su kapagukit nami sa proseso. Minukit kami sa malu mapasang a napagukitan. Strikto ged su proseso, kagina pagabungan I Covid ba niya. Endu saki su entuba a timpo na madtalo ko I dili ako pan ged ready, malu ako pan pakagedam sa kaugat na kanggiginawa sa kapagukit sa proseso.”*

(In the name of Allah(SAW). Greetings of Peace. What I can narrate to you Maam, during the time of COVID, we experienced hardship. It was during that time that we are instructed to go to Camp Darapanan, since that is where the (decommissioning) processing will take place. We went through considerable hardship. The process is very strict, because of the Covid (pandemic). I can say that during those time, I am not yet ready, I have heavy feelings in undergoing the process.)

**Participant 12.** *“Assalamu alaikum. Niya ko taman na madtalo, kagina samayto malo noget den su kinaukit name sa proseso na niya ba pedtalun a decommissioning ba niya. Ugayd na sampay saguna na dili ko pa mun kalipatanan I napagukitan name lu sa processing area. Madakel kami lu ba a nalimod, uman isa na pamagidsaya ngin I matala tanu sa entu ba a proseso. Niya nami bu ipenggamot sa dili name ged kapegkasabot sa pidtalu a decommissioning na su pidtalu na mapulo name sa umpungan. Niya nin inidtutuma sa lekami na mukit kami sa proseso kagina entu kun ba I nabpasadan, sa kanu pangenin tanu langon a kalilintad na dalpa tanu.”*

(Greetings of Peace. All I can say is, since it had been quite a long time ago that we have undergone the decommissioning process. But until now, I cannot forget what we went through in the processing area. We have gathered together, and most of us were asking what will happen in the processing. We just have to

comfort ourselves despite the fact that we still do not fully understand the process. Our officials (in the front), told us that we should undergo the process because it was an agreement, and it will answer our longing for peace in our land.)

To wrap up what transpired in the series of Key Informant Interviews among the decommissioned combatants, the researcher had given them assurance that although the interview had been audio recorded, and there were pictures for documentation purpose, their identities will be strictly protected. Conversations that were identified by the researcher as sensitive, and will jeopardize the normalization process were treated as off the record.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study aimed to present a narrative of challenges and opportunities of MILF Decommissioned combatants. Specifically, it sought to gather in depth responses among the participants about the challenges they encountered during the decommissioning process. And what are the opportunities that await the participants after the decommissioning process. Furthermore, to present the policy recommendations drawn out from the study.

This study used the Qualitative-narrative research design, which aimed to present a narrative of real-life challenges and details of opportunities that await the MILF decommissioned combatants.

The Key Informant Interview was conducted in the Municipalities of Sultan Kudarat and Datu Odin Sinsuat, Province of Maguindanao del Norte. The participants of the study were 12 MILF- BIAF Decommissioned combatants. The interview provides in depth understanding of the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of the participants.

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings are drawn:

1. The transformation of decommissioned combatants involves various processes, starting from identifying the combatants to be decommissioned, validation of combatants and weapons. The IDB (International Decommissioning Body) is tasked to conduct verification, registration, validation and inventory of weapons and forces of MILF with the assistance of the VMAT (Verification and Monitoring Assistance Teams).
2. The process of validation includes the establishment of a pre-Assembly and Processing Area (pre-APA). The GPH and MILF established this and jointly conduct a pre-screening and pre-registration of MILF combatants scheduled for decommissioning.
3. The identities of MILF combatants are verified through civil registration and provision and processing of Certificate of Live Births. The Civil registration support initiative was launched in Camp Darapanan, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Del Norte on June 15, 2022. It is called ALIAS DC (Access to Legal Identity and Social Services for Decommissioned Combatants), the project will not only be implemented among the decommissioned combatants but also includes their family, and members of their communities.
4. Each combatant is validated and duly registered through biometrics by the IDB, with their photos and fingerprints taken and printed in the

Identification Card or the decommissioned combatant's ID issued exclusively by the IDB. The information collected from the registration is properly handled through an IDB database system and is treated with utmost confidentiality and security.

5. After the process of decommissioning, the validated and registered combatants were turned over for the so-called "Social-intake interview under the TFDCC (Task Force for Decommissioned Combatants and their Communities) and the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development). Each successfully decommissioned combatants received 100,000Php as transitional cash assistance with a DSWD-issued ID (biometric system) as part of their transformation to civilian, and productive lives. The cash aid comprises the 80,000Php Bangsamoro Transitory Family Support Package and 20,000Php Livelihood Settlement Grant. The so-called 1 million worth of package are in a form of non-cash benefits such as Study grants/ scholarships, skills training, and social protection based on the result of the Needs assessment conducted.

6. The decommissioned combatants went through a Case Management process of the DSWD to ensure that the transitional cash assistance was properly utilized to help them in their transformation. The OPAPRU (Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity) through DSWD have hired case workers to monitor and manage the status of all decommissioned combatants and assess their cases, in preparation for the implementation of socio-economic programs.

7. The majority of the participants stated that the decommissioning process was a long-drawn-out process. The outstretched and tedious process made them feel impatient.

8. The participants were not fully aware of the entire benefits and livelihood package that they are about to receive.

9. They expressed sadness that the socio-economic package that they are about to receive will take so long. And they feel that they will not be able to fully enjoy it due to old age or poor health conditions.

10. The participants expressed their reluctance to avail of the skills training because they had been misinformed that it requires a specific level of educational attainment and special skills. In which they felt that they do not have, particularly the older ones.

### **Implications of the Study**

The researcher, being born and raised in the Municipality of Datu Odin Sinsuat (then known as Dinaig), Maguindanao del Norte have witnessed the struggle of the bangsamoro people for self-determination. After more than 40 years of struggle, and 17 years of negotiations between the GPH and the MILF, finally the Bangsamoro peace process had been realized. And the bangsamoro people are optimistic in achieving a better quality of life and a peaceful community to live with. This study had given the researcher a once in a lifetime opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with the decommissioned combatants. And have high hopes that they can turn their challenges into a brighter world of opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the researcher had drawn out conclusion that the challenges encountered by the decommissioned combatants during the decommissioning process were multi-dimensional. It encompassed their Psychological, Social, and Physical aspects. The decommissioned combatants went through different processing from verification, registration, validation, profiling, and inventory. All throughout the conduct of these processes, the decommissioned combatants began to feel weary and impatient.

Furthermore, the opportunities that await the decommissioned combatants, generally called Bangsamoro Family Support Package and Livelihood Settlement Grant, were not fully understood by them. They have just initially received the socio-economic cash aid worth 100,000 Pesos. And they are not fully aware as to how and when they will be going to receive the remaining support packages.

Generally speaking, the decommissioned combatants have only availed of the Dressmaking NCII, Organic Concoctions, Extracts Production under the TVET Program. Jointly facilitated by the MBHTE-TESD in partnership with accredited training institutions in the two municipalities where the study was conducted.

The Socio-economic development package, particularly the skills training is not a one-size-fits-all. The decommissioned combatants find difficulty in choosing the right training qualifications that will enhance their basic skills.

## **Recommendations**

On the basis of the summary of findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are being offered.

1. The emotional preparedness of the combatants should be considered at the start of the decommissioning process. To be able to reduce the feeling of reluctance, fear, uncertainty, and frustration.
2. There should be a proper information dissemination of the socio-economic development packages intended for the decommissioned combatants. It can be in a form of orientation, forums or awareness programs in their respective communities. To prevent the decommissioned combatants to feel anxious, impatient and lose their interest in availing the programs and services. Taking into consideration that they are not fully aware of the Bangsamoro Family Support Package and the Livelihood Settlement Grant.
3. It is highly recommended that the skills/livelihood training will be community-based, because most of the decommissioned combatants were working inside their communities. They are mostly farmers, they spend most of their time, planting, feeding or herding their farm animals. and that would be one of the contributory factors on why they cannot fully avail the skills/livelihood trainings. Attending skills training outside of their community, will take most of their time, and will be one of the reason that they will become not fully interested. Furthermore, the skills/livelihood training programs should be tailored-fit to the decommissioned combatant's basic skills and needs.



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