

## **MESSAGE OF MINISTER MOHAGHER IQBAL**

*Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao; and Chairman, Moro Islamic Liberation Front Peace Implementing Panel*

### ***“Islamic Leadership for Political Change: The Bangsamoro Experience”***

*May 26, 2020*

*BI-SMILLĀHI R-RAḤMĀNI R-RAḤĪM,*

*Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.*

*Thank you very much to Dr. Emma Leslie and the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) for allowing me to address young political and civil society leaders. I can reminisce about my tender age when I looked at Moro leaders of the time as my role model, only to be frustrated when most of them only paid lip service to the ills of society that marginalized our people. This feeling of frustration explains why, after getting my master's degree in 1972, I joined first the MNLF and later MILF without any hesitation. I was adamant about fighting for the liberation of our people from the yoke servitude, oppression, and persecution.*

*Perchance, in the eyes of the young generations, we are assuming that part today, and likewise, they are scrutinizing us as we did before. I hope they would not be frustrated by how we played our roles in this troubled 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We have done our best, and at least we have a concrete legacy to pass on to the next generations: **concluding the formal negotiation and putting into place the Bangsamoro Government.***

*For today's session, the organizers requested me to speak on **Islamic Leadership and Political Change**. I will try my best to do so. I also hope that my speech today would be insightful and will contribute to your work and advocacies. You can draw many lessons from our experiences but do not copy them. Every conflict is unique. It is your determination, creativity, and unity that will make the difference.*

*On a personal note, I hope that all of you had a Blessed Ramadhan; I pray the Almighty will continue to bless you and your families with joy and happiness and protect you from the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Before I formally start, I want to clarify that discourse is not strictly theological in approach. We can examine it through the lens of a revolutionary, as well as through the template of leadership and governance. Here are some of them:*

- 1. The viceregency of man on earth that started with Prophet Adam (AS). Almighty Allah has a plan to execute it through Adam, who was designed and equipped with the design and purpose and sent to the earth to establish it.*
- 2. "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority. (And) If you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination." (Qur'an: Al Nisa, 59).*
- 3. "And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute (with one another) lest you lose courage and your strength depart and be patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient." (Qur'an: Al Anfal, 46).*
- 4. "When three persons go on a journey, let them put one of their number in command." (Hadith: Abu Da'ud on the authority of Abu Sa'id).*
- 5. In a hard struggle, the forming of a core group is essential in its success. The group consists of men whose orientation, dedication, commitment, perseverance, and sacrifice are for the struggle alone.*
- 6. "Real leaders don't play small ball. Whether it's a constituent problem or a societal problem, they live to come up with innovative solutions to big, tough problems. Real leaders are great troubleshooters."*
- 7. Leaders lead. We all know that. We always see them step up and effortlessly take charge. Look a little more closely at a good leader, you know, and you will notice there are times when these good leaders don't lead; they let others lead.*
- 8. Real leaders create other leaders. The more that you empower others, the more opportunity manifests.*
- 9. Success in any significant endeavor requires faith and continuous struggle, hence the concept of Jihad. The literal meaning of Jihad is struggle or effort. It means more than war which is qital in Arabic. Muslims use the word Jihad to describe three different kinds*

*of struggle: A believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as well as possible. The struggle to build a good Muslim society. And the struggle to repel or defeat an invading army.*

*Now we can proceed.*

### **ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP: THE BANGSAMORO EXPERIENCE**

*Effecting political change in society requires a generational struggle. It started with a vision that serves as the guiding star. No matter what happens, that vision will always guide and steer the tortuous journey. At times, the travelers might not be pursuing the straight line, but they must always strive to fall into line and place. In jest, sometimes the straight line is not always the best way to do it, e.g., when one traverses the forest, cliffs, and mountains.*

*Moreover, they are fully conscious that they are not establishing paradise on earth or a utopian state. Leaders of the MILF, especially the late Salamat Hashim as the leading ideologue, are pragmatic in many ways. He said, exercising the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro people could either be achieved or realized through securing independence or meaningful autonomy.*

*The MILF did not secure a decisive victory over the enemy for many reasons, but we survived for decades by resorting to mobile warfare and community organizing. Nevertheless, a sort of stalemate happened, and this stalemate is mutually hurting both sides. Pragmatism and compromise thus became the trajectory option, which paved the way for negotiation with the participation of third-party facilitation and the international community.*

*I believe Dr. Leslie has shared with you that the Philippine Government and the MILF signed two essential documents plus its annexes: the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. These political documents paved the way for the drafting of relevant legislation, the Bangsamoro Basic Law as it was called then, which allowed the legal entrenchment of the negotiated peace settlements.*

*After six years of working and debating with the Philippine Congress, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (or Republic Act 11054) was signed by President Rodrigo Duterte in August 2018. We*

*successfully had a referendum in January 2019, ratifying the BOL. Shortly thereafter, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was officially created.*

*The BARMM's establishment officially abolished the previous system under the ARMM Government. Part of the commitment under the signed peace agreements is the creation of the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority, which serves as the interim government. Leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, as well as Moro National Liberation Front, was appointed as either a member of the BTA and the Interim Parliament or the BARMM Cabinet. In my case, I serve both in the Parliament and also in the Cabinet as Education Minister.*

*At present, we are now in this transition phase of laying the foundation for a robust, efficient, and morally upright regional government that genuinely represents the Bangsamoro people and readily protects their well-being and future. I should emphasize that the BOL embodies the aspiration of the Bangsamoro people for their right to self-determination, or the right to chart our own political, economic, socio-cultural future and express our distinct culture and traditions. With the BARMM in place, we hope to make that aspiration for self-determination a reality.*

*Parallel to our efforts to set up a new governance structure, we are busy responding to our people's everyday concerns. At present, the BARMM's focus is the implementation of priority programs on education, social services, health, and the economic upliftment of the Bangsamoro people, all indicated in Chief Minister Ahod B. Ebrahim's 12-Point Priority Agenda. Furthermore, we are trying to mitigate the negative impact of the armed conflict through various peacebuilding efforts.*

*Admittedly, it was a challenge for us to enter public service. The intricacies of the bureaucracy, no doubt, are complicated even for the most experienced executive or government official. We can also describe public service as a "thankless job" because not everyone will appreciate your efforts. Therefore, we can surmise that those who decide to dedicate their professional lives to serving, securing, and supporting the Bangsamoro people with little compensation are a league of their own.*

*Despite the difficulties and challenges associated with government work, the MILF leadership believes that this is one avenue to introduce the necessary reforms in the Bangsamoro region. Unfortunately, Mindanao has suffered from years of inequality, poverty, corruption, and peace and order issues. Hence, by leading the BARMM, the MILF continues its unwavering pledge to fight for the Bangsamoro people's rights by establishing a government infrastructure that will respond to their concerns and difficulties. We are also here to mitigate the enduring effects of war by advocating the need for development, justice, tolerance, healing, and reconciliation.*

### **MORALE GOVERNANCE: The BARMM's Islamic Leadership**

*The principle of **Moral Governance**, which is inspired by teachings on Islamic Leadership, shall guide all actions of the Bangsamoro government. In a nutshell, this principle is about employing ethical values in governance. Every official or leader must effectively and efficiently implement lawful programs for the people's general welfare. Moreover, commitment to Moral Governance means shunning all forms of graft and corruption.*

*Corruption, in any form, is unacceptable to the BARMM. It undermines good governance by subverting formal and legal processes. It erodes the institutional capacity of government to deliver services if lawful procedures are violated, and public offices are bought and sold. It betrays the trust and confidence of the Bangsamoro people when precious resources are siphoned off. If the BARMM fails to uphold Moral Governance and tolerate corrupt practices in this region, we would have wasted fifty years of our struggle for peace, justice, and the right to self-determination.*

*Regardless of our commitment to good governance, it would be naïve to believe that the journey towards a peaceful, just, and prosperous BARMM is tranquil. Creating the BARMM government is just the beginning. Introducing crucial reforms aimed at addressing the status quo and transforming the governance, security, socio-economic and political structures in the Bangsamoro is like "fighting an uphill battle." Hence, we need to uphold and apply Moral Governance and critical Islamic leadership principles in our work as it revitalizes hope in the BARMM government's ability to deliver essential public goods and services. Furthermore, it would inspire our constituents to support our programs and a merit-based government system.*

## **APPLICATION OF MORAL GOVERNANCE IN THE EDUCATION MINISTRY**

*The adherence to Moral Governance has already made an impact in the BARMM. While I cannot speak for the whole regional government, I can cite my office as an example. The Education Ministry is the largest agency in the BARMM, where more than 60 percent of the employees report here: teachers and education managers, school nurses, and other non-teaching personnel. Commensurate to the size of the organization is the gamut of its problems and difficulties. For instance, high dropout rates of our learners, lack of access to education services, especially in the remote areas of the Bangsamoro, and inadequate teacher management processes are just a few of the issues that the Ministry needs to address.*

*Our people are yet to feel the bulk of the improvements, but it began with the resolute commitment to pursue Moral Governance in the Bangsamoro. The Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education has already introduced good governance practices and crucial reforms, and these were exhibited through:*

- 1. Initial efforts to “clean” the human resource list and payroll system;*
- 2. Provision of relevant review sessions for prospective educators and school heads;*
- 3. The observation of appropriate working hours;*
- 4. The reiteration of no collection of fees and other incentives from teacher applicants;*
- 5. The setting up of a data management system to promote evidence-based planning and decision-making;*
- 6. The review of existing education-related interventions, such as the school-based feeding program;*
- 7. The creation of proper procedures in the hiring of qualified teachers through the Regional Human Resource Merit Promotional and Selection Board;*
- 8. The establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System, or MEMO System, for transparency and accountability;*
- 9. Undergoing the proper bidding process for the construction of classrooms;*
- 10. The reshuffling of school division superintendents, the first time in 20 years;*
- 11. Our improved performance in the 2019 Palarong Pambansa, the Philippines’ national athletic meet for young people held annually, as well as the successful hosting of the 2020 Palarong BARMMAA; and*

12. *Improving the salaries and employment status of MBHTE personnel.*

- a. *I have promoted 285 provisional teachers from across the nine divisions in the BARMM to regular employees, which became official as of May 2020.*
- b. *We increased the basic pay of contractual employees from P7,500.00 to P12,267.00 at the lowest level.*

*So far, our endeavors have received support from our constituents. While many of us in the BARMM are new to government service, we are determined to carry out our mandate to serve the Bangsamoro people and fulfill the directives of our principal, the Chief Minister Ahod B. Ebrahim.*

### **CONCLUSION**

*The Islamic-oriented leadership of the MILF has succeeded in putting a change in the political landscape in the Bangsamoro Region. The success might be modest, and indeed, it is, but it is the consequence of almost fifty years of bloody struggle and 17 long years of hard negotiation. How we managed to accomplish this feat is first and foremost with the help of Almighty Allah, and secondly, the combination of many factors like willingness to strive and suffer the consequences, faith, leadership, good deeds, unity and cooperation, consistency, decisiveness, and prayers.*

*Thank you very much for listening.*

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