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Philippines (Moros) (1972-)

The war between Moro separatists and the government of the Philippines dates from the early 1970s. During the most intense period of fighting, from 1972 to 1975, more than 50,000 people are thought to have been killed. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed a peace agreement with the government in 1996. Another rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), has been engaged in peace talks. A third rebel group, led by Abu Sayyaf, began kidnapping and killing civilians in 1991. In the course of the conflict, the Philippine army has been accused of systematic human rights violations, including the targeting of civilians, rape, and torture. Both the army and the rebel groups have killed civilians and destroyed villages.

The Moros reside in southern Mindanao and the Sula archipelago. Ever since the Spanish colonization of the Philippines in the sixteenth century, the Moros have resisted Christian domination. In the 1960s, the Philippine government sponsored migration from elsewhere in the country to regions traditionally dominated by Moros. Sporadic clashes broke out in Mindanao between Christians and Moros, and a number of Moro groups emerged advocating independence or autonomy for the island of Mindanao. By 1972, most of the Moro fighting groups joined together under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

In the mid-1970s, Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos requested Islamic countries to help resolve the conflict with the MNLF. In 1976, negotiations in Tripoli, Libya, culminated in an agreement that included autonomy for the Moros in Mindanao, but dissension within the MNLF over whether to accept autonomy or continue fighting for independence led the group to fracture, and the MILF formed as a breakaway group. Fighting soon resumed. In 1986, after the overthrow of the Marcos regime, Philippine president Corazon Aquino held talks with both groups. Although the MNLF and MILF still refused to sign an agreement, the talks resulted in the creation of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao, encompassing four districts of the island. After further talks, the government and MNLF signed an agreement in 1996. MILF has engaged in several rounds of peace talks with the government, which have yet to yield a definitive peace accord.

Since 1991 a third and smaller rebel group, led by Abu Sayyaf, has conducted a terror campaign of abductions and bombings.

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Timeline

1967 - growing unrest between Christians and Moros in southern Mindanao

1972 - Moros rebel, creating MNLF; Marcos declares state of emergency

1976 - peace talks; MILF splits from MNLF over autonomy

1986 - Corazon Aquino becomes President

1987 - government approves autonomy plan, rejected by MNLF and MILF

1990 - Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao established

1991 - Abu Sayyaf splits from MNLF and begins kidnapping campaign

1992 - Fidel Ramos elected President, attempts peace talks under auspices of National Unification Commission (NUC); NUC, MILF, MNLF begin talks

1994 - MNLF and government reach ceasefire, talks continue

1996 - MNLF and government sign peace agreement

1997 - MILF and government begin talks; fighting between them continues

1998 - Joseph Estrada elected President, opposes peace plan

2000 - Government declares all-out war on MILF

2001 - Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo becomes President; MILF, government agree to a ceasefire

2002 - MILF and government continue talks, but skirmishes continue

2005 - heavy fighting between MILF; peace talks continue amidst clashes