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## The Future of Islamic Da'wah in the Secular State of the Philippines

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the future of Islamic da'wah (outreach) in the secular state of the Philippines, where Islam is practiced by a minority within a predominantly Christian society governed by a constitutional separation of religion and state. The study explores how Islamic da'wah can adapt to the country's socio-political landscape, with a particular focus on the role of Muslim leaders and organizations in promoting social justice, interfaith dialogue, and community development. Utilizing a combination of literature review, case studies, and interviews with Islamic leaders, the research identifies both opportunities and challenges in conducting da'wah within a secular framework. The findings highlight the need for a contextualized approach that aligns with Islamic principles while respecting the secular nature of the state. While secularism may impose limitations on traditional forms of da'wah, it also provides avenues for addressing societal issues such as poverty, education, and social harmony. Ultimately, the study proposes a model of da'wah that fosters peaceful coexistence and inclusive development within the secular Philippine context.*

**Keywords:** *Da'wah Islam in Secular States, Islam in the Philippines, Interfaith Dialogue, Muslim Community Empowerment.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines' Islamic da'wah initiatives have had a variety of effects on the nation, its people, and its culture. It's crucial to remember that Islam is a minority religion in the Philippines, primarily practiced in the southern provinces of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. The country is predominately Christian. On the other hand, the Philippines' rich cultural diversity has been enhanced by Islamization. Islam has coexisted with other faiths to create a diverse tapestry of traditions, beliefs, and practices. Activities known as "da'wah," or the spread of Islam and invitations to follow, have the potential to raise the number of Muslims in nations with a predominately Christian population. The efficiency of the outreach, the target population's receptivity, and the community's social, cultural, and religious aspects all influence how successful the Da'wah efforts are.

The Philippines, a predominantly Christian country with a secular government, presents a unique environment for the practice and propagation of Islam. While the Muslim population is concentrated mainly in the southern regions of Mindanao, Muslims in the country face the challenge of practicing and spreading their faith in a secular state that upholds the separation of religion and government. This constitutional framework guarantees religious freedom but limits religious expression, particularly in the public sphere. As a result, Islamic da'wah (the call to Islam) in the Philippines must navigate the complexities of a diverse society, where religious practices and outreach efforts must align with Islamic principles and the secular norms of the state. Islamic da'wah has long been an essential aspect of the Muslim community, serving not only to spread the teachings of Islam but also to address social issues such as poverty, education, and justice. In the context of a secular state like the Philippines, however, the traditional methods of da'wah may need to adapt to fit within a framework that emphasizes the separation of religion from state affairs. Islamic organizations and leaders face the challenge of engaging the broader Filipino society through peaceful and inclusive means, promoting interfaith dialogue, and contributing to national development without overstepping the boundaries set by the secular state.

This paper explores the future of Islamic da'wah in the Philippines, assessing how it can continue to thrive in a secular environment. It examines the potential for Islamic outreach to foster social harmony, empower marginalized communities, and promote interfaith cooperation while respecting the country's secular governance. By considering the evolving nature of da'wah, this paper aims to offer a model of Islamic outreach that not only upholds Islamic values but also contributes to a more inclusive and harmonious society, benefiting both the Muslim community and the broader Filipino population.

## METHOD

Investigating the future of Islamic da'wah efforts in the secular state of the Philippines, focusing on qualitative research methods, was done using a methodological approach. A thorough literature review was carried out to provide a theoretical foundation and contextualize the study on Islamic da'wah activities concerning Philippine society. This required reading academic books, papers, government reports, and other pertinent sources to understand historical patterns, current dynamics, and possible future situations. Second, semistructured interviews with important informants, including religious leaders, scholars, legislators, and community representatives, were conducted using qualitative data-gathering techniques. These interviews offered insightful viewpoints on the variables affecting Islamic da'wah efforts, the difficulties encountered by Muslim communities, and the possible futures of Islam in the Philippines. This study aims to provide complete insights into Islamic da'wah's future in the Philippines by analyzing these qualitative data sources.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Involvement of Islamic Organizations in Islamic Da'wah Activities

Islamic organizations play a significant role in Islamic Da'wah activities in the Philippines, contributing to religious outreach, education, and community development. The involvement of Islamic organizations in da'wah activities, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), reflects a multifaceted approach, encompassing education, community development, and outreach efforts. These activities aim to promote a better understanding of Islam, strengthen the Muslim community, and contribute to social harmony in a diverse and pluralistic society. The organization's approaches include the distribution of handouts and pamphlets containing different Islamic topics, the interfaith between Islam and Christianity, belief issues, and so on (Lingasa et al., 2007). It shows that the participation of Islamic organizations in any form of Islamic Da'wah activities is critically demanded to ensure the teachings of Islam can reach all levels of the community.

The MILF has adopted some ways and mechanisms of Islamization, which involve education, publication and communication, military, and diplomacy. The educational approach of the MILF focused on educating the Bangsamoro people on the actual teaching of Islam, which is carried out through *The Madrasah* system of education. Islamic educational institutions such as Maahad Al-Maarif, Islamic scholars, and religious leaders, including imams of mosques, actively engage in Da'wah activities by delivering sermons and lectures and conducting religious classes. They are crucial in imparting Islamic knowledge and guiding the Muslim community. Several Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Discovery Islam Baguio, Discovery Islam Pangasinan, and Da'wah Riders, engage in da'wah and charities as part of their mission. They conduct outreach programs, provide humanitarian aid, and offer educational initiatives focusing on Islamic teachings.

Majul (1973) mentioned that Arab missionaries had successfully disseminated Islam through Islamic campaigns and street Da'wah in the Philippines because of the nature of their behavior that implied the native people in the said area. The Arab missionaries were able to adjust themselves to the customs, norms, and behavior of the native inhabitants. Likewise, they presented Islam in a very humanized and enlightening way with great sincerity and full commitment. In addition, the five stages in Da'wah methodologies as laid down by MILF were also parallel to these findings. The first stage is to start and focus on the Muslim individual, which is the first cornerstone of the society. The second is to build a Muslim family according to the Islamic way of life so that the family will not become the building block of the human social structure in which the success and efficiency of the social order depend on the stability and harmony in the domestic household which depends on how each family members fulfilling their obligations in the society. The third stage is to reform the culture and make it an Islamic society. The fourth stage is to liberate the Muslims from the rule of the current colonialism, and the last stage is to establish a Muslim government in Muslim land. These are the main objectives of the Da'wah program (Ebrahim, n.d.)

However, in the country, Muslims are traditionally not in the practice of having simultaneous marriage or polygamy. It is a fact that Islamic Da'wahs are spread using marriage, but due to their social status, polygamy is not widely accepted by local Muslims. The high cost of living can be observed in the traditional dowry, which usually ranges from P500,000 to 1,000,000 (MYR 50,000 to 100,000). This contradicts the average wages of ordinary labor per day, ranging from P300-500 (MYR 30-50). Similarly, Islamic Da'wah is not well conducted through religious debate either within Muslim or non-Muslim communities. This approach does not suit the norms and culture of local people of various tribes, languages, and thoughts. Thus, polygamy and debate gave the lowest level of methods used in spreading the Islamic teachings in Cordillera areas.

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) is one of the most significant Islamic organizations in the nation. The government founded it and performed several vital tasks for the welfare and advancement of the Muslim community in the Philippines. It contributes to formulating policies that advance Muslim Filipinos' rights, welfare, and advancement. This entails collaborating with stakeholders and governmental organizations to solve concerns unique to the Muslim community. Also, it advocates for Muslim Filipinos' rights and interests on a national and worldwide scale and represents their interests in various governmental agencies. This involves promoting laws dealing with religious freedom, cultural preservation, and socioeconomic inequality.

The government appoints a commission in charge of all things Islamic in the Philippines, including institutions, religious rituals, and education. It may fund Islamic institutions such as mosques, schools, and spiritual leaders. It also improves the socioeconomic situation of Muslim communities in the Philippines and fosters tolerance and knowledge of Islam in Filipino society. These programs might help with livelihoods, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development in places where Muslims predominate. In addition to encouraging harmony, tolerance, and understanding among the various religious and cultural communities in the Philippines, the NCMF is essential in advancing the rights, welfare, and development of Muslim Filipinos and is involved in efforts to settle disputes and support peacebuilding projects given the history of conflict in some areas with sizable Muslim populations. Addressing underlying grievances and advancing reconciliation may entail collaborating with international partners, civil society organizations, and government agencies.

### **Impacts of Islamic Da'wah Activities in The Country Free Practising and Spreading of Religion**

The country of the Philippines is a predominantly secular state with a constitution that provides for the separation of church and state. The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines, Article II, Section 6 states: "The separation of Church and State shall be inviolable." This principle underscores the idea that the government should not favor or endorse any particular religion and that individuals are free to practice and spread their religion without interference from the state. The Philippines, a diverse country with various religious beliefs, acknowledges and respects the freedom of religion for its citizens. In addition to the constitutional provisions, the Philippines also has laws that protect religious liberty. The Revised Penal Code, for example, penalizes acts that offend religious feelings (Article 133) to ensure that individuals can practice their faith without fear of persecution. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others, in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance," according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, Islam's application is more extensive because of its complete meaning. Addressing religious liberties is a complex topic because of many ambiguities and disagreement areas. Freedom of religion or worship is a fundamental human right, and an individual or community must manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance. The Philippine Constitution states in Article III, Section 5: No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required to exercise civil or political rights (Abdullah, 2015).

Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools allow church groups to teach moral values during school hours. In many parts of Cordillera, Muslim students routinely attend Catholic schools from elementary to university level. These students



are not required to undertake Catholic religious instruction, but they freely observe the Islamic teachings through some Islamic subjects. After their classes in government-run schools, Muslim students would not have to attend madrasah or private Islamic religious schools, as the education department is offering Arabic and Islamic subjects to them as part of the state's madrasah education project right within their schools.

The freedom of religion suited Muslims right after the government came up with a roadmap to madrasah education in 2004, and the implementation of the madrasah program began in June 2005. Muslims also have the right to preach Islamic teachings within Muslim and non-Muslim communities. By allowing non-Muslims to learn Islam and Islamic values, this freedom of religion would be geared towards building peace and understanding among Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Like many other countries, the Philippines values freedom of belief as a fundamental human right. Freedom of religion allows for the coexistence of different faiths, fostering cultural diversity and mutual understanding among the population. The respect for religious freedom promotes tolerance and harmony among various religious groups. It encourages people to accept and appreciate the differences in beliefs and practices, reducing the likelihood of religious conflicts. Embracing religious diversity can strengthen national unity. When people feel their religious rights are protected, they are more likely to identify with and participate in the broader national community. As a result, upholding freedom of religion contributes to a positive global image for the Philippines. It demonstrates a commitment to human rights and the principles of democracy, which can enhance the country's standing in the international community.

### **Acceptance of Islam among Christians as a way of living**

Indeed, the freedom of religion in the Philippines plays a significant role in fostering acceptance and understanding among different religious communities, including the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Freedom of religion encourages interfaith dialogue, providing opportunities for Christians and Muslims to converse about their respective beliefs. This dialogue can lead to better understanding, dispelling misconceptions, and fostering tolerance. When Muslims are free to practice their faith openly, it promotes their integration into the broader community. This integration helps break down barriers and build connections between different religious groups. Generally, adherents of all faiths can exercise their religious beliefs in all parts of the country without government interference or restriction. However, socioeconomic disparity between the Christian majority and Muslim minority has contributed to persistent conflict, but only in certain provinces. The principal remaining armed insurgent Muslim group continued to seek greater autonomy or an independent Islamic state.

As part of their strategy for moral and religious revival in Muslim areas, some Muslim religious leaders argue that the government should allow Islamic courts to extend their jurisdiction to criminal law cases, a step beyond the many civil law cases that they already can settle as a part of the judicial system. Some ulamas also support the MILF's goal of forming an autonomous region governed by Islamic law. Contrary to the stereotyped perception that Muslims are violent, Islam teaches a sense of peace. Islam means submission to the will of God, and Islam suits the best needs of humans. Through Islamic Da'wah activities, there are increasing numbers of Muslims as more people tend to live in peace. The government must recognize Islam as a positive factor or force in pursuing peace and unity. The sooner the nation and the government acknowledge this fact, the better it is for the future of the country as a whole. The prejudices of the past must be destroyed, and they must begin to remake the history of the Filipino people without the social barriers that tend to divide them.

This interprets that the Islamic Da'wah activities are merely carried out at the particular level of individual and community, which means the freedom of religion only implies within

the Muslim community. Muslims are given the freedom to serve their family with Islamic principles as their guide guidance. However, Islamic Da'wah activities need endorsement from higher authorities, such as the parliamentary level, in order to reach the great impact of Islamization throughout the country. The causal factors might be attributed to several reasons, such as the lack of government funding, the absence of Muslim representatives at the parliamentary level (senator), and the limited number of expertise among Muslim preachers.

### **Islamic Da'wah Issues among Muslim Minority in The Philippines**

There are various issues of Islamic da'wah encountered by the Muslim minority in the Philippines, including different sorts of problems such as natural, physical, material, and spiritual, which are generally classified as internal and external constraints. They are as follows. Firstly, the Government's policies and restrictions imposed on Muslims. This problem is not only encountered by the Muslim organization but also by the Muslim community and individuals in CAR. The Philippine Government imposed policies and restrictions on Islamic activities mainly after the incident of September 11, which is related to terrorist action. This eventually affected the religious rights and freedom of Muslims not only in Cordillera but in all the Muslim countries worldwide. Most Muslim preachers face the situation remarkably after the emergence of the terrorism issues in which Muslims have become political and religious victims of discrimination and persecution unleashed by predominantly non-Muslim leaders in the world. It also coincided with the Philippine Government, which strongly promotes secularism. Muslim organizations who are actively involved in Da'wah activities clearly claim to promote a radical approach to Da'wah. The Filipino Christians in CAR are always suspicious and worry about the Da'wah workers preaching to the public (Shaikh, 2015)

Secondly, there are Insufficient modern facilities and devices for Da'wah purposes. Modern devices are helpful tools for accelerating Da'wah activities. The insufficient of those devices is also regarded as a problem in the Da'wah program, which is purposely used to convey the message of Islam throughout the community. These essential devices' limitations have led to the passive growth of new Muslim converts. Modern devices are required along with technological development, such as computers, television, overhead projectors, radio, and the Internet, which are acknowledged to be effective in large settings of Da'wah programs, especially in isolated areas (Kawangit et al., 2019). Thirdly, Absence of social institutions to facilitate the Da'wah activities. Another issue is the Absence of social institutions in CAR that can work with local Muslim leaders. This has eventually led to the limitation of Da'wah venues and facilities. In some Muslim countries, the Da'wah workers have no restriction in utilizing the existing social institutions in the country to facilitate the Da'wah activities with strong government support. For instance, Malaysia has successfully managed several social institutions actively involved in Da'wah and humanity's works within and across the country. It shows the power of having social institutions supported by the government to spread the message of Islam (Kawangit et al., 2019).

Fourthly, there is a shortage of qualified Muslim teachers. As a Muslim minority country, the Philippine government still lacks expertise in Islamic education and other related fields that have the capability to bring forward Islamic subjects at a high level of education. For example, the existing Muslim teachers in ALIVE programs are not enough to cater to the demands of local Muslim children in CAR. Similarly, language constraints are also another issue faced by certain local Muslim teachers as the school children come from different tribes and dialects. Almost every tribe in CAR has a distinct dialect, which could be a barrier in medium instruction, especially for young school children who are poor in English and Tagalog. Then, Fifthly. Financial problems among Muslim leaders. The Muslim leaders in the particular area of Cordillera are mostly not financially sound. In other words, they are poorly paid, not

according to their academic level, and even some of them are volunteers in the jobs. Their salary sources mostly come from the local Muslim community and are seldom given by the Arab society as an annual incentive. This big issue has become the main factor behind the passive growth of Da'wah activities as they have to adopt the concept of self-reliance in earning their living to sustain their family and at the same time keep themselves participating in the Da'wah activities.

Sixthly, Christian missionary penetration. The presence of Christian missionaries in all sorts of Muslim areas is one of the constraints in Islamization. The situation worsened when they used integrated approaches and means to deliver their belief to the central population like Bagiuo and some adjacent places, especially to the aboriginal people in Cordillera. They come into the public with Christian purposes through various developed methods such as established schools, health centers, food service centers, shelters for the poor, and financial aid. They are trained to work hard and keep up with their religious mission. In this way, they are freely moved within the community for humanitarian help. They are even willing to stay in mountainous areas for years and be a part of the native people to show their concern and win the people's hearts toward Christianity. This pushes the significant challenges for all Muslim organizations to be well prepared with the actual spirit of determination, perseverance, and sacrifice to spread the message of Islam into the entire Philippines.

The seventh is the social gap between existing Muslim preachers and newly converted Muslim leaders. There are some internal constraints within Muslim organizations in which they are not putting themselves at the same level as Islam. The organization consists of different tribes of people. Some Muslim leaders are not behaviourally sound. They only cooperate with those from their tribe using the same language and treat those for personal interest. Some also look down on those new Muslim converts with the underestimation taught about their Islamic knowledge and skills. In some areas of Cordillera, the Arabic Language is a must for Muslims to learn. To a certain extent, any Muslim who does not communicate well in Arabic they are not eligible to be a leader. Even school children are taught Arabic at an early age, exceeding their native language. They authorly viewed this then this phenomenon in Islamic schools in Cordillera. It has supposedly not happened in any Muslim organization that really strives for the benefits of Islam as Islam never puts religion on a particular race or language, but it is meant for the whole human in the world (Sannad, 2015).

Eight is the Active participation of Muslims in Da'wah activities. There are only less than 1% Muslim population in Cordillera. Da'wah activities are also limited but well-designed and suitable for locals. However, Muslim minorities in Cordillera and even in other places in the Philippines are not serious about their religion. They do not perform daily prayer, do not behave as Muslims are supposed to act, do not observe the dress code, do not understand the barrier of social integration with peers, and they also are not serious about deepening Islam as their way of life. This can be observed during prayer time; only certain people attend the prayer. In terms of halal food, they only forbid themselves from taking alcohol and pork. Unfortunately, they never know how Islam underlines the concept of halal, far from what they understood. This situation requires full efforts by Muslim organizations to convey Islamic teachings directly to them as one of Da'wah's responsibilities (Muripaga, 2015).

## **Discussion**

Following the commencement of Islamic da'wah in the Philippines, Islam became more widely recognized and embraced by the Muslim community there. An increasing number of Islamic schools and food centers were opened, and Muslim citizens began to experience the freedom to exercise their religious rights and learn about Islam. The number of people attending congregational prayer in mosques increased, as did the number of women appropriately covering their aurahs. The public was allowed to use Da'wah streets, and Islamic courses were introduced and taught at all educational levels. Additionally, female students were permitted

to wear Islamic uniforms and were no longer prohibited from engaging in Islamic activities within their schools and centers. The halal food policy is another area where Islamic da'wah has an impact. Muslims are beginning to grasp the true meaning of halal, which goes beyond simply abstaining from alcohol and eating pork. Halal takes care of every detail regarding food safety and cleanliness. It is intended to promote a Muslim's spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. On the banking side, another effect is also noticeable (Glang, 1974). Although there aren't any Islamic banks in the Cordillera, the Philippine government has erected a few Islamic banks in Manila and Mindanao to support the Muslim community's religious rights. Numerous Islamic banking products have been introduced, including Islamic savings accounts, loans, and online and offline transactions. For Muslims to succeed in this world and the next, it is now their responsibility to uphold their Islamic beliefs, choose their lifestyle, and hold fast to their convictions.

This desire of the Muslim leaders around the country is the driving force behind the issuance of Department of Education Order 51 series of 2004 by former secretary Edilberto De Jesus, which states that “for the Muslims of Mindanao and other parts of the country, the rightful and legitimate aspiration is to have an Islamic education that is authentic and appropriate for the Muslim society. They aim to establish Islamic schools that would prepare generations of learned and intellectual Muslims imbued with Islamic values and spiritually prepared to serve the people and the country as a whole” (Congress of the Philippines, 2004). This was also announced by the President on February 22, 2002, after considering that *madrasah* education in the Philippines would help lessen the radicalism among Muslims around the country (Press Release, 2002). As part of mainstreaming *Madrasah* education in the country, the Department of Education issued Department Order 46 Series of 2005, which governs the implementation of enriched curricula for private *preachers* and public schools in Muslim communities. The document also covers the hiring, training, and source of salaries for the hired Muslim teachers (Flamiano, 2015).

Due to the statement above, the author suggests that the Philippines government build and establish some fully sponsored institutions for educating Muslim societies. Muslims should manage these institutions because they know and understand better what their needs are, especially in educating their own community. The government should give proper training to the workers who should be capable of executing and managing the institution to achieve its vision and mission.

Since most of the *preachers* in the Philippines are offering basic education and since the proposed mainstreaming is geared towards the institutionalization of *madrasah* education as part of the public education sector, it will be best to support existing *preachers* and give incentives like scholarships, curriculum design and re-engineering, instructional supervision, and school site improvement programs rather than implement a very diverse *madrasah* program under the public education sector. DepEd Order 81 S of 2007 explicitly espouses assistance in sourcing financial assistance from countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference for the following: upgrading of existing facilities of private *preachers*, capability building, and the assistance in augmenting the private *preacher's* recurrent cost of operations. At the onset, although these *preachers* are religious by nature and its operations are purely Islamic, the Philippine government secularizes instruction by training more *asatidz* in privately-run *preachers* in order to improve academic instruction, provide stable and secure employment opportunities within the DepEd for talented and skillful *asatidz* who are teaching in privately-run *preachers*.

## CONCLUSION

In order to institutionalize Islamic da'wah as an active partner in the long-term sustainable development of the Filipino Muslim human capital, the Philippine Congress's



legislative act is needed to strengthen the strengthening to promote respect for human diversity, religious tolerance, peace, and stability in the country. The Philippine House of Representatives and the Senate of the Philippines need to legislate laws that support the strengthening of existing Islamic non-government organizations and provide government funds to administer these local preachers effectively. The majority of the Muslim preachers under investigation disclosed that their education originated in the Middle East rather than the Philippines. This makes sense because no madrasahs in the Philippines offer Islamic degree programs other than those offered by the University of the Philippines and Mindanao State University. However, these graduate and baccalaureate programs require prerequisites that can only be met by attending secular education programs provided by most public and private schools approved by the Department of Education (DepEd). Since most preachers working in the Philippines are neither accredited nor recognized by the DepEd, these programs require equivalency and transfer qualifications, which are lacking among preachers.

Graduates of these preachers frequently enroll in Islamic universities abroad because, among other reasons, the DepEd does not recognize the curriculum these preachers offer, making it impossible for them to be admitted to any college or university in the Philippines with just their diploma and transcript of records from their madrasah. In most public schools, a student's grade in an Arabic course emphasizing mathematics does not translate into an equivalent creditable grade in elementary math. This helps to explain why parents enroll their kids in multiple public schools Monday through Friday while also enrolling them in a madrasah on Saturday and Sunday. However, DepEd continuously states that it supports graduates of international institutions and universities regarding hiring credentials.

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#### Supplementary Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here

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