



**MINDANAO into the 21st Century,
a Photographic Journey**
Mindanao News & Information Cooperative Center
Davao City. c2011, 191 pages, 25.7 x 21.1 x 2 cm

Chronicling the faces and places of Mindanao throughout a 10-year period that began on the first year of this current millennium, *MINDANAO into the 21st Century* is aptly subtitled 'a photographic journey'. Spanning 192 pages of visual images and brief explanatory texts, this hard-bound photo book offers a convenient window into the island of Mindanao, a place that is often misunderstood and very rarely chronicled, and the lives of Mindanaoans, a people whose struggles have often been downplayed, if not totally marginalized, in the face of Manila-centric issues and concerns. This photographic collection also showcases Mindanao through the raw beauty of its landscapes, the distinctiveness of its culture, and the interesting blend of traditional and modern that characterizes many of its buildings and structures. Simply put, this book strives, through a veritable collection of photographs, to look back and see where Mindanao has been and to predict where this often-embattled but promising southern Philippine island is headed.

Two major parts plus a one-page introductory message by Editor Bobby Timonera make up the bulk of this photographic compilation. The Introduction provides succinct background information on the book as well as an explanatory paragraph on the book's front cover photo: a *habalhabal*, an extended motorcycle of humble construction whose facility at navigating

almost non-existent roads and the most rugged of landscapes is no different to the ability of Mindanaoans to rise above the socio-political, cultural, and environmental travails that have besieged and continue to confront the region. The first part of the book is a collection of photographs that record major events, from images of warfare and bombings to photos of floods and environmental rallies. The second part of the book is a photographic tour of Mindanao provinces and some of their most talked-about and lesser-known attractions. Thus, this book is more than just a historical account of Mindanao through still pictures; it is also an impressive presentation of a beautiful, peaceful Mindanao that is not often advertised and very little explored.

MINDANAO into the 21st Century, a Photographic Journey is produced by MindaNews journalists and photographers and published by MNICC or the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center According to their website, MindaNews is a “cooperative composed of independent, professional journalists who believe and practice people empowerment through media”. The vision of the MNICC is to be the “leading provider of accurate, timely and comprehensive news and information on Mindanao and its peoples.” Seen and captured through the camera perspectives of MindaNews photographers, the photographs compiled in this book evoke a certain sense of straightforwardness that can only come from years of experience in the photojournalistic field.

As one browses through the first section of this book, he will recall how then President Estrada’s “all out war” ushered in the first year of the new millennium and that the May 2010 elections and the El Niño spell, among others, punctuated the conclusion of the first ten years of the 21st century as far as the Mindanaoans are concerned. In this first part of the book, the photographs are direct and candid, the images sometimes harrowing, yet tirelessly faithful in its depiction of real life in a less than ideal milieu. The second section of the book, which provides stunning pictures of Mindanao culture, sweeping vistas of its natural landscapes, and a privileged peek into the private lives of its peoples, is no less remarkable. In these pages is a continuously developing and evolving Mindanao gifted with picturesque lakes, marshes, and coastlines, panoramic mountain terrains, and well-preserved cultural traditions. These are visual glimpses into the lives

of Mindanaoans from one city, one *barrio*, one festival to the next. The photographs are beautiful in their creativity and experimentation, affording this book's audiences with unexpected angles and perspectives, such as a worm's eye view of MORESCO linemen dancing atop poles or an expansive view of beautiful Lake Sebu blanketed by water lilies. Through these visual feasts, the book endeavors to demystify the image of Mindanao as a dangerous place that deserves no attention from travelers and tourists.

MINDANAO into the 21st Century, through its vivid pages and straightforward stories, offers a compelling visual recall of the major socio-political events that have placed Mindanao on the forefront of local and news between the years of 2000 and 2010. Throughout its pages is a decade of history of a Philippine island that has arguably battled the most number of insurgencies and wars at a time when the rest of the country has stopped firing its guns or dropping its bombs. The book, furthermore, features issues that are often relegated as second-priority in a territory often besieged by war and religious factions: environmental issues, stories of exploitation, etc. It is a photographic journey that serves as both reality and escape. If only for its faithful visual depiction of the natural disasters and socio-political events that have shaped the ridges of Mindanao and hopefully sharpened the consciousness of every Mindanaoan and Filipino, this book is deserving of every coffee table spot or an easy-to-reach bookshelf niche. After all, *MINDANAO into the 21st Century* is more than just a photographic journey. This book is, from all angles, a photojournalistic feat.

R- Aimee C Faunillan