

RECORD OF THE SENATE

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2000

OPENING OF THE SESSION

At 3:31 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Franklin M. Drilon, called the session to order.

The President. The 23rd session of the Third Regular Session of the Eleventh Congress is hereby called to order.

Let us all stand for the opening prayer to be led by Sen. Vicente C. Sotto III.

Everybody rose for the prayer.

PRAYER

Senator Sotto.

Almighty Father, as we come before You, allow us to experience Your nearness to us and may Your presence fill us with hope, comfort and joy.

Grant that we may never forget that You are always at our side.

Here we are, Lord, as we empty ourselves of everything that is not of You. We pray that You will deal with our weaknesses in a manner that will allow us to grow more in You and You in us.

Grant us the courage and zeal, Lord, that we may strive to proclaim Your greatness in our lives, that we may be living witnesses to Your infinite love.

Give us courage to stand up for Your Name. And may we not give in to fear, knowing that You will never forsake us.

Father, continue to use us in ways that would please You. Grant us the sensitivity of spirit that we may seek You to work in us through big and small acts of love for our fellowmen.

May the love that we have for You move us to be obedient to Your commands and statutes. May we really obey and uphold Your righteousness out of love even in the midst of our nation's difficulties.

Let our faith in You grow more and more each day. Give us the sufficient grace even as You purify us in the furnace of afflictions. Let Your peace reign in our hearts, O Lord, and may we seek it from Your presence alone; for indeed peace that does not come from You is no peace at all.

Father, You know what is in our hearts. Come, O Lord, and transform our nation's mourning into rejoicing. Come and be our ultimate joy.

Amen.

ROLL CALL

The President. The Secretary will please call the roll.

The Secretary, reading:

Senator Teresa Aquino-Oreta	Present
Senator Robert Z. Barbers	Present
Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon	Present
Senator Renato L. <i>Compañero</i> Cayetano ...	Present
Senator Anna Dominique M.L. Coseteng ...	Absent***
Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago	Present*
Senator Juan Ponce Enrile	Present
Senator Juan M. Flavio	Present
Senator Teofisto T. Guingona Jr.	Present
Senator Gregorio B. Honasan	Present
Senator Robert S. Jaworski	Present
Senator Loren B. Legarda-Leviste	Present
Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr.	Present
Senator Blas F. Ople	**
Senator John Henry R. Osmeña	Present
Senator Sergio R. Osmeña III	Present*
Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr.	Present
Senator Ramon B. Revilla	Present
Senator Raul S. Roco	Present
Senator Vicente C. Sotto III	Present
Senator Francisco S. Tatad	Present
The President	Present

The President. With 18 senators present, there is a quorum.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

THE JOURNAL

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I move that we dispense with the reading of the *Journal* of Session No. 22 of Monday, October 2, 2000 and consider it approved.

The President. Is there any objection? [*Silence*] There being none, the motion is approved.

* Arrived after the roll call

** On official mission

*** On account of illness

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

Senator J. Osmeña. Mr. President.

The President. Sen. John H. Osmeña is recognized.

Senator J. Osmeña. We are bringing in staff. In fact, the consultants are going to fly in, I think, from Europe to assist us here in the interpellations. May we know if we will take this up tomorrow?

Senator Tatad. The Minority Leader says that he will be ready with his interpellation on Monday.

Senator J. Osmeña. So, we will resume our interpellations on Monday.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Senator Tatad. Thank you, Senator J. Osmeña.

BILL ON SECOND READING
S. No. 2129—Strengthening the ARMM Organic Act
(Continuation)

Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129 is now in order.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Tatad. We are now in the period of interpellations. The Minority Leader wishes to deal with a brief liquidity problem. I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the session is suspended for one minute.

It was 5:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:05 p.m., the session was resumed.

The President. The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, we are still in the period of interpellations. I ask that the distinguished sponsor,

Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., be recognized; and to interpellate, the Senate Minority Leader.

The President. Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., the principal sponsor of Senate Bill No. 2129, is recognized. To interpellate, Sen. Teofisto T. Guingona Jr., is recognized.

Senator Guingona. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, will the distinguished sponsor yield for some questions?

Senator Pimentel. With pleasure, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. May I be permitted to lay down some basic considerations.

We know that the Jakarta Agreement, as the sponsor stated in his speech, named 10 cities and 14 provinces for possible inclusion in an expanded ARMM. Assuming that all 10 cities and 14 provinces agree for inclusion into the expanded ARMM, will this not violate Section 15, Article X of the Constitution because that section clearly states that "There shall be created autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao..."? And the basis for this should be people "sharing common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, economic and social structures, and other relevant characteristics..."

Now, of course, in some provinces, the population may have changed. I understand that in Basilan which used to be 50-50, or thereabouts, a number of Christians have left and the majority now seems to be the Muslim population. At the same time, I understand that Cotabato City which was previously predominantly Christian has now a majority of Muslims. But in the other provinces and cities mentioned, the prevalent population consists of Christians, and they have different or distinctive historical and cultural heritage from our Muslim brothers who are in the four provinces already included. Assuming only that all of the 14 provinces and 10 cities envisioned will agree to the expanded ARMM, it would, in effect, violate the vision of Section 15, Article X, of the Constitution which mandates for a common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, even economic and social structures and other relevant characteristics. It is stated here in the Constitution.

So I feel that if all of the 10 cities and 14 provinces would join, then our Muslim brothers will be in the minority and it would not comply seemingly with the mandate of this Section 15, Article X, which was precisely to give them an autonomous area so that they could exercise their common

cultural and historical heritage as a people. Of course, that possibility is remote but it is still there, and in legislation we should look at all angles. So I was wondering whether the distinguished sponsor can enlighten us on this.

Senator Pimentel. The first point, Mr. President, is that there will probably be 15, not 14, provinces that will have to be included because of the impending creation of Zamboanga Sibugay. So we will have one more province.

The second point, Mr. President, is that the likelihood of that event ever coming to pass is as remote as our going to the moon considering the circumstances.

But the point that the distinguished gentleman is trying to be concerned with is really a valid one. As a matter of fact, that has also been my stand ever since the creation of the autonomous region, that the region should be really left to the predominantly Muslim-occupied provinces, cities and municipalities for the simple reason that the Constitution demands it.

But to arrive at that point where we determine whether the Muslims in a particular area are the ones predominating in a plebiscite, that will have to be tested in an actual submission of the question to the people themselves. And once the people decide, I would submit that they would have exercised a political decision that will, in effect, remove the issue from being merely a legal one.

Senator Guingona. I would like to thank the distinguished gentleman for that.

Are we not being confronted with this problem because the Jakarta Agreement was more or less based on a desire to follow the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit?—and I am looking at Secretary Aguirre and Secretary Yan.

Senator Pimentel. Are they nodding in conformity with the observation of the distinguished gentleman, Mr. President?

Senator Guingona. They are stoic, they are not smiling. Now, I see them smiling. *[Laughter]* But that was the intent, I think, to follow in spirit the 1976 Tripoli Agreement which was participated in, I understand, by Senator Enrile then as secretary.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. In the same manner that the gentleman participated in the Jakarta Agreement as secretary of Justice also, Mr. President, I think.

Senator Guingona. No. I did not actively participate.

Senator Pimentel. All right. Good. That clarifies the issue.

Senator Guingona. That is why I am not smiling with...*[Laughter]*

Senator Pimentel. In any event, the distinguished gentleman's observation is correct.

Senator Guingona. And that premise or basis is not the basis of the 1987 Constitution. So those events seemed to have overtaken previous events. Whereas, the intentions of the Jakarta Agreement drafters were very noble, very good, but at the same time, they wanted to mix two distinct cultures, two distinct religions or backgrounds and traditions. So, we are confronted here with that desire to comply with the Jakarta Agreement. But at the same time, we have this Constitution to live up to.

Senator Pimentel. The happy thing about this whole issue, Mr. President, is that the proposal for the creation of an expanded autonomous region covering 15 provinces now and 10 additional cities is by no means final. It has to be subjected to a plebiscite, and this is the people's way out of that situation.

So that the issue of "Are we complying with the constitutional requirement?", I am sure will be one of the campaign matters that will be submitted to the people upon which they can make their own decision, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. But may I just be permitted to pursue that a little, so that the people who bother to read the records will know that if all the 15 provinces and 10 cities agree to join the autonomous region in the plebiscite, then they will elect their own governor and set of officials. Will they not?

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, and will make it difficult for a Muslim candidate to win, Mr. President. That is really true. This is one of the considerations that our people in that plebiscite will have to consider very seriously.

Senator Guingona. If that happens, in the remote event that it happens, then it will be defeating the very purpose of putting up an autonomous region for Muslim Mindanao.

Senator Pimentel. Exactly. In fact, it will put to naught what Mr. Misuari has been advocating through the years. That is why, our people will just have to exercise their sound discretion so that somehow, the intent of the Tripoli Agreement and the Jakarta Agreement will materialize through their intelligent choice that they must have to reflect when they cast their vote in the plebiscite.

Senator Guingona. Thank you, Mr. President. And the Jakarta Agreement, of course, did not intend that in seeking the addition of additional areas—of an intended expanded autonomy—we would disregard the Constitution or the laws pertinent to the plebiscite.

Senator Pimentel. Not at all, Mr. President. The distinguished gentleman is correct.

Senator Guingona. Therefore, the Jakarta Agreement and the Constitution as well as the laws rely basically and ultimately on the choice of the people.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. If the people show a desire to join, let them join. If they show a desire not to join, let that be respected. And if they desire not to continue, that should also be respected because, after all, it is the people's choice. If we are going to restrict and qualify, I do not think that is mainly the intent of the Jakarta Agreement. It is an agreement to try to expand but certainly, to respect the Constitution, the laws, and, most of all, the desire of the people to be included or not, to remain or not.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, my own reading is that the Jakarta Agreement was entered into in the hope that the present autonomous region would be expanded, both in area as well as in power. First, I think we are hewing closely to the intent of the Jakarta Agreement by saying that the four original members of the autonomous region, the four provinces, should no longer be asked in a plebiscite whether they want to continue belonging to the autonomous region or not. Otherwise, should that happen, then the autonomous region—assuming that the four provinces will opt out of the region—will collapse and we will therefore be compelled by constitutional mandate to resurrect it somehow. I believe this is a sound constitutional judgment call. Second, it is in full accord with the intent of the Jakarta Agreement.

Senator Guingona. Will the distinguished gentleman agree with me that, ultimately, it is the basic choice of the people which should be respected? It is what we did in the Cordilleras and I think our Muslim brothers will also understand that it is also equitable and feasible to ask them also the same questions. My difficulty here is in the different questions that are posed to those who are already within and a different set of questions to those who are without and who are hopefully expected to come in. As I earlier announced, I have some reservations on constitutional issues but I will not go into those anymore. There may be certain practical difficulties, assuming, for example, that the question is asked of the province of Basilan and its municipalities.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. How is the question phrased?

Senator Pimentel. The question is: "Do you approve of the amendments proposed for Basilan?"

Senator Guingona. Basilan is outside.

Senator Pimentel. That is right. "Do you wish your province or municipality to be included in the expanded area of autonomy?"

Senator Guingona. And the municipality of Isabela will say that it desires to be included. The rest of the province will say that it does not, because it has already rejected this in the past.

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. Then we will have one province with one or two municipalities that will be governed by different laws. Assuming that the four provinces already within the ARMM will say that they do not wish to accept the amendment, then they remain within the ARMM but guided or ruled by the old law.

So here we have the municipality of Isabela, one or two, ruled by the amended act that we are now framing, part of the autonomous region, but the autonomous region itself is to be governed by the old law. So, there will be two sets of laws governing two sets of the population and the province itself is divided because the governor will no longer have jurisdiction over the towns which voted for the amendment.

So, I was wondering whether we could think of a way of rephrasing these questions so that we avoid those difficulties.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, the chairman would certainly welcome a refinement of the questions to be addressed in the plebiscite that is being contemplated. But let me also add immediately that indeed, the problem of municipalities opting to become members of the expanded area of the autonomy is confronted by the possibility that the provinces to which the municipalities belong might not agree to be included in the expanded area of the autonomy. That certainly poses some difficulties. But we cannot avoid it because that is mandated by the Jakarta Agreement, that municipalities be allowed to opt as members of the expanded autonomy even if their provinces would not do so. That is specifically found in the Jakarta Agreement, Mr. President.

The President. With the permission of the Minority Leader. May I just pursue that particular point?

Suppose the province says "yes" and the municipalities say "no?"

Senator Pimentel. Then, I think that reversal of rules would also be respected, Mr. President.

The President. So that we would have a situation where the provincial governor belonging to the ARMM region would have no authority over a municipality which said "no?"

Senator Pimentel. That obviously is a distinct possibility, Mr. President. I really have been cracking my head as to how best we can address that situation. So, collectively, we probably can find a way out. One thing that comes to mind now is that, if a province overall says "yes" that should include all the municipalities.

The President. Yes.

Senator Pimentel. That is one way of doing it and the reverse may not be true. Meaning to say that if a municipality opts to belong but the whole province says "no," the decision of that municipality will have to be respected pursuant to the Jakarta Agreement, Mr. President.

The President. I thank the Minority Leader for allowing that intervention.

Senator Guingona. Thank you, Mr. President.

And I was also wondering whether municipalities like Pangantukan—

Senator Pimentel. In Bukidnon.

Senator Guingona. —in Bukidnon, no, in Lanao del Sur.

Senator Pimentel. Lanao del Sur but accessible to Bukidnon.

Senator Guingona. Pangantukan, Mr. President, is more accessible to Bukidnon than to Lanao del Sur over which it is a part. And as far as cultural heritage, background, et cetera, are concerned, I think it is distinctly different from the rest of Lanao del Sur. So, would they not be given the opportunity if we maintain the municipalities as a basis, to say "yes" or "no?"

Senator Pimentel. It would have that right, to say "yes" or "no," Mr. President, the way the provision is now crafted.

Senator Guingona. I hope that we can sit down. I see General Yan again no longer smiling. *[Laughter]* He is smiling now.

What could be the reason, Mr. President, we adhere to the Jakarta Agreement which, I understand, would not seek any violation of our intended laws in the pursuit of any plebiscite or referendum? May we know the reasons if we ask the same questions of those already in the ARMM, if we ask the same questions of those already outside? And the fear expressed by the distinguished sponsor that some members of the ARMM—the possibility—may opt out. May we know the reasons? Because he has conducted a very laudable survey personally.

Senator Pimentel. The reason principally, Mr. President, is, first of all, to adhere to the intent, if not the wording of the Tripoli Agreement, which allowed not only provinces but geographical areas to adhere to the autonomous region. That is as far as the justification for allowing the municipalities to come into the autonomous region separately from the province which is also found in the Jakarta Agreement that specifically mentions the municipalities this time.

On the matter of why the two sets of questions are being addressed differently, first, to the present four-province member of the Autonomous Region and the other set to be addressed to the expanded area of the autonomy, let me say this. What we gathered from our consultations is that the political leadership, for example, of Sulu and the political leadership of Lanao del Sur are not against the idea of having an autonomy. They are against being placed under Mr. Misuari, to put it very bluntly.

So that if we are not careful in the way of formulating the questions, the decisions of the present four-member province of the Autonomous Region might be influenced by bias, hatred, or dislike for the present leadership of the Autonomous Region rather than opting or rejecting—opting to be included or opting to be out of the Autonomous Region on the basis of deeply held convictions.

In other words, Mr. President, we are trying to prevent our process from being corrupted by partisan and personal motivations. That is why we mentioned earlier that this is a hard constitutional call that we have to take as a Senate, unless the better judgment of our colleagues will see another way of doing so.

Senator Guingona. I thank the gentleman for that.

The fear of being under the incumbent governor will only be for a few months.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. I understand that the plebiscite should be held 60 days—

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. —before the elections.

Senator Pimentel. Sixty days, not more than 90 days.

Senator Guingona. Not more than 90 days. Not less than 60 days before the election itself for governor and other officials.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. Perhaps the fear revealed to the distinguished sponsor can be tempered in the information drive that he is proposing concerning the amended powers and the amended law. If there is that fear, that can be removed by them in a free election 60 days later. But whether to remain in ARMM, if there is no other fundamental reason, should be their own choice, I think.

Senator Pimentel. Let me respond to that concern of the gentleman and say that there is no other fundamental reason. It is just a considered judgment that it might be better not to allow them to opt out considering all the circumstances. But other than that, there is no other substantial reason to preclude the submittal of a plebiscite question to the present four-member province as to whether or not they would want to stay or opt out of the Autonomous Region.

Senator Guingona. The distinguished sponsor mentioned Lanao and Maguindanao.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. May we know the result of the gentleman's personal survey as far as Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are concerned.

Senator Pimentel. The political leadership of Sulu today, Mr. President, indicated to me that they would rather opt out if Gov. Nur Misuari remains at the helm of the Autonomous Region. That was also in effect the message of Zacaria Candao in Maguindanao. Although I have not talked with Governor Sahali, I have talked with some of his leaders and the same message was relayed to me.

Senator Guingona. How about Gov. Nur Misuari himself? Is he keen on maintaining the four provinces to be kept within

the autonomous area or is it his disposition that... Because I have heard him face Sec. Alexander Aguirre only from newspaper reports. I do not know the personal... I understand that he feels that the Jakarta Agreement has not really been substantially complied with. Is he still keen on this?

Senator Pimentel. That is my reading of the situation, Mr. President, because otherwise he would not have moved to expand the area—that concept of expanding—unless the original group was also maintained. One cannot expand something unless one starts from somewhere, and the somewhere that we are talking about here are the four provinces—the original members of the Autonomous Region.

The principal preoccupation of Gov. Nur Misuari today is to hang on to his position. Because I understand there are moves to ease him out of office.

Senator Guingona. Has he been eased out of office?

Senator Pimentel. No, he has not been eased out.

Senator Guingona. So he stays as governor.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President. And my perception of the situation is, it is really much better to keep him there rather than replace him with somebody else for the simple reason that there are only a few months left before regional elections are held. It is a practical argument, prescinding from whether we approve of the way Mr. Misuari runs the governorship of the ARMM or not.

Senator Guingona. I share the same view, and I think Secretary Aguirre also shares the same view. He is nodding his head. That makes him a statesman.

Senator Pimentel. He agrees with Misuari and this representation, imagine.

Senator Guingona. And so, we are here now deliberating on the expanded autonomy. May we know how Mr. Misuari feels about the SPCPD?

Senator Pimentel. Mr. Misuari believes that the SPCPD should really continue as the development arm, as it were, not only of the present ARMM but also of the proposed expanded area of the autonomy. Of course, he feels that he has been shortchanged in the way the SPCPD has been handled.

Senator Guingona. In what manner, Mr. President?

Senator Pimentel. That not all the promises of funding and support have been forthcoming.

Senator Guingona. So, this was intended to be a developmental vehicle, at least, per recommendations.

Senator Pimentel. *Hindi.* That is my understanding from the government which the gentleman represented in the past.

The President. May the Chair ask and intervene on SPCPD?

Senator Guingona. Certainly, Mr. President.

The President. The Chair is just wondering, Mr. Sponsor. What happens after the plebiscite? Will the SPCPD have a coverage still of the entire area it covers now or will it be limited to the area which would be the new area of autonomy?

Senator Pimentel. Obviously, Mr. President, the outcome of the plebiscite will determine also the application of the SPCPD. But let me immediately inform the Body that in the House version of this bill which we adopted, when the new regional government is put in place the SPCPD will automatically be dissolved.

The President. Thank you, Senator Guingona, for yielding.

Senator Guingona. Now, the distinguished sponsor has already said that Governor Misuari feels shortchanged. May this representation know why the SPDA...

Senator Pimentel. SPCPD?

Senator Guingona. No, no.

The President. The SPDA.

Senator Guingona. No, SPDA—Southern Philippines Development Authority.

Senator Pimentel. All right.

Senator Guingona. I understand that his nominee was, as I understand it,—I could be wrong—arbitrarily removed and replaced with someone without even informing him.

Senator Pimentel. I am not privy to the circumstances of the removal of the former holder of that position. But the position is at the discretion of the President, and I think he exercised that discretion accordingly.

Senator Guingona. I understand that the one holding that position issued some checks pursuant to his duty to

develop the area. But he was dismissed and, naturally, the bank questioned him about the checks to the embarrassment of this Muslim representative and to the embarrassment also of Governor Misuari. I do not see General Aguirre smiling now.

Senator Pimentel. I am not too sure that General Aguirre is also privy to the circumstances of the incidents that the gentleman mentioned. But let me just put this in context that the reason checks may be dishonored can arise from so many factors and not necessarily because anomalies attended the issuance of those checks. For all I know, *walang perang inisyuhan*.

Senator Guingona. May I hastily correct that. I did not imply in any way that there were anomalies. The checks were dishonored because he was no longer the SPDA chairman. Allegedly, he no longer had authority to issue those checks.

Senator Pimentel. Those are matters of fact, Mr. President, that can very well be settled in a proper venue.

Senator Guingona. Yes, I only would like to pursue on the attitude of Governor Misuari and the present officials of ARMM, so that we can legislate with more objectivity in taking all issues into consideration.

Senator Pimentel. That is also my desire, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. The distinguished sponsor has proposed the timetable to approve this by November.

Senator Pimentel. Hopefully, Mr. President, even earlier if we can, because the House already has finished its version. So hopefully, by November, we will be able to finish this bill and if we are able to finish this whole thing by December, we can have the Bicameral Conference Committee and all that. Then, by late January or early February, we can have the plebiscite and the elections can be held on the second Monday of May 2000.

Senator Guingona. Yes, Mr. President, that would be ideal under normal circumstances. However, my concern is that in the wake of conflict, in the wake of guerilla warfare, in the wake of confrontation and the deepening bias between some elements, some Christians and Muslims in Mindanao, the distinguished sponsor knows what we refer to, would this timetable not help us in preserving and attaining the peace that we all long for? Or, will it deepen the animosities, conflicts, and activities of confrontation between our Muslim brothers and the Christians?

In other words, here we are telling them, "You choose." Then there is an element of choice which may further inflame the fires of discord already there. May I hear the comments of the distinguished sponsor?

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, the circumstances obtaining in Mindanao today would indicate that there is a shift towards a more peaceful resolution of the conflict between our government and the MILF. In fact, the President himself has announced the grant of amnesty and call for a resumption of negotiations. These steps are positive steps in the right direction.

The only possible guerilla war that might cause some problems would come from the Abu Sayyaf partisans who might still be alive as of the moment. But the existence of the Abu Sayyaf guerillas, if they would eventually become guerillas, Mr. President, should not deter us from pushing for the adoption of the amendments that are now under consideration and the holding of the requisite election subsequently for the reason that even as we recognize that there are remnants of NPA guerrillas, we are not suspending elections all over the country or anywhere in the country as a result of that.

Now, the added reason, Mr. President, is that if we do not do anything now regarding the demands of the Jakarta Agreement, then we will probably exacerbate the situation in Mindanao because as the gentleman knows, Mr. Misuari has already been complaining to the OIC that the government is dillydallying on the performance of its obligations under the Jakarta Agreement. And so we are really placed in a bind. We have to do something about the Jakarta Agreement in the hope that we will also somehow resolve, at the same time, our conflict with the MILF on another front.

Senator Guingona. Yes, does this have anything to do with the visit of the OIC representatives?

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, let me put it on record that we view our government's conflict with the MILF as our own internal affair. This is a basic premise. Nonetheless, considering historical precedents where the Organization of Islamic Conference had a hand in hastening the resolution of the problem, let us say, in the matter of the MNLF, from the administration of Mr. Marcos up to President Estrada, somehow the OIC has been brought into the picture.

And I would like to put on record, Mr. President, that the chairman of the eight-member committee of the OIC which is tasked with overseeing the developments here in the Philippines, as far as the MILF is concerned, and the MNLF also, is Indonesia which has always been our friend.

I would like to look at it from that point of view. In the past, Mr. President, I had my reservations about the propriety of other nations coming into our shores and settling this internal problem that we have. But if we look at developments in the world today, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland sought peace with the Ulster Protestants under the auspices of the United States. Israel and Palestine are warring but they have to ask the intervention of a foreign power to help settle the matter. And, of course, the events in Kosovo which was intruded upon by the United Nations and also East Timor. In other words, these are recent circumstances that indicate that perhaps, the narrow view of insisting that this problem is ours and we do not allow foreigners to come in and help us settle the issue might no longer be feasible.

Senator Guingona. I thank the gentleman for that. However, the OIC, I believe, understands and with the help of Secretary Aguirre, he has explained to the OIC members why there has been some delay in the enactment of amendments to the ARMM Law. So, it will not matter when they come whether we have enacted this or not. We are still in the period of amending the ARMM Law. As a matter of fact, if we do it with deliberate haste, we are only doing it because of the merits of a good law and incorporating therein what we can by way of amendments to the Shari'ah law, that is one, and the other issues that are presented here.

Senator Pimentel. The gentleman is correct, Mr. President. But I think we will remove the ammunition of propaganda from the enemies of our government if it is shown that we are really proceeding with deliberate speed, as the gentleman has pointed out, on this issue. So when Secretary Aguirre faces the OIC again, he will have ample reasons to demonstrate that indeed the legislative arm of the Philippine government is doing everything possible to implement the Jakarta Agreement.

Senator Guingona. May we know when the OIC delegation is coming, Mr. President?

Senator Pimentel. I understand on the 16th of this month, Mr. President. So we probably will have no time really to rush this. But what is important is, we demonstrate to them that we are trying to do everything to put this law into place.

Senator Guingona. And Secretary Aguirre will face them. *[Laughter]*

Senator Pimentel. I think so. *[Laughter]*

Senator Guingona. Mr. President, I have other questions to ask but it is almost six o'clock. I think this issue needs

the attention also of our other members of the Chamber. On such a vital amendment, we should call for due deliberations on the part of all, if not, the majority. So may I, with that reservation, continue next time.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION
OF S. NO. 2129**

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, in view of that manifestation, and there being no further interpellations for the moment, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I move that we adjourn the session until three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday, October 4, 2000.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the session is adjourned until three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday, October 4, 2000.

It was 5:57 p.m.