

Freedom of Religion among Muslim Minority in Secular State: A Case Study in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT--- *The survival of Islamic da'wah in the Philippines is need to come up with the comprehensive programs which enhance the Muslims society to survive into the current critical condition under the Philippine constitution that promotes secularism. This research aims to analyze the impacts Islamic da'wah activities in the Philippines. In this study, a quantitative methodology research was applied which include a survey of a set of questionnaires to the total number of respondents as of 272 people and the data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 21. The results showed the impacts of Islamic da'wah activities which mainly focus on the freedom of religion and acceptance of Islam as a way of living in Cordillera Administrative Region gave the high level of mean values of 4.07 and 3.81 respectively. The results found that there is an increasing of number of Christians accepting Islam as their new religion in life.*

Keywords--- *Cordillera, Islamic Da'wah, Philippines, Freedom, Religion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Peter Gowing (1988) stated that the Islamic *da'wah* activities become active on 14th century and the process of Islamization accelerated the natural expansion of the barangay and in effect produced an Islamic barangay type of society. At the moment, Islam gave a sense of community to those who embraced it, a consciousness of being part of an international brotherhood that transcended tribal, linguistic and even racial considerations. The coming of Spaniards with the sword and the cross intensified Islamic *da'wah* activities to such a point that Islam emerged as a rallying ideology which, together with patriotism, served as a force against Christianity. The vast majority of Muslims were never incorporated into the Spanish colony. For more than three hundred years, the relation between the Spanish colony and the Muslim communities would be characterized by hostilities.

Peter Gowing and Robert McAmis (1974) reported that Islamic *da'wah* activities in the Philippines began late in the 14th century with the work of missionaries from Arabia, the East Indies, Malaya and Borneo. Islamized Filipinos were part of the Islamized Malay world before the Spaniards settled in the Philippines late in the 16th century, and they had achieved the most developed and cohesive political organizations, which is the Sultanates of Sulu and Mindanao. If the history of the Philippines were written fully and without prejudice, it would tell of how the Muslim Filipinos offered the earliest and the longest armed national resistance to the encroachments of Western imperialism in these Islands.

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However, Alunan (1974), mentioned that the phase of the coming of Muslim activists known as Makhdumin (an Arabic plural terms from the singular word Makhdum) who sowed the first seeds of Islam in the Philippines. At the end of the 15th century, Sumatran Islamic influences and political institutions found their way into the Muslim areas of Mindanao and Sulu. Later, this period was represented in the Sulu and Maguindanao genealogies by the coming of Rajah Baginda Ali with his ministers and troops who arrived in Sulu and established the Sulu Sultanate. The first Sultan was Sayed Abu Bakr and Sulu had become Muslim areas until Islamic institution was implemented and then followed by the coming of Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan in Cotabato, an Arab-Malay from Johore. However, in 1571, Rajah Soliman, the first Muslim king of Manila was defeated by Martin de Goiti, the first Spanish to set eyes on the Muslim kingdom of Manila. The continuation of Islamic *da'wah* activities in the Philippines is immensely important, it is an obligation for every Muslim to be a *da'i* (al-Quran (3):110 and it cannot be left to immature and inexperienced persons (Wadja Esmula, 2000).

II. METHODOLOGY

This research is a quantitative method which includes a survey and distribution of a set of questionnaire. A total of 272 respondents were targeted to represent Muslim societies in Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), northern part of the Philippines. The respondents were of those persons who actively involved in Islamic organization such as Islamic schools, Islamic *da'wah* organizations, mosques, Muslim leaders), Muslim teachers and Muslim preachers. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling among those who are actively involved in spreading the Islamic religion in CAR. The location of the research focused in CAR, northern part of the Philippines whereby it consists of six provinces namely, Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and Mountain Province. However, after a survey made, it was noticed that Muslims society can be found only in Benguet (Baguio City, La Trinidad, Ambiong, Crystal Cave and Marcos Highway) and Mountain Province (Abatan). The remaining states are totally inhabited by hundred percents of Christian's populations. The rationale of the study in CAR is based on the increasing number of Muslims in the northern Philippines. The Islamic *da'wah* movement had now been actively engaged with the existence of Islamic organizations with the help of Arab countries. The main source of the data was gathered and collected from the answers given by respondents through the issuance of a set of questionnaires. The research was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 21.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1) Demographic Studies

Respondents' demography in this research consists of gender, age, educational background, employment, marital status, position and birth status. The significance of demographic studies lies on its contribution to help the author with better deal for the important details related to the respondents.

2) Gender

In terms of gender, the results showed that majority of the respondents comprised of 52.9 percent of female while the male respondents was 47.1 percent. This group of respondents showed female were majority of 52.9

persons from total 272 respondents (Table 1). This common situation could also be seen in most Muslim organizations as females are more active and highly interested to voluntarily join the Islamic da'wah activities than the males. Most of the male Filipinos are the family breadwinners and this may prevent them to fully participate in such religious activities compared to females whom mostly consist of housewives or unemployed mothers.

Table 1: Distribution of respondent's gender

<i>Category of Gender</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Male	128	47.1%
Female	144	52.9%
Total	272	100%

3) Age

The information of ages among the respondents in CAR was shown in Table 2. The respondents' ages were categorized under four categories, 18-25 years, 26-30 years, 31-40 years and 41 years and above. The results showed that of the total 272 respondents, the highest number was indicated by the respondents in the age of 18-25 years, which accounted for 192 persons (70.6%), followed by the group between the ages of 26-30 years of 32 persons (11.8%). The smallest number of respondents was belong to the ages of 41 years and above, which accounted for 23 persons (8.5%) followed by the ages between 31-40 years as 25 persons (9.2%). The study showed that those respondents in the group of ages between 18 to 25 years old as the highest number of respondents whom mostly join the Islamic organizations as a member in CAR. The ages of 18-25 years are the significant ages for young labours to be active in various posts such as in workplace position, religious memberships and family affairs.

Table 2: Distribution of respondent's ages

<i>Category of Ages</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
18-25	192	70.6%
26-30	32	11.8%
31-40	25	9.2%
41 above	23	8.5%
Total	272	100%

4) Educational Background

The findings related to the educational background were listed in Table 3. The respondents come in various levels of academic qualifications. In majority, 208 persons (76.5%) were in undergraduate levels, followed by 58 persons (21.3%) reached the stage of high school, while 5 persons (1.8%) were in elementary levels and one respondent (0.4%) was in postgraduate level. It means 76.5% of the respondents were highly educated people and most of them have been recognised as important members in such Islamic organizations. Having first degree in academic qualification with related social experiences is oftenly sufficient for a person to be assigned as an eligible Muslim leader in most of Islamic organisations in Cordillera.

Table 3: Distribution of respondent's educational background

<i>Level of Educational Background</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Elementary	5	1.8%
High School	58	21.3%
Undergraduate	208	76.5%
Postgraduate	1	.4%
Total	272	100%

5) *Employment*

Based on the answers given by the respondents related to employment as in Table 4, majority of the respondents, a total of 152 persons (55.9%) were students, followed by self-employed workers with total of 60 persons (22.1%), while 48 persons (17.6%) were private sector workers and 12 persons (4.4%) were government staff. The reason behind the abundance of students' membership in Islamic organisations in CAR is closely dealt with the opportunity and time factor. Students are physically able to have various memberships either in college or within their community in residential areas as they are apparently well equipped with time and knowledge. Students also play as potential contributors to keep an organization actively involved in a way of developing Muslim populations in the certain areas.

Table 4: Distribution of respondent's employment

<i>Category of Employment</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Government	12	4.4%
Private	48	17.6%
Self-employed	60	22.1%
Student	152	55.9%
Total	272	100%

6) *Marital Status*

The results in Table 5 shows that the majority of respondents were single of 184 persons (67.6%), 82 persons (30.1%) were married and 6 respondents (2.2%) were widow/widower. There was significant difference in total number between married and single respondents. Rationally, a single person is physically able to give full commitment and mentally able to hold responsibility in such organisations as they are not busy with various problems such as earning a living to support their family and arranging family matters.

Table 5: Distribution of respondent's marital status

<i>Category of Marital Status</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Married	82	30.1
Single	184	67.6
Widow/Widower	6	2.2

Total	272	100%
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7) Position

In terms of hold position, it shows that majority of the respondents with a total of 225 persons (82.7%) were members of the Islamic organisation, 11 persons (4.0%) were Imam, 8 persons were Vice President and Secretary (2.9%), followed by Treasurer with 7 persons, 6 persons were President and Program Coordinator (2.2%), while the remaining respondent with only one person (0.4%) held a position as a School Principal.

Table 6: Distribution of respondent's position

<i>Category of Position</i>	<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
President	6	2.2%
Vice President	8	2.9%
Secretary	8	2.9%
Treasurer	7	2.6%
Imam	11	4.0%
Program Coordinator	6	2.2%
School Principal	1	.4%
Member	225	82.7%
Total	272	100%

This section discusses the findings of descriptive means values. A Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used in the instruments. In determining the level of the mean value for each variable, the author has categorized the mean scores into 5 levels as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Interpretation of 5 levels of average scores

<i>Average Scores</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
1.00 to 1.89	Extremely low
1.90 to 2.69	Low
2.70 to 3.49	Moderate
3.5 to 4.29	High
4.3 to 5.00	Extremely High

8) Analyzing the Impacts of Islamic Da'wah Activities in Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)

This section aims to analyze the impacts of Islamic *da'wah* activities in CAR. The impact on Islamic *da'wah* activities were evaluated through two main topics, freedom of religion and acceptance of Islam as a way of living. The research findings are as follows:

9) Freedom of Religion

Table 8 shows the findings of descriptive mean value and the level of the freedom of religion in CAR. The overall mean value of the result was 3.78. This means that the level of the freedom of religion in CAR was at a

high level. The findings in details showed the items 'Arabic language is used in private and public schools' with a mean value of 4.07 and 'There are freedom of preaching Islam' with a mean value of 3.97 which were at the highest level. These two items were at the high levels. While the item, 'Government separates cemetery land for Muslims' with a mean value of 3.37 showed the lowest level of mean value which were at moderate level. The study found that the Islamic movement in the northern part of the Philippines has a bright future based on the findings in public education sector whereby Arabic language has been taught in both government and private schools. Freedom of religion can be seen through the freedom of spreading the Islamic teaching within the Christian community despite the lack of support from government funds such as land alienation among Muslim and Christian cemetery.

Table 8: Mean value, frequency, percentage and level of the freedom of religion

No.	Description	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
I1	Muslim societies have freedom to build mosque	9 3.3%	17 6.3%	47 17.3%	138 50.7%	61 22.4%	3.83	High
I2	Government separates cemetery land for Muslims	11 4.0%	37 13.6%	104 38.2%	80 29.4%	40 14.7%	3.37	Moderate
I3	There are freedom for Muslims to recite Adhan (calling for prayer)	8 2.9%	22 8.1%	48 17.6%	131 48.2%	63 23.2%	3.81	High
I4	There are freedom of preaching Islam	3 1.1%	15 5.5%	36 13.2%	150 55.1%	68 25.0%	3.97	High
I5	Muslims societies have freedom to publish Islamic teaching	4 1.5%	20 7.4%	63 23.2%	119 43.8%	66 24.3%	3.82	High
I6	Muslims societies have freedom to implement Islamic law	8 2.9%	28 10.3%	89 32.7%	99 36.4%	48 17.6%	3.56	High
I7	Arabic language is used in private and public schools	0 0%	19 7.0%	5 1.8%	187 68.8%	61 22.4%	4.07	High
I8	Muslims societies have freedom to make business trading	3 1.1%	16 5.9%	67 24.6%	140 51.5%	46 16.9%	3.77	High
	Total Average Mean						3.78	High

10) Acceptance of Islam as a Way of Life

Table 9 shows the findings of descriptive mean value and level of the acceptance of Islam as a way of living in CAR. The overall mean value of the result was 3.81. This means that the level of the acceptance of Islam as a way of living in CAR was at a high level. The findings in details showed the items of 'There are increasing number of non-Muslims converting to Islam in CAR' with a mean value of 3.86, 'Muslim societies in CAR are free to practice their cultures' with a mean value of 3.84 and 'The government gives freedom to the Islamic organization to spread Islam in CAR' with a mean value of 3.83 which were at the highest level. These three items were at a high level respectively. While the item of 'Muslim societies in CAR practice their religion without any disturbance' with a mean value of 3.71 showed the lowest level of mean value which were at the high level. It is interesting to observe the increasing number of conversion among Christians towards Islam. Not

only that, Muslims are free to practice their own religion, culture and the most interesting is Islamic organizations are free to spread the teachings of Islam to the general public.

Table 9: Mean value, frequency, percentage and level of the acceptance of Islam as a way of living

No.	Description	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
I9	There are increasing number of non-Muslims converting to Islam in CAR	2 0.7%	10 3.7%	73 26.8%	125 46.0%	62 22.8%	3.86	High
I10	Muslims in CAR have their peaceful life in the society	2 0.7%	13 4.8%	67 24.6%	147 54.0%	43 15.8%	3.79	High
I11	Muslim societies in CAR practice their religion without any disturbance	1 0.4%	17 6.3%	81 29.8%	134 49.3%	39 14.3%	3.71	High
I12	Muslim societies in CAR are free to practice their cultures	3 1.1%	14 5.1%	57 21.0%	148 54.4%	50 18.4%	3.84	High
I13	The government gives freedom to the Islamic organization to spread Islam in CAR	4 1.5%	15 5.5%	64 23.5%	130 47.8%	59 21.7%	3.83	High
	Total Average Mean						3.81	High

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the impacts of Islamic *da'wah* activities in CAR showed the descriptive mean value and the level of the freedom of religion in CAR was at a high level. The findings in detail showed the items 'Arabic language is used in private and public schools' and 'There are freedom of preaching Islam' which were at the highest level.

Freedom of religion or freedom of worship is a basic human right that an individual or community has the right to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. The Philippine Constitution states in Article III, Section 5: No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights.

Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools make available to church groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. In many parts of the country, Muslim students routinely attend Catholic schools from elementary to university level. These students are not required to undertake Catholic religious instruction but they are freely observing the Islamic teachings through some Islamic subjects. After their classes in government-run schools, Muslim students would not have to attend madrasah or private Islamic religious schools, as the education department is offering Arabic and Islamic subjects to them as part of the state's madrasah education project right within their schools.

The freedom of religion suits Muslims' right after government came up with a roadmap to madrasah education in 2004 and the implementation of the madrasah program began in June 2005. Muslims are also have the right of preaching the Islamic teaching within Muslim and non-Muslim community. By allowing the non-

Muslims to learn Islam and the Islamic values, this freedom of religion would be geared towards building peace and understanding among Muslim and non-Muslim community.

However, the findings of the acceptance of Islam as a way of living showed the descriptive mean value and the level of the acceptance of Islam as a way of living in CAR were at the high level. The findings in detail showed items 'There are increasing number of non-Muslims converting to Islam in CAR', 'Muslim societies in CAR are free to practice their cultures' and 'The government gives freedom to the Islamic organization to spread Islam in CAR' which were at the highest level.

Generally, adherents of all faiths are free to exercise their religious beliefs in all parts of the country without government interference or restriction. However, socioeconomic disparity between Christian majority and Muslim minority has contributed to persistent conflict but only in certain provinces. The principal remaining armed insurgent Muslim group continued to seek greater autonomy or an independent Islamic state.

As part of their strategy for moral and religious revival Muslim areas, some Muslim religious leaders argue that the government should allow Islamic courts to extend their jurisdiction to criminal law cases, a step beyond the many civil law cases that they already can settle as a part of the judicial system. Some *ulamas* also support the MILF's goal of forming an autonomous region governed in accordance with Islamic law.

Contrary to the stereotyped perception that Muslims are violent, Islam teaches a sense of peace. In fact, Islam means submission to the will of God and Islam suits the best needs of human. Through Islamic *da'wah* activities, there are increasing number of Muslims as more people tends to live in peace. Islam must be recognized as a positive factor or force in the pursuit of peace and unity by the government. The sooner the nation and the government recognize this fact the better is it for the future of the country as a whole. The prejudices of the past must be destroyed and they must begin to remake the history of the Filipino people without the social barriers that tend to divide them.

V. CONCLUSION

Islamic *da'wah* activities in Cordillera experienced too much challenges and tribulations such as restriction of government policy, financial constraint, lack of experts in the field of *da'wah*, lack of *da'wah* training programs, etc. All these challenges can be overcome in the presence of Muslims unity in CAR (Qur'an, al-Hujurat (49):10), support and helping each other (Qur'an, al-Taubah (9):71), so that Islamic *da'wah* activities can be planned and organized in well manner. There is growing of efforts implemented in accordance to the condition of Muslim societies in CAR in a way of spreading the Islamic religion as their direction of life. The efforts cover all sort of life aspects including economics, political, educational, infrastructural and media aspect. Thus, various responses had been given by the Muslim and non-Muslim societies on the Islamic *da'wah* activities in CAR. The responses had contributed to the progressive thoughts among Muslim preachers in holding the *da'wah* responsibilities with empowering *da'wah* approaches which suit to the local environment in a way of capturing the attention of non-Muslims towards the beauty of Islam.

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