

A group of Muslim religious leaders and scholars on Thursday warned the national government that unless the issue of GPH-MNLF agreement is satisfactorily resolved, escalation of armed conflict and displacement of innocent civilians in Mindanao will continue.

The group said unless the national government will bring together the “four concerned entities in conflict,” the Mindanao problem will not end.

These four entities they were referring to are the Philippine government, the MNLF, the MILF, and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) as witness and mediator or facilitator to the talks.

The Muslim leaders who converged in this city are from Zamboanga Peninsula and from the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi Tawi.

The group also explained that they are in this city to also express their deep concern on the 22-day stand off in this city between government troops and the MNLF that have resulted in the loss of many lives.

They said innocent civilians who are mostly Muslims were caught in the crossfire.

Their position was relayed to Sulu Rep Habib Tupay Loong, chair of the House Committee on Muslim Affairs.

They said the MNLF and MILF should cooperate and work out a common plan and agreement to finally end the armed conflict in Mindanao.

They asked Rep Loong to lead their group and of respectable government and non government officials to discuss the issue in order to achieve the effort of bringing together the

four entities which they called as “Quadripartite Committee”.

The group of Muslim religious leaders and scholars also outlined some measures which should be done to realize the effort.

Among the measures, they said, are: To designate a credible and respectable Muslim emissaries to talk with the leadership of both the MNLF and the MILF to seek a unity of their effort to resolve the peace problem in their homeland in the interest of the entire Bangsamoro people for which they are fighting for; to request the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to continue its effort of mediation in the Philippine government-Bangsamoro conflict in the name of Islam and in the interest of the Muslims in the Philippines; to urge President Benigno Aquino, III to talk peace simultaneously with the MNLF and the MILF in order to reconcile all the existing agreements to the satisfaction of all, in the interest of the people in Mindanao.

The group believes that the incident is a result of the closure of the six-year review of the GPH-MNLF 1996 Final Peace Agreement which the MNLF found most unacceptable.

The MNLF claimed that their Final Peace Agreement has not been fully implemented and assumed that the government has no more intention of implementing it.

According to them the government has already signed another agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the same issue, concerning the same territory and involving the same people.

This has pushed them to revert to and to declare their original aspiration of “Independence for their homeland” which led them to enter Zamboanga City fully armed to raise their flag just to express their sentiment and aspiration, said the scholars and religious leaders. — Nonoy E Lacson