

Chapter 15

National Harmony: Healing the Wounds of EDSA

I. SITUATIONER

Social inequality, poverty, and social exclusion in the Philippines, appear to be important driving forces behind the conflicts of EDSA 1, 2 and 3. Both absolute and relative deprivation have become so serious as reflected in the May 1, 2001 storming of Malacañang and the series of people power attempts.

When the poor suffer from long-term unemployment, low incomes, lack of access to education, opportunities and various social services, the valuable norms of trust and cooperation break down. This results in socially destructive behavior, including contempt for the law, the “us vs. them” mentality, and lack of respect for public property, among others.

Preventing the social volcano to erupt by addressing the serious problems of these forms of deprivation is the core challenge that faces the country’s leaders and institutions.

II. GOALS, STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

At the societal level, reconciliation is seen as a usually lengthy process of overcoming hostility and mistrust between parties in conflict. It essentially refers to the promotion and consolidation of constructive social relations among different groups of the population, including parties to significant social conflicts. It includes the recognition among the parties of the need to develop a common understanding of the causes and nature of the conflict and acquire shared notions of responsibility.

The endeavor to achieve reconciliation is much helped by a spirit of forgiveness, although forgiveness usually comes after a long process of healing and is not always attained. It is also not an absolute precondition for reconciliation and for the carrying out of work toward reconciliation.

In principle, truth seeking and sufficient truth telling, restitution or reparation, and amendment of attitudes and behavior toward constructive ends and cooperation for the common good, are essential conditions for reconciliation. These should be pursued to the extent that is advisable in each concrete situation.

Reconciliation almost always requires facilitation by credible and competent institutions or persons. This is often realized at various levels of society, such as the top leadership, the middle level of the channels of social communication, the basic level of grassroots and local communities. Respectful dialogue among the parties in conflict and the facilitators is needed for reconciliation. Appropriate policies and processes that are institutionalized by legislation or other suitable means are important for the work toward reconciliation to proceed optimally.

The main points mentioned above have to be applied in ways specific and suitable to the Philippine context and to the various social conflicts that divide our people. Factors such as the local culture and the choice of terms to denote a given process or procedure must be taken into account.

There is a plurality of ways of applying the ethical principles for reconciliation. Among others are prosecution and litigation, negotiated solution, and structure sharing of experiences. These various ways are often complementary and can be used in combination. The measures meant to promote reconciliation should strengthen democracy rather than make it more vulnerable to assault or undermining by anti-democratic forces. Care should be taken to address the real danger that the procedures and activities meant to promote reconciliation may be co-opted or “hijacked” by one or more of the parties in conflict.

To consolidate reconciliation and attain stable peace, the root causes of the social conflicts should be adequately addressed. The method or approach chosen to address a particular conflict should be evaluated at suitable times, and modified as needed.

The following elements comprise the action plan for national healing and reconciliation:

1. Accelerate compensation to victims of human rights violations;
2. Consult people nationwide regarding their views on how to pursue reconciliation and national unity;
3. Provide safe venues, sufficiently accessible to victims and perpetrators of oppression, for the carrying out of structured sharing of experience of the conflict, especially of hurtful ones, and for the possible elicitation of requests for and granting of forgiveness. The Churches shall be requested to help identify these safe venues;
4. Pursue reforms in the military and implement the recommendations of the fact-finding Davide Commission (for the December 1989 attempted coup d’etat) and the Feliciano Commission (for the July 2003 Oakwood Mutiny);
5. Design and implement creative approaches, involving an appropriate mix of modalities, for handling conflicts involving leading figures of the administrations deposed on February 1986 and on January 2001. These approaches should be assessed from time to time, and changed as needed; and
6. Formulate, bring to legislation, and implement effective national security reforms with a balanced focus on both internal and external concerns. The Congress plays a vital role in defining the country’s defense and security policies that would adequately address terrorist threats, with emphasis on precrisis activities of detection and prevention.