

**TRANSFORMING OUR UNITARY SYSTEM
TO A FEDERAL SYSTEM:
A Pragmatic, Developmental Approach**

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As I originally intended, this paper was written to provoke discussion and reflection on a radical alternative to the traditional unitary structure of the Filipino political system. I present ideas for transforming our unitary political system into a federal one in two stages that would take ten years to bring about, from 2000 to 2010. Instead of making the change in a rush, as some advocate, I believe in a ten-year transition as in the Philippine Commonwealth that prepared the nation for independence from 1935 to 1946. The decade of transition will also allow us the time to carefully examine various other ideas for constitutional change being proposed and act on them together instead of piecemeal. Overall, I have in mind the medium and long-term prospects of our country's democratic political evolution as a heavily populated, developing country that wants badly to industrialize and modernize in order to achieve higher levels of human, social and economic development that is also sustainable.

Meanwhile, we have to accelerate the process of government decentralization under the 1987 Constitution both ways: by de-concentrating national government administration from Metro Manila to the regional centers and by devolving more national government functions to the local government units through continuing amendments to the Local Government Code of 1991. At the same time, we have to reorient our people away from their traditional and forced dependence on the national government, toward greater self-reliance and responsibility through local governance and development, including developing their capacity to raise more local revenues and generate funding for local development, and to attract investments.

If we can make the political transformation steadily and successfully, we would be able to end the stifling centralized unitary structure in the 1987 Constitution and in earlier constitutions and during Spanish and American colonial rule. Then we shall be better able to unify, strengthen and develop the Philippines as a pluralistic nation and the Republic as a functional and democratic political system. Our political development, socio-economic development, and cultural development will be mutually reinforcing and sustainable. As I shall reiterate in this paper the shift from a unitary political system to a federal one in itself is not a panacea to solve all our problems. But it will help to catalyze new solutions to many of them.

For the first stage of reform, legislation would be necessary to group together the existing 15 administrative regions into 10 larger “socio-economic” regions that would prepare them for their eventual transformation into states in a federal system. After a decade of valuable, practical experience in this “new regionalization,” the time will come for the second stage: the actual shift to a federal system by constitutional amendment or revision beginning about 2008.

Later in the paper I present a theory of federalization: its form in outline, its justification, and its expected outcomes

I. IMPLEMENTING PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL AUTONOMY IN OUR PRESENT UNITARY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Given the goals of the basic reforms I am advocating, I support the views and proposals of legislative, local government, and academic experts for incremental reform and improvement of our unitary system of government in the next decade. For example, there is House Bill No. 7845 introduced by Representative Romeo D.C. Candazo, chairman of the House Committee on Local Government. The bill proposes several amendments to the Local Government Code of 1991 in order to extend and strengthen *the devolution* of powers and the *deconcentration* of administration to local government units, and to provide additional sources of funding for local programs, services and activities. Senator Aquilino Pimentel, chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government and principal author of the Local Government Code of 1991, has been proposing significant amendments to enhance local autonomy within our unitary system of government and has held consultations around the country.

In his paper, “Current Issues and Emerging Trends in Local Autonomy,” Alberto C. Agra, legal consultant to the League of Municipalities, examines recent policies and jurisprudence and explores proposals for policy reforms and possible changes in the Constitution. He takes a liberal and progressive position on several issues of local autonomy and recommends giving local governments various kinds of resources. In his response to the author’s request, Rodolfo V. Vicerra, deputy-director of the Congressional Planning and Budget Office, is critical of the performance of the national government and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in our centralized unitary system. He recommends giving more powers to local governments and strongly favors changing to a federal system.

Based on the PHILCONSA studies in 1968-1971, Salvador Araneta proposed in 1981 “The Bayanikasan Constitution for the Federal Republic of the Philippines,” a 110-page draft. Also in the 1980s, Gabriel U. Iglesias and Rizal G. Buendia, scholars at the U.P. College of Public Administration, proposed federalism in lieu of our unitary system. Some of their ideas are cited in this paper. The title of Buendia’s article in *the Philippine Journal of Public Administration* is “The Prospects of Federalism in the Philippines: A Challenge of Political Decentralization of the Unitary State” (April, 1989).

I recognize that the liberal and vigorous application of the local autonomy principle in the 1987 Constitution contains the germ of federalism. This is in the sense that the constant push for local autonomy--with its successes and frustrations in various parts of the country--encourages local government leaders as well as national leaders to open their minds to the possibility of going the full length of structural transformation into a federal government. In fact, former Cagayan de Oro mayor and assemblyman Ruben Canoy has renewed his call for Mindanao autonomy and Moro autonomy within it, in a Philippine federation instead of his earlier advocacy of an independent Mindanao. Several senators have proposed federalism as a structural solution to the Moro secessionist movement in Mindanao. In November 2000, advocates of federalism are meeting in Cebu to formally launch a national movement for federalism.

Most advocates of federalism want to call a constitutional convention for the purpose as soon as practicable. However, I firmly believe in a deliberate and practical, experimental approach to federation. We should begin by first regrouping or amalgamating our many existing administrative regions into ten or so larger administrative or socio-economic regions and granting their local governments more substantial autonomy as "proto states" of an emergent federation.

II. FIRST STAGE: A NEW REGIONALIZATION AS A TRANSITION TO A FEDERAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

In the present unitary government structure, all local government units are political and territorial subdivisions of the Republic. These are under the general or direct supervision of the President of the Philippines. Congress may grant varying degrees of local autonomy to local government units as mandated in the 1987 Constitution. This may be done through one of two forms of decentralization. By *devolution* certain powers and functions of the national government may be transferred to the local government units (political autonomy). By *deconcentration* the national government may delegate authority and functions to its field offices and to local governments (administrative autonomy).

In the first or transitional stage of my proposed structural reform, it is proposed that Congress authorize the regrouping of existing administrative regions into seven larger administrative regions which may be called Socio-Economic Regions, to distinguish them from their component administrative regions. (See Box No. 1. "Possible Socio-Economic Regions" as "Proto-States."). Within the existing unitary system, each of them shall be given substantial administrative autonomy through *deconcentration* and much more local autonomy through *devolution*.

Congress may want to begin the reforms in the "leading economic zones or growth centers," such as CALABARZON; BULACAN-PAMPANGA-SBMA-Clark-TARLAC; PANGASINAN-LA-UNION; METRO CEBU AND ENVIRONS; CAGAYAN-DE-ORO-ILIGAN; and DAVAO-GENSAN. These areas have shown their resources, leadership and capacity for accelerated development.

The purpose of the transitional reforms is to remove the expendable legal and administrative constraints on the enterprise, initiative and resourcefulness of regional and local leaders and local governments and businesses, in their push for industrialization and/or agricultural development. Or, more positively, to encourage them to intensify their efforts in attracting investments and industries to their areas, in engaging and empowering the people in the common endeavor for development, and in generating additional revenues to enable the economic regions to provide more and better public goods and services.

The special policies and administrative arrangements that have been devised for the present Special Economic Zones and the Export Processing Zones may be adapted and further enhanced as incentives to the selected “economic zones.” These would give them additional capacities for accelerated development. The important point is to introduce creative experimentation in policymaking, governance, public administration and development, instead of habitually adhering to the bureaucratic principles of uniformity and standardization and controls that tend to stifle the imagination and frustrate innovation. The grant of special powers and autonomy to the “socio-economic regions” shall include more taxing, fund-raising, and borrowing powers. They should also be empowered to deal with those who might abuse their expanded powers, for the success of the new regionalization hinges on the competence, honesty and integrity of the regional and local government leaders.

In concluding his comprehensive review of local autonomy issues and trends in our present unitary system, Alberto C. Agra says:

The bottom line is increasing the resources of local governments. These resources...are:

1. Political Resources, by pursuing the principle of subsidiarity, promoting democratization, advancing the agency and stewardship role of local governments;
2. Financial Resources, by broadening the revenue base of and recognizing the fiscal autonomy of local governments;
3. Information Resources, by applying rules of strict accountabilities, facilitating access to records and policy instruments and participating in regular dialogues and consultations;
4. Legal and Constitutional Resources, by advocating for the liberal view of municipal powers, pushing for broad self-governance, formalizing separation of powers at the local level, defining the role of the courts, expanding the constitutional powers of local governments, creating the environment for federalism: and

5. Hierarchical Resource, by adhering to policies on legislative control and executive supervision, understanding and operationalizing local autonomy at various levels and resolving conflicts in favor of integration and local solidarity.

To reiterate, the first phase in the reforms I am advocating would take ten years to undertake, from 2000 to 2010. As valuable experience is being gained in the practical experiment in selective empowerment of the leading “socio-economic zones” and then of all the “socio-economic regions,” we shall also examine more closely the prospects for federalization, and work out the important details of shifting from our unitary government to a federal government.

We should study and learn from the many variants among the 40 or so federal governments in the world and also from the semi-federal unitary systems. Among the leading federations whose features may be adapted are the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, India, and Malaysia. Much can also be learned from such “semi-federal unitary systems” as Spain and the People’s Republic of China that have special autonomous political regions.

III. SECOND STAGE: THE SHIFT TO A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT UNDER AN AMENDED OR NEW CONSTITUTION

In the second stage of the proposed reforms, beginning in 2010, the Republic of the Philippines will become a federation under an amended or new Constitution. The Constitution will specifically divide political powers and functions between the federal or national government on the one hand, and the seven states and their local authorities on the other. In the constitutional division of powers and functions, their exercise may be shared (concurrent or interlocked) by the two levels of government, or they may be performed only either by the federal government or by the state and local governments (exclusive).

The federal or national government shall retain certain exclusive national powers and functions. Among these are national policy, planning and legislation; national security and defense; foreign relations; the monetary system; the federal appellate courts of justice; national commissions for civil service, elections, and audit; federal grants-in-aid to the states for development and for redistribution; and initiating changes in the Constitution.

The federal or national government shall exercise concurrent powers and functions with the states in such fields as science and technology development; education, health and welfare; environmental protection; housing and urban development; agricultural development; trade and industry; transportation and communication; protection of labor and workmen’s compensation; and national culture and the arts.

All other powers and functions not reserved exclusively for the federal government shall belong to the states and their component local governments. States and their local authorities shall be given certain powers of taxation, fund-raising and borrowing that shall not be subject to the infringement of the federal Executive and Congress, and may be curtailed only when abused as determined by the federal appellate courts.

The federation shall have a presidential form of government with a nationally elected president and vice-president of the Republic. It shall have a bicameral federal Congress of not more than about 200 members to enact laws for the whole country. Three senators shall be elected by the voters in each of the ten states to represent those states in the Congress. The rest of the legislators, the representatives, shall be elected by the voters in the congressional districts to represent the people. For economy and efficiency, the federal government shall be down-sized because a number of its functions will be devolved to the states, or shared with them.

The federal government shall help ensure the balanced and equitable development of the whole country and the welfare of all Filipino citizens, especially the poor, the needy and disadvantaged. This is to say that national redistribution of resources and welfare is a major function of the federal government, while the states are to be the engines of economic and social development and the main provider of social services and public safety (Peterson:viii; 187-195).

As suggested earlier on, it is proposed that the federation shall have ten states. These are (1) Metro Manila, the National Capital; (2) Northern Luzon, (3) Cordillera (4) Central Luzon, (5) Southern Tagalog, (6) Bicol-Samar, (7) Visayas-Palawan, (8) Western Mindanao, (9) Bangsa Moro, and (10) Eastern Mindanao. The states and their local governments would comprise and represent contiguous or adjacent territory and the various ethno-linguistic groups of Filipinos. Metro Manila shall be the national capital and the site of the federal government. (See Map of the Ten States of the Proposed Federation.)

The various local governments shall be consolidated and integrated within the states and their further fragmentation shall be prohibited in the Constitution. Each state shall elect its governor and vice-governor. It shall have a compact unicameral legislature, the State Assembly, whose members shall be elected in the component provinces and cities. The State Assembly shall select the location of the state capital. The state governments and local governments within them shall be lean and their bureaucracy simplified to achieve economy, efficiency, and responsiveness, and to allocate the bulk of their resources to public services and development rather than to salaries and pensions.

As the national capital, Metro Manila shall have a unified metropolitan government headed by its elected governor and legislative assembly to deal with problems affecting the whole metropolis and relations with adjacent states. Consistent with this unified and coordinated governance, the local governments in the metropolis shall administer their jurisdictions with a measure of local autonomy and meaningful citizen participation.

Other metropolitan areas may adapt the unified, two-tier structure of governance of Metro Manila.

In the federal system envisioned, all elected national, state and local leaders shall serve a term of four years, and all elections shall be synchronized. This is intended for economy and to encourage the development of nation-wide political parties that will campaign for the election of their candidates at all levels on the basis of their ideologies and programs of government, and involve citizens actively in the political process. A strong and stable party system is conducive to the operation of a federal system. This does not preclude the establishment of regional and local parties.

Accordingly, it is proposed that the constitutional change for federalization shall also include the change of the term of office of the President and Vice-President from the present six years without reelection to a term of four years with one reelection, or a total of eight consecutive years of service. This would be a return to the presidential term under the amended 1935 Constitution. Moreover, there shall be “block voting” for the President and the Vice-President in order to promote party unity and accountability. The election of three senators by each state will ensure equitable representation of the 10 states in the Senate.

It is proposed that the Constitution be amended or revised so as to begin electing the President and Vice-President, the senators and representatives, and all other elected leaders in 2010. This shall also be the time when the proposed federal system will begin to take effect.

In practice, the amendments or revision of the Constitution should be completed sometime in 2008-2009. They should then be ratified by the people in a plebiscite held for the purpose also in 2009. The whole decade would allow the nation ample time to undergo the transition stage of building the enlarged administrative regions and giving them substantial autonomy as “proto-states,” and then preparing the federalization scheme and the specific constitutional changes to be submitted for the people’s ratification.

IV. A THEORY OF PHILIPPINE FEDERALIZATION: WHY SHIFT FROM A UNITARY SYSTEM TO A FEDERAL SYSTEM

Here I present hypotheses forming a theory of enhancing national development through a basic change in the structure of government; namely the shift from the centralized unitary system to the proposed federal system. My theory is related to specific conditions that political theorists have associated with the origins and maintenance of federations. A general argument and supporting statements are offered for discussion and debate and further serious study. The proposal or theory is not dogmatic. It is tentative, partial and open. Nor is the proposed federal system intended as a panacea that can solve most of the nation’s complex problems.

It is simply argued and hypothesized that federalism--one major independent variable or condition, together with other independent variables or conditions—is likely to produce a number of desirable outcomes (the dependent variables) for the country and the people. Here are the hypotheses as elements of a theory for the proposed federal system.

1. National unification of the Filipinos who belong to distinctive ethno-linguistic groups and their significant common experience in democratic political development have laid the basis for further decentralization, local autonomy and devolution of the centralized unitary nation-state that make federalism feasible.

It is recognized that centralized government during Spanish and American colonial rule and since independence in 1946 contributed to the unification of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the archipelago into a national political community: the Filipino nation. Spanish misrule that had fomented many revolts led to the Propaganda Movement for reforms and to the Filipino Revolution of 1896 and the founding of the Filipino nation-state we call the first Philippine Republic. Under American colonial rule, guided Filipino self-government through representative institutions, the President of the Commonwealth, the national administration, the judiciary and local governments hastened national unification and enlarged the capacity of the Filipinos for governing an independent nation-state. However, the political system did not fully accommodate the interests and welfare of Muslim Filipinos and other ethnic minorities.

Filipino national unification and political development have been further enhanced by the people's experience in democratic governance and development since independence in 1946. This includes rehabilitation and institution-building after World War II, the destruction of democratic institutions under the Marcos authoritarian rule, the overthrow of the dictatorship in the EDSA Revolution, and the process of re-democratization, local autonomy, and devolution under the 1987 Constitution. The latter is testimony to the nation's resolve to improve the democratic political system. The adoption of *Filipino* as the national language and an official language, and its diffusion and use nationwide as the indigenous lingua franca, is a sign of the degree of national unification that has been achieved, despite many other continuing problems.

2. The persistence of massive poverty and underdevelopment, and the problems associated with them, in a populous country with a rapid rate of population growth, makes it difficult to achieve substantial and equitable development. These conditions point to the need for basic structural changes in the society and the political system, including federalism, that could greatly increase the capacity of the government and the people to deal with those problems.

With a population of some 75 million, the Philippines is the 14th most populous country in the world. Continued centralized governance of such a large, dispersed population from a distant national capital inhibits the people's meaningful and effective participation in governmental decision-making and public affairs affecting their lives. Federalism is one of those structural changes that can better involve the people in democratic

governance, unleash their creative energies, enhance their enterprise, productivity, and competitiveness, and hold the government accountable to the citizenry.

Despite decades of government development programs from the center, upwards of 60 percent of Filipinos periodically classify themselves as poor and official statistics support their perception. Hunger, malnutrition and disease, educational problems, low incomes and considerable unemployment abound, although human development indices show improvements in longevity, literacy, and per capita incomes since 1990. Growing numbers of people are without land and decent homes. So much inequality and inequity mark the distribution of family incomes and wealth.

Large numbers of Filipinos seek employment overseas because the pace of industrialization and development cannot create enough jobs locally. The Philippines is having a hard time building global competitiveness. Neighboring countries tend to attract more direct foreign investments.

The pressure for government employment and inadequate revenues compel the payment of low salaries and wages that in turn drive away many qualified workers to the private sector. These adversely affect the overall capacity, productivity and effectiveness of government in providing public goods and services and promoting national development.

3. The growing dissatisfaction with our highly centralized unitary system of government has finally exerted pressure to decentralize administration to some extent and devolve some powers and functions to local governments. The unresolved national question regarding the Moros (Muslim Filipinos) and the people of the Cordilleras, that has forced them to rebel and even want to secede, has engendered an accommodation of their cultural or religious interests in the form of regional autonomy, but old problems persist.

For over 350 years Spain governed *Filipinas* as a highly centralized colony in order to control its inhabitants. Even then the Spanish colonial government had only nominal control over parts of Muslim and *lumad* Mindanao and the people in the Cordilleras. Sired by the Filipino Revolution and born under threat of annexation by the United States, the infant Philippine Republic had to be unitary in structure for its survival. For expediency, the United States continued the highly centralized unitary system although greater self-government was granted to the Filipino political leaders and administrators.

Under the 1935 Constitution, for the transition Commonwealth and the ensuing Republic, the unitary structure was institutionalized to further unify the young nation amid national insecurity and fears of Japanese imperialism in East Asia. The Filipino political elites who governed the young nation-state were inclined, in the manner of the Spanish and American colonial governors, to continue with the centralized control of the nation and archipelago. Local autonomy was largely a slogan and it was granted only in small, ineffective doses. Under the Marcos dictatorship the national government tightened its grip on the people and the local governments more than ever before.

In the 1987 Constitution the framers enshrined the ideals and goals of participatory democracy, local autonomy, and regional autonomy in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras. This was a strong reaction to the Marcos authoritarian rule, and to the proverbial inefficiency, red tape, ineffectiveness, unresponsiveness, and unaccountability of our highly centralized government. It was also a positive response to the assertion of the people's power in the EDSA Revolution that brought down the dictatorship and ushered in the restoration of democracy. The constitutional mandate to establish an autonomous region for Muslim Mindanao and for the Cordilleras recognized the demands for autonomy partly to avert secession by the Moro and Cordillera rebels.

The enactment of the Local Autonomy Act of 1991 has devolved certain powers and functions from the national to the local governments and further enhanced the participation of civil society organizations in governance. With the resurgence of press and media freedom as well, the consolidation of our newly restored democracy has better prospects of success. Admittedly, these developments in democratization and decentralization have followed the achievement of a measure of national unity that a long, centralized, unitary structure had made possible.

The interval of authoritarian rule underscored the paramount importance of re-democratization, separation of powers, and decentralizing and dispersing power to lower levels of government and in the society. The further dispersal of governmental powers in a federation will create stronger centers of countervailing power that will enhance the protection of liberty.

4. Local leaders are demanding their release from the costly, stifling, and demoralizing effects of excessive centralization and controls by the national government.

The centralization of governmental power and resources in the national government has impelled local government leaders to spend too much time, money and energy in following up their papers and secure the release of funds in the national offices in Metro Manila. Local and national officials and even the faculty of state universities need the approval of Malacanang to travel abroad in connection with their work. The procurement of vehicles and certain equipment and of some contracts for services require approval of the Office of the President or the Department of Budget and Management.

This administrative centralization and the President's tight control over the releases of funds already authorized and of the local governments' share of the taxes they have collected has led local leaders far from the capital to complain of "Imperial Manila." They feel that their localities are treated like "colonies" of the national government. It is this cumulative local resentment that once fueled a movement for the Mindanao independence movement. The excesses of centralization have also motivated the movement for local autonomy which is still being constrained by the momentum of entrenched centralism.

Even the limited decentralization and local autonomy carried out under the 1987 Constitution and the Local Government Code of 1991 have already produced

encouraging results in the form of innovations, resourcefulness, and self-reliance on the part of leaders in certain localities, as documented by the *Galing Pook* awards program. Some examples cited by Erlinda Burton are:

- Health services: mobilizing *puroks* (local communities) for primary health care in Balilihan, Bohol;
- Environmental management: saving the watershed in Maasin, Iloilo;
- Public finance: increasing tax collection in Binagonan, Rizal;
- Peace initiatives: energizing *puroks* and reconciliation with Communist rebels in Sampaloc, Quezon;
- Integrated development: sustaining integrated development efforts in Guagua, Pangasinana;
- Socio-cultural development: enriching local culture in Bulacan;
- Employment generation: strengthening economic enterprise in Penablanca, Cagayan Valley; and
- Productivity improvement: increasing productivity in Naga City;

As Alex B. Brillantes, Jr. describes the effects of the Local Government Code of 1991:

A quiet revolution is going on in the countryside proving that devolution is working. Though not as widely publicized, it may be asserted that due to the increased powers and responsibilities of local governments, innovations and creativeness at the local level have been engendered by the Code. Not only local governments are taking up the challenge of devolution. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) as well have been encouraged by the code to be active participants in the process of governance at the local level (p.531).

5. Greater freedom and home rule through the larger regional states and their consolidated local government units would create conditions that substantially improve public services and benefits and accelerate the economic growth and sustainable development of these areas, and therefore of the country as a whole.

The consolidation of some 78 provinces, many of them small ones, into just seven states made up of the existing administrative regions, will make the states more economic in size and resources, and therefore more economically and politically productive and viable. The present mini-provinces do not have adequate resources as revenue base and spend too much of their budget in staff salaries.

With substantial power and authority to govern, including the power to tax and to retain state and local revenues, and a leaner bureaucracy, the states would be in a better position to attract investments, promote industrialization, modernize agriculture, develop tourism, and protect and enhance the local environment.

The existing centralized government structure and culture which emphasizes regulation and control discourages creativity, initiative, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

Decentralization in a federal system will require a rethinking and reengineering of government. Federalism will challenge national leaders to do what can best be done by the federal or national government. Likewise, it will challenge state and local leaders to do what should be done in the states and localities. A federal structure will attract more leaders with business and entrepreneurial skills to serve in the state and local governments.

6. A federal political system would better enable Filipinos to sustain their national unity and identity, and at the same time preserve and enhance their regional and local cultures and languages. National unity shall be built on the foundation of cultural diversity and social and political pluralism.

Federalism will foster inter-state competition in achieving regional and local economic development that will in turn support cultural vitality and diversity in the states, even as the federal or national government helps the whole country to attain equitable and balanced national development and cultural progress.

The use and development of *Filipino*, the national language and lingua franca, is a welcome cultural development. This has been advanced by *Tagalog* and *Filipino* movies and the broadcast media, by the teaching of *Filipino* in the schools, and by increasing internal travel and migration. The development of the national culture and language is reflected in the increasing production of published materials in *Filipino*. At the same time the nation benefits by the learning and use of English as medium of communication, internally and internationally.

However, national cultural development is proceeding at the expense of most other Filipino languages and cultures. The latter have remained in the oral tradition and are largely unwritten. Thus they are difficult to develop and disseminate. The upshot is the cumulative impoverishment of Filipino national culture as a whole. The globalization of cultures that accompany transnational and borderless trade, industry, news, entertainment, and communication also endangers the survival and nurture of our various indigenous cultures. The ideal Philippines should reflect “national unity in cultural diversity.”

As already said, in a federal system decentralization stimulates socio-economic development and progress. The division of the whole country into a few regional states having greater homogeneity of languages and cultures and improving the livelihood of its people will foster pride in one’s locality, ethnicity, and regional and local cultures and environments. At the same time the federal structure will spur inter-state competition and national progress.

The continuation of the presidential form of government--in which all qualified citizens vote directly for the President, Vice-President, and federal legislators--will be a unifying force for the nation. The role of the federal or national government will be to strengthen national unity and identity, ensure national security, and promote a balanced and

sustainable national development. It will especially assist and support the less developed areas and communities in cooperation with their states and local governments.

7. The internal threats of economic underdevelopment, social injustice, Communist and Moro rebellion, and the potential for greater civil discontent are compounded by external threats in the form of globalization and the growing economic and military power of some neighboring countries in the Asian region. With the advantages of federalism cited above, a federation would be better able to meet the challenge of globalization and to ensure national security.

Some theorists of federalism cite the presence of threats from perceived foreign enemies as a factor associated with the origins of federations (Riker, Wheare, Maddox, Dikshit). Moreover, there are serious internal threats to Philippine national security. In this context, as federalism strengthens the nation's capacity for effective governance, encourages national unity and social cohesion, accelerates development, and in the long run reduce internal stress as more citizens participate in shaping their destinies, the nation will be better able to cope with internal and external threats to national security.

The foregoing hypotheses touched on several conditions that political theorists of federalism associate with the beginnings of federalism. As cited by Jonathan Lemco, two of those are:

- The existence of some popular hope that conditions for them would improve by changing from a unitary system to a federal one (Wheare, Deutsch); and
- The experience of a previous political association among the people (Wheare, Watts).

8. There are still other conditions present in the Philippines that political theorists associate with the origins of federalism in various parts of the world.

Again, as cited by Lemco, these include:

- the presence of a territorial or spatial division of power between the national government and the local government units (Elazer, Lijphart);
- the presence of a written, flexible constitution (Watts, Lijphart);
- the presence of a bicameral form of government.(Watts, Lijphart)in which the Senate can be made to represent the states and the House of Representatives the people in the localities and the country at large;
- geographical neighborhood among local governments as constituent units (Wheare, Maddox) of the political system;

- the presence of flexible political elites during the federating process (Deutsch, Lijphart), although it remains to be seen if they are flexible enough to favor and carry out the proposed, drastic change to a federation.
- the presence of a general community of outlook (Watts) which also remains to be demonstrated; and
- the existence of role models (Watts) of which Filipinos can point to many, such as Malaysia and Switzerland among the smaller countries, and India, Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States, and Canada among the larger ones.

V. SUMMING UP

The proposed conversion of the present unitary system of government to a federal system shall be undertaken in two stages. The first stage will require the amalgamation of the present 14 administrative regions, plus the ARMM, into just ten large administrative regions and the granting to them of more substantial regional and local autonomy. This new “regionalization” will continue until 2009-2010.

In 2008-2009 constitutional amendments or revision to institute a federal system and the other reforms will be drafted and completed. These shall be ratified in a plebiscite to be held also in 2009. The amended or revised constitution will govern the federal, state and local elections to be held in 2010. This is the second stage of the conversion to a federal system.

To summarize the theory of federalization underlying the proposal to transform the Filipino political system from its present unitary structure to a federation, let me restate my hypotheses as follows:

1. The Philippines has achieved sufficient national unity and democratization, including a measure of decentralization and local autonomy, as the basis for establishing a federal system of government. The latter will follow a decade’s transition of “regionalization” and increased local autonomy involving both the national government and the local governments.
2. Specifically, it has been the growing difficulties and frustration with the country’s highly centralized unitary system that culminated in the 1987 Constitution’s design for the development of participatory democracy, local autonomy, and an active role for civil society in governance. (The latter was partly a reaction to the extreme centralization during the authoritarian regime that began in September, 1972 and – ended at the EDSA revolution in February, 1986).
3. Federalism will respond to the demands of local leaders for their release from the costly, time-consuming, stifling, and demoralizing effects of excessive centralization and controls by the national government in the unitary system. The structures and processes of the federation will challenge and energize the people and their state and

local governments. Such further democratization will encourage creativity, initiative, and innovation, spur inter-state competition, and foster state and local self-reliance.

4. By removing the centralized structures that impose local dependence and stifle local initiative and resourcefulness, and thus providing greater freedom and home rule, a federal system will greatly increase the capacity of the people and the government to deal with the country's chronic problems of poverty, injustice, and inadequate social services and infrastructure—the manifestations of under-development.
5. In a federal structure substantial and equitable development for the whole country is more likely to be achieved, and the people's liberty will be protected by the further dispersion of power in the government and the society. Metro Manila, the national capital, will have the status of a state and will be able to deal more effectively with its problems as a metropolis.
6. A federal system will be better able to achieve and sustain national unity and identity, and at the same time protect and enhance the nation's cultural diversity and social pluralism.
7. By strengthening the nation-state's capacity to deal with its critical internal problems and to develop, a federal system will also be better able to respond to the external threats to national security and the challenges of globalization.

There are more conditions cited that would tend to favor the conversion of the unitary Filipino political system to a federal system. In this regard, it is in order to recall the conclusions drawn by two other Filipino advocates of federalism in the 1980s.

Referring to K.C. Wheare's theory in his book, *Federal Government*, Rizal G. Buendia reached this conclusion which I quote with only minor editing:

As far as the pre-conditions for federalism are concerned, the Philippines has relatively satisfied these, to wit:

- (1) a previous existence of the federating state as a former distinct colony and a nation-state with a distinct government of its own;
- (2) a divergence of economic interests with the federating unitary state leading to the desire of the component local governments to remain autonomous for certain economic, political and cultural purposes;
- (3) geographical obstacles to effective unitary government, i.e. large areas separated by bodies of water, mountains or other physical obstacles, poor communications, etc.;
- (4) differences of culture, religion, language or nationality;
- (5) dissimilarity of social institutions; and
- (6) existence of different laws, norms, practices, and ways of life.

Citing Gabriel U. Iglesias' paper, "The Advantages of a Federal Form of Government," Buendia adds:

Iglesias aptly describes the advantages of a federal structure for the country which are as follows:

- (1) it accords equal status and treatment to...the needs of all parts of the country regardless of their ethnic, religious, linguistic or geographical condition;
- (2) it leads to less pressure for separation from the nation-state as peculiar needs of various cultural groups are defined in accordance with their own customary and religious practices, and enhances the development of their resources based on their identified priorities;
- (3) it serves as an equalizing factor as it promotes a more balanced socio-economic and political development attuned to the needs of the region, enabling greater participation of the people ...in the decision-making process;
- (4) it brings the government closer to the people and makes it sensitive to their problems and needs; and
- (5) it enhances national integration and unity.

Finally, Buendia sharply contrasts federalism with centralism thus:

As federalism promotes democracy, centralism forces undue obedience. As federalism enhances Filipino nationhood, centralism forces unity and homogenization. As federalism expresses confidence in the ideals of liberty and freedom, centralism remains “the refuge of fear.”

The federal system of government for the Philippines offers a resolution towards the national question. It secures not only the sovereignty of the Republic but the future of the people’s lives.

I would not go as far and overstate the case for federalism. However, to me federalism offers a higher probability than our unitary system of enabling the people and the nation-state to realize the advantages and benefits that I have stated in my theory and proposal.

I have also indicated other structural changes that should go with the shift to a federal system, to strengthen and sustain the sense of unity and nationhood.. One is the continuation of the presidential form of government and direct election by the people of the President and Vice-President, but by “block voting.” Second is the synchronization of all elections every four years, for economy and for promoting the development of nationwide, political parties. Third is that the President may be reelected only to a second term, or for a total of not more than eight consecutive years, so the President can be more easily made accountable for his leadership. Fourth is the establishment of an integrated metropolitan government in Metro Manila, the national capital state, that may also serve as a model for Metro Cebu and Metro Davao.

When established the federation will not be a fixed structure but a flexible one. It will necessarily undergo continual change and adjustment in the degree of centralization and decentralization. It will offer continuing challenges to federal, state and local leaders to effect the needed changes in policies and structures, the better to solve their unique as

well as common problems, with the people's increasing participation. In some ways it will be more difficult to make a federation work well. It will require not only "a federal spirit" of cooperation and compromise but also a lot of political will at all levels (Gagnon: 35). But whether the political system is unitary or federal, these are crucial ingredients of democratic governance.

By no means would federalism be a panacea to our many and complex problems as a nation. In his study, *Political Stability in Federal Governments*, Lemco concludes: "Federalism is simply not the great panacea that so many have claimed it to be" (:166).

VI. CONTINUING STUDY AND PUBLIC DEBATE IN AID OF CONGRESSIONAL REFORMS AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

I intend to pursue my reform ideas by subjecting them to serious criticism and improvement. This can be done under the auspices of the Philippine Political Science Association, and specifically through its multi-disciplinary Committee for Constitutional Continuity and Change--which I chair.

Under the Constitution, it is Congress that initiates and proposes amendments and revision of the Constitution. I would like therefore to propose to the leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives that they include in their agenda for constitutional change a study of the possible federalization of the Republic of the Philippines.

I would also request the leaders of the Union of Local Authorities, the League of Provinces, the League of Cities, and the League of Municipalities to consider proposals for federalization as part of their agenda for reforms.

The Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy at the U.P. National College of Public Administration and Governance can work together with the PPSA's Committee on Constitutional Continuity and Change and the U.P. Law Center in pursuing the study of federalization and other possible constitutional changes.

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