NEGOTIATING PEACE

An Insider's Perspective on the Bangsamoros' Struggle for Self-Determination

Mohagher Iqbal

Volume 1

2005 - 2018

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Copy-editng by:
Louise Castillo
Zabra Siwa

Layout by:
Boonruang Song-ngarm

Published by:
The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), 2018

Funding support by:
The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Foreword

In my limited outsider's understanding of Islam, Chairman Mohagher Iqbal is the personification of the Islamic concept of 'sabr'. If Sabr means to remain steadfast, and to keep the faith and struggle for good, even when faced with opposition, setbacks, unexpected challenges and undesirable results, than this surely sums up his character. In his years as the chief negotiator for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) he has been both praised and criticized for patience in the face of numerous unexpected and unwanted, and at times victorious, outcomes. This collection of his speeches from negotiations and in public is the greatest testament to this.

As the Conciliation Resources representative in the International Contact Group (ICG), the mechanism that supported the peace talks between the Government of the Republic Philippines and the MILF, I witnessed the delivery of many of Chairman Iqbal's speeches. Over the years Iqbal proved himself a formidable counterpart to the legal mind of now Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines Marvic Leonen, to his successor the academic mind of University of the Philippines political science profession Mirriam Coronel-Ferrer, and to the intelligence capabilities and prowess of Malaysian Facilitator the late Tengku Datu Abdul Ghafar Tengku bin Mohamed. Iqbal's austere face, quiet humor, gentle smile were all part of his style. But there are three critical elements define him as an esteemed negotiator and highly respected MILF leader –

- His commitment to preparation, whether it be in writing his opening speech word for word, or consulting widely on the proposed agenda and related issues;
- His grasp and knowledge of the issues. He would say this is because he has lived long, but it is also his love of history and a wise knowing that the Devil remains in the details;
- And above all his commitment to the values of the MILF, the essence of the struggle and the pursuit of justice for his people.

That is why this book is far more than a collection of speeches, nor is it only a testament to a skilled negotiator of commitment, honor and endurance.

It is a significant historical document which details the steady and strategic desire of a people to be recognized for the historic injustices done to them, by providing a way forward for their own self governance through autonomy into the future. It should, perhaps in abridged versions, be a text for every school student in the Philippines. It must be required reading in Philippines history classes. It should be drawn on by legislators, policy makers, doctorate students, historians, researchers and professors alike. But most importantly, those of us who profess to be peace builders should read it as a guide to the steadfast patience, wily discipline, and deep wisdom that is takes to achieve peace.

May this collection in its humble way contribution to the ongoing struggle of the Bangsamoro people to achieved justice and sustainable and meaningful peace in our time.

Dr. Emma Leslie
Executive Director
Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
November 2018

List of Acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AHJAG	Ad Hoc Joint Action Group
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BIFM	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement
BLMI	Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute
BNTF	Bangsamoro Trust Fund
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CCCH	Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities
CHD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
CNI	Commission on National Integration
CR	Conciliation Resources
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSO	Civil society organization
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DOJ	Department of Justice
EDSA	Epifanio delos Santos Avenue
EU	European Union
FAB	Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
FASTRAC	Facility for Advisory Support for Transition Capacities
FPA	Final Peace Agreement (between the GRP-MNLF)
GPH	Government of the Philippines
GPNP-MILF	Government Peace Negotiating Panel for Talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front
GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
GZOPI	Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute
IB	Infantry Brigade

ICG	International Contact Group
ICP	Independent Commission on Policing
IDB	Independent Decommissioning Body
IED	Improvised explosive device
IGR	Intergovernmental relations
IMT	International Monitoring Team
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
IP	Indigenous people
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JNC	Joint Normalization Committee
LMT	Local Monitoring Team
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINHRAC	Mindanao Human Rights Action Center
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MPC	Mindanao Peoples Caucus
MSU	Mindanao State University
NCMF	National Commission on Muslim Filipinos
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NPE	New political entity
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OIC-PCSP	Organization of Islamic Cooperation - Peace Committee in Southern Philippines
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
PCBL	Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines
PNP	Philippine National Police
SMS	Short message service
SPCPD	Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development
SWAG	Special Warfare Group (of the Philippine Navy)
SWS	Social Weather Stations
TAM	Transitional Arrangements and Modalities
TPMT	Third Party Monitoring Team
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UP	University of the Philippines

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The Right to Self Determination as a principle can never be subject for negotiation, but the way to achieve it can be negotiated.

”

- **Mohagher Iqbal**

SUPPORT
THE PEACE
PROCESS
DO NOT
KILL THE
PEACE
PROCESS

Chapter 1:
Speeches from 2005 - 2010

The big question is, "Can we succeed in this endeavor?" The answer is "yes, if we can manage ourselves and agree to agree on something which is to our common objective interests." This we are doing for the last couple of months --- and we are not stopping: We keep on beating the odds and we always stay focused.

- **Mohagher Iqbal**

Opening statement during the GRP-MILF Special Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on May 5, 2010

Our Patience and Our Commitment to the Peace Process Paid Off

Speech at the closing ceremony of the 9th MILF-GRP Exploratory Talks at KL, Malaysia on September 15 to 16, 2005

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Excellency Dato' Uthman bin Abdul Razak;
Excellency Secretary Sylvestre Afable, Jr.;
Esteemed members of the Malaysian Secretariat;
Esteemed members of the GRP Panel and its TWG;
Brothers in the MILF Panel and its TWG

Assalamu Alaikum W. W.

The successful conclusion of the 9th MILF-GRP Exploratory Talks has finally brought us closer than ever to our goal of achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Homeland.

The ordeal that we went through for the two days that both Panels and their respective TWG's were crafting the agreement on the governance strand of the Ancestral Domain was a crucible that both tested our patience and taxed our nerves. Alhamdullilah, our patience and our commitment to the peace process paid off. So now we are realizing the fruits of that sacrifice and are happy in the thought that we are going back to our respective principals and people bringing with us the good news that would keep alive their hope to finally see a lasting peace and justice at the end of the tunnel.

For the monumental success that we have achieved in this meeting in Kuala Lumpur, we again express our deepest gratitude to the Malaysian Government, particularly his Excellency Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi for his unfaltering support to and facilitation of the Peace Process.

We also take this opportunity to convey our sincerest appreciation to the GRP Panel and its TWG under the abler leadership of Sec. Afable for having endured with us the difficulties that came with the effort to preserve the peace process.

Finally, may I congratulate my brethren in the MILF Panel and its TWG whose self-sacrificing commitment to our just cause, exemplary resolve, and patience under strain spelled the difference between success and failure.

Thank you and Wassalam!

Your presence alone is a great succor to a grieving and suffering people

Closing remarks during the Farewell Program for IMT-4 at Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Shariff Kabunsuan (now defunct), November 28, 2008

My responsibility in this afternoon's program, as usual for the last four years since 2005, is very simple: A CLOSING REMARK. I can do this simply by saying: I now close this program. But this time it is not that simple. If my part previously was a simple closing remark for the farewell program for a particular end of tour of duty of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), say IMT-1, IMT-2, or IMT-3, this time it is very different. This program is not simply to bid good bye to this particular IMT, this IMT-4 tour of duty; if the Philippine government and the MILF cannot find immediate consensus, then the IMT will go home forever. Such is how serious, emotional and historic my part in this program this afternoon.

In your exit, the GRP-MILF peace process will miss not only your presence but your impartial, effective and sincere monitoring and implementation of the ceasefire in Mindanao that reduced violations thereof to almost zero level but also your inspiring presence that your brethren here, the Bangsamoro people, feel and assured that they are not alone in Mindanao in spite of the hardships and recriminations befalling them. Your presence alone is a great succor to a grieving and suffering people.

Frankly, we do not know how to repay you and your governments, the governments of Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and Japan, for your and their unstinted support to peace-making in Mindanao, which is clearly heading towards an unknown zone. If the parties cannot find a way forward, which I believed is not forthcoming, then war is becoming an option opened especially to the government. This can be seen in how it conducted its so-called punitive military offensive against so-called three rogue commanders of the MILF, which unfortunately, appeared deliberate on its part, hitting the civilian populations more than the combatants of both sides. Today, as

all of you are well aware of, more than 500,000 are already displaced and more are expected to be displaced in view of the widening arena of the fighting in Mindanao.

At this juncture, please allow me to share with you why the IMT is going home. First, it must be said that the MILF is keen to extend your stay in Mindanao, but there are relevant issues that remained unresolved to this day. One, the MILF wants the government to form its peace panel immediately. The extension of the IMT requires the two panels to sit down together and extend the tour of duty of the IMT. The government committed only to appoint an acting chairman, which is not enough to do official business. Two, the MILF wants the IMT to investigate all the violations of the ceasefire, including those allegedly committed by Kato, Bravo, and Pangalian. The government wants the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) to investigate and, in the meantime, the pursuit operations against the three MILF commanders continue. The government argued that what the three commanders did was plain criminality and therefore outside of the framework of the ceasefire.

At this point, I feel obliged to tell everyone that it is not the fault of Malaysia that the IMT is leaving. The truth is the government and MILF are the ones that failed to reach a consensus on time to save the IMT from leaving.

But to the MILF, it is the government that is solely responsible for your leaving after November 30. The government keeps on changing the rules of the peace process and unilaterally imposing conditions, for instance the tagging of our three commanders as criminals. In the case of Kato, the government has filed 101 charges against him despite the fact that those acts can still be handled within the framework of the ceasefire between the MILF and government. On the same breath, the government did not file a single case; say arson, against those soldiers, CVOs and CAFGUs, who also committed the offenses against, this time, the Bangsamoro people. In North Cotabato, more Moro houses were burned than settlers' houses. This is how unjust the justice system in Philippines is.

I do not know whether the IMT can still return to Mindanao. The Malaysian government merely said in its official statement that the IMT is "suspended" and is going home after November 30. I do not know the exact meaning or intention for using this word, and I do not want to interpret it myself. We can leave it that way and leave the rest to the future.

In closing, let me congratulate the officers and men of the IMT-4 for a job well done in Mindanao. We salute you and we ask your forgiveness for whatever shortcoming, omissions or commissions by anyone of us including our commanders and men in the

field. We did not mean to hurt you or undermine your mandate. Those were simply the consequence of being human beings; and moreover, in a war situation, errors and sometimes excesses are committed.

Thank you and Assalamu Alaikum, W. W.

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Thank you and Assalamu Alaikum, W. W.

The Bangsamoro Question In The Eyes of the MILF

Speech during the meeting of the Department of Minorities and Muslim Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Conference on April 18-19, 2009 at Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Let me begin this speech by expressing my deepest thanks and gratitude to the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), particularly to His Excellency Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, for giving the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), through this humble representation, the chance to speak before this August Body. I hope I will live up to your expectation in sharing with you a brief historical background of the Bangsamoro people, some highlights of the Mindanao conflict, and the ailing GRP-MILF peace process.

Frankly, this is the first time since it's founding in 1977 that the MILF is given the chance to speak before the OIC or any of its instrumentalities. Long in the coming, but it has come in the most precise moment. This is truly historic and memorable!

It is true that the Bangsamoro people are a minority in the Philippines. Numbering only about eight million in a population of 86 million Filipinos, they are indeed a minority. But our case perhaps needs a little review of the past. Our minoritization is not only due to the evil vestiges of colonialism but more so of the Machiavellian machination of an anti-Muslim government in Manila, which saturated Mindanao with millions of settlers or migrants.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Moros were the majority in Mindanao and owned 98% of the lands. Together with the indigenous tribes, they made up more than 90% of the population of the Moro Province, which was created by the Americans in 1903 to administer Moro affairs separately from the Filipinos of Luzon and the Visayas.

At present, the Moros constitute only about 35% of the population of Mindanao and owned only 15% of the lands. This worsening situation did not stop here. Encroachment on our remaining domain and dispossession of our remaining lands continue unabated.

Sixty three years after the exit of the United States from the Philippines in 1946, Moro situation had worsened instead of improving. Many believed Moros were better off during the Spanish regime than under the administration of Filipinos.

In the 1970s, after failing to integrate and assimilate Moros into the Filipino mainstream, the government tried genocide "to solve" the Moro Problem. The campaign started on March 18, 1968 when 64 or so Moro trainees were killed in Corregidor Island, off the coast of Cavite, for protesting the abuses of their military handlers, the cutting of their allowances and regular meals, and for refusing to follow orders to invade Sabah in Malaysia. This was followed in 1969-1971 when the state-sponsored Christian fanatic group, the Ilaga, killed Moros en masse. Tens of thousands died, wounded, or maimed. Those who were not killed fled their homes and many have not returned to their places of origins to this day.

It is on this grim backdrop that the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was organized in 1969. There was no alternative left for Moros except to band themselves and resist in order to survive as a people. Not long after, in October 1972, the MNLF initiated the war in Mindanao. This, however, gave the government another reason to resume their mass killing of Moros now in the name of Martial Law, which President Marcos declared on September 21, 1972. He ordered the Moro rebellion crushed and on the process killed Moros by thousands. To cite just few instances, in August 1974 government forces massacred 1,000 Moro civilians including women and children inside a mosque in Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat; in October 1977, 600 civilians were massacred in Patikul, Sulu; and in February 1981, 2,000 civilians were massacred in Pata Island in Sulu Province. Up to now, no justice has been given to the victims and the perpetrators are still scot-free.

In 1975 towards the closing days of 1976, a new approach was devised to address the Moro Problem and the raging armed conflict in Mindanao. Negotiation was held under the auspices of the OIC. Consequently, on December 23, 1976, the Tripoli Agreement was signed between the Philippine government and the MNLF. It provided for Moro autonomy covering 13 provinces and five cities in Mindanao. But instead of complying with the letter and spirit of this agreement, the government "misimplement" it by creating two bogus autonomous regions, instead of one.

However, the uneasy peace brought about by the peace deal did not last long. War hastily returned to Mindanao. Again, civilians were caught in the middle; many had been killed or injured or summarily executed. Others were arrested, jailed, or disappeared without traces to this day. Destruction of properties, homes, and orchards was widespread; displacement was severe; and militarization heightened.

Twenty years later, the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement (FPA) was signed in Jakarta, Indonesia on September 2, 1996. High expectation and an aura of peace was everywhere.

The FPA envisioned autonomy for the Bangsamoro people, with integrative features that led to the appointment of many MNLF high officials into the government and MNLF forces joining the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

But the high expectation vanished soon after. Again, the Philippine government did not implement the FPA in letter and spirit. The government just dribbles and dribbles to this day, while the Bangsamoro people anxiously waited in vain for thirteen long years.

Honourable members of this conference, since the signing of the FPA, the MILF has consistently wanted it implemented. We know that if this will be implemented in full, it will help consolidate the gains of the Bangsamoro people's struggle for self-determination.

Now, the question is: Why did the MILF decide to enter into separate talks with the government, given the FPA?

Well, like most if not all peace agreements, the FPA is not a perfect agreement; it has flaws and loopholes that require remedying or plugging if only to solve the Moro Problem. The MILF wants to get a more comprehensive peace settlement, which will give our people substantive powers to govern themselves and effective access to or use of their natural resources. However, in doing so, the MILF is not negotiating for itself but for the entire Bangsamoro people. If one carefully examines the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), it is clearly not for the MILF alone but for every Moro in Mindanao. We want to be inclusive so that everyone irrespective of groups, tribes, or political affiliations is recipient of the fruit of our negotiation. We have never thought of seeking positions in the government to become part of the peace deal.

Now, in spite of the harsh and protracted negotiation, the defining moment nevertheless came when the government and MILF finally agreed on the final text of the MOA-AD, which they initialed on July 27, 2008. They scheduled the formal signing ceremony on August 5, 2008. But to the "dismay and frustration" of the MILF, the Malaysian government as facilitator, and the international community, and anger of some MILF military leaders, the government cancelled the signing at the last hour.

What is the MOA-AD?

The MOA-AD is the first substantive agreement reached by the government and MILF since they entered into peace talks on January 7, 1997. It is about Ancestral Domain, the third and last aspect of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace signed between the MILF and the government in Tripoli, Libya, on June 22, 2001. The other two aspects are on Security, and Relief, Rehabilitation, and Humanitarian.

The MOA-AD, among other significant features, is a framework agreement that embodies the substance of the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the Tripoli Agreement of 2001. Once the MOA-AD is signed, the parties will move to the discussion of the negotiated political settlement of the Moro Problem and the armed conflict, which will be contained in the comprehensive compact. It establishes remedies to restore the Bangsamoro people's legitimate right to self-determination, a right enshrined in the United Nations Charter and other international laws.

The MOA-AD integrates the 80 or so consensus points on the four strands of ancestral domain: Concept and principles, territory, resources and governance, which the parties earlier agreed after three years and eight months of hard bargaining. However, in its character ways, the government wanted the entire consensus points repudiated even before the debacle in Malaysia. But there was no way to do it without appearing villain and the MILF hero in the eyes of everyone and the international community. Therefore, the intervention of its Supreme Court, directly or indirectly sought, came as the timely saviour. It provided the government the perfect excuse to undo what it had already conceded to the MILF.

In the meantime, fighting has flared up in Mindanao from July 2008 to the present. Likewise, this fighting is the necessary offshoot of the government dilly-dallying in the peace talks. It has always treated the peace process and the ceasefire as mere counter-insurgency tools. The debacle in Malaysia just provided the fuse to further conflagrate the region. In reality, the AFP has long wanted to attack the MILF, but they have no justification to do so. Therefore, the actuation of the three MILF commanders provided

them the much-needed pretext to move against the MILF. Immediately, fighting ensued that resulted in massive destruction and displacement, reaching as high as 600,000 evacuees, mostly Muslims. Burning of houses, lootings, and other violations of human rights were widespread. In Maguindanao alone, the AFP burned 1,700 Moro civilian houses. The situation has already reached the level of humanitarian tragedy, but the government is in a state of complete denial.

Paradoxically, however, the European Union, Japan, the United States, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Germany, Australia, and dozens of Western countries-backed international non-government organizations (INGOs) immediately came to the rescue of the suffering people of Mindanao. But sad to say, similar or greater involvement from our Muslim brothers and countries is yet to be seen by our people. They are in dire need of your help now.

At this juncture, allow me to explain why the MILF does not agree to make the Philippine Constitution the framework of the peace talks. To many this sounds ridiculous if not totally unacceptable. But to the MILF and international negotiation experts, this jibes well with current conflict resolution models around the world.

First, all sovereignty-based negotiations such as those in South Sudan, Northern Ireland, Bougainville, Kosovo, and Aceh are extra-constitutional. Their peace agreements were used to amend their respective constitutions, without infractions;

Second, the Philippine Constitution establishes a unitary structure of government, which is a carryover of the colonial setup established by the Spaniards and then by the Americans. A unitary state is highly centralized in governance and by its very nature does not permit sharing of powers to minorities or indigenous peoples necessary to govern themselves even in a sub-state status;

Third, it is tailored fit for the Christian power structure without just Moro representation; in fact it represents their interests exclusively, as the dominant population who control the political, economic, and military powers in the Philippines; and

Fourth, it is a lame excuse and shallow framework for which to argue the case of the Bangsamoro people towards their right to self-determination.

In closing, we solemnly appeal to the members of this August Body to seriously consider the Premises and Resolutions which we proposed for inclusion in the Resolutions on the "Question of Bangsamoro in South Philippines" during the Thirty-sixth Session of

the Council of Foreign Ministers, to be held in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, from May 23-25, 2009. They are appearing in our report to OIC about the general situation of our people and the status of the GRP-MILF Peace Talks. Please find them in one of the documents we provide this conference.

Wa Billahi Hi Taufiq Wal Hidayah!

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh!

All History Is Contemporary History

Opening statement during the GRP-MILF Special Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on May 5, 2010

We are back to this beautiful and progressive City of Kuala Lumpur, as part of our continuing efforts to seal something beneficial to all of us. But as we struggle forward, time is ticking away very fast before President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo exits from office on June 30, 2010. Only fifty-six days are left of her term of office. The big question is, "Can we succeed in this endeavor?" The answer is "yes, if we can manage ourselves and agree to agree on something which is to our common objective interests." This we are doing for the last couple of months --- and we are not stopping: We keep on beating the odds and we always stay focused.

Excellences, honorable counterparts, I will not deal on this subject lengthily. It is very hard to deal on the future; it is not in our hands to determine and control. There are many other players, as there are many unforeseen situations. But rather, I will delve on the value of history in our peace-making efforts in Mindanao. To tell you frankly, we cannot set aside history; it is very much part of our discussion. What we see today, what we value today, and what we would like to see in the future are very much appreciated in the context, not only of the contemporary, but also of the past. The Filipino foremost hero, Dr. Jose Rizal once said, "The man who does not look back to the past will never reach his destination." In the words of Benedetto Croce, an Italian critic, idealist, philosopher, and occasionally also a politician, said, "All history is contemporary history". And the third but not the last, George Santayana (1863-1952), a Spanish-American philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist, is best remembered for this famous statement: "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Put in the context of our current peace talks, history is similar to the institutional memory of the peace panels or their members. Without this memory or availability of signed documents, inconsistencies, contradictions, and conflicts do occur oftentimes or frequently in our talks. If the MILF Peace Panel has to claim any edge, it is only this aspect. Some of its members have uninterrupted and continuous participation in the peace talks since January 7, 1997.

We cannot forget history. It is very much part of the discussion. If an ambassador, before he takes his post, has to know the history and current situation of the host country; if a lawyer has to know the background of every case he handles; and if a doctor has to know the case history of his patient, how much more for negotiators who are trying to solve an age-old problem and armed conflict?

Surely, we will keep on citing pertinent aspects of the past, because it is this past happening that shaped or created the horrible situation of the Moros in Mindanao today. We never wanted to be part of the sale of the Philippines to the Americans to the tune of $20 million, because we were never colonized by the Spaniards. We never wanted to be handed to the Filipinos by the Americans, because they (Filipinos) will never treat us fairly; a statement that comes true or we will not be in this negotiation today.

Thank you.

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Chapter 2:
Speeches from 2011

"It is possible to have no more war in our midst but we must have peace with justice first; not simply forgive and forget."

- Mohagher Iqbal
Opening statement during the opening session of the 23rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on December 5-7, 2011

The Struggle, Education, and the Peace Process

Speech before a gathering of educators in Marawi City on January 8, 2011 sponsored by the Peace Center of CHED-ARMM, in coordination with Regional Association of Higher Education Institutions (RAHEI) in the ARMM, particularly the Philippine Muslim Teachers' College (PMTC), the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS) and the Society of Educators for Educational Development (SEED)

It is an honor to be invited to this Educators' Forum in this scenic City of Marawi to speak on a subject of common interest: "The Moros' struggle, education, and the Peace Process in Mindanao". Actually, I normally do not accept speaking engagement in open assembly like this, but to tell you frankly, I do not know how to say no to Dr. Norma Sharief, who is a distinguished educator herself and the niece of my comrade in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for 35 years, Alim Abdulaziz Mimbantas, now a full-fledged vice chairman of the Front.

Frankly, speaking to educators, like all of you here, humbled me a lot, knowing fully well that my specialty is not about education but involvement in a life-time struggle where death is the only valid cause for retirement and whose rules of engagement is framed on the lofty goal of delivering our people from the clutches of servitude, persecution, and oppression, and more importantly, to pursue their right to self-determination. This right is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nation and other international laws and covenants.

At the turn of the second and third quarters of the last century almost everyone disliked being called "Moro", because of its derogative connotation or attachment. The word was equated to "piracy", "juramentado", "killer", "traitor", and many more. They were painted black and grim; that is why we disdained being called Moros in those times. But after thousands of us died in Corregidor, Kauswagan, Tacub, Manili, Alamada, Tulunan, Palembang, Wao, Dinas and Labangen in Zamboanga del Sur, and many other places in our homeland, we rediscovered that indeed Moro is not bad at all. It had its root in the Maurus or Mauris of North Africa and Spain, who were Muslims and conquerors. Here in this country, it is the consequence of anti-colonialism struggle of our forefathers, in contrast to Filipino, which is the product of capitulation of those in Luzon and Visayas. The youth leaders, who banded themselves into the Moro National Liberation Front and later the Moro Islamic Liberation Front were the first to give justice to this moniker and named their two liberation movements after it. It was for them a source of pride and identity for an emerging new nation in this part of Southeast

Asia. Today, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is carrying the brunt in asserting this identity and this effort is already paying off when it is made part of signed documents with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). But this assertion can only be successful unless everyone is conscious and accepts that he is a Moro, distinct and separate from the Filipino. Consciousness, acceptance, and assertion are the magic keys to our success in this endeavor.

But before this awakening, especially during the post-Kamlon Hadji and Tawantawan rebellions in the early fifties, many of our leaders wanted to adopt the Muslim Filipino label and actively worked for our integration into the national body politic as solution to the so-called Moro Problem. They helped create and nurture the Commission on National Integration (CNI) to fast track this assimilation, mainly through education. Consequently, many of those who studied in Manila under the scholarship grants of the CNI did not go home after their graduation, married Christians, and, as an aftermath, their children became Christians.

This integration scheme almost succeeded. Many Moros started to copycat the Christian ways of living especially in wedding, clothing, drinking, etc. Sometimes some Moros outdid them in the celebration of New Year, Christmas, and birthdays. Belief gave way to hedonism. While many still threw lavish thanksgivings (kanduli) oftentimes it is associated with another happening where drinking and dancing were the first order. This secularization process strayed into many homes and stayed until the Corregidor Massacre took place where scores of Moro trainees were killed en masse in 1968. This was followed by the rampage of the Ilagas in Cotabato and Lanao that also claimed thousands of Moro lives.

Sixty-four years after the grant of so-called Philippine independence in 1946, their situation is far from better. They continue to remain the subjects while the Filipinos stay on as masters. The Moros are never part of decision-making and the Filipinos continue to prescribe everything for them, including how to run themselves. Those who claim to be members of the royalty, the datus and sultans, the traditional ruling class among Moros, are no exception. Most of them, with hardly any exception, swallow the hook, line, and sinker of the rulers in Manila. From 98 percent ownership of land in Mindanao in 1898, only less than 12 percent are still in their hands today. And the loss is continuing. New migrants from Luzon and the Visayas and from other parts of Mindanao are entering traditional areas in Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and occupy them. Not only Davao is lost forever, but also the Zamboanga Peninsula. Poverty and lack of education are

prevalent. Many have managed to accumulate wealth, but the overwhelming majority remains below poverty line. Disunity is still a problem; they are hardly freed from the strangulation of tribal divide. Instead of taking part actively in the formation of a new nation, many still dig deep into the quagmire of tribalism. The token governance exercised by those leaders in government is marred with inefficiency, corruption, and impiousness. Backwardness is the landmark of Moro areas. There are exceptions, but these exceptions are not many. And lastly but not the least, while we have thousands of graduates in Islamic education, compared to the number of Moro populations, Islam is still weak.

There is no shortcut solution to these problems. Deliverance does not come easy; it is a long drawn-out process. It requires a multi-pronged approach to arrest this downtrend. Victory of the MILF-led struggle is the main menu, but when will this happen, we do not know. What is consoling, however, is that we continue to move forward, little by little --- and surely. And we know that no matter how long and protracted, the end of the tunnel is always there.

In the meantime, while the main liberation track is being pursued vigorously and ceaselessly, education, a correct education, can play a complementary role. It is not only a catalyst of change, but it holds the other keys to success in this world and the day hereafter.

What do we mean by correct education? It simply means that that education addresses the spiritual and moral requirements of Muslims, as well as their temporal needs. The revealed knowledge and the acquired knowledge must be blended and made part of our curriculum and school system. We are aware that over-stressing the spiritual needs of man will inevitably lead him to passiveness and underdevelopment, while over-emphasizing his earthly needs will drag him to worldliness and finally to hell. We want those educated in revealed knowledge to learn also sciences, physics, geometry, astronomy, etc. and those learned in acquired knowledge to have a good foundation of the spiritual and moral scruples of Islam. One can be good doctor, lawyer, teacher, physician, etc. and at the same time a practicing Muslim. The two are not dialectically opposed to each other; in fact, they can make up a good believer --- a truly Allah's vicegerent on earth.

This educators' forum is not only timely; it is required from time to time that educators meet to share their knowledge and learn from others. Education is not the monopoly of one; the more one is learned, the more he or she feels wanting in more

knowledge. Only the ignorant even if he or she has obtained the highest degrees claims he is learned and knows everything. Knowledge is something that is imbued in man in trickle or in very little quantity.

The third menu, which can contribute to our deliverance, is for the success of the current peace negotiations between the MILF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). Even if it is marred by delays, impasses, uncertainties, and even wars, Moro rights to self-determination is continuously entrenched by the signing of documents between the two Parties. The adversary may violate, ignore or throw away these documents, but as long as we do not waver in our commitment, firmly in grip of our guns, and continue our assertions, we will reap the fruits of our sacred endeavor sooner or later.

But mind you, talking peace with an adversary is also tortuous, tricky, and demanding. The adversary will not readily give in to what we perceive as solution to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. As long as they have the power, they will find all the alibis and excuses to frustrate our effort to empower our people. They will insist on giving us sham autonomy that perpetuates, not only mendicancy and dole outs, but also a rotten system that is corrupting and dehumanizing.

Rest assured that the political settlement that we seek for our people is one based on the equality of peoples, specifically between Moros and Filipinos, whose relation has been one of master and followers, as I pointed out earlier. The least that we accept is one that clearly outlines an asymmetrical state-substate arrangement where the powers in their respective jurisdictions are clearly defined, without giving up our collective right to self-determination. Short of this is totally unacceptable.

But to date, the GRP-MILF peace talks has been hanging in the balance. We do not know when it resumes or will it ever resume at all. The government is clearly engaging in dribbling tactics, which is taxing the patience of people and fighters on the ground. Our people are now speaking; in Maguindanao, thousands of rallyists chanted, "disengage from the peace talks", while those in Marawi City, who numbered by tens of thousands, asked the MILF to revert to independence. Clearly, these are signs on the wall that the MILF cannot and will not ignore.

On this note, I appeal to everyone in this hall to help the MILF in mustering the strength and resources to create an impregnable people's movement capable of defending itself and of promoting the political aspiration of our people. Only through

this, insha Allah, the victory for the MILF and the Bangsamoro people will be assured. Although, many of you are working with the other party, we are very confident that we have one body and spirit, in pursuing our sacred struggle until we achieve our final destination.

Thank you and wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

Sincerity is a State of the Mind

Opening statement during the Informal Meeting Between the GRP and the MILF Peace Panels In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on January 13, 2011

Two years, five months, and 17 days ago on July 27, 2008 the government peace panel headed by Secretary Rodolfo Garcia and the MILF peace panel headed by this humble representation were here in this Bellamy Hall to initial the historic Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). That same night, after the initial, Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr. of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) immediately boarded the earliest available flight to Manila to catch up with the State of the Nation Address (SONA) the next day of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who upon getting a copy of that initialed document, proudly announced a "breakthrough" in the GRP-MILF Peace Talks.

The MOA-AD had been under intense negotiation for three years and eight months, or from December 2004 to July 27, 2008. And much of it was deliberated by the Parties in this building. This is how memorable this place is to our current peace negotiation, in addition to be one of the remaining vestiges of British colonialism. This is where, I was told, where one British official used to stay during his stint in this country.

Yes, the MOA-AD was not signed on August 5, 2008. It was challenged before the Supreme Court and the government peace panel was stopped from signing it. But the consequence was devastating. The Arroyo administration was shamed" before the international community for not abiding by a commitment and "blamed" for the bloody fighting that ensued.

Today, we are back to this hall, in deference to the commitment of the Parties made on June 3, 2010, when they solemnly signed the Declaration of Continuity for Peace Negotiation Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and

the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in the presence of the Malaysian Country Facilitator and Secretariat and members of the International Contact Group (ICG), which contained the following:

1. Adoption of a new formula that permanently responds to the legitimate aspirations of the Bangsamoro people for just peace, freedom founded on parity of esteem, equal treatment for their identity, ethos, and rights and for the Bangsamoro people as a whole to exercise self-governance on the basis of consent in accordance to an agreed framework which shall be negotiated and adopted by the Parties;
2. In good faith, building on prior consensus points achieved, these negotiations and their results will proceed on the basis of consent and courses of action free of any imposition in order to provide the parties definitive commitment to their success for peace settlement;
3. The ultimate goal of the talks is to consider new modalities to end the armed conflict with responsibility to protect and for human security, in addition to resolve the legitimate grievances and claims for the people of Moro ancestry and origin;
4. In reframing the consensus points on Ancestral Domain, respect the existing property and community rights taking into account in particular the rights of indigenous people in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
5. As a general principle indigenous peoples who originally inhabit particular constituent units shall receive protection and enjoy equal rights similar to those enjoyed by the Moros taking into account in addition to economic and geographical criteria, their individual and communal rights, cultural integrity, customary beliefs, historical and continuity traditions; and
6. Agreed upon texts and signed instruments on the cessation of hostilities and security arrangements guidelines and development initiatives and rehabilitation guidelines to be subsequently incorporated in a comprehensive text of the compact agreement.

Clearly, these are the Parties' guideposts to continue and move this peace process forward. In fact, this is the only way forward. This jibes perfectly well with what Chairman Murad Ebrahim said during the MILF-FOCAP Forum on the Peace Process on August 9, 2010, that the only way for the peace process is "forward". Moving sideways, right or left, and worse, backward, are ingredients of war. It is not worth trying!

The resolution of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao has been long overdue. Personally, I believe that the forthcoming negotiation is easier than the previous ones; simply, because, the parties have already signed so many agreements of varying importance, and the foundation of setting up a future Moro state or substate, has been well documented, including the "acknowledgement of MOA-AD as unsigned and yet initialed document, and commitment by both parties to reframe the consensus points with the end in view of moving towards the comprehensive compact to bring about a negotiated settlement".

Frankly, if we conduct this negotiation as real problem-solving exercise, we would not spend three years into it. That is too long to spare on something whose main formula does not include option to secede, as what was provided for in the Machakus Agreement in South Sudan. The January 27, 2010 draft of the MILF on the Comprehensive Compact outlined an asymmetrical state-substate arrangement. Six months up to one-year timeline is enough to complete the process. But if the exercise is just to manage the conflict in Mindanao, as most if not all previous administrations did, the six-year term of office of President Benigno Aquino III will not be enough. There will always be reasons to obstruct the negotiations, as there are people who prefer the war option to solve the problem in Mindanao.

We do not only believe in consultation; we have conducted consultations not only regularly but often in grand scale. We were never remiss in this regard. And the real and final consultation shall take place when the people are called to a referendum to freely determine their final political status.

The real stakeholders must have full view and knowledge of the essence of the exercise. They possess the final say on which to accept and which to reject. But to treat everyone as stakeholders of equal footing is to render the negotiation a captive especially of those whose real motive is to let the process fall and allow war to continue its deadly toll.

For the MILF, there are only two main stakeholders in this negotiation, the Filipinos and the Bangsamoros (the indigenous peoples included), whose totality of relationship is the subject of this negotiation. Since the annexation of their homeland in 1946, their relationship has been one-sided, the former continue to be masters and the latter as mere followers. The Moros have never been part of decision-making in the Philippines. And they have no hope to remedy this and better their lives under a crippling unitary setup of government.

For those who see the Moro Question as purely and simple domestic issue, we tell them: This question has always been an international issue right from the start. Set aside the fact that in 1975 President Ferdinand Marcos sent his wife, Imelda Romualdez Marcos, to Benghazi, Libya to ask President Muammar Qhaddafi to help in the resolution of the MNLF-led Moro struggle in Mindanao; set aside the fact that on February 7, 2001, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to this beautiful and progressive city of Kuala Lumpur to ask then Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad to facilitate the GRP-MILF Peace Talks, after it collapsed during the 2000 all-out war declared by President Joseph Estrada against the MILF. EVEN BEFORE THAT, Mindanao and Sulu had always been a "foreign territory", separate and distinct from Luzon and the Visayas. Spain, a superpower at the time, never conquered the Moros despite 321 years of warfare. And at the turn of the last century in 1898, the Americans came and one of the first things they did was to sign a treaty with the Moros called Kiram-Bates Treaty. Then they organized the Moro Province to administer the affairs of the Moros separate from those of the Filipinos in the North.

There is no turning back in the quest of the Moros to full nationhood. It had formally started, albeit later than the Filipinos, in 1924, because the notion of nationhood had also taken late in the history of nations. It was only during the Napoleonic Era in Europe that the concept of nation had started, not as a consequence of man's search for better beings, but more borne out of as a better way to mobilize greater number of people in war.

In this regard, we salute our counterpart in the government headed by Secretary Rodolfo Garcia and, more so, the government under President Arroyo for being truthful and daring enough to agree to sign the various consensus points on the Ancestral Domain aspect of the Tripoli Agreement of 2001 and to initial the MOA-AD in 2008, which contained, among others, the "recognition of the birthright of all Moros and all indigenous peoples of Mindanao to identify themselves and be accepted as 'Bangsamoros'".

We do not doubt the sincerity and capability of the present government under the leadership of President Aquino to find a just, lasting, acceptable, and comprehensive settlement of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. In fact, we are also fully aware of his huge political and social capital indispensable to propel his peace agenda to success.

But sincerity is a state of the mind that can only be fully appreciated and validated when actions are congruent with it. We hope that his actions now and in the future jibe with his declared intention. And similarly, the power and capability of the presidency is

almost beyond measure, as amply and vividly described by President Arroyo in one of her SONAs: "The president can be as powerful as she or he wants it to be".

It is on the record that we have interacted intensely with previous government peace panels, and despite our differences of opinions and divergence of positions, sometimes immovable, we remained friends and respectful of each other. After all, negotiation is always not a contest of personalities but of issues that are always contradictory and poles apart.

Lastly, we want to assure our present counterpart in the government headed by Dean Marvic Leonen that we are cognizant of their expressed commitment to make peace happen during their time --- and immediately, as what he boldly asserted during a forum in Quezon City on August 13, 2010. Together, under the excellent facilitation of the Malaysian Government, especially of His Excellency Datuk Othman bin Abd' Razak, and with the participation of the International Contact Group (ICG), and the International Monitoring Team (IMT), maintaining the peace and tranquility on the ground, as well as other mechanisms of the GRP-MILF peace negotiation, WE CAN MAKE JUST PEACE AND JUST SETTLEMENT OF THE CONFLICT IN MINDANAO HAPPEN, Insha Allah (God willing)!

Thank you and Wasalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh!

Every Step Brings Us Closer To Our Destination

Opening statement during the opening program of the 20th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on February 9-10, 2011

Today, we are in the formal exploratory mood of the negotiation in our continuing journey of peace towards the signing of the negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question based on the Bangsamoro people's right to self-determination and freedom. While the exact time to destination cannot be determined right now, but every step we take now is bringing us closer to it. After all, what is left for the Parties to deliberate is the final agenda of the peace talks; i.e., the comprehensive compact. As what I said during the "clearing the air" informal meeting on January 13, one-year timeframe is good enough for the Parties to wind up the discussion and sign the document. I am happy to note that my honorable counterpart from the Philippine government, Dean Marvic

Leonen, shared this optimism when he said during his press conference at the University of the Philippines the other day, and I quote: "In our view as his panel, we think that if the MILF remains sincere and is open to being pragmatic but at the same time principled in their stance, one year is a reasonable period to come to a fundamental agreement on a politically negotiated settlement."

I take exception to the misimpression by some quarters that the MILF is very anxious to start the negotiation immediately, imputing, without necessarily stating, that we want to start it for reasons beyond the need to really address the legitimate grievances of our people. If there is urgency on our part to engage immediately, it is because we are fully aware of the situation in the field and the presence of so many powerful and well-entrenched spoilers of the peace process both in Manila and Mindanao. On the part of the MILF, we have problems. Ustadz Ombra Kato is one of those problems, but the MILF leadership is still hopeful that we can manage and solve this problem; otherwise, we will tell the government, the facilitator, and the international community that he has already burned his bridges with the MILF. He is not one of us; he is not with the MILF.

However, to be frank with all of you here, Kato is indeed a problem, I repeat, but if we are truthful to ourselves and to the facts surrounding why he had been a problem it is because of the betrayal of the previous administration (not its peace panel) in not signing the Memorandum of Agreement of Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) on August 5, 2008. Kato is one of our commanders, who do not believe in negotiation, but we managed to let him toe the line for so long, until the present Philippine dispensation came into power. Ramadan passed, the month of October passed, November passed, December passed, but it was only on January 13 when the two peace panels finally met. This is not blaming anyone, but I am just highlighting here that these delays are giving him more ammunition to prove his thesis that he is right, that negotiation is useless, because the government is not sincere. It is very difficult to argue with those who in the first place take an opposite view right at the start.

At this juncture, I want to make strong note that while negotiation requires confidentiality to ensure its success, this is just one side of the same coin. The other side is the need for transparency, especially when serious issues affecting the people are at stake. The presence of the International Contact Group (ICG) in our face-to-face negotiation is not only to be appreciated in terms of what they can help to move the process forward, especially in exerting "proper leverage" to the Parties to abide and comply with commitments but also a way in our part to practice what we sincerely believe as indispensable; i.e., the need for transparency.

It is therefore my belief that better judgment so requires that the ICG members, both states and non-states will be invited to observe the present proceeding and those yet to come. They can play their role exceptionally well if they know what is really happening in the negotiation; otherwise, the Parties would have to spare time and efforts to brief them in Manila and in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao. I am quite optimistic that everyone in this session would see the wisdom of my view.

I also want to state here that we are formally withdrawing our January 27, 2010 draft on the comprehensive compact, as what we officially put on record last January 13, and in its stead, we are submitting a new draft, whose essential elements are similar to the first, to our esteemed counterpart from the government and the Malaysian third country facilitator. We are not going to discuss this draft now but when the time for it comes, probably tomorrow, February 10, we would request that we be given the chance to make a general description of it. After this, our counterpart from the government may ask questions but only those relevant to our draft will be taken up. Other questions that have no direct bearing to this draft will be reserved for other forums, not necessarily with the MILF peace panel. The reason for this is simple, which I find not obliging on my part.

On this note, once again I extend to you a very "good morning" and wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi barakatuh!

Issue of Totality of Relationship

Opening statement during a forum in Cotabato City on March 6, 2011 participated by non-Moro NGOs, CSOs, and POs in Mindanao

In 2005 the peace panels of the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have agreed to organize two advocacy groups, one for the GPH and another for the MILF. Their task, in the case of the GPH, is to reach out and hold consultations with the Filipino people and those in governments, and in the case of the MILF, to conduct dialogues with the Bangsamoro people including the indigenous peoples in Mindanao, which we did regularly and extensively. Datu Michael Mastura headed the MILF advocacy group and Ms. Sylvia Paraguya the GPH's. The rationale behind this is simple: There are only two main constituencies or stakeholders in these negotiations: the Filipino people represented by the GPH and the Bangsamoro people

(including the IPs with the attendant right to free choice) by the MILF. All others are in the category of sub-constituencies or sub-stakeholders. As we repeatedly stressed, the main issue in the current GPH-MILF peace negotiation is how to correct and solve the one-sidedness or imbalance of totality of relationship between Filipinos and Moros, the former continue to be rulers and sole decision-makers, while the latter stagnated into mere second-class citizens without any role in national decision-making.

As we are gathered here today, a question has to be asked: Is this a consultation? To a limited extent, yes, it is. But strictly speaking, this is not, because the main responsibility to conduct dialogue with you, as noted above, belongs to the government peace panel. On our part, it is a matter of necessity that we must leave no stone unturned if only to make the cause of peace succeed. This is also a sign of goodwill that we also reach out to groups other than those within the sphere of our responsibility. After all, we are all from Mindanao -- neighbors, friends, and associates or partners in finding a just, lasting, and acceptable solution to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. We really feel the need for this face-to-face meeting, in view of the inadequacy of information surrounding the peace process, specifically what really is in store for all of us in this negotiation, including those migrants whose forebears have started to live in Mindanao since a century ago. We have already suffered lot for the absence of genuine peace and the perpetuation of the conflict in Mindanao, not to state of the deaths of so many people and the destruction of billions worth of properties, but also the underdevelopment in the entire country. The Philippines started as the second economy in Asia after Japan after the Second World War, but today it is at the tail end of the economies in this region. And the main reason for this is its inability or failure to address and come to terms with the various insurgency groups in this country. In Europe, in Africa, in New Zealand, and in some Asian countries, questions of right to self-determination struggles are handled perfectly well without suppressing them, but in the Philippines it continues to prescribe outdated formula that perpetuates the master-slave relationship. It appears this country is not serious in learning lessons from successful conflict resolutions around the globe today.

There is also need for other people or groups like you to understand the MILF proposal, whether what we want for ourselves signals the demise of other groups, or whether our proposal is framed on extremism that defies logic and moderation. Or we want to live and let others live in peace, love, and harmony.

In more specific terms, there are groups who are out to sabotage the peace process; they continue to snipe at it, with the intention of bringing it down. Some of them come from the media practitioners, whether print, broadcast or television, who deliberately

give wrong or distorted angling, annotation, spinning of statements attributed to the MILF. Spoilers, whose main agendum is for the retention of the status quo to perpetuate their greed for more wealth and power at the expense of the poor and marginalized population of this region, also continue to conduct sustained and systematic poisonous campaigns against the process. One such malicious assertion fashioned the MILF as out to grab all the lands of the settlers and drive them out of Mindanao in order to give way to a Taliban's style of regime in Mindanao. This is not only outrageous, but malicious as well. It is clearly designed to draw in the so-called anti-terror "coalition of the willing" into Mindanao, once dubbed as the second Afghanistan.

At this juncture, let me backtrack a little into the past. Mindanao has always been in itself, a separate and independent entity from Luzon and the Visayas, even before the Spaniards came in 1521. Spain never really conquered the Moros for more than 300 years. When the Americans came in 1898, they did not only sign peace treaties with our forebears, but also created the Moro Province (Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Sulu) in 1903 to administer the Moro affairs separately from Luzon and Visayas. The Moro Province was 90 percent Moro and Indigenous peoples-populated. We opposed the inclusion of our homeland in the grant of independence in 1946, but the Americans did not listen to our pleadings. They saw the Philippines governed by Filipinos as serving their imperialist agenda. Under Filipino hegemony, Moro state of affairs continued to deteriorate. They continued to lose their lands; they lagged in almost aspects of life. Davao, Cotabato, and Zamboanga were gerrymandered and are now no longer in their hands. But alas! Even with this little space remaining in their hands, the power of the status quo is too powerful in conceding this to us, so that we can chart the destiny of our people free from the dictates of the political class in Manila.

We thank Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, secretary general of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC), for inviting us to this forum. She is one woman, heading an array of cause-oriented individuals under the umbrella of the MPC, who took a clear stand in favor of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 when most of the civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) in this country especially those in Mindanao refused to take a stand, which in plain explanation saw in the document as not serving their interests. The MPC almost singlehandedly brought their campaign of the MOA-AD right at the very hall of the Supreme Court, the domain of the "infallibles" whose hands decide the fate of men and events, but in doing so, found themselves reversing many of their decision in more instances than one. In this forum, we are here to listen to you and to answer your questions or clarifications, because we firmly believe in the open debate and free market of ideas, including those difficult ones. After all, "truth stands distinct from

error", says the Holy Qur'an of the Muslims. If there is one adjective that we can console and describe ourselves is the MILF's willingness to debate ideas even with its bitterest of "enemies". A Mindanao writer, an off-and-on critic of the MILF, Patricio Abenales, had this to say on this in his article at the Our Mindanao, December 2010 issue:

"In a sense, if one were to grade the MILF in terms of its potential as a future ruler, one finds a lot of good things in its record. And one can debate with it over these inadequacies, but as I said earlier in another column -- one that drew the ire of a bunch of dim-witted supporters of the organization -- the other thing commendable about the MILF is its willingness to debate its critics. The organization does not hesitate to seek different views.You don't get this sense of limited openness with the warlords who govern the ARMM."

On this note, we thank again Atty. Mary Ann Arnado for arranging this forum and for inviting us and for giving us the opportunity to interact and exchange views with all of you regarding the draft of the MILF on the proposed negotiated solution to the Moro Question. However, the draft we are using now is the old draft, which the MILF presented to the GPH peace panel on January 27, 2010. But except for some few points, this draft is the same as the final draft, which we submitted to the GPH peace panel last February 10, 2011. We cannot use the new draft, simply because the GPH peace panel has not yet commented on it, and it is unfair and contrary to established protocol of our negotiation that documents of this nature is not treated as confidential. Rest assured that this draft and the new one varies very little, and therefore, it is truly reflective of the position of the MILF in the negotiation.

Thank you very much and good day!

We Are Not Afraid of Ideas

Opening statement during a forum in Cotabato City on March 6, 2011 participated by pastors and nuns of the various Protestants groups in Mindanao

Let me start this speech by quoting the letter of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the monk of St. Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai in the year 628. The English translation of that document follows:

"**This** is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them.

Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them.

No compulsion is to be on them.

Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries.

No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses.

Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. **No one** is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. **The** Muslims are to fight for them.

If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray.

Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants.

No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world)."

This charter of privileges has been honored and faithfully applied by Muslims throughout the centuries in all lands they ruled. Insha Allah (God willing), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) will also honor this commitment in the same way the Muslims before us had honored this covenant once the Bangsamoro state will be emplaced in some parts of Mindanao.

Let me also inform you that the responsibility to consult the Filipino people and those in government, and understandably including members of the Church, both Catholics and Protestants, fall squarely on the shoulders of the government peace panel, but we in the MILF peace panel, upon the expressed go signal from our principal, get out of our way and conduct dialogues with church people, a very important sector in the society. While there is separation of Church and state in the Philippines, the truth remains that the Church is a very powerful institution that holds the spiritual side of every Christian and, therefore, can influence their decisions, especially in relation to the cause of peace in Mindanao.

To carry this out, in 2005 the peace panels of the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have agreed to organize two advocacy groups, one for the GPH and another for the MILF. The task of the GPH peace panel is already indicated above, and in the case of the MILF, its responsibility

is to conduct dialogues with the Bangsamoro people including the indigenous peoples in Mindanao, which we did regularly and extensively. Datu Michael Mastura headed the MILF advocacy group and Ms. Sylvia Paraguya the GPH's. The rationale behind this scheme is simple: There are only two main constituencies or stakeholders in these negotiations: the Filipino people represented by the GPH and the Bangsamoro people (including the IPs with the attendant right to free choice) by the MILF. Frankly, I do not know how the Church situates itself in this equation. Perchance, the Church and the state should look into this in its proper perspectives.

As we are gathered here today, we might be tempted to ask this question: "Is this is a consultation? To a limited extent, yes, it is. But strictly speaking, this is not, because the responsibility to conduct dialogue with all non-Moro and non-indigenous tribes' groups, as pointed out above, belongs to the government peace panel. On our part, it is a matter of necessity that we must leave no stone unturned if only to make the cause of peace succeed. This is also a sign of goodwill that we also reach out to groups other than those within the sphere of our responsibility. After all, we are all from Mindanao -- neighbors, friends, and associates or partners in finding a just, lasting, and acceptable solution to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. We really feel the need for this face-to-face meeting, in view of the inadequacy of information surrounding the peace process, specifically what really is in store for all of us in this negotiation, including those migrants whose forebears have started to live in Mindanao since a century ago. We have already suffered a lot from the absence of genuine peace and the perpetuation of the conflict in Mindanao, not to state of the deaths of so many people and the destruction of billions worth of properties, but also the underdevelopment in the entire country. The Philippines started as the second economy in Asia after Japan after the Second World War, but today it is at the tail-end of the economies in this region. And one of the main reasons for this is its inability or failure to address and come to terms with the various insurgency groups in this country. In Europe, in Africa, in New Zealand, and in some Asian countries, questions of right to self-determination struggles are handled perfectly well without suppressing them, but in the Philippines it continues to prescribe outdated formula that perpetuates the master-slave relationship. It appears this country is not serious in learning lessons from successful conflict resolutions around the globe today.

There is also need for other people or groups like you to understand the MILF proposal, whether what we want for ourselves signals the demise of other groups, or whether our proposal is framed on extremism that defies logic and moderation. Or we want to live and let others live in peace, love, and harmony. Please examine our proposal very closely. I believe every one of you has an advance copy.

It is not unknown to you that there are groups in Mindanao especially those who are out to sabotage the peace process; they continue to snipe at it, with the intention of bringing it down. Some of them come from the media practitioners, whether print, broadcast or television, who deliberately give wrong or distorted angling, annotation, spinning of statements attributed to the MILF. Spoilers, whose main agendum is for the retention of the status quo to perpetuate their greed for more wealth and power at the expense of the poor and marginalized population of this region, also continue to conduct sustained and systematic poisonous campaigns against the process. One such malicious assertion fashioned the MILF as out to grab all the lands of the settlers and drive them out of Mindanao in order to give way to a Taliban's style of regime in Mindanao. This is not only outrageous, but malicious as well. It is clearly designed to draw in the so-called anti-terror "coalition of the willing" into Mindanao, once dubbed as the second Afghanistan.

At this juncture, let me backtrack a little into the past, Mindanao has always been in itself a separate and independent entity from Luzon and the Visayas even before the Spaniards came in 1521. Spain never really conquered the Moros for more than 300 years. When the Americans came in 1898, they did not only sign peace treaties with our forebears, but also created the Moro Province (Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Sulu) in 1903 to administer the Moro affairs separately from Luzon and Visayas. The Moro Province was 90 percent Moro and Indigenous peoples-populated. We opposed the inclusion of our homeland in the grant of independence in 1946, but the Americans did not listen to our pleadings. They saw the Philippines governed by Filipinos as serving their imperialist agenda. Under Filipino hegemony, Moro state of affairs continued to deteriorate. They continued to lose their lands; they lag behind in almost all aspects of life. Davao, Cotabato, and Zamboanga were gerrymandered and are now no longer in their hands. But alas! Even with this little space remaining in their hands, the power of the status quo is too powerful in conceding this to us, so that we can chart the destiny of our people free from the dictates of the political class in Manila.

We thank Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, secretary general of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC), for inviting us to this forum. She is one woman, heading an array of cause-oriented individuals under the umbrella of the MPC, who took a clear stand in favor of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 when most of the civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) in this country especially those in Mindanao refused to take a stand, which in plain explanation saw in the document as not serving their interests. Even the Catholic Church, if my reading is correct, took an ambivalent position. Only Archbishop Orlando Quevedo and one or two other priests expressed support for the MOA-AD.

In today's meeting, we are here to listen to you and to answer your questions or clarifications, because we firmly believe in the open debate and free market of ideas, including those difficult ones. After all, "truth stands distinct from error", says the Holy Qur'an. If there is any distinct fine adjective that perhaps we can console ourselves in the MILF is our willingness to debate ideas even with its bitterest of "enemies". We are not afraid of ideas, because we firmly believe that our cause is just and our position stands on the solid foundation of truth.

Lastly, we want to clarify that the draft we are using now in this discussion is the old draft, which the MILF presented to the GPH peace panel on January 27, 2010. But except for some few points, this draft is the same as the final draft, which we submitted to the GPH peace panel last February 10, 2011. We cannot use the new draft, simply because the GPH peace panel has not yet commented on it, and it is unfair and contrary to established protocol of our negotiation that documents of this nature is not treated as confidential. Rest assured that this draft and the new one varies very little, and therefore, it is truly reflective of the position of the MILF in the negotiation.

Thank you very much and good day!

Truth Sets You Free

Speech during a dialogue with Catholic bishops, priests and nuns in Davao City on March 30, 2011

We come to you today not for theological debate; because religion is a matter of choice and free will; and it is already a settled issue, as what the Quran says: "There is no compulsion in religion; unto to you your religion, and unto me my religion." We are here on a mission of peace and dialogue, a mission based on what we believe as just and truthful. Islam approves of dialogue, even the religious ones; in fact, dialogues have been held everywhere in Europe, Canada, the USA, Australia, Iran, and in the Philippines. Even in the Vatican itself discussions were held between Vatican theologians and Egyptian Muslim scholars. Further dialogues were held between Vatican theologians and Saudi Arabian Muslim scholars in Rome in 1970, 1974, and 1978. Many more discussions were held in Colombo, not to mention Muslims being invited by many churches to present Islam in different parts of the world to their congregations. Their discussions,

however, were polite, pleasant, friendly, and constructive without the slightest intention of hurting the feeling of the other side.

Putting aside these theological issues, let me state here with all humility and humbleness that we in the MILF are not afraid of ideas related to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. We are willing to debate ideas, even those hurting ones. I am sure men of religion like you profess it exactly as we do, as what the Christian Bible says: ""Truth hurts, but it sets you free." In another verse, it says: ""Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21).

Our main purpose of coming here, as said above, is to reach out to you and explain the side of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. Specifically, we want to present to you the draft of the MILF on the proposed comprehensive compact that would contain the proposed negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question and this armed conflict in Mindanao. We request you to examine it very closely; whether our proposal signals the demise of other groups, or whether it is framed on extremism that defies logic and moderation; or it is a menu that honestly prescribes living and letting others live in peace, love, and harmony. In the end, or during this dialogue, if you find the draft or some provisions thereof harmful, please don't hesitate to call our attention. We are here to listen and respond, mindful of your valid concerns. But if you find our proposal just, practical, and the least that can be offered to the Moros in Mindanao, taking into account their original birthright to this region and the justness of their original position, we appeal to all of you here to support our formula. In this hard conflict in Mindanao that has defied solution for almost four decades already, there is no place for ambivalence; time is up to call a spade a spade. Each and sundry must take a stand – and hopefully on the side of truth and justice. We do not want to repeat the botched Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). After it had been under intense discussion for three years and eight months and initialed by the Parties on July 27, 2008, the Supreme Court declared it "unconstitutional". And one of the underlying reasons that led to that decision was the alleged lack of consultations. True or not, if there was indeed lacking in informing the people, especially the main stakeholders, it was the fault of the government peace panel. But the truth of the matter is that even if the GPH peace panel was not remiss in their conduct of advocacy, many if not most or all of those who opposed the MOA-AD were hardened spoilers of the peace process; so much so, that even if they were consulted, they would still hold on to their opposition, because they were driven by their vested interests founded on "greed, mistrust and hatred of Moros".

Mindful of this criticism, even if it were not well founded, we have gone out of our way to conduct dialogues with non-Moro groups including the various Christian churches, although it is not our primary responsibility to do so, because this belongs to the government and its peace panel. Our responsibility is to consult the Bangsamoro people and the indigenous peoples, who wish to identify themselves with us. And we have done our share of the burden resoundingly.

Actually, this meeting is the fourth in a series of dialogues, which we started on March 6 with the non-Moro NGOs, CSOs, and POs in Cotabato City; followed by meeting with Protestant pastors and lay workers, also in Cotabato City, on March 9. On March 14, we had another session in Marawi City with around 60 Catholic and Protestant ministers, NGOs. CSOs, and POs. Today, we are here in Davao City to meet you and tomorrow with the business people. All these dialogues were and will be held under the auspices of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) led by its energetic secretary general, Atty. Mary Ann Arnado. To her and all her colleagues in the MPC, we salute you and thank you very much!

At this juncture, let me backtrack a little into the past. Mindanao has always been in itself, a separate and independent entity from Luzon and the Visayas, even before the Spaniards came in 1521. Spain never really conquered the Moros for more than 300 years. When the Americans came in 1898, they did not only sign peace treaties with our forebears, but also created the Moro Province (Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Sulu) in 1903 to administer the Moro affairs separately from Luzon and Visayas. The Moro Province was 90 percent Moro and Indigenous peoples-populated. Today, it is only about 30 percent. We opposed the inclusion of our homeland in the grant of independence in 1946, but the Americans did not listen to our pleadings. They saw the Philippines governed by Filipinos as serving their imperialist agenda. Under Filipino hegemony, Moro state of affairs continued to deteriorate. They continued to lose their lands; they lag behind in almost all aspects of life. Davao, Cotabato, and Zamboanga were gerrymandered and are now no longer in their hands. But alas! Even with this little space remaining in their hands, the power of the status quo is too powerful in conceding this to us, so that we can chart the destiny of our people free from the dictates of the political class in Manila.

Before I conclude this opening statement, allow me to refresh our memory of what Archbishop Orlando Quevedo had asserted in his paper entitled "Injustice: The Root of the Conflict in Mindanao," which he read before the 27th General Assembly and Annual Meeting of the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference at Fort Bonifacio Global City, Taguig,

Metro Manila on July 8, 2003. He enumerated the three historic injustices committed against the Moros namely, a) injustice to Moro identity, b) injustice to Moro political sovereignty, and c) injustice to Moro integral development. He concluded that it is the what and how of this just and fundamental Moro aspiration for freedom within the context of circumstances that have superseded some facts of history, which must be the heart of all political negotiation for lasting peace in Mindanao. His view directly contradicts the prevailing thesis of almost everyone including the government that the root of the conflict in Mindanao is poverty.

On this note, once again we thank you very much and good day!

The MILF is Not Against Development

Speech during a forum with businessmen in Davao City on March 31, 2011

At the outset, I must confess that I find addressing business people as the most challenging if not the most difficult one to do; simply, because they are the breed that are quick in reading situation. While you are not engaged in a life and death struggle, as what we have been in for almost four decades, your profession had transformed you to become adept in the world of business, which to some is described, wrongly or correctly, as "cruel", because there is no shortcut pathway to getting what you want from it. But the most envying part in your vocation is your readiness for a square deal. It is this principle of "don't flinch, don't foul, and hit the line hard," so to speak, that made many of you not only successful but also pro-people, and therefore, popular.

For your information, the MILF is not against development, provided it is not development aggression – one that makes the people the victims, not the beneficiaries; that sets aside the people in development planning, not partners in development; and that considers the people mere resources for profit-oriented development, not the center of development. Development aggression violates the human rights of people in all their dimensions—economic, social, cultural, civil and political.

To show that the MILF is not anti-development, we have agreed with the Philippine Government in 2002 to organize the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), which is the development arm of the MILF. Its mandate is "to determine, lead, and manage" relief, rehabilitation, humanitarian, and development projects in the conflict affected areas in

Mindanao. Perhaps, you will be surprised to know that the MILF is the only revolutionary organization in the world, which allows development to take place in the course of its hard struggle. Other revolutionary organizations do not only oppose development projects but they resort to means, fair or foul, to stop or even destroy them.

But real development, I must stress here once again, comes at the precise moment when the conflict is finally settled, not before and not during; otherwise, there would be waste of time and resources. It is good to note at this juncture that much of the natural wealth including gas, oil, gold, and other natural resources in the proposed territory of the Bangsamoro state or sub-state remain largely untouched. We cannot get or tap these by ourselves for obvious reasons; we need good businessmen or investors as partners. But before we can go with this venture, we need to solve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao first. This is one of the reasons why we are here today and holding a dialogue with you. Specifically, we want to present to you the draft of the MILF on the proposed comprehensive compact that would contain the proposed negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question and this armed conflict in Mindanao. We request you to examine it very closely. Perhaps of interest to you is our proposal on wealth sharing and regional and international trade, or what we may call wealth creation. This perhaps sounds new to some of us because this system is not popular in the Philippines. We will explain this thoroughly as we engage you in the open forum later.

On a more serious note, please examine our draft proposal very intently, whether it signals the demise of other groups, especially the business sectors; or whether it is framed on extremism that defies logic and moderation; or it is a menu that honestly prescribes living and letting others live in peace, love, and harmony. In the end, or during this dialogue, if you find the draft or some provisions thereof harmful, please don't hesitate to call our attention. We are here to listen and respond, mindful of your valid concerns.

But if you find our proposal just, practical, and the least that can be offered to the Moros in Mindanao, taking into account their original birthright to this region and the justness of their original position, we appeal to all of you here to support our formula. In this hard conflict in Mindanao that defies solution for almost four decades already, there is no place for ambivalence; time is up to call a spade a spade. Each and sundry must take a stand – and on the side of truth and justice. We do not want to repeat the botched Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). After it was under intense discussion for three years and eight months and initialed by the Parties on July 27, 2008, the Supreme Court declared it "unconstitutional". And one of the underlying reasons that led to that decision was the alleged lack of consultations. True

or not, if there was indeed lacking in its effort to inform the people, especially the main stakeholders, it was the fault of the government peace panel. On our part, we have done our part and in no instance that we were accused of remiss in this responsibility. But the hard truth is that even if the government peace panel had done their part well in informing people, the fact remains that many of those who opposed the MOA-AD were hardened spoilers of the peace process; so much so, that even if they were consulted, they would still hold on to their opposition, because they were driven by their vested interests founded on "greed, mistrust and hatred of Moros".

Mindful of this criticism, even if it were not well founded, we have gone our way to conduct dialogues with non-Moro groups including the various Christian churches, although it is not our primary responsibility to do so, because this belongs to the government and its peace panel. Our responsibility is to consult the Bangsamoro people and the indigenous peoples, who wish to identify themselves with us. And we have done this resoundingly. No one had accused the MILF of being remiss in this regard.

Actually this meeting is the fifth in a series of dialogues, which we started on March 6 with the non-Moro NGOs, CSOs, and POs in Cotabato City; followed by meeting with Protestant pastors and lay workers, also in Cotabato City, on March 9. On March 14, we had another session in Marawi City with around 60 Catholic and Protestant ministers, NGOs, CSOs, and POs. Yesterday, March 30, we met leaders of the Catholic Church led by Archbishop Orlando Quevedo and Archbishop Fernando Capalla. We had a very frank and honest-to-goodness discussion of issues. Today, we are here to meet you, the business people, whom we consider as one of the most important pillars of good governance. We hope to have with you another frank exchange of views. We thank the International Alert, headed by my friend, Mr. Pancho Lara, Mr. Vicente Lao, chairperson of the Mindanao Business Council, and of course, Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, secretary general of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) and her staff, for making this forum possible. To all of you, thank you very much!

At this juncture, let me backtrack a little into the past, Mindanao has always been in itself, a separate and independent entity from Luzon and the Visayas, even before the Spaniards came in 1521. Spain never really conquered the Moros for more than 300 years. When the Americans came in 1898, they did not only sign peace treaties with our forebears, but also created the Moro Province (Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Sulu) in 1903 to administer the Moro affairs separately from Luzon and Visayas. The Moro Province was 90 percent Moro and Indigenous peoples-populated. Today, it is only about 30 percent. We opposed the inclusion of our homeland in the grant of independence in 1946, but the Americans did not listen to our pleadings. They saw the

Philippines governed by Filipinos as serving their imperialist agenda. Under Filipino hegemony, Moro state of affairs continued to deteriorate. They continued to lose their lands; they lag behind in almost all aspects of life. Davao, Cotabato, and Zamboanga were gerrymandered and are now no longer in their hands. But alas! Even with this little space remaining in their hands, the power of the status quo is too powerful in conceding this to us, so that we can chart the destiny of our people free from the dictates of the political class in Manila.

On this note, once again we thank you very much and good day!

Let Us Fast Track the Negotiation

Opening statement during the 21st GPH-MILF Peace Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on April 27, 2011

Under the Aquino dispensation, this is our third meeting to pursue the peace negotiation that started fourteen years ago. Surely, we are still very much on track and we hope to stay on course until we finally sign the comprehensive compact, which contains the negotiated political solution to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. I am sure both peace panels have this in mind and are both committed to make this a reality.

Frankly, at no time in the 14-year GPH-MILF peace negotiations but now that the delivery capacity of the government is seen very clearly. First, President Benigno Aquino III has vast political and social capital that he can use to rally massive support to his peace agenda in Mindanao. His popularity, as reflected in various surveys, is unequalled in the history of presidents in the Philippines. Second, my counterpart has expressed several times his unflinching commitment to address the problem in Mindanao including the resort to the "universe of possibilities" in order to sign a peace deal with the MILF. This indeed is very encouraging. Afterward, he made another bold assertion that a peace pact with the MILF can be done within one year. Thirdly, the current peace panel is undergoing serious consultations with various stakeholders in Mindanao especially local government executives, whose political interests, although some are fleeting, are radically affected by any alteration or dislocation of power in governance. And fourth, the government has all the time needed to accomplish this peace pact with the MILF within their remaining time in government.

On the part of the MILF, we are also holding dialogues with various non-Moro groups in Mindanao, even if it is not our responsibility, as agreed by the parties. We have reached out to the clergy, both Catholics and Protestants, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs), people's organizations (POs), and business groups. After this meeting, we will have a new round of dialogues in Manila with non-Moro NGOs, CSOs, business groups and members of the diplomatic community; and from there, we will proceed to Zamboanga City, the island provinces of Western Mindanao, Pagadian City, Cagayan de Oro City, and Iligan City. At the same, we are also conducting side forums with members of the indigenous communities and members of the MILF political and military leadership in the various cities and provinces which we visited and which we are scheduled to visit. They must not be left in the tail-end of the dialogues; on the contrary, they must be in the forefront to know and understand not only the inside and out of the peace process but more importantly to accept the validity and wisdom of a peaceful, just, and lasting negotiated political settlement of the problem in Mindanao. They must own the peace process and the results; otherwise, a problem is in the offing.

Mind you, in these sorties even to areas traditionally dubbed as "unfriendly" to the peace talks like Zamboanga City, people are cautioning us about the security risk. We told them that all these efforts are done in the name of peace and are part of advocacy agreed by the parties. We tell them also that our counterpart in government is informed of this officially and we are sure they are not remiss in their responsibility.

In addition, we have met several experts on conflict resolutions and constitutional negotiations, and in the course of our serious discussion, we have learned and drawn lessons from their vast experiences that, to us, are of tremendous value to anyone serious in resolving conflicts of various nature, including sovereignty-based like the MILF. I hope those government officials whom these experts talked too share our views.

At this juncture, let me refresh our memory about the coming in of the International Contact Group (ICG) to the GPH-MILF peace process. During the GPH-MILF non-meeting on July 7, 2009, the MILF peace panel had categorically told their counterpart in government that the MILF will not return to the negotiating table even in the brink of more fighting except when there is an international guarantee. We cannot trust the government anymore after they deliberately did not sign the MOA-AD.

After some serious talks, the MILF and the government settled to use "contact" instead of "guarantee", on the condition that its main task is "to exert proper leverage" to the parties in negotiation.

For the MILF, the ICG is not dispensable; they must be invited to attend and observe not only the opening and closing programs of the talks but more importantly the plenary session where the substantive agenda of the talks is under deliberation. Of course, it is the prerogative of the parties to go on an executive meeting to discuss an agenda that is considered exclusive to them.

On the issue of Ameril Ombra Kato, he has not yet "burned his bridges" with the MILF. On the contrary, he said he will stay within the fold of the MILF no matter what happens. Kato has said that he will not create trouble against the peace process and the ceasefire. He also pledged to respect the good result of the negotiation. What he cannot accept is "endless negotiations" and the failure of government to deliver their part of the bargain.

For your information, the MILF Central Committee has exerted efforts to make him realize his mistakes, discontinue with his so-called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and return to the fold of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) but more efforts are still wanting --- and we are not giving up.

The Kato problem is internal to the MILF. Leave this problem to us.

Fourteen years since the start of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation in 1997 is too long a process. We have gone through various hardships and tribulations and practically only one agenda is left for discussion; i.e., the comprehensive compact. For the MILF, this is not a very difficult agenda; it is only about an asymmetrical state-substate relationship. We are not talking here of independence, as what was done in Islamic Sudan and Christian-Animist South Sudan.

But let me caution ourselves that all eyes are trained on us, whether we are serious or not, or whether we are engaged in problem-solving or merely managing the conflict in Mindanao. For the MILF, the parties need to fast track the process. Practically one year has already been consumed in the six-year term of President Aquino, and the GPH peace panel has not yet submitted their counter-draft on the comprehensive compact. We want the GPH peace panel to be ready with their draft during the next round of talks. If they want ample time to be able to this, we can allow them the time they need; and one month timeframe, I think, is fair enough.

On this note, let me once again extend my heartfelt gratitude to members of the International Contact Group (ICG) for their coming and attendance in this important meeting of the parties. We trust you and we recognize and thank you for all your invaluable contributions to the GPH-MILF peace process. And to his Excellency, Datuk

Othman Bin Abd' Razak, our sincerest thanks for his services in the name of peace- and, more importantly, for his sterling performance as Malaysian facilitator of the GPH-MILF peace talks. He can be equaled but his deep commitment to peace and fair play are outstanding that could remain in the annals of this negotiation for the years and generations to come.

Thank you and wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

Long Drawn-out Peace Negotiations

Speech during a meeting with ambassadors at the British Embassy in Manila on May 5, 2011

The Moro Question has always been an international issue since the Moro-Spanish War started in 1578 up to the coming of the Americans in 1898. During the American regime in the Philippines, they administered the affairs of the Moros separately from Luzon and Visayas by creating the Moro Province in 1903 and run by American governors until it was abolished in 1913. That the Philippine government's contention that the Moro Question is a domestic problem with international dimension is to gloss over the "justness of the original position" of the Moros at the time of conquest. Never in the entire history of the Filipinos did they ever own us or conquer us; on the contrary, many parts of Luzon and Visayas were under the hegemony of the Moros. Two cases in point were Manila and Tondo, which were ruled by Rajah Solaiman and Rajah Lakandula, respectively. Solaiman defended his throne valiantly until his last breath in the Battle of Bantayan in 1570, and the victorious Spaniards severed his head and brought it to Olongapo, a compounded Tagalog word that stands for ulo ni apo, meaning "head of grandfather or elder or leader", and buried (t)here.

We can cite so many instances in history to prove that we were once the masters in this part of the world, not the Filipinos, but with the coming of Spain and subsequently by the United States, fate has been quite unkind to us. It led to the difficulties that we are facing now. But we are not here to argue on this premise or to stress that the Moro Question is an international issue, because to the MILF, the real thing here is how to find ways to resolve the age-old Moro Question and fast track the already long-drawn-out peace negotiations that started fourteen years ago. And whoever is willing and sincere in helping resolve this problem is welcome to the MILF.

But the Philippine government is looking at the issue in another angle. They want to limit the participation of those willing to share a helping hand to solve this problem, including members of the international community. In particular, we are referring to the note verbale issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs on August 20, 2010 requiring representatives of foreign governments and intergovernmental entities to seek prior clearance from the Philippine Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), before they visit Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao or any other similar sites, or meet with the leaders, negotiators or commanders of the MILF thereat. These restrictions, the GPH said "guidelines", also apply to UN agencies and other international organizations/development agencies.

This restriction came to fore during the recent visit of the new Head of the European Union Delegation in the Philippines, His Excellency Ambassador Guy Ledoux, to the MILF peace panel on April 6. The venue was originally set at Darapanan and all systems were ready, but all of a sudden the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued a note verbale barring the meeting at the MILF peace panel office at Darapanan. Naturally, we felt slighted by the breach of good practice by the Aquino administration. It is an antidote to what has been with us as a good practice since the diplomatic stage of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation started in 2001. But out of respect the MILF peace panel met the EU ambassador at the headquarters of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Cotabato City. Aside from focusing on the role of the EU in the humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development component of the IMT, the MILF peace panel composed of Atty. Datu Michael Mastura and Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga also explained the displeasure of the MILF why such important meeting cannot take place at the office of the MILF peace panel in Darapanan.

We view this act of the Philippine government as a scheme to domesticate the issue. It was also a serious non-confidence building measure (NCBM), notwithstanding several ambassadors had already gone to the same place and talked to MILF leaders. The ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Japan, Ireland, Norway, Brunei, the 11-man delegation of ambassadors composing the European Union in the Philippines, Sweden, and the United States.

Frankly, we don't consider the participation of the international community, especially members of the International Contact Group (ICG) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT) as a scheme of the MILF to seek belligerent status, although currently we have many of those factors. To the MILF and perhaps to most if not all experts on international law, conferring or seeking belligerency status by rebels has no relevance in the current trend in conflict resolutions in the world today. It is simply passé!

If the MILF seeks the participation of the international community in the resolution of the conflict in Mindanao, say the ICG, it is because the government has consistently shown its willingness --- and it did it nth times --- to breach commitments. Imagine for 36 years since the peace talks started in Libya in 1975, this conflict has continued to draw in blood, destruction, and fear in Mindanao.

On this note, let me reiterate once again our deep appreciation for your presence here, and more importantly, for your deep and unwavering commitment to help solve this conflict in Mindanao peacefully and without delay. I hope the Philippine government will open up and view those initiatives, local, national and international, as moves in the right direction. If there is any group who is really in need of attention and help, they are the Moros, who suffered tens of thousands dead or wounded from the bloody hands of the government, either as a result of massacres, or harmed deliberately by state forces, or were listed as collateral damages. Our situation is worse than those in Libya now, which draw in not only the international community but also formally even the United Nations.

Cause-oriented Groups Should Take A Position

Opening statement during a forum in Cotabato City on May 5, 2011 attended by non-Moro NGOs, CSOs, and POs in Mindanao

At the outset, let me thank the Mindanao Solidarity Network, the Gaston Ortigas Peace Institute and the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC), and Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, in particular, for initiating and arranging this forum which allows the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) through its peace panel to talk directly to you and other sectors of the Filipino society about issues and concerns related to the GPH-MILF peace negotiation. Our expression of thanks also rightly belongs to all of the personalities who are with us today for their presence and patience and giving us the opportunity to present our formula of peace in Mindanao. We know how valuable the role of every person and organization in making this genuine aspiration for peace possible. Their role, I believe, is indispensable in reaching out to those who, after a long journey and incremental process, would finally make the decision.

For the last several weeks, not counting those dialogues in the past months and years held by the MILF peace panel, we have been very busy in reaching out to the non-Moro non-government organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), people's organizations (POs), religious groups both Catholics and Protestants, business

groups, and indigenous communities. We explained to them the position of the MILF in addressing the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao, contained in our draft of the comprehensive compact and how it redounds to the benefits of everyone and the government. While there were repeated questions on such basic concerns that show how misinformed the public is, such as: 1) what will happen to our lands, and 2) will we still be free to exercise our religion in a Bangsamoro state or substate, the feedback that we received from the participants are very encouraging, especially from the business group and the Christian religious groups in Mindanao. If properly informed and mobilized behind the peace negotiation, we would have a very effective and powerful base of support for our journey to peace and just settlement of the conflict in Mindanao.

However, we have observed in our years of dialogues and interactions with the NGOs, CSOs, POs that some of them refused to take a stand vis-à-vis the hard issues in the negotiation, the most outstanding of example of which was the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). We do not really understand what made them adopt this ambivalent attitude when the very reason for their creation and existence is to advocate for truth, justice, and fidelity in honoring commitment. To us, except for some, we attribute this ambivalence to the generally lack of in-depth grasp of the issues in the talks and the benefits derived therefrom once the comprehensive compact is signed. Man and organization, by nature, always go for something that is beneficial to them, especially when expressed in term of lofty ideals. But if some refuse to bulge from their conservative mindset, I would attribute this to many factors, some innate, others by force of external factors, say the fear for the loss of source of funds, which, I think, is temporary.

Let me tell you also that while there are people and groups in Mindanao and elsewhere in this country who are clearly espousing negative attitude against the GPH-MILF peace negotiation, the real people or groups who can make and unmake this peace journey are those welding power, authority, and wealth – and most of them are in government. They are the decision-makers; they are those whose vested interests are radically affected or altered if there is a change in the status quo, because many of them own vast of lands in Mindanao; and they are also engaged in mining, plantation economy, logging, banking, trade and industry. In short, the most powerful and well-entrenched "spoilers", if I may use the word, are mostly in the government. Of course, there are other groups, not in the level of spoilers, who have reasons to fear for radical alteration in the status quo. I think it is not wrong to say if I include the Catholic Church and to a little extent the Protestant Church in this categorization, although the latter has shown greater flexibility or accommodation as far as solving the conflict in Mindanao is concerned, while the former has not yet come out with a definitive stance on the Moro

Question, except by individual Church leaders like Archbishop Orlando Quevedo. The Liberation Theology that has gained popularity first in Latin America is slowly creeping into the ranks of the clergy, whether Catholics or Protestants, in the Philippines. Such political theology, which interprets the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions, has found adherents in a poor country like the Philippines. And it is no wonder that some priests are already involved even in the underground movement.

In reiteration, the MILF peace panel is here to explain the side of the MILF in the current negotiation. We urge everyone to be very frank with us; please tell us how you feel especially in relation to our draft of the comprehensive compact.

For your information, the main formula we propose to address the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao is the creation of an asymmetrical state-substate relationship, which is clearly not secession, but a formula of unity with the Philippine state. While the Shariah-run Sudan agreed to a formula of "unity with option to secede" for the Christian-Animist South Sudan, here we propose for this state-substate arrangement without that option to secede, although we will not give up the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro people. No one can foreclose or deny this right to our people; it is a natural right under international law.

Thank you very much and good day!

The Playing Field Is Not Level

Speech during a forum with the Makati Business Group on May 6, 2011

Before we left for Belfast in Northern Ireland in late June 2009, the MILF four-man delegation, which was officially invited by the British government through its Embassy in Manila, had an audience with the assistant secretary for the Northern Ireland Office in London. This office is responsible for Northern Ireland affairs.

After some preliminary exchange of views, he asked the MILF delegation composed of your humble representation, Atty. Datu Michael Mastura, Maulana Bobby Alonto, and Abdullah Camlian, what is in your area that is so valuable. Almost in chorus, we replied, "we have oil, gas, gold, copper."

"Ah", he said, "the Philippine government will not give you what you wanted."

Frankly, at the back of our mind, we asked ourselves, "Is he really serious in making those words?"

We do not have the ready answer to this day. But given the long drawn-out peace negotiations in Mindanao that started 36 years ago, involving first the MNLF and now the MILF, that British official must be talking with real sense.

Today we are with you in this beautiful Makati City, the center of business and commerce in the Philippines and wrongly or rightly dubbed as the seat of "Imperial Manila" as far as political economy in this country is concerned. This is where practically all the big deals in business are cooked.

What really brings us here? Are we here on a mission to tell you how to run your business? What a hell of boyish thought; you are all businessmen --- and I am sure that all of you are successful businessmen, while we, the MILF peace panel, continue to wallow in the quagmire of poverty of our people back home. The provinces where they are domiciled continue to lag in almost all human endeavor; they are in the tail-end in the development index in this country.

Why is this so? Is it because the Moros are less human than all of you here? Or, our intelligent quotient belongs to a sub-race? I know none of you will make the answer.

Seriously speaking, the disparity in our conditions is dictated by many factors. First, the Moros had never had the chance to be part of national decision-making in this country. The Filipinos continue to be master over us, while the Moros hardly had a chance to argue his case. The Philippine Constitution and laws are set up to the clear edge of the majority, while the minority has no chance to meet the challenges of life in level playing field.

Second, Filipinos are not only making use of their resources in their domains but are also exploiting those in our areas including those of the indigenous peoples, especially in Mindanao. One time in 1998, I had a chance to visit the malls in Cubao, Quezon City and while we were going down on the escalator, I jokingly asked my companion, "How long we would be able to have this kind of building and amenities in Kabuntalan in Maguindanao, a fifth-class municipality? He said with all seriousness, "two hundred years from now".

Third, the unitary set up in this country stagnates and stunts development in the other areas of the country. Look at the countries with federal systems of government! Look at

Malaysia, look at the United States, look at Germany, and many other non-unitary states, their development is almost at par with each other. They are very progressive, while the Philippines continue to retrogress, despite being the number 2 in economy after Japan sixty years ago.

And fourth, uninhibited capitalism which is very much in play in this country would continue to create super elites and super poor, which in the long is not very healthy for a stable country.

We are here to plead the case of our people and appeal to the conscience of men in this country. We have already talked to religious groups, Catholics and Protestants, non-government organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), peoples' organizations (POs), as well as members of the indigenous communities, and so far, their responses are very encouraging. We expect your response to be no less exciting. We know the sector where you belong is the most pragmatic in many ways, which I do not need to state here.

For your information, in our current negotiation with the Philippine government, we have already presented a formula of unity with the Philippine government, and this is in the proposed comprehensive compact that would contain the negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. Specifically, we propose for the setting up of an asymmetrical state-and substate relationship. The powers of the state and the substate are clearly defined, with the former having exclusive jurisdiction over national defense, foreign relations, coinage and currency, and postal services, and the latter most of the rest. There are powers of joint jurisdiction by the state and the substate.

Clearly, we are not seeking an independent state, but something that the Moros can effectively govern themselves with little interference from the central government. Enough is enough of this direct interference from Manila. It is sending our people to nowhere. The so-called Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which has never been autonomous after all but only administrative, has been energizing corruption and dole-out amongst the people especially those anointed by Malacañang Palace to run it. This scheme is antidote to development, progress, and real people empowerment.

Lastly, we want to inform you that the MILF is not anti-development; we are for development. But there is a brake to development. Certainly, we oppose development aggression – that which makes people as the tool, not the object.

However, much as we want this development to reach our localities, the situation is not ready for it. The fighting has not gone away completely; what is holding the two armed protagonists, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) to go for war is the ceasefire and the resumption of the negotiations. More importantly, we want the Moro Question settled first before real development comes to our place. But this settlement is hard to secure; we need the help of everyone, especially the business sector like all of you here.

Thank you very much for allowing us to meet you through the kind facilitation of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) and its partner's organizations here in Manila. We thank Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, MPC Secretary General, and her co-organizers for graciously making this forum possible.

Thank you.

The Peace Negotiation Cannot Be Delayed Anymore

Opening statement during the 22nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on August 22-24, 2011

We are once again at the beautiful city of Kuala Lumpur after the historic meeting in Tokyo, Japan between President Benigno Aquino III and MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim on August 4. Eighteen days after it is still in the limelight and headlines of newspapers and magazines back home. Public enthusiasm and approval to continue the peace negotiation until a deal is clinched continue to rise. We must seize this defining moment and strike a deal while the iron is still hot, so to speak.

We thank the Malaysian government through its country facilitator, H.E. Tengku Dato' Abd' Ghafar Tengku bin Mohammed, and Madame Che Khasnah, head of the Malaysian Secretariat, for playing their part exceptionally well in making this historic meeting happen, including their precious presence during the meeting of the two leaders. We are very grateful to the Government of Japan and its Embassy in Manila for providing venue for this meeting and assisting it in many ways. We also thank and salute President Aquino for his statesmanship by deciding to meet Murad in a foreign country; and of course, we congratulate our honorable counterpart from the government, headed by Dean Marvic Leonen, for their wisdom in supporting the President's own grand gesture to meet with Murad. I also congratulate the MILF Central Committee for their correct

decision to agree on the meeting in Japan. Such decision earns for the MILF praises and congratulations.

Today, everybody is anticipating for the government counter-proposal with deep breath. We too share this enthusiasm. And even without our go signal, many media personalities from the Philippines are now in Kuala Lumpur anxious to know what the government proposal is all about. I hope we can manage this to the best interest of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation.

Personally, I expect the government proposal to be substantive. My expectation is anchored on the fact that on July 29, 2009, the government and MILF peace panels, after having acknowledged the MOA-AD as unsigned and yet initialed document, "**have committed to reframe the consensus points with the end in view of moving towards the comprehensive compact to bring about a negotiated political settlement of the conflict in Mindanao.**" This should be the template of the two proposals on the comprehensive compact, which the MILF had already done, otherwise, like a boat powered by two engines, one 100 horse-power and the other is 30 horse-power, the movement would not be forward but either to the right or to the left. In short, if such a situation happens, we would be like a cat playing with its own tail. The negotiation would not move from where we are now.

To be frank with you, Commander Ameril Omra Kato continues to be a challenging concern of MILF. So much effort, patience and understanding have been invested in resolving this concern, but a real breakthrough is not yet at hand; we are however not giving up. We will tell the government, as I said previously, if Kato completely burns his bridges with the MILF.

The latest decision of the MILF Central Committee is to declare him "bughaat", an Arabic term which means "one who defies or who does not obey a lawful order of a ruler or duly mandated authority."

In Resolution No. 03-06 Series of 2011 the MILF Central Committee, taking into full consideration and finally adopting the decision of the Assembly of the Ulama on June 27, 2011 declaring Ameril Omra Kato, his companions, and followers as "bughaat", hereby declared the following:

1. That Ameril Omra Kato, his companions and followers are no longer members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front unless they cease and desist without delay their anti-MILF campaigns and other related activities that are intended

to discredit and destruct the entire legitimate leadership of the MILF and henceforth return at once to the fold of the MILF;

2. That Ameril Omra Kato, his companions and followers must stop immediately spreading rumors and malicious accusations against the leadership and members of the MILF; and
3. That the Assembly of the Ulama will meet again not later than ten (10) days after "Eidul Fitre" (end of Ramadan) to decide what is the best option in order to preserve the brotherhood, unity, solidarity, cooperation and dignity of the leadership and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for the preservation and maintenance of its unified political leadership and military command.

The Central Committee further resolved that it will closely monitor the reaction and compliance of Ameril Omra Kato, his companions and followers vis-a-vis the decision of the Assembly of the Ulama declaring them as "BUGHAAT" as aforementioned in this Resolution.

The Central Committee finally decided that being the highest policy making body of the Front it reserves the inherent rights, obligations and authority to exercise appropriate actions and necessary measures in order to preserve and maintain the Islamic brotherhood, unity, solidarity, cooperation and integrity of the leadership of the MILF in accordance with the pristine teachings of Islam. The Resolution took effect on August 18, 2011 after Chairman Murad signed it, right after his arrival from Japan.

However, as we gathered here today, a new twist in Kato's case had developed very swiftly. Kato has formally split from the MILF and formed a new organization called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Front (BIFF). As a consequence, the MILF Central Committee has to revisit the Resolution. How it deals with this new situation is not in the domain of the MILF peace panel to know at the moment. As far as we are concerned, the decision contained in the resolution cited above is all what we can officially transmit to our good counterpart from the GPH.

Excellencies, Kato's group is a tiny group, not even one percent of the entire military strength of the MILF. As partners in the search for genuine peace in Mindanao, we expect the GPH not to make a mountain out of this molehill. After all, he became a headache to the MILF after the GPH did not sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). We are doing what we can to assuage his feeling and grievance arising out of the failure of government to sign the MOA-AD and the prolonged delay in the negotiation. In fact, one of his commanders, Talio Silongan, had already surrendered to the MILF. More are sending feelers and are expected to follow soon.

I believe President Aquino's political and social capital is still too good up to 2013 and after this period, it is expected to diminish. Therefore, we must fast track the negotiation, as President Aquino and Chairman Murad have agreed in Japan. We cannot afford to delay or to engage on side issues. Seriousness and the lack of it are clearly distinct from one another.

The main menu of this negotiation is and will always be the need to resolve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao in the form of a comprehensive compact. This is the track and I invite everyone including members of the International Contact Group (ICG) to help the parties to stay on course.

Thank you very much!

Peace is the Concern of All

Opening statement during the forum at the University of Bohol on September 9, 2011

I will start this short opening statement by sharing with you what little things I know of your beautiful island province. This is not to lecture you on these matters, because you know them more than I know; it is your turf. For me, the only purpose is just to provide a starter in this morning session.

At least two very historic blood compacts had taken place in this island, one very popular and the other probably lost in the course of human events. I don't know if you ever come across this event. Anyway, the first blood compact was between Datu Sikatuna of Bool and Datu Sigala of Loboc and Legazpi on March 16, 1565 not far from the modern town of Loay. The second is not between a local chieftain and a foreigner but between local chieftains, one group from this island and the other from Mindanao, who had one common interest in forging the compact; they both hated the excesses of the Spanish colonizers. I am referring to the blood compact between the datus of (Damulag?), Bohol and Kapitan Laut Buisan, the father of the legendary Sultan Kudarat of Maguindanao in the 16th century. (*Source: Muslims in the Philippines by Dean Cesar Majul of the University of the Philippines, 1973*).

Bohol also has the distinct honor of achieving the longest rebellion in the Philippines, courtesy of Francisco Daguhoy known as Daguhoy Revolt or Rebellion. It lasted for 85 years from 1744 to

1829. The other significant revolt, in fact much earlier, was the ***Tamblot Uprising*** *in 1621 led by* ***Tamblot****, a babaylan or native priest from Bohol, which was basically a religious conflict.*

On the island of Mindanao, the Moros had ceaselessly fought the Spanish for 320 years. They managed to hold on to their power despite the superiority of Spain, which was a superpower during the period. When the Americans came in 1898 after defeating the Spaniards, they signed with the Moros the Kiram-Bates Agreement of 1898 and the Carpenter Agreement in 1915. Both agreements were with the Sultan of Sulu.

Early on, the Americans were aware that Mindanao was never a part of the Philippines. On the contrary, many areas especially in Luzon like Manila and Tondo were under Moro rulers like Rajah Soliman and Rajah Lakandula.

In 1903, the Americans created the Moro Province in which Moro affairs were administered separately from Luzon and the Visayas. When the issue of granting of independence to the Philippines was pursued vigorously by Filipinos, the Moros dissociated themselves from it completely. They wanted the Moro Province to be left out as an American colony, which will be granted self-rule later. But the Americans did not listen and proceeded to include the Moro Province in the territory of the Philippines in the grant of independence in 1946.

Today, in talking to the Americans, leaders of the MILF told them very bluntly that they are responsible for planting the seed of enmity in Mindanao. Had they separated the Moro Province from Luzon and the Visayas in the grant of Philippine independence, there would have been no war in Mindanao today. This is the very reason why we ask the American government to help solve the mess that they have created. This is the reason why the late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim and the present MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim wrote President George Bush and President Barack Hussein Obama, respectively, asking them to help solve this problem in Mindanao. I confirm that much of what had been contained in the Wiki leaks about the US and the MILF are founded.

About 200,000 people, rebels, soldiers, and civilians, have already died since 1972. It is time to settle this problem now. The truth is while the Moros carry the main brunt of the deaths and destruction in this conflict in Mindanao, in the whole, it is the entire country that suffers. After World War II, the Philippines was second only to Japan in economy and the Malaysian states were still under the tight grip of the British colonizers. But today, not only Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam had overtaken us but probably the economic tail-enders like Burma and Cambodia would someday jettison from the pack of poor countries and surge ahead of us.

The peace negotiation between the government and MILF is entering the second half of the second decade. It started in January 1997 involving four administrations, Presidents Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo, and now Aquino, and we have signed about 90 agreements on various issues and concerns. Only one agenda is remaining on the negotiation table; i.e., the negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao in the form of a comprehensive compact.

Essentially, this problem is political in character that requires a political solution. Its core is about granting genuine self-rule for the Moros of Mindanao to govern themselves, without detaching themselves from this republic. They remain part of it and are still citizens thereof. But it is their birthright to choose their identity and be known as Moros or Bangsamoro. In order to effectively carry this out, the MILF is proposing, as contained in its draft proposal on February 9, this year, for the establishment of a substate. This substate is only about a fourth of Mindanao where they still predominate.

Instead of positively responding to this clamor, the government insists on them to accept the so-called enhanced Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which, contrary to its billing, is not autonomous at all. The ARMM is an administrative unit of government, which has no real powers at all. Look at the facts that even in matter of setting the date of election in the ARMM and the choice of leaders thereof it is determined by the central government.

The MILF had rejected the ARMM at least four times: in June 2000, in June 2001, in February 2003, and in January 2010. The present draft of government, which it presented during the 22nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, is basically the ARMM's framework, which government tries now to reform. But the ARMM is irreformable; the spring cannot rise above its source.

The GPH-MILF peace negotiation is practically in a state of deadlock, after the GPH rejected the rejection of the MILF peace panel of their draft. The GPH proposed for a way forward, but we have other way of doing it. We asked the GPH to jointly or separately request the Malaysian facilitator to do a shuttle between Manila and Maguindanao. While we are here now in the Visayas, the Malaysian facilitator had arrived in Cotabato City and he had talked to leaders of the MILF and the remaining members of the MILF peace panel. We are not yet aware of what transpired during their meeting, which I still for the continuation of the peace parleys.

I thank all of you for being with us today. We also thank the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) especially Brother Gus Miclat for the bold decision for us to have a swing

to the Visayas, which we readily accepted, despite the postponement for several times. The issue of peace --- and also of war --- is a serious concern or all of us.

Thank you and once again good morning!

The Collective Security of Moros Threatened

Opening statement during the forum at the De La Salle University in Bacolod on September 10, 2011

First of all, let me tell you that we come to you today on a mission of peace and goodwill and to appeal to your collective reason and wisdom by joining us to examine, understand, and work for a solution to the long lingering problem in Mindanao that had already claimed the lives of 200,000 people, rebels, soldiers, and civilians. Although the truth is that the Moros carry the main brunt of the deaths and destruction in this conflict, in the whole, it is the entire country that suffers most. After World War II, the Philippines was second only to Japan in economy and the Malaysian states were still under the tight grip of the British colonizers. But today, not only Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam had overtaken us but probably the economic tail-enders like Burma and Cambodia would someday jettison from the pack of poor countries and surge ahead of us. The main reason for this poor economic situation, as the World Bank reported, is due to the havoc and destruction brought forth by internal conflicts, especially those that are sovereignty-based.

Hence, solving this problem is indeed a priority, especially of the current administration, because while it will benefit Moros and the indigenous peoples in Mindanao --- and the migrants and their present and future generations, who made the region as their own and home --- it is the government in Manila that will benefit most, in terms of peace, security and economic growth and development. And it can pride itself of having solved the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao, which is the longest running conflict in the world today.

I am inclined to assume that not all of you here are fully aware of the seriousness of the problem facing the Moros in Mindanao today. To the Moros and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in particular, we believe that what is already threatened is not the individual Moro but their collective security and survival. To understand this, let us have a brief look of the past, as seen through the prism of the present. At the turn of the

last century, 98% of the lands in Mindanao belonged to the Moros and the indigenous peoples (IP); today, only about 12% remained in their hands. In 1903-1915, the Moro Province, composed of five districts namely, Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Sulu, was 90% Moro and IP populated. Today, Zamboanga, Davao, and Cotabato had slipped out of their hands; and worse, even the provinces where they are still in the majority like Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, incursions are taking place. Up to 1968, the Moros were still the majority in the once empire province of Cotabato (now subdivided into five provinces), but today only one province is still in their hands.

For your information, one of the main culprits in this dispossession of Moro landholdings is the oppressive land laws of this country, specifically, Public Land Act No. 2874 in 1919, which provided for the manner of acquiring land ownership, especially in Mindanao. Under this law, a Filipino was entitled to apply for and possess a 24-hectare parcel of land, while a Moro could only apply for ten hectares. Another law, the Philippine Commission Act No. 2254, allowed Filipinos to own 16 hectares, while limiting to only eight hectares when the applicants were Moros. There are other similar land regulations or laws, but I think they should be discussed in another time and forum.

The peace negotiation between the government and MILF is entering the second half of the second decade. It started in January 1997 involving four administrations, Presidents Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo, and now Aquino, and we have signed about 90 agreements on various issues and concerns. Only one agenda is remaining on the negotiation table; i.e., the negotiated political settlement of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao in the form of a comprehensive compact.

Essentially, this problem is political in character that requires a political solution. Its core is about granting genuine self-rule for the Moros of Mindanao to govern themselves, without detaching themselves from this republic. They remain part of it and are still citizens thereof. But it is their birthright to choose their identity and be known as Moros or Bangsamoro. In order to effectively carry this out, the MILF is proposing, as contained in its draft proposal on February 9, this year, for the establishment of a substate. This substate is only about a fourth of Mindanao, where they still predominate.

Instead of positively responding to this clamor, the government insists on them to accept the so-called enhanced Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which, contrary to its billing, is not autonomous at all. The ARMM is an administrative unit of government, which has no real powers at all. Look at the facts that even in matter of setting the date of election in the ARMM and the choice of leaders thereof it is determined by the central government.

The MILF had rejected the ARMM at least four times: in June 2000, in June 2001, in February 2003, and in January 2010. The present draft of government, which it presented during the 22nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, is basically the ARMM's framework, which government tries now to reform. But the ARMM is irreformable; the spring cannot rise above its source.

The GPH-MILF peace negotiation is practically in a state of deadlock, after the GPH rejected the rejection of the MILF peace panel of their draft. The GPH proposed for a way forward, but we have other way of doing it. We asked the GPH to jointly or separately request the Malaysian facilitator to do a shuttle between Manila and Maguindanao. While we are here now in the Visayas, the Malaysian facilitator had arrived in Cotabato City and he had talked to leaders of the MILF and the remaining members of the MILF peace panel. We are not yet aware of what transpired during their meeting.

Thank you and once again good morning!

We Reject The Rejection

Speech during the Agong Network Forum in Davao City on September 24, 2011

Before I give you the updates on the MILF peace negotiation with the government of the Philippines, let me share with you first the crux of the message that Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim had conveyed to His Excellency President Benigno Aquino III during their historic meeting in Tokyo, Japan on August 4. This had taken place more than a month ago but I think it still has relevance to the subject of this forum today. The meeting was unusually long; it lasted for about two hours; and I was privileged to be present during the meeting, as note taker on the part of the MILF. Dean Marvic Leonen, chairman of the GPH peace panel, was also the note taker on the part of the government.

The conversation was frank, straight-forward, and in a pleasant mood. In many ways, it displayed how the two leaders, one government and the other rebel, think and deal on number of vital issues that faced the country today, especially the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao.

Simply put, the message was:

- The only way to solve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao is through negotiation, not through the barrel of the gun or by integrating the

Moros into the national body politic. This has been tried or is being tried, but it failed miserably. It did not only worsen the situation of the Moros; on the contrary, resistance is increasing. But the negotiation and ceasefire must not be endless and the ends by themselves;

- The problem in Mindanao is political in nature that requires a political solution. This can be addressed by granting genuine self-rule to the Moros, in the form of a substate, which is still part of the Philippines. A close semblance or similar to this is Scotland, which is a substate, functioning within the ambit of the unitary system of the United Kingdom;
- Real and hard development projects can only come after the signing of the peace settlement. In the meantime, a relief, rehabilitation, and small-scale development activities can come to the conflict affected areas to alleviate the sufferings of the people and to make them feel of the benefits of the ongoing peace negotiation.

On August 22-23, this year, we met in Kuala Lumpur for the 22nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks. The main agenda was the submission of the GPH of their counter-proposal or proposal in the form of comprehensive compact as solution to the decades-old Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. (The MILF's draft proposal was submitted to the GPH peace panel last February 9, this year, almost seven months apart).

But before the parties started their formal session, the Malaysian facilitator called for an executive session, with a format of 1+1 from each side to sort out the order of the agenda. The GPH wanted to discuss first the issue of Ameril Omra Kato and the BIFF, saying this is a pressing and worsening problem that requires immediate determination whether Kato is still part of the MILF or is already a "lost command". The MILF maintained that since the submission of the GPH's proposal is already agreed and the fact that it is more important, then it should precede all other agenda. The discussion was so intense that it took the parties one hour to settle this. The submission of the GPH's draft was upheld as the first business of the day.

Thereafter, the plenary session was convened by the facilitator. It opened up with the traditional opening statements of the facilitator, GPH peace panel chairman, and MILF peace panel chairman. Mr. David Gorman, coordinator of the International Contact Group (ICG), spoke for the group.

All the members of the ICG were present, for the states, The United Kingdom, (represented by no less than by its ambassador to the Philippines, HE Stephen Lillie),

Japan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia; and for the international non-government organizations (INGOs), the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, The Asia Foundation, Muhammadiyah, and Conciliation Resources.

The session proceeded. The GPH submitted its proposal to the MILF peace panel. This was followed by a power-point presentation by the GPH peace panel to explain their proposal, which they labeled as 3 in 1 approach, namely, I) Development and Socio-Economic Reconstruction in the Region; 2) The Peace Accord; and 3) Acknowledgment of Historical Causes of the Conflict and Initiatives Towards Reconciliation. The MILF peace panel did not ask questions nor made their official response to it, saying they would study it and confer with their principal, and promised to state their position the next day.

The other items in the agenda were deliberated one by one: The issue of Ameril Omra Kato and BIFF, the 25 MILF "political detainees" who are still languishing behind bars, the Oil and Gas explorations in Moro areas in Mindanao, and the proposed terms of reference (TOR) for the Humanitarian, Relief, and Development Component (HRDC) of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), which is being handled by the European Union.

On the Kato's case, the MILF reiterated its original position that it is an internal problem and, therefore, should be dealt with internally with our promise to officially inform the GPH of its status in due time. On the issue of political detainees, the GPH made a brief rundown of the status of these detainees, whom the MILF wishes to be freed without delay as part of confidence-building measure. On the aspect of oil and gas exploration, the GPH peace panel promised to take it up with their principal, now that the MILF has formally presented the issue in the negotiation. And on the TOR of the HRDC-IMT, the parties approved it in principle, but they tasked the IMT to call for a special meeting for the purpose fine-tuning the draft proposal.

On the second day of what was originally set for three-day meeting, the MILF peace panel, after studying the GPH's proposal intensely overnight and after conferring with their principal, 'decided to reject the GPH's proposal and to bring the matter to the MILF Central Committee' for final disposition, citing the following compelling reasons:

- The GPH peace panel draft is way below our expectation. We thought the Aquino administration has a better formula than the previous administrations in addressing the Moro Question and armed conflict in Mindanao;
- The draft has no meeting point with the MILF peace panel draft; hence, will not fast track the negotiation as agreed by President Aquino and Chairman Murad in Japan last August 4;

- The GPH draft is not solving the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao but it is a formula to prolong it;
- The unbridled domination of the Philippine government over the Moros through the unitary setup of government is not only maintained but reenergized or re-entrenched; and
- Practically, the GPH draft derogated from all signed agreements or documents including the historic Tripoli Agreement of Peace of 2001.

On hearing this, the chair of the GPH peace panel, after ascertaining that the decision of their counterpart in the MILF had the concurrence of their principal, retorted: "We reject the rejection."This ended the meeting and the facilitator adjourned it. No schedule for the next round of talks was set or a joint statement ever made.

Today, the peace negotiation appears heading for rough waters, or the least, in limbo. The GPH proposed for a meeting last September 12-13, but the MILF did not see the need for it, saying the gaps between the GPH's and MILF's drafts are too wide apart. Any meeting between the parties, without first closing the gaps, is doomed to fail; and instead, the MILF proposed that the Malaysian facilitator would shuttle between Manila and Darapanan, which he did last September 9. During the meeting, the MILF had upheld its peace panel's rejection of the GPH's draft but proposed for a way forward, which I am not privileged to share with you this morning. The proposal was conveyed to the GPH peace panel; it is in their court now --- and we are waiting!

Before I end this presentation, let me share you very briefly the GPH's draft as contrasted with the MILF's. The GPH's proposal calls for "partnership" both in the socio-economic and the political components that, in the words of veteran writer Patricio Diaz, "Manila controls". The third component seeks merely to acknowledge a distinct identity and history of the Moros. In clearest words, the government dips its fingers into the internal affairs of the Moros. The MILF proposal, on the other hand, divides powers of government into three, those reserved for the central government, those exercised by the substate government, and those jointly exercised by the central and substate authorities. By this scheme, it truly gives meaning and substance to the principle of people's right to self-determination (RSD) and genuine autonomy.

Thank you very much for your indulgence!

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Let Us Call Spade A Spade

Opening statement during the opening session of the 23rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on December 5-7, 2011

We are in this beautiful city of Kuala Lumpur again to thread through the most substantive aspect of the 15-year old peace negotiation, amidst the growing calls of the civilians directly affected by the conflict in Mindanao, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs), well-meaning peace advocates, and the international community to fast track the peace negotiation and conclude it by signing a comprehensive peace agreement between the Philippine Government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Any delay for whatever reason will surely not be appreciated and the responsible party will have to do a lot of explanation, including a possible isolation from the arena of public opinion.

To the MILF, this expectation is not hard to fulfill, simply, because, all the issues in the negotiations are already put on the table. Nothing is hidden anymore from both sides. It is only the unwillingness or insincerity of either of the two parties to solve these problems that can deter them from succeeding.

In the current negotiation, the MILF, as everyone knows, has no option to secede by agreeing to settle for real self-governance in the Bangsamoro state, which is still within the larger Philippine state. But the government must put real premium to this by seriously putting forward a proposal that truly plays justice to this goodwill and sacrifice of the MILF. It is time the government stop thinking of solving the conflict in Mindanao by attempting to integrate the Moros into the national body politic. This scheme is a thing of the past and should not be revived anymore, for it only invites bad memories of the past, when under the aegis of Philippine rule, the Moros lost much of their lands and wealth in their homeland, not to speak of their marginalization and isolation. Integration is a word synonymous to shattered hope and dim future.

The government should learn from the failure of the past. Despite decades of working to integrate the Moros into the national body politic, including the creation of several offices like the Commission on National Integration (CNI) and now the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), the Moro aspiration for a separate identity and territorial autonomy are as strong as ever. This will not die down; it will consolidate and harden as years pile up. This is the reason the MILF is urging the government not to suppress this aspiration, and instead, find an acceptable formula leading to a more constructive engagement in order to ensure the unity of this country. For the MILF, we

view the state-substate asymmetrical formulation as a formula of peace and unity in this country.

The parties must now call spade a spade. Any resort to rhetoric is a waste of time, and certainly, we are not here for that, or to engage in debates, for such are suited only during our college days and among legislators. We are here to discuss hard issues in order to move the peace process and bring it closer to our objective of signing a comprehensive compact that would put final closure to the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao.

At this juncture, we wish to relate here that we are jolted by the failure of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) to proceed with the investigation of the fighting in the municipality of Payao, Zamboanga Sibugay between MILF and government forces from October 15 and onward. In these series of encounters, aside from mostly initiating the attack, in direct violation of the ceasefire agreement and spirit of the peace negotiation, the government forces also used excessive force, including naval boats, attack helicopters, and bomber planes. As a consequence, tens of thousands of civilians, both Moros and Christians, fled their homes and evacuated to safer grounds.

To be very frank with you, it is not the failure of the IMT to investigate which is disheartening, which can be temporary, for any day from now they can decide to go, but it is the decision of Governor Rommel Jalosjos of Zamboanga Sibugay to defy the decision of the government through its peace panel to conduct the investigation, in compliance with a standing commitment in the peace negotiation. If a local government executive can oppose decision of government in such an important but still relatively a minor case, how much more if the stakes are already high, say a comprehensive compact between the GPH and MILF. Seriously, we cannot understand why Governor Jalosjos chose to stand in the way of the investigation: to hide the truth or to show that he can stand up against the President? If he has the second reason, I think he is in the wrong move. President Aquino is showing much decisiveness in recent weeks --- and hopefully through to the end of his term in 2016. In the end, Jalosjos will find himself in an odd situation. This is what we can foresee if the government still values the integrity of the peace negotiation and the ceasefire agreement.

On a more positive development, let me share with you that the people in Mindanao especially those in the eye of the conflict are yearning much for peace to come to their communities soon. On November 24, Mayor Loreto Cabaya Jr. of Aleosan, North Cotabato, members of the town council, and most of his barangay officials came to Darapanan in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao on a peace mission. Some members of the

MILF Central Committee headed by Vice Chairman Ghazali Jaafar and this humble representation met the group for a more than three hours of frank exchanges of views. For your information, Mayor Cabaya was one of the staunchest enemies of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 and the first bullet fired after the MOA-AD controversy was in his municipality on July 1 that year. Why he now embraces the way of peace and accommodation is perhaps attributed to the positive transformative value of conflict. A case in point is former President Fidel Ramos, who had been a military man in most of his life, called for peace dialogue rather the way of war in dealing with the MILF; and compare him with former President Joseph Estrada, who had never been a military man except in the movies, but surprisingly insisted on all-out war option against the MILF, especially after the killing of 19 Special Forces in Albarka in Basilan on October 18. Sometimes, warriors become great peace-makers, while armchair military men and politicians are notorious warmongers if not war-makers.

During the Q&A session, Cabaya's first question was: "Hindi ba puwede na wala ng gyera sa lugar natin?" (Is it possible that there will be no more war in our midst?). To which, our answer was: "Yes, it is possible, but we must have peace with justice first; not simply forgive and forget."

The people of Mindanao want peace now and not later. Surprisingly, the voices of war are more numerous in "Imperial Manila", to borrow the words of some writers, especially many if not most members of the oligarchy who are only concerned with their luxurious lives, their wealth, and their investments. It is their "greed, hatred, and mistrust" that prevail in their hearts. It is good that President Benigno Aquino III did not listen to them and still insisted on the way of peace to address the conflict in Mindanao. Surely, this is a legacy that stands the test of time and space.

Thank you and wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh!

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Chapter 3:
Speeches from 2012

"For the MILF, no obstacle is harder than our collective will to overcome it. The yearning for peace is equal to our disdain for war. Let us ensure that the reign of peace happens and the scourge of war is obliterated forever."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**

Opening Statement during the 28th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on May 28, 2012

Interim Mechanism Indispensable

Opening statement during the 24th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on January 9-11, 2012

We are heartened by the latest development in Manila whereby the decisiveness and political will of President Benigno Aquino III is clearly exhibited in many of his policies and hard decisions, especially on the cases filed against former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona. While we do not take sides on these issues, because it is internal to the government, to me, this is the kind of principal that our counterpart in the government needs and can bank on when the going gets tough. I hope this will show itself when it is most needed especially when it comes to the Moro Question and its resolution.

It is in the light of this welcomed development that I urged the Aquino administration through our honorable counterpart to take into full account of the continued defiance of Zamboanga Sibugay Governor Rommel Jalosjos to allow the International Monitoring Team (IMT) to investigate the incident in Payao, this province. This defiles not only the integrity of the ceasefire, the IMT, and the current negotiation but even that of His Excellency Aquino is also tainted. I hope our good counterpart in government would not take this lightly.

In his monthly report for December 2011, IMT Head of Mission, Major General Dato' Mahdi Yusof, stressed this point:

> *"... The IMT is still waiting for the clearance from GPH CCCH to enter municipality of Payao to conduct long outstanding verification, which was put on hold due to Zamboanga Sibugay Governor's stand. IMT is deeply concerned about this unnecessary delay imposed on the mission's initiative to implement verification in the affected areas of Payao. In addition to this, the IMT has also been hindered in conducting even normal monitoring routines by unauthorized interference of the provincial governor. The IMT reiterates the importance of the Peace Panels intervention to stop such unprecedented conduct ...."*

On the current peace negotiation, we likened it to a drama. The nearer one is to the zenith, the more intense the action is. We need to emulate this if we want to conclude the current GPH-MILF peace negotiation to a successful end, without derogating prior agreements. But are we doing this to assure ourselves that we are indeed in the right tract and the right pace?

The Aquino administration is already in the last six months of its second year in office and two months and 22 days shy of the March this year government self-imposed deadline for the completion of this negotiation and sign the comprehensive compact to address the Moro Question and armed conflict in Mindanao. Unless we are sincere, dedicated, and work hard and in double time, we cannot beat the deadline, although the MILF is not necessarily bound by this timeline. But if we can do it, why choose the longer way?

Factually, the MILF agrees fully with the GPH in fast tracking the negotiation. We have been in this negotiation for the last almost 15 years since 1997. This is too long a process that not everybody has the guts and tenacity to stay on course. While we in the MILF peace panel can withstand any challenge as long as we can walk and speak and have the confidence and authority of our principal, the people on the ground and the international community are not happy with this situation. More importantly, we are afraid that we might not be able to hold on indefinitely against groups whose radical agenda are feeding voraciously on the failures of the negotiation and the perceived dilly-dallying of the government that put the MILF on the receiving end that we agree to negotiate "aimlessly" for this long period. Ameril Omra Kato had already split from the MILF and there is frustration among the hardliners within the MILF and restlessness among the youth. To tell you frankly, the pragmatic approach of the MILF vis-à-vis the political settlement of the problem in Mindanao proved too hard to prevail over the Utopian mindset and advocacy of the idealists and the hardliners. When given a choice who would not choose an independent state over a substate or autonomy?

How do we fast tract the negotiation process? To the MILF, it is simple. Aside from meeting regularly and for longer period, we need to be clear and leveled off on the agenda, which the two parties had already settled as early as January 1997; i.e., How to solve the Bangsamoro Problem, which we now refer to as Moro Question. Indeed, we are not the problem, but our political status has not been settled since 1935 during the Commonwealth and more officially in the grant of the Philippine independence in 1946. Then the two parties must agree on basic principles and concepts, then on the basic elements or strands of the proposed Moro juridical entity, then provide the details, then the operational mechanisms, and finally sign it. But this is not yet the end of the road, because the agreement will not implement itself. We need to provide for the implementing road map or mechanism that would include the active participation of the international community.

Frankly after almost two years into the Aquino administration, we are not very productive as expected of us. We barely moved from where we started last year and perhaps the only compliment that we can be happy for the moment was our agreement

on the 11-point basic issues and concerns last December 5-7 during our 23rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks that included "autonomy" as the form of self-governance that we intend to put into place in the future Moro state or substate. Why is this important? Because, it puts into definitive and clear term that in this negotiation we are not talking about a sham autonomy like the present Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) with all its integrative features but something short of an independent state. The moment we focus on this form of self-governance, given the abundance of models in the world today, like Scotland, Hong Kong, The Aland Islands, and Puerto Rico, we can expect swift development in the talks. And then the March deadline is possible.

At this juncture, let me state here succinctly that to put guarantee to stability, security, and life to the state-substate asymmetrical arrangement those powers allocated or conceded to the future Moro state must be entrenched by the government by undertaking constitutional amendment either by appending the Agreement to the present Constitution or to undertake a surgical amendment of the Constitution from Section 15 to Section 21. Any effort less or below par than the aforementioned mode is only to invite more complications and hardships or dangers in the future. And more seriously, the MILF will not accept tentative arrangement or formulation, because we have learned a lot from the experience of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which, after agreeing to accept the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and governorship of the ARMM, on the strength of the promise that the ARMM Organic Act will be amended to accommodate and give way to the provisions of the GPH-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of 1996, nothing happened or fulfilled afterward. Today, the MNLF is not only frustrated but failed miserably in their quest to empower our people, because the promise to amend the Constitution using the provisions of the 1996 Agreement was not delivered. I am not saying that President Aquino is not trustworthy and reliable. Frankly, we still trust the President. But to put the collective future of the entire Bangsamoro people to an uncertain future even to the most trustworthy man is laden with risks. President Aquino is a human being and any mortal man or woman can leave this world without warning.

The need for the interim period or mechanism before the regular phase of the implementation of the agreement takes place is indispensable. Transitions occur throughout life for all of us: in daily living, health, education and employment, especially if the shift is from bullets to ballots. All the peace agreements that I know have provided for interim periods for their implementation. Even for practical purposes, and in the case of MILF, would you expect a rebel organization, to jump to election and run government efficiently? The transformation, transfer, and devolution of power requires

time, preparation, and training. Any sudden or drastic change of status quo will meet so many challenges or oppositions, not excluding violence, especially from people or groups who used to enjoy power and privileges.

Would the GPH deprive us of the opportunity for a transition when the Filipinos also asked for it before the grant of independence in 1946? Was not the commonwealth a transition to full statehood in 1946?

Lastly, I would like to assure once again our good counterpart from the government, the members of the International Contact Group (ICG), and the Malaysian Government that the MILF is really serious in this negotiation. We want to finish this process as soon as possible and give our people the much sought-for-peace, which they never experienced since 1578 when Spain started the Moro-Spanish War that lasted for 320 years. I sincerely hope that the Aquino administration would reciprocate and, in partnership, we put in place real autonomy in the future Moro political entity.

Thank you!

The MILF Envisions A System of Governance In Mindanao That Is Inclusive

Speech during the Opening Session of the Consolidation for Peace (COP) 5 Conference in Penang, Malaysia on January 17, 2012

At the outset, let me thank the organizers of this conference, more particularly Prof. Dr. Kamarulzaman Askandar, coordinator, Research & Education for Peace (REPUSM) and Regional Coordinator of Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network, and Ms. Sachiko Ishikawa and the whole of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japanese Government for inviting me as one of the speakers this morning. I also wish to commend Universiti Sains Malaysia, through the leadership of Prof. Dato Omar Osman whose courage and foresight in putting peace studies and peace work as one of its flagship programs is something that is extraordinary for a university.

Truly, I am honored but also humbled by this invitation to join you in the Fifth Consolidation for Peace (COP) Conference consistently held in this beautiful and progressive island State of Penang in Malaysia. It is an honor equally bestowed on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on whose behalf that I am standing in front of

you to deal on a subject close to my heart. I have been in the peace negotiation with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) from 1997 to the middle of 2000 and again from July 29, 2003 to this day, some 11 long years of hard bargaining across the negotiating table in our attempt to end the conflict in Mindanao, once and for all.

Let me thank also the Japanese Government for its invaluable support and involvement in the formal infrastructures or mechanisms of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation such as its membership in the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) and in the International Contact Group (ICG) and for providing the necessary logistical support for this conference. Through the JICA, Japan is also active on the ground in Mindanao. I am happy that Honorable Keizo Takewaka, political Minister of the Japanese Embassy in Manila, and JICA's chief representative in Malaysia, Mr. Tsutomo Nagae, and their entourage are with us today. This unmistakably speaks of their continuing commitment in our journey to peace in Mindanao.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I look around I see so many faces, most I know personally. Among the outstanding names that graced this occasion include Secretary Teresita "Ging" Deles, Secretary Jesse Robredo, ARMM-OIC Vice Governor Bainon Karon; all five provincial governors of the ARMM: Governor Sadikul Sahali, Governor Abdusakur Tan, Governor Esmael Mangudadatu, Governor Mamintal Adiong, Jr, and Governor Jum Akbar; our Congresswoman from North Cotabato, Nancy Catamco, and Congressman Jesus Sacdalan; we also have the Gabriela Party list Congresswoman Luzviminda Ilagan from Davao; Ms. Cynthia Petrigh of the European Union contingent to the IMT, and Mr. Naoyuki Ochiai of the Japan contingent in the IMT; and from the academe, we have Dr. Jose Abueva, and other professors from Mindanao. It is also an honor to meet here my honorable counterparts from the GPH peace panel Dean Marvic Leonen and Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel. Of course, we are not here to negotiate; that job is with the Malaysian facilitator and the venue is in Kuala Lumpur. With this kind of personalities taking part in this conference, we can expect high level of deliberation and engagement.

We have met with our counterpart from the Government of the Philippines (GPH) in Kuala Lumpur for our 24th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks from January 9 to11. For me, this meeting and those that are to be scheduled in the near future represent the critical part of this 15-year old negotiation that started in 1997. Why? Here following are the reasons:

First, the GPH had made a self-imposed deadline for signing an agreement in March this year, barely 2 months and a half now. While we commend President Benigno Aquino

III for his boldness and courage in setting this timetable, the question is this possible? On the part of the MILF, this simply is not possible, because the issues on the table are not only hard but they can break the negotiation so easily. And haste makes waste, as the saying goes.

Second, all the issues of the negotiation especially of the MILF are already on the table. Practically, nothing is concealed anymore. Any reading or misreading beyond good intention is dangerous, like "Don't give Moros their substate, because they will secede from the republic."

Third, after everything is already known, it boils down to whether the GPH is really serious in this negotiation by agreeing to the very reasonable demand of the MILF to have a substate out of some areas in Mindanao, which Moros can run and call theirs --- not the one they called gobirno na sarwang a tao or government by foreigners. After all, they are not getting out of the larger Philippine state.

And fourth, both sides, GPH and MILF, are under intense pressures from within and from without including those friends of the peace process from the international community to end this long running negotiation by signing a negotiated political agreement. Any delay would only result in frustrations and complications, which are the favorite menu of spoilers, hardliners, and enemies of peace. They are many of them out there in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, and they are just waiting for the right moment to rock the boat or throw venom to the whole peace process and ruin it altogether.

Notwithstanding the above, let me tell you that the gaps between the positions of both parties have narrowed down to a point that is not impossible to overcome. We are slow in our steps, but we are moving forward nonetheless. The core issues like modality of ensuring that whatever powers allocated or devolved to the Moro substate or state will not be taken back by the Central government remained undecided. The three-day intense deliberation was not enough to settle and put to rest this nagging issue, which to the MILF will decide whether there is life for our people after the signing of the agreement with the government. The MILF wants this guarantee expressly stated, simply because it cannot entrust the collective security and future of our people to the mercy of chances and an uncertain future. The experience of our brothers and sisters in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is a big lesson learned for us; it is still in our minds to this day. The government promised them amendment of the Organic Act of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) by using the provisions of the GRP-

MNLF Final Agreement of September 2, 1996, but this was not fulfilled. To this day, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari still feels very much betrayed and accuses the government of abandonment. Please pardon me for using these hard adjectives.

The GPH and MILF peace panels are set to meet in the middle of next month to continue to hammer out possible compromise that would ensure this guarantee without losing sight of the prevailing legalese tradition or practice in the Philippines. This is a sticky point that cannot be easily resolved by the parties especially by the government, which consistently interprets provisions of the Constitution not in favor of giving way to a peace agreement.

The GPH and MILF peace panels also disagree on the concept of the interim mechanism or period starting from the signing of the agreement to the establishment of a regular government. To the MILF, the need for transition period is indispensable and cannot be set aside, lest the future is put to the mercy or tyranny of chances. Transitions occur throughout life for all of us: in daily living, health, education and employment, especially if the shift is from "bullets to ballots". All the peace agreements that I know have provided for interim periods for their implementation. Even for practical purposes, and in the case of MILF, would anyone expect a rebel organization, to jump to election and run a government efficiently? The transformation, transfer, and devolution of power requires time, preparation, and training. Any sudden or drastic change of status quo will meet so many challenges or oppositions, not excluding violence, especially from people or groups who used to enjoy powers and privileges.

This view precisely brings to mind why the MILF has priority programs and activities on capacity building and capacity mobilization that involves not only local friends of the peace process but international players as well. The MILF is not unaware of its modest absorptive capacity and, therefore, the better part of judgment is to go in full gear in preparation for the time that the game is about governance and no longer in the battlefield. This is the rationale why the MILF spearheaded the birth of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), which is the development arm of the MILF, and the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI), which is tasked to train future workers or leaders of the Moros, who are not only from the MILF but from all sectors of society. I thank the Government of the Philippines (GPH) through its peace panel for their foresight, maturity, and concurrence in the establishment of these agencies, which are certainly in anticipation of the post-conflict situation in Mindanao. We believe firmly that no matter how long the war or negotiation takes place in this region, it always ends in nation-building, which requires time, resources, skills, and painstaking efforts.

For sure, any new self-governing Moro political entity in Mindanao will create minority groups like the indigenous tribes (IPs) and Christian migrants. For those who are unaware of the policy of the MILF and the underlying principles contained in its comprehensive compact proposal would fear that discrimination, repression, suppression would be the basis of policy. Certainly, these are unfounded fear and the product of distorted view, reminiscent of the days of old. The MILF is fully committed to respect one's identity and the parity of esteem of everyone in the political community. It also commits to the protection of civil rights and religious liberties of individual, which is the underlying basis of peace and justice in the realm. Concretely, legitimate vested property rights shall be recognized and respected. In Islam, the guiding ideology of the MILF, there is no need for the "People of the Book" like the Christians or even the IPs to assert for their rights using all available means, because those are given and will be readily granted to them. Just examine the situations of minorities especially Christians in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, and compare them with those in the Philippines, the difference would be disheartening. There is no need for me to go further in details.

In the same compact proposal, the MILF has granted or allocated reserved seats in the legislature and in government for these minorities to ensure that their constituencies are not deprived of representation. It is a fact that poor, marginalized, uneducated minorities, especially those despised, hated and discriminated, have no chance to compete and win seats in a political exercise where the overwhelming majority has the tyranny of numbers and monopoly of powers.

The MILF envisions a system of governance in Mindanao that is inclusive. It is for everybody, including, if I may say, those belonging to other rebel groups, civil society organizations, the IPs, etc. The MILF will not stay forever. Our role is only good during the duration of the interim period where we are in the driver's seat, alongside other sincere and competent partners in nurturing the new entity. Some quarters question the wisdom of letting the MILF in the driver's seat during the interim period. The answer is: Are they not aware that even common sense would tell them that the MILF, an armed revolutionary group, did not only fight the government in the battlefield, but also engaged it in a negotiation for more than a decade, only to let others occupy the driver's seat for a destination that is known only to themselves? Come to think of it! It is only fair that the MILF – with the GPH assisting – will set the new house in order and level the playing field before going to the regular period and let everybody participate in an election without fear or favor. Then and only then that real leaders of people will emerge and lead them to where they are destined to: a government of, for and by the Moros.

What does "in the driver's seat" mean in concrete terms? It simply means that in the interim period, the MILF would provide leadership, direction, guidance, and priorities. Alone or in the company of others who are equally dedicated to work for the best interests of our people? As above stated, the other occupants or workers in the vehicle, so to speak, are coming from other groups. We never believe that only the MILF has the monopoly of best intentions and ways to deliver our people from where they are now to a much better future.

However, after the new Moro entity is organized, the institutions are set up, and the basic law is written and ratified, the MILF will exit and prepare itself or through a political party to engage in an open and free election during the regular period. If it wins, then it will have the right to form the state or substate government, because the MILF is proposing for a ministerial system of government whereby the legislative and executive powers are fused together.

Rest assured that the MILF wants the current peace talks to succeed and sign a negotiated political settlement with the GPH, without further delay, because there is no other way under present condition that real peace and development can be realized in Mindanao. The way of war is never the way to real and permanent peace in this region.

It is also clear that the MILF is trying to exhaust all democratic remedies to solve the Moro Question and armed conflict in Mindanao. On the advice of former Malaysian facilitator, Datuk Othman Bin Abdu' Razak, the MILF had painfully agreed to mellow down its proposal for the establishment of a state-substate asymmetrical arrangement in Mindanao. And for this gesture, the MILF has been criticized severely, left and right. Worse, the MILF is accused of engaging in an "endless and directionless" negotiation with the GPH, which is predicted, to end only in cooptation and capitulation.

Finally, let me convey to you that MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim fully supports this kind of peace-building exercise. Through this conference, the MILF as an organization is hopeful that more people will help in bringing long lasting peace in Mindanao so that we, the Moros, will be given our right to self-determination, and that we can also live side by side with our Christian and Indigenous Peoples brothers and sisters who all deserve to have a peaceful future in our homeland Mindanao.

On this note, we thank everyone for lending your ears to hear the message of the MILF in this conference. Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

We Are Not Dealing With An Ordinary Conflict

Opening statement during the 25th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on February 13-15, 2012

Let me start my opening statement by reminding ourselves that we are now threading the most difficult phase of the 15-year old GPH-MILF peace negotiation. We are now dealing with the core of the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao, which is the issue of genuine self-governance for our people. It is for this reason that we now experience numerous problems along our path. If we are not engaged in real problem-solving negotiation, then we will end up without signing the comprehensive compact soon or at any time during the Aquino administration.

However, what is consoling to us is that practically all the hard issues are on the table and clear to all parties; for instance, power-sharing, wealth-sharing, territory, and interim period. But if we cannot settle these issues soon, surely, we are heading for more headaches. The other elements of the proposed Bangsamoro entity – or shall we officially call it now a "Moro substate or state" – like the establishment of police, internal security force, basic law, and normalization, among others, are equally challenging. What I am saying here is that we must tighten our belt and continue to deal with these issues head-on, bearing in the mind that time is running out, if we are to take into consideration the view of the GPH that the comprehensive compact has to be signed next month.

I want to remind ourselves again that the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao are not easy nuts to crack. Our negotiation is not about solving an ordinary conflict. What we are dealing here is about a deadly armed conflict where thousands upon thousands of people died or injured, and millions of people became homeless – many of whom have not returned to their original dwellings to this day and their lands are taken over by other people. It is about a home-grown sovereignty-based armed struggle that cannot be simply addressed by giving them cash, houses, or positions in government.

In other words, we cannot just design a formula that is working with ordinary conflict, because the MILF-led struggle is different. The MILF is armed, the MILF has the popular backing and support, the MILF has the organization, and the MILF has ideology, which gives its members not only direction and guidance, but the reasons to undertake the struggle. We did not join the MILF for the sake of wanting to get wealth and positions in government. We are not solving our individual, family, or groups' problem. What we are solving is the problem of the Moros, a problem spawned by colonialism and Filipino

neo-colonialism. This is one of the reasons why the problem of Brother Nur Misuari refuses to fly away because he still wants to be in power even after becoming governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and chairperson of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). Otherwise, if it were not a personal problem, he would willingly pass the buck to the MILF, because he has nothing more to offer to our people, after he agreed to be subsumed by the current system in the Philippines.

On the practical side, do we think the MILF will settle for something that is not lasting and is not sure of really solving the problem? Do we think the MILF is willing to disarm and turn over its "12,500 firearms", granting this government figure is correct, for something that is not sure to happen? Certainly, we cannot put the collective interests, security, and future of our people at the mercy or tyranny of the future. We need to be sure that what we sign with the government is the one that really addresses the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. A half-baked solution is worse than no solution at all.

For almost two years within the Aquino government, we managed to sign only few documents: four joint statements, which were worded almost vaguely, and two terms of references (TOR) for the International Monitoring Team (IMT) and the Humanitarian, Relief, and Development Component of the IMT. All these documents are certainly important but they are not directly related to the substantive issues of the current peace negotiation that can propel it nearer to its goal. But seemingly we forgot something very important that despite the rough-sailing in the current peace talks, the parties have already agreed on many things especially on the 11-point formulation that the parties have accepted last December 7, 2011, with GPH's reservations on three issues, as part of the basic principles of the current negotiation. In addition, no less than His Excellency President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III agreed to the MILF's proposal to create a ministerial form of government in the future Bangsamoro entity provided that those running the state government are elected directly by the people. Are these matters less agreed because they are not signed? To me an agreement is an agreement whether signed or not, because accountability does not only rest with men alone, but most solemnly to God. But in a negotiation, this is not to be treated this way. There is no agreement at all until the parties so agreed and sign it.

For this reason, I wish to invite my honorable counterpart from the government to consider seriously from now on putting all these agreed points including the 11-point formulation above-mentioned into formal documents and sign them, so we can

tell ourselves that indeed we have achieved something and we are moving forward. We have also concrete proof to show to our people and the international community that indeed the two parties are serious and are producing results and not just talk, talk, and talk. More importantly, these papers will also form part of the official documents of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation that we can bank and guide us on as we go into the details of the various issues of the negotiation.

On this note, let me thank all of you for lending me your ears as I read through my opening statement. Good morning and wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

Myriad Of Reasons For Optimism

Opening Statement during the 28th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on May 28, 2012

In behalf of the Central Committee on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the MILF Peace Panel in particular, let me thank and express our profound gratitude to all those who condoled with us during the passing away of MILF Vice Chairman Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbantas last May 2, after our historic meeting with the new president of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Darapanan in Sultan Kudarat in Maguindanao.

Truly we miss him forever. But the seeds of struggle implanted in the hearts and minds of our people especially the youths, first by the late Chairman Salamat Hashim and nurtured by Abdulaziz, will ensure that this struggle will not stop until we finally achieve our right to self-determination and freedom. Surely, the MILF had only one Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbantas. But he had seen to it during his lifetime that many like him will come forward to carry on the liberation struggle. This was his legacy. He had also seen to it that in life and in death, he and Salamat were inseparable and are symbol of unity for our people. Both died in the very midst of the oppressed and suffering Moro masses whose cause and rights they sought to defend and uphold to the last of their breaths. Salamat died in Lanao and Abdulaziz had willed that when he died he would be buried near the former's grave. There together in the hallowed ground in the jungles of Lanao del Sur, they lie together in the "bounty of their Lord".

I take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the coming and presence of the Honorable Director Ali Demirci of the Minority Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as an official representative of H.E. Ihsanoglu Tevetoglu, the OIC Secretary General. This is the second time a high official of the OIC ever blessed the GPH-MILF peace negotiation. The first was in August 2008 when H.E. Kassem El-Masry, Adviser and Special Envoy of the OIC Secretary General, came to Kuala Lumpur during the supposed formal signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). Obviously, he went home frustrated after the Arroyo administration did not sign the MOA-AD.

Welcome your Honor!

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we are back to this beautiful city of Kuala Lumpur, after our successful meeting here last month. More than one, we have myriad of reasons to be optimistic. The shades of our success when we signed the GPH-MILF Agreement Decision Points in Principles last April 24 are still very much alive and staring at us. They energize us, give us more confidence in ourselves, and increase our trust with each other. More importantly, our people back home and the international community are expecting us to sign the peace pact soon and without reason or delay.

Truth is that if the Philippine government is really serious and committed, signing a peace pact is possible now. For the MILF, no obstacle is harder than our collective will to overcome it. The yearning for peace is equal to our disdain for war. Let us ensure that the reign of peace happens and the scourge of war is obliterated forever.

Let me assure one and sundry that the MILF has all the good adjectives for the Aquinos, the father-senator-martyr, the widow-president, and the son-president. Up to this moment, we have never maligned President Benigno Aquino III, either his person or his presidency. We still believe in his commitment to solve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. Like his mother's trip to Jolo, Sulu in 1987, after the EDSA People Revolution in 1986, Noynoy's meeting with MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim in Tokyo, Japan on August 4, 2011 is history in the making. It showed how, with humility, the Aquinos stepped back in the name of peace and moved forward to make peace happen. But sad to note, however, the Cory-Misuari Meeting in Jolo did not result in the conclusion of the GPH-MNLF peace negotiation; instead it paved the way for the passage of the organic act leading to the creation of the so-called Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Contrary to public belief, the ARMM is not the product of the peace negotiation between the MNLF and the GPH. It was a unilateral

act of government in which the MNLF had no role in it whatsoever; in fact, the MNLF denounced the creation of the ARMM as a betrayal of the GPH. We hope that the Murad-Noynoy Meeting will not lead to the same result in creating an entity outside of the consequence of the current GPH-MILF peace negotiation.

Today, as we set to start this 28th exploratory meeting of the parties, I have the feeling that the issue of transitional arrangement is still the most ticklish issue to crack. This puts to test whether the government is really serious in empowering the MILF in the transition period and finally the Moros in the regular government. Everyone knows that the role of the MILF here is very brief and it is not alone in the implementation. In partnership with the government, it sets the house in order and after which, it will be free for all. The MILF either runs in the election in the regular period or puts up a political party to participate in it, and if it wins the majority in the assembly will form the government. If the government insists on making the MILF hitchhike in the transition and let others occupy the driver's seat, then it is not really serious. It runs opposite to good practices that partners in peace-making will help one another in the implementation. Is this not the most reasonable and natural arrangement?

It is time to test the mettle of the MILF, whether it can rise to the occasion and deliver or it is just another corrupt group that when empowered will do exactly the thing they disdained. The politicians have been in the helm of government ever since and what did they do to improve the lot of our people? The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was installed in power in 1996 and what did they prove? Did they make any difference in the lives of our people? Just look around in the Moro areas and one will get the answers to this question.

However, I do not fault the politicians and the MNLF in every way. Perhaps, they can only be faulted for joining a system that they have no chance of correcting. Whoever joins it without a provision for a level playing field of engagement will be subsumed and finds advocating the same corrupt practices. Or they will be cast aside as casualties of the system. For the MILF, a revolutionary Islamic movement, the best way to fight a dysfunctional system is not to enjoy it --- but to present an alternative but superior system and assert it until it becomes a reality.

Please be reminded that the flashpoint at the Scarborough Shoal has simmered down a little. Thanks to the diplomatic handling of the Aquino administration. But even with this diplomatic entente, the sore lurking in the corner will not disappear so easily. I don't think the Chinese will ever be convinced that they have no valid claim over the disputed

territory. This puts the resolution of the conflict in Mindanao a valid priority for the Manila government. And in order to fast track the current peace process, erase it from the radar of the Aquino administration, and concentrate on the emerging crisis in the South China Sea, it is my wish that the GPH should offer the best proposal to the MILF in order to save time, effort, resources, and goodwill.

Thank you and wassalamu alaikum!

Our Success In This Endeavor Starts On Our Own Resolve

Speech during the turnover ceremony of the BLMI building on June 6, 2012

It is an honor and a real pleasure for me to be with all of you this afternoon and to address this distinguished gathering, which is made more exciting when practically all the players in the current peace negotiation between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are here this afternoon. We have with us our honorable counterparts from the government, Dean Marvic Leonen, Professor Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, former Secretary of Agriculture Senen Bacani, and Madame Yasmin Busran-Lao; my colleagues in the MILF Peace Panel, Atty. Datu Michael Mastura, Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga, Datu Antonio Kinoc, Atty. Raisa Jajurie, our lawyer-consultant, Brother Jun Mantawil, head of our peace panel secretariat; the Malaysian Facilitator, His Excellency Dato Tengku Ab' Ghafar Tengku bin Mohamed; and the members of the International Contact Group (ICG), as if the venue of the peace talks has been transferred from Kuala Lumpur to an area just above the administrative base of the MILF in Darapanan. For your information, Darapanan was used to be a major military camp of the MILF but after the all-out war waged by President Joseph Estrada against the MILF in 2000, we abandoned it as such and now it is the center of peace-making of the MILF in its peace talks with the GPH. The office of the MILF Peace Panel is located here. We are also very lucky, because this occasion is also graced by prominent personalities from the GPH namely, Secretary Teresita Ging Deles-Quintos of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, and Senator Teofisto Guingona III. Thank you very much for accepting our invitation!

Ladies and gentlemen, surely we are not here for the peace talks. We are here to celebrate one of the good fruits of this negotiation. We are here for the turnover ceremony of the building funded by the Government of Japan through its Embassy in Manila for

the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI). In this regard, on behalf of the MILF Peace Panel and the MILF in general, let me express our gratitude to the Government of Japan and to His Excellency Ambassador Toshinao Urabe, the Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines, for the aid grant that made possible the construction of this training center. With all gratefulness and sincerity, we accept this edifice and rest assured that we will use this building in the furtherance of knowledge, justice, and peace in our land. With this training center, we can now safely say "good bye" to what we used to do before by hoping from one building to another only to find out that some of trainings had to be postponed or cancelled for lack of available venue. This sounds unfortunate but to us in the MILF, it is a virtue to accept reality and strive to move on and on until we achieve our objective. This explains why for the last two years, we have conducted fewer training.

We are also grateful to the Government of the Philippines (GPH) under the present leadership of His Excellency Benigno Aquino III for extending five million pesos for the initial operational and administrative expenses of the BLMI. We assure the government that this money will be used wisely and in furtherance of peace, understanding, and justice amongst peoples. Rest assured also that the rule of transparency and accountability shall be observed at all times. This is a commitment that we are answerable up to the Highest Heaven.

We also acknowledge with utmost sincerity the big contribution extended to the BLMI by The Asia Foundation through its country representative to the Philippines, Dr. Steven Rood, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung through the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through The Asia Foundation, the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP), the Asian Institute of Management (AIM), and the Non-Violent Peace Force (NVPF) through its Philippine Project Director, Brother Atif Hamed, either in conducting direct training or providing funds for it on various fields of knowledge needed to capacitate future Moro leaders especially from the youth sector.

We hope that with their examples, other well-meaning donor countries or aid agencies will also help fully operationalize the BLMI. As anyone can see, it is still lacking in many things. We lack equipment, we lack reference books, we need a fence for the compound, and we lack road and water facilities. Moreover, all our workers are volunteers.

Be this as it may, let me assure everyone here that while we hope for outside help for the BLMI to stand on its feet, at the same time we pledge unto ourselves that our success in this endeavor starts on our own resolve. We believe in the Quranic verses that

man shall have nothing but what he strives for and God does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in their hearts. Firmly, I believe the MILF is in the right track --- and we will succeed, Insha Allah.

Finally, let me stress here that the BLMI is for our people irrespective of groups, tribes, class, gender, or political affiliations. In truth, we have lined up several trainings for members of the indigenous tribes and for women. This will be very soon.

Thank you very much.

At No Time in the Past that the International Community is Actively Involved Than At Present

Message during the IMT, GPH CCCH and MILF CCCH Tripartite Meeting in Davao City on June 25-26, 2012

The ceasefire is holding. There is no recorded armed skirmish between MILF and government forces since January 2012. Is this good news? Certainly, the answer is yes. And without saying, the big credit primarily goes to the government and MILF for maintaining and upholding the primacy of the peace process. The role of the government and MILF Coordinating Committee on Cessation of Hostilities (CCCHs) and all of you here, gentlemen, cannot be overstated. Without doubt, you have done your part in ensuring the ceasefire intact and holding. Of course, this achievement cannot be complete without mentioning the indispensable role of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) now led by HE Maj. Gen. Dato' Abdul Raheem Bin Mohammad Yusuff. My kudos also to Brig. Gen. Gilberto Jose Roa and Brother Said Sheik, chairs of the GPH and MILF CCCHs, respectively. To all others, my congratulation, and please keep up the good work!

While I am lavish in my praises to all of you for this feat in maintaining the ceasefire, let me remind you also that the ceasefire is not to be upheld for its own sake. It is not an end in itself; rather, it is a mechanism in support of the negotiation with the end in view of solving the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. The negotiation must progress and move on, while the ceasefire mechanism provides the necessary tranquility and peace on the ground; otherwise, without this, the ceasefire is not serving the intended purpose. An endless ceasefire without really solving these problems is to

court more and more disasters in the future. This will only feed the appetite of those who are waiting at the sidelines for the failure of these negotiations. These include the radicals, the idealists, the adventurists, and those who are frustrated by the endless peace negotiation. Imagine the negotiation had started in January 1997 and the parties are still locked up in battle on the negotiating table. And in my case, aside from my role as member of the MILF peace panel from 1997 to 2000, I have been the chair of the panel for almost ten years since 2003.

Once again, let me prod and appeal to you to be doubly sure that the ceasefire will hold while we in the MILF and government peace panels continue, without let up, to hammer out the remaining substantive issues in the current GPH-MILF peace negotiation. For your information, the negotiation is passing through a critical phase that may or may not lead to the signing of the comprehensive compact. During our last meeting in Kuala Lumpur last May 29-31, the parties have not achieved something of great impact similar to the GPH-MILF 10-Point Decisions on Principles, which we signed on April 24. There was no joint statement and there was no fixed date for the next round of talks.

But rest assured that while this situation appears disheartening, to me and the rest of the MILF peace panel, this gives us more reason to strive on and on until the elusive peace in Mindanao is with us. I am sure our counterparts in government shared the same feeling and resolve to finish our jobs within the administration of President Benigno Aquino III. I have seen and experienced similar if not far more serious hitches in the talks especially from 1997 to 2000 wherein our counterparts in government were former military generals like Maj. Gen. Fortunato Abat, Major Gen. Orlando Soriano, and Maj. Gen. Edgardo Batenga. Despite their military backgrounds, we find them exciting and challenging to deal with, notwithstanding the fact that oftentimes we hardly reached our bases and fighting erupted, because at that time, there was no IMT to speak of and to confer with when the going goes rough. We only had the Quick Response Team (QRT) and the Independent Fact-Finding Committee (IFFC) headed by a Catholic priest, Fr. Eliseo Mercado Jr., who is both friend of government and the MILF.

Frankly, it is not true to say that military men are not good negotiators, as my experience disproves this assertion; in fact, sometimes, it is far more difficult to deal with lawyers, who by profession are trained to argue even on the issue of words, terms, phrases, or clauses. There is a little bit of exaggeration in this assertion, but my intention here is to drum-beat the fact that good negotiators cannot only come from a single set of profession.

Perhaps, as a soothing equalizer, let me inform you also that at no time in the past that the international community is actively involved in the pushing the GPH-MILF peace negotiation to success than at present. Some members of the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as several international non-government organizations, are already on board the peace process. Their involvement, to me, is a big plus factor for the negotiation that neither the government nor the MILF can afford to ignore or even to downplay. Extension of good offices is more the rule in international conflict resolutions rather than an exception. As proponent of peace, justice, and development, their defining moment comes when the choices of the parties in negotiation are narrowed down to fewer options.

Finally, let me reiterate here the point that the ceasefire is a very important component of the peace-making in Mindanao. It is also good confidence-building measure, in support of the negotiations. For this reason, I appeal to everyone and sundry to be truthful and sincere in discharging his duties and responsibilities. One can argue and justify, say a violation of the ceasefire, but in the end, it does not solve anything at all. Truth will always come out in the end; it cannot be suppressed forever. And lastly, please remember that while all of you either belong to the government or MILF, and you are bound by the guidelines set by your principal, the fact still remains that you are here to uphold the ceasefire and solve those problems or violations that stand on the way. Therefore, as much as possible, please be considerate and accommodative in order to give way to the higher reason for your being here; i.e., helping the government and MILF through their respective peace panels in finding a just, lasting, and acceptable negotiated political settlement of the century-old Moro Question and the four decade-old armed conflict in Mindanao.

Thank you and good morning.

Our People And Their Leaders Have Spoken

Opening statement during the 29th GPH-MILF Peace Talks in KL on July 16-19, 2012

It is my pleasure to thank all of those who came and attended the MILF-sponsored "Moro leaders' Assembly" in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao last July 6-9. In particular, I want to express my thank and gratitude to the Malaysian facilitator, HE

Dato Tengku Abd' Ghaafar bin Tengku Mohamed, my honorable counterpart from the government, Dean Marvic Leonen and members of his panel, Prof. Miriam Ferrer, Secretary Senen Bacani, Prof. Hamid Barra, and Bai Yasmin Busran-Lao, and of course, the members of the International Contact Group (ICG) led by David Gorman, Dr. Steven Rood, Minister Keizo Takewaka, Ms. Emma Leslie, and Sabih Can Kanadoglu of the Turkish Embassy in Manila Let me also extend my great appreciation to Secretary Teresita "Ging" Deles-Quintos for taking time to join the MILF in this assembly. Her presence speaks well of the future of the peace talks. To all of the guests and visitors, our sincerest gratitude for their valued presence that made our assembly more exciting and well engaged.

Today, we are about to venture into the crux of this current negotiation. If we do not summon all the remaining powers within us and face the future with resolve and sincerity, we might be the victim of the quicksand of uncertainty. But there is a way to do this more easily. We can ease this burden by doing a little of statesmanship to make this tough job easier. Here's how. It is a fact that after almost two years into the Aquino administration we have already agreed to establish a real self-governing new entity in place of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) within the larger Philippine state. This we describe it in the MILF circle as a "state-substate asymmetrical arrangement" which in reality is the essence of the federal system of government. A federal system of government is one that divides the powers of government between the central government and state or local governments. Each level of government has competence in some areas and shares powers in other areas. For this reason, we can fast track the discussion of power-sharing and wealth-sharing by examining all models of federalism and get inspiration there from. The government must be magnanimous to yield those powers that are freely conceded to the state government in these models. Through this we can save goodwill and time, which we direly need in confronting other hitches in our peace negotiation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me reiterate the need to resolve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao now and not later. First, the momentum for this peace settlement is at hand. The people and their leaders, who were gathered in Darapanan, representing diverse organizational and party affiliations, have clearly spoken in favor of this settlement. The international community had also conveyed the same message. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Indonesian government have sent their respective representatives. None so far had ever spoken ill of the MILF and its quest for the solution to this conflict, including those who represented the MNLF. They never stated any doubt about the inclusive approach of the MILF.

Members of the indigenous peoples, the women, and the old and young folks have all been represented.

In brief, their messages are loud and clear. The MILF can be a reliable partner in the search for peace in Mindanao. It has also demonstrated that it can relate to all sectors of Moro society, which is an indication that the MILF enjoys the trust of the people and their leaders. One former Moro congressman, whom I cannot identify now, told those 800 or so gathered during the Moro leaders' assembly proper on July 8 that the MILF should go ahead with its grand agenda for the people and not to listen to the whispers of other people including those who pretend to be their leaders. He expressed confidence in the maturity and wisdom of the MILF leadership and the correctness of its political line.

Our people and their leaders have spoken. A popular leader like President Benigno Aquino III should now listen, which I believe he will. To a Christian like him, a practicing at that, "the voice of the people is the voice of God" carries so much weight. I am sure, he will discern on it so seriously. Besides, a good son of a good senator, a martyr and a national hero, what the MILF is pushing through in the negotiating table now is lesser than what his late father, Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., had promised to the Moros in his famous speech on the resolution of the Moro Problem delivered at the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on May 12, 1981. Allow me to quote a portion of that speech, which I believe has relevance in our negotiation today:

> *"... That all Christian troops in Mindanao should be withdrawn from that area. It takes two to fight. If there are no more soldiers, there will be no more fighting and therefore, we will be able to disconnect the fighting. All Christian troops will be removed from those Muslim areas and we will let the Muslims police themselves. We will tell them, we are removing the Christian troops, and you set up your own police force, you set up your regional forces, you police yourselves because we do not want any more conflict between Christian and non-Christian communities."*

In another portion, he had this bold proposal:

> *"....We will propose that the Muslims set up their own courts, their own "Shariah" courts, their own schools, their own madrasahs. If they want to use Arabic to teach their children, let them use Arabic to teach their children. Why should we impose English or Tagalog, if they should also have their own courts, and they should also have their own schools? Their local autonomy should a Muslim [sic] and this should be elected by their own people. The national government will always support them if they are entitled to by way of development."*

"I believe the Muslim community should be allowed to call in their lawyers and set up their own civil code as against our own civil code. If this will be achieved, it will go along essential opportunities that will signal the beginning of the renaissance in the Muslim Philippines, which some five hundred years ago was the center of the Filipino culture, learning and power. With the assistance of the Islamic Conference, funds for development could be secured ushering all over the Philippines.We feel that if our brothers will be united and the hostilities will stop, we can set up training camps, educational institutions all over Mindanao so that the products of these institutions can come to the Middle East for better employment ...."

Finally, I appeal to the international community particularly members of the ICG to extend all possible help to the government and the MILF to overcome their differences and sign the comprehensive compact immediately. Malaysia, as the facilitating country, is doing a very fine job, but any external help within the bound of agreed terms of reference is certainly a welcome development. A breakthrough in this endeavor is certainly to the best interests of the parties, especially the Philippine government that is also confronting another problem in the South China Sea. Instead of easing, it appears the row is far from over.

Thank you and good day.

Keys To Shift Conflicts From Arms To Dialogue

Paper read at Hiroshima University Partnership Project for Peace-building and Capacity Development (HiPeC) at Hiroshima, Japan on August 2-3, 2012

This paper aims at directly responding to the theme of this workshop, "Keys to Shift Conflicts from Arms to Dialogue," with my thought also drifting to the other auxiliary issues that require serious and sincere reflections on why and how this shift has taken place, but whose terminal point is yet to be reckoned by the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). They are still in the thick of hard negotiation. Honestly, the end of this process is difficult to foresee, although what is clear now is that it is in the final stretch; and for which reason, discussions are getting more intense and, at times, emotional. The cliché that in negotiation, the devils are in the details is very much evident.

As a backdrop, as a member of the underground revolutionary movement for almost 40 years since 1972, I must confess that this shift from militancy to dialogue is not an easy transformation. This was also true with the rest of the leaders in the MILF. How much more difficult it is if the decision is made at the formal organizational level. Consider the following obstacles in the shift of policy:

First, when one decides to fight the government, it carries with it not just the litany of legitimate grievances against it, but a program to change the system or status quo, which, in the first place, caused the miseries and sufferings of our people. To achieve this, the main approach is through armed struggle. The premise is that the status quo will not yield to reformist approach except by force of arms or revolutionary struggle.

Second, the excesses of the state and its armed forces continued unabated even in the course of the negotiation.

Third, any appearance of "softening" by anyone in the movement does not auger well for the rest. Sometimes, it is viewed very negatively.

Fourth, after persevering in organizing the people into committees and the military into a fighting force, in addition to a support from those who are engaged in the open and legal struggle, any radical shift in approach, even for strategic or tactical reasons, is hard to justify in the eyes of our people and our fighters.

And fifth, a localized peace talks is largely considered as giving in to the dictate of the enemy, because the playing field is not level. The government has all the edge, in terms of resources, skills, and manpower. It can also use the open engagement to pry on the secrets of the rebel organization. This is the rationale why it took the MILF 20 years before it decided to negotiate peace with the GPH in 1997.

Indeed, the negotiation that ensued was not easy. Our counterparts in government were former military generals, and at times, while we were still facing each other in the negotiating table, fighting had already or was already taking place somewhere. This harsh state of the negotiation remained for years until it suffered a major setback in 2000. President Joseph Estrada declared an all-out war against the MILF, despite the ceasefire and the on-going negotiation. More than a million people were displaced; hundreds of combatants and civilians on both sides died or wounded; and millions worth of properties were destroyed. As a consequence, the negotiation bogged down completely. The MILF withdrew its peace panel and hit back, using a highly mobile tactical counter-

offensive. But in his characteristic "arrogance", Estrada summarily declared victory after government forces succeeded to occupy some of the major camps of the MILF, without knowing that the withdrawal was largely part of the tactical maneuver of the MILF to engage the enemy in full guerrilla warfare, which is most suited for smaller forces fighting a superior enemy.

The bloodshed could have prolonged indefinitely, but an unexpected event took place. President Estrada was ousted from office and Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed the presidency. She immediately reversed the all-out war policy of Estrada into all-out peace policy and asked Malaysia's help to convince the MILF to resume the negotiation. True enough, the talks resumed not long after. This, however, elevated the peace talks from the domestic stage to the diplomatic stage, with third party facilitation. However, barely two years after, Arroyo resorted to the same policy of her predecessor by declaring another all-out war against the MILF, this time in Buliok Complex in Pikit, North Cotabato on February 11, 2003. The target, dubbed as "high value", was no less than the late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim who was delivering an early morning sermon for the Eid'l Adha prayers marking the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Almost simultaneously, the lairs of Vice Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and Vice Chairman Ghazali Jaafar were also target. Both leaders luckily anticipated the dragnets and escaped unscathed.

Because of this treachery, reviving the talks was very difficult. Trust was at its lowest level. It was compounded by the lengthening peace process. Adding to this difficulty was the intense lobbying of the Arroyo administration with the United States Government to declare the MILF as a "terrorist organization". The Arroyo government almost succeeded had not the MILF been quicker in the draw when it engaged the United States constructively earlier on. The late Chairman Salamat Hashim had sent a letter to President George Bush reminding him of the unfinished obligation of the United States to correct the "historic injustice" committed against the Moros when it "illegally and immorally" annexed the Moro homeland into the Philippines in the grant of independence in 1946. President Bush responded through the US Assistant Secretary of State affirming that the US recognized the "legitimate grievances" of the Moros, which shall be addressed through a peaceful negotiation between the two parties. When President Bush addressed the Joint Session of the Congress of the Philippines in 2003, he mentioned the Salamat's letter and urged the Philippine government and the MILF to resume their negotiation immediately. He also promised to extend help to the peace process "politically" and "economically".

At this juncture, the two parties signed the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the GPH-MILF Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) whose main task and responsibility is "to interdict and isolate" kidnap-for-ransom groups; and by extension it covers also the so-called terrorists, because kidnapping is also their forte. These twin developments effectively staved off the terrorist tag to the MILF. The main reason, however, is the fact that the MILF is truly a revolutionary organization with a clear political agenda. As such, it disdained resort to anti-people activities like kidnapping, robbery, extortion, etc.

In the meantime, the peace negotiation continued to crawl forward, despite the fragile ceasefire on the ground and the occasional flare-up of skirmishes in some part of Mindanao. But the parties persevered and moved on. This time they agreed to bring in the International Monitoring Team (IMT) led by Malaysia, and with Libya, Japan, Brunei, as members. The task is mainly to monitor the ceasefire agreement and create peace and tranquility on the ground while the two parties engage in the negotiating table.

By this time, the parties had already signed the implementing guidelines for the two aspects of the Tripoli Agreement of 2001, namely, on security and relief, rehabilitation, and development, which brought them to confront the third and last aspect, the ancestral domain, which is a very difficult matter to crack. They put this in the agenda of talks in December 2004 and after three years and eight months of hard bargaining, they clinched a deal called Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) which they initialed on July 27, 2008, but not after an MILF walkout the day before, in protest of the changing of positions by the government. They set August 5 as the formal signing ceremony, which attracted several foreign dignitaries including the US Ambassador to the Philippines, Kristie Kenny. But what was set as a day of rejoicing turned out to be a black day. The Philippine Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional.

Given this setback in the negotiation, the reaction of the MILF, at least its three commanders – Abdullah "Bravo" Macapaar, Omra Kato, and Ali Pangalian – was almost predictable and instantaneous. Without clear mandate from the MILF central leadership, they initiated firefights in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte. At first, the Arroyo administration adopted a hardline stance, and sent massive force for a counter-offensive. But the MILF stood its ground and refused to budge an inch including condemning its three commanders. The most that it conceded was to call for a third party investigation to determine who was really guilty in starting the firefight. While it can easily concede that Bravo started the haywire in Lanao del Norte, but in North Cotabato, Kato was the aggrieved party. He was attacked by government soldiers and militias in Aleosan, North Cotabato on July 1, 2008, without justifiable reason.

Not long after, the Arroyo administration agreed to cease fighting and wanted the negotiation to resume. The MILF refused to return to the negotiating table and denounced the government as traitor for failing to sign the MOA-AD. Malaysia, as third party facilitator, intervened and asked the MILF to reconsider its decision and to return to the negotiating table immediately. After some serious inner thoughts, the MILF agreed to resume the negotiation on the condition that an international guarantee must be in place. The government refused to accept the nomenclature, citing that no state on its own volition could accept outside imposition. However, after some back-channeling or shuttling, the term "International Contact Group" or ICG was agreed by the parties, whose main function is to "exert proper leverage" to the parties. The ICG is composed of states and international non-government organizations (INGOs) namely, for the states: the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and for the INGOs: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, The Asia Foundation, Conciliation Resources, and Muhammadiyah.

Meanwhile, while there was relative peace in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte, the Province of Maguindanao became the new scene of disturbances. More than 300,000 people fled their homes and evacuated to safer places. The military also blocked the flows of food, medicines, and other supplies to the beleaguered communities. The desperate situation came to fore when Lt. Col. Jonathan Ponce, spokesman of the Army 6th Infantry Division in Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao, described these internally displaced persons (IDPs) as "enemy reserve force'. He made matter worst when he made the pronouncement during an interview with a group of media, some of whom came from Manila, and a few were members of international news agencies and wire services. As a consequence, the MILF pounded on this blunder and demanded that a mechanism attached to the IMT must be in place for the protection of non-combatants including children, women, and old folks. This gave way to the creation of the fourth component called "Civilian Protection Component" (CPC) of the IMT, now having additional members namely, Norway, Indonesia, and the European Union.

Currently, CPC has four members: Non-Violent Peaceforce, an international NGO, Mindanao People's Caucus, MinHRac, and MOGOP.

By the way, the other components of IMT are Security, Socio-economic, and Humanitarian, Rehabilitation, and Development. Malaysia leads the security; Japan the socio-economic; and the European Union the HRDC.

Today, the GPH-MILF peace negotiation is creeping forward very slowly. Two years into the Aquino administration, the parties have managed only to sign one agreement

of consequence. This is GPH-MILF Decision Points on Principles, which they signed on April 24, 2012. Whether there will be signing of the comprehensive compact or merely a framework agreement is difficult to say. The difficulty lies in the very nature of the Moro Problem or Moro Question, which is centuries-old problem, and the protracted nature of negotiation. By their nature, all sovereignty-based negotiations, except perhaps, the Aceh-Indonesia peace negotiation, are incremental in character. Besides, the status quo is so established that undoing it is not an easy task. Those enjoying the benefits will naturally resort to everything, including brute force, to prevent any change thereof. The problem gets even more difficult, because those in the top echelon of government, who are the decision-makers, are the ones mainly benefitting from the status quo. Moreover, there are many spoilers who do not want the peace talks to succeed. Their motives are varied, ranging from hatred to whatever is associated with the Moros or Islam to ensuring that their selfish or vested interests are not put in harm's way. Their eyes and ears are closed and they cannot see reasons except theirs.

By the way, there are other institutions, blocs and players, aside from the Philippine state, which are powerful and are not onboard the peace process. If they are only supportive, they will make a big difference, perhaps including the signing of the comprehensive compact. Who are they? They are the business groups, some of whom are in government, the Catholic Church in the Philippines, which holds at least the spiritual side of the majority Christians in the Philippines including their leaders, and members of the Fourth Estate or the media, which are generally hostile when it comes to giving powers to Moros in general. One can see the extent of their biases, prejudices, and hatred in their writings, editorials, columns, and talk shows.

Similarly, the international community is not fully mobilized in support of the peace process. The inability partly rests in the limited capability of the parties to involve or rally them on the basis of clear proof that it is to their national interests that the Moro Question will be settled once and for all. The other consideration is the fact that there is not enough stakes in the problem in Mindanao that the international community will consider as very important and strategic. This explains why the international community is slow in the coming, as compared to their swift responses in Kosovo, East Timor, South Sudan, Northern Ireland, and even Libya. In these conflicts, the stakes for the international community are high in terms of security, military, political, and economic.

The GPH-MILF peace negotiation is entering its 16th year and by any stretch of imagination, this is already too long a process. Surely, uneasiness to fatigue is creeping into the players, particularly on the rebel side, who, after all, want a fundamental change,

a real change for the better. The ideologues in their ranks can certainly sustain through to the end. But surely they will not be there in the driver's seat forever. Thereafter and inevitably, the young will soon be in the saddle. What can we, therefore, expect from this crop of new leaders who are borne in the heat of frustration and treachery of the government? Combine these with their idealism and the radicalism of the day, the outcome is not hard to foresee. This is the concern of the current leadership of the MILF. If the problem will not be settled during their lifetime, a chance of solving it in the next episode with the emerging young Moro leaders is hard to imagine. It is on this urgency that solving this conflict without delay is of paramount priority.

Thank you very much for lending me your ears.

Bargaining Becomes More Intense In The Final Stage

Opening statement during the 30th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on August 7-11, 2012

I do not intend to deliver a long speech today. Much of what I am supposed to say now has already been highlighted in my previous speeches and it is fasting month of Ramadan.

Clearly, we are now traversing the last stretch of our 15-year peace negotiation, and for which reason, we can expect every sort of obstacle and complication. It is the nature of this undertaking that bargaining becomes more intense in the final stage. If we do not persevere, we will either fall on the wayside or we become the victim of our own making.

As every real negotiator would tell, especially we in the MILF side, because some of us have been in the negotiation for more than a decade, negotiation is never easy; it is never fun. It is very difficult and exhausting. It is incremental. Honestly, the telling effect of this prolonged engagement is more felt on the rebel's side rather than on the government side. The reason for this is simple. There are numerous men and women out there who can be tapped by the government to defend the status quo, while we find rare souls who are willing to serve the MILF for free and with all the attending hardships. More seriously, it is very hard to find the right man or woman, who is sincere to the cause, has the knowledge of the issues in the negotiation and willingness to take the risks

and undergo hardships that come with the negotiation. This difficulty was very much evident when, in the case of the MILF, the negotiation was in its domestic stage where our counterparts were mostly military men. Sometimes, while we were still talking, fighting had already taken place elsewhere.

However, despite the hardships and risks, we find happiness and strength in the undertaking, because we are doing this for our people. We do not expect recompense in this regard, except that out of our sacrifice we expect good future for our people, especially the generations yet to come. We know that the fruits of this undertaking will not be reaped much by the present generations.

On the lighter side of this exercise, another hitch is how to manage expectation and frustration. Any stress on one against the other will create big problem for the parties in the future. But even if the parties can handle this satisfactorily, sometimes, those outside of the loop pretend to know more than those sweating it out in the negotiating table. Look at the short message system (sms) or texts circulating back home especially in Mindanao that the government and MILF have already signed the framework agreement for the establishment of the new Bangsamoro political entity when the truth of the matter is that we are still here in Kuala Lumpur trying to hammer out this issue. The end of the road for this is still very much to be reckoned by the parties. We do not know when this will happen, although we hope it to be soon!

More seriously, it is in the concluding stage of the negotiation that the spoilers are expected to launch their last-ditch efforts to frustrate our effort to conclude these talks successfully. The recent aggression initiated by the so-called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) against government forces is an example of dirty spoiling. Their intention is clearly to shame us and to stop the peace negotiation. But will they succeed? It depends on the MILF and the government. If we are not decided to settle the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao, then we become their first casualty and their laughing stock.

This development also underscores the difficulty facing the MILF in pursuing the negotiation track to solve the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. The so-called radicals are not only distancing themselves from the pacific approach of the MILF, but they are branding us "traitors" for engaging in peace talks with the adversary. Surely, they will not stop until they see the total failure of this negotiation. But by God's leave, however, they will not succeed. The MILF knows that it is pursuing the right way to solve these twin problems in Mindanao. The path of peace is always the preferred way

than the road of war. The late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim once said: "The most civilized and practical way to solve the Moro Problem is through a negotiated political settlement." In this way, everybody is a winner.

But rest assured that the MILF is confronting the problem of radicalism, especially among the youths, head-on. Of course, the so-called terrorists are not part of the equation. We know that some of those radicals can be won over to the pacific method of resolving the conflict in Mindanao, as indeed, some are already onboard the MILF after series of dialogues with them. It is a matter of reaching out and patiently explaining to them the pacific ways of the MILF. As per our experience, this group is divided into three categories: the ideologues, the uninformed, and the "rah-rah" boys. We have gained substantially in winning over the last two categories, but we are still locked up in the battle of the minds and ideas with those in the first category.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is often asserted that opportunity knocks only once. If we cannot seize the current favorable atmosphere of the negotiation, we lose the opportunity --- and the option to non-pacific ways is in the offing. To me there is no other better time to settle this problem than at present. First, the Bangsamoro people are in the mood to settle this conflict; second, the Aquino administration is still enjoying a high popularity rating, and President Benigno Aquino III is strongly viewed as willing to give the peace process all the chances to succeed; third, the current leadership of the MILF is solid, consistent, and reasonably pragmatic; fourth, the international community is urging both parties to conclude the peace talks without delay; and fifth, the conflict in the South China Sea is still not brewing to the hilt. Perhaps, the sixth reason is that the MILF has demonstrated itself as a reliable partner in peace-making. If we do not want to lose this momentum, then we must seize it by signing the agreement that will address the problem in Mindanao. And altogether, we can face the future with much hope and confidence.

Thank you very much!

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Battle Of Ideas Raging Among Moro Groups

Opening statement during 31st GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on September 5-7, 2012

First and foremost, let me reiterate my and the MILF's expression of condolence and sorrow for the death of Interior and Local Government Secretary Jesse Robredo during a plane crash in the seas off Masbate last August 18. This indeed is a great loss not only to the family and relatives and to the Aquino administration but also to the peace process in Mindanao. The late Secretary will always be remembered as a strong supporter and mover of this peace-making effort. I hope that his successor in the DILG will follow his footsteps in supporting the peace process in Mindanao. I hope the newly appointed DILG Secretary, in the person of former Secretary of Transportation and Communication Mar Roxas III, will actively work behind President Benigno Aquino III efforts to finally settle the Moro Question and the armed conflict in Mindanao. We hope that what he did to the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 leading to the defeat in the Supreme Court is going to be a thing of the past. To the new DILG Secretary, here's our message: The future is more important than the past.

Today, the GPH-MILF peace negotiation is passing through a defining moment, nay critical phase, which allows no complacency on the part of the parties. Very clearly, the spoilers are mounting their guns and are ganging up on us and certainly if they have their way, they want us to stop and fail. The recent "aggression" of the so-called BIFM/BIFF is a clear example. Their agenda, as I mentioned previously, was two-fold: to shame the MILF (and the government) and to stop the peace talks. What made their sinister act doubly serious is they are not acting alone. The collusion of some personalities or groups is documented, but which I do not want to divulge details in this speech, lest it will stir another complication. But I am so sure, the government or its military, given their good intelligence network, is fully aware of this development.

At this juncture, let me inform you that in the face of this serious development that undermines the negotiation, and more importantly, causing sufferings and displacements of civilians, the MILF did not take the challenge sitting down. We mobilized more than 3,000 of our forces and encircled the 200 or so BIFF forces, which are divided and isolated into two groups, and demanded that they cease their aggression or we will be forced to resort to our last option. As a result, five of their top commanders including Mohiddin Animbang or popularly known as Kagi Karialen, their vice chairman on military affairs and chief of staff signed a deed of commitment not to create trouble

while the negotiation is moving forward. However, Ameril Omra Kato and Mohammad Ali Tambako, chairman and vice chairman of their group, respectively, are yet to affix their signatures on the paper. Kato's signing the document, however, is most unlikely, because he is seriously ill and can hardly speak or move --- and is no longer in control of the group.

As of yesterday, the MILF has loosened the containment a little to allow them breathing space and to rethink their position rationally, and perhaps, change in favor of pacific ways. At the same time, we are monitoring their movement very closely.

Without saying, the MILF's upper hand position in the face of the current hard situation obtaining in some parts of Maguindanao and North Cotabato hinges on various factors. One, both the ideological and political lines of the MILF remain very valid and not seriously challenged; two, the MILF enjoys popular support; three, the MILF's has a functioning people's committees; fourth, the MILF's legitimacy and international support is growing; and fifth, the MILF's military strength is more than all of those in the hands of other Moro armed groups combined. In addition, the MILF leadership is firm and decisive; once a decision is made, it is carried out without hesitation.

However, the sad part of this harsh reality is that these challenges will not cease in the near foreseeable future. This can be inherited even beyond the signing of an agreement, which, therefore, require the parties to this negotiation to rethink proactively how the new political entity --- and the MILF --- would be able to cope up with these challenges. This is a challenge that we negotiators of the government and MILF must now think of seriously.

To reiterate, there is a stiff and protracted battle of ideas raging among Moro groups in Mindanao. This phenomenon is not only true to our case in Mindanao, but rather this is the rule in all conflicts elsewhere in the world. This is also true among policy makers in governments. In our case, one group bats for radical approach, which is militaristic, and another follows the MILF's line, which pursues for a negotiated political settlement of the conflict in Mindanao. An outright verdict in this controversy is not forthcoming. An idea cannot be defeated by any other means effectively, except by a better idea and well-thought-out program of action. This can only effectively happen and put to rest when after signing an agreement with the government, the MILF can deliver and the condition of the people will change for the better.

Lastly, an article posted in the Mindanews carried a statement of Secretary Teresita Deles of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) seeing

bright prospects for peace in Mindanao as negotiations with the MILF are "making headway". This is the first time, as far as I know, the good Secretary has ever made a very positive statement, short of saying that the agreement is already in the bag. I hope she was quoted correctly.

Perhaps, this optimism reflects the positive response of the government to the proposal of the MILF vis-à-vis some of the remaining sticky points still to be hurdled by the parties. In such a case, signing the Framework Agreement is not a remote possibility. It can happen, perhaps not in a very distant future.

On this note, let me thank all of you for giving me the chance to speak before you.

We Must Examine Our Differences

Speech at the University of Santo Tomas on September 12, 2012

It is indeed a great honor to be invited here at this prestigious University of Santo Tomas, the oldest university in the Philippines, to speak on a topic close to my heart. I thank Dr. Lilian Sison, Dean of the UST Graduate School, and concurrently Secretary General, Religions for Peace Philippines, for this invitation, and of course, my friend and my junior, Associate Prof. Pablito Baybado Jr., for the kind introduction.

Manila and its environs are not strange to me. I studied and stayed here for more than seven years until I decided to go home in 1972 and directly joined the underground movement, then under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Up to this time as I stand before you, I am still technically a "rebel". It is only the ceasefire and the peace negotiation that allows me to surface and engage everyone on the discourse of peace. I consider this topic as one of the best themes that any man or woman can talk about, promote and live in. After all, as a Muslim, I know the meaning of Islam is peace. We always strive for peace even at the time of war.

As I said, the subject that you asked me to deal on is close to my heart. Why I am saying this? The reasons are twofold: First, I have been involved in this negotiation for 14 years and as chairman of the MILF peace panel for 10 years since July 29, 2003. It has already become a vocation on my part; and second, the main agenda of this negotiation, which is now officially referred to by the government and MILF as "Moro Question",

concerns my people, of which I am a part. Their suffering is my suffering, their pain is my pain, and I share their aspiration, and more importantly, I swear to myself to fight for their rights and future through to the end of my life.

In that letter, you asked me to speak on the present "**Aspirations and State of the Bangsamoro people including the Status of the GPH-MILF Peace Process**". This subject usually requires long discourse especially when one links or intersects it with the current status of the peace process. But let me try to do it in the simplest way that I know by skirting away from the intricacies of vague assumptions and controversial assertions. Simply put, the aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is political, but with the ingredients of historical, social, cultural, emotional, economic, religious, is they want to run their life "free of any imposition". In essence, this is their right to self-determination, which is an inalienable right of people enshrined in various UN conventions. If a separate state, an independent one, is not possible, given the fact the MILF is not demanding for the option to secede in this negotiation, as what the South Sudanese Christians demanded, then what we are pushing here is a state-substate asymmetrical relationship with the Philippine state. This is the most concrete expression of this aspiration. By this stance, we are in effect conveying the message very clearly that it is time to deal with where we differ and not where we agree. It is in our differences which is the problem and not where we concur. Said in another context, do not force me to accept yours and I will not coerce you to accept mine. Therefore, the government, the MILF, and everybody must examine these differences jointly or collectively and come out with an agreed formula that addresses the problem.

In more concrete frame, the government and the Bangsamoro people differ on ways to solve the Moro Question or Problem. All previous regimes in Manila starting from the American Period to the Estrada administration (In fairness, both President Arroyo and President Benigno Aquino III adopted a much better approach than their predecessors) wanted to integrate or assimilate our people into national body politic, but we vehemently resisted to the point of rising up in arms against the state. Our people wanted to create their own independent state. This is the uncommonality, and this is where we have to exert our efforts to look deep into this difference. Such cliché' "we are all Filipinos" is no longer a yardstick to calm the restlessness among our people in Mindanao. It never did and has never put this to rest. In reality, it did more harm than good, because it lumped everybody together irrespective of their differences. Most always, the good pours down to the majority; only by good fortune does it trickle down to the minority.

Therefore, this attitude of total indifference to where we differ will make us understand vividly the consequence on the state of the Bangsamoro people. Let us not go back to 1570 when Manila and Tondo were ruled by Moro chieftains nor to the start of the Moro-Spanish War in Mindanao in 1578; that was long time ago and people sometimes do not want to be reminded of history. They want present reality as basis of solving people's problem. But let us reckon right at the time the United States threw out the Spaniards in the Philippines in 1898, and subsequently made their foothold in Mindanao complete. During that period, the Moros were not only the rulers of the island but they were also the majority. Their fighting force was no less than 30,000 fully armed and ready to die for a cause. They also owned 98% of the lands. Except in the Caraga region, which directly faces the Visayas, and therefore very near for settlers to come, Christian migrants in other areas only started to arrive in 1912 at the instance of the Americans. The Moro Province (made up of the districts of Sulu, Zamboanga, Lanao, Davao, and Cotabato), which was created by the Americans in 1903 (and abolished in 1913) was 90% populated by Moros and indigenous people tribes. Today, after more than 60 years into Filipino domination, the Moros lost about 80% of their lands and are a minority even in the once Moro Province. Instead of improving their lives and protecting their rights, properties, and their lands, the annexation created a harsh situation where the majority Filipinos became the rulers and the Moros the subjects. Examine the laws passed and even the Philippine Constitution itself, they are serving the interests of the majority. This is the reason why in the current negotiation the Constitution is also contested. While theoretically there is democracy in the Philippines, this democracy is elitist; it favors the rich and the powerful. The poor has no chance in winning in election and of defending themselves in court, much more serious if they belong to the Moros. Remember the thousands of Moros massacred by government troops; e.g., Pata Island Massacre (3,000 killed), Patikul Massacre (700), Palembang Massacre (1,000), and many more.

This is the current state of our people. Perhaps, other people would argue that the main cause of this marginalization is attributed to Moros themselves, because they are ignorant, uneducated, lazy, etc. Our answer was and has been and will always be this: "We were better off when we were not in Filipino hands. Our various sultanates have withstood the onslaught of colonizers. Better sever us from this republic and let the Moros swim or die by his own making".

This is the reason why in the current negotiation, we are pushing, as noted earlier, for at least a state-substate asymmetrical relation, which is actually a system of federalism. But we cannot call it outright federalism, because the Philippines have a unitary system of government, where all sovereign powers belong to the central authority and not shared, as in federal system.

In regard to the current status of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation, it is fortunate that while there are still big elephants in the room that prevent the parties from concluding their talks, there is modest stride in this negotiation, especially during the latest round, the 31st GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks last September 5-8, 2012. Atty. Datu Michael Mastura and I have just returned from that talks and we have not yet returned home to Mindanao.

The positive thing in the current negotiation is that I could sense that the government peace panel is recently engaged in problem-solving with us rather than treating the exercise as mere management of the conflict. By this, the remaining bottlenecks in the talks can be creatively handled by both parties, using various approaches, like resorting to constructive ambiguity in the text of agreement, which will be dealt on later by the parties.

After the parties signed the Ten-Point Decision Points on Principles in April 2012, the MILF and government peace panels have proceeded with modest speed to discuss the proposed Framework Agreement which contains essential elements leading to the establishment of new political entity, replacing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which is a mere administrative unit of government for the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao.

The essential elements which are currently under discussion in the negotiation, some of which have been settled, are transition mechanism, power-sharing, wealth-sharing, territory or geographical areas, police and internal security, constitutional issues, normalization, etc.

Towards the end of this month, we will go back to Kuala Lumpur and confront the remaining issues including the most contentious ones. The frequency of the meeting, sometimes twice in a month, speaks of the urgency that the two parties see in closing the deal. The government has set a timetable for which it can smoothly deliver its commitment. Strictly speaking, we are not acting on the basis of that timeline. However, our stand is that if we can get what is good for our people, the sooner we achieve it, the better. We have been in this negotiation for almost 16 years and by any stretch of imagination this is too long a process. People are already anxious to see results and they want it sooner than later. Both parties are fully conscious of the negative impact if this negotiation fails. Besides, the spoilers are always active to frustrate our peaceful ambitions. They are always ready to strike at any opportune moment to shame us and stop the negotiation.

It is on this premise that we once again appeal to everyone to share a hand in pushing this peace negotiation successfully. Everybody must own the negotiation, because all of us have a stake in it. The success of this negotiation will redound to the benefit of everyone, and inversely, its failure, especially when war occurs, affects us all. More urgently, it is important for the government to settle its home front problem while the external threat is still knocking at our borders. Doing it soon is the best part of judgment.

Thank you very much!

Need To Manage Expectations

Opening statement during the 32nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on October 2-5, 2012

I want to say here again that the negotiation is now in the homestretch --- and the smell of success is reinforced every day. We all know this, because we are the ones involved in this negotiation. We also know that the unsettled issues are not insurmountable; they are well within our grasps. If we persevere and remain reasonable, we will have it soon, God willing!

However, this impending success will not be reason for complacency. Nothing is in the basket yet, so to say. Besides, the dangers of success are harder to notice. By the time, you come face to face with it, you will feel as if the whole world has fallen on you. This is simply because you are not prepared and could not get out of the way in time. Remember that negotiation, contrary to what many believe, is a risky business. If we cannot conclude it soon successfully now that we are at the brink of the exercise, we will be in trouble.

For all we know, the greatest source of risk comes from spoilers – leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it. There is no need for me to be very specific on this. I know the government and the military are fully aware of what I am saying here. This uncertainty is further complicated by the onset of the elections next year. As expected, switching of party affiliations is the rule, and this is coupled with complex unprincipled alliances that those hardened political enemies in yesteryears are now the best of friends or allies.

Sad to say, however, that this positive picture of the peace process is not all positive for us. It has the dark side of it. The far-reaching expectation that it creates amongst the people is what we are worried of. The higher the expectation, the higher also the frustrations if they are not met. We therefore need to manage this expectation head on.

Worse, the negative impact is more felt in the MILF rather than on the government. First, the MILF cannot fully deliver, especially basic services to the people, during the two succeeding interim periods. It can only start to deliver if in the election, in case it decides to convert itself into a political party, it wins and forms the government of the new political entity. And second, our access to media is very limited. The media cannot only make heroes or villains, but can also unmake good governance.

Therefore, we need to put up an effective communication strategy, the main emphasis of which are five-fold: (1) the absence of war in our midst is in itself a gain for everybody; (2) the rules of engagement under a choking unitary government arrangement has been remedied by the agreement to make the playing field level; (3) the people at large are freer in the determination of their political life than any time in the past; (4) there is more access to international aid packages than ever. With good partnership of the parties and the international donor countries and agencies and correct assessments of people's needs, these development projects will not only uplift people's lives, but more importantly make communities safer to live in; and (5) the people should be reminded that real deliverance must come from within or amongst themselves, and not from elsewhere. The Holy Qur'an says: "Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change it themselves."

Finally, let me sincerely thank the two heads of states, President Benigno Aquino III and Prime Minister Dato' Sri Haji Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, for making those very encouraging statements made at the sideline of the APEC Summit in Vladivostok in Russia last September 7 – that a peace pact is forthcoming in Mindanao. We know that the two leaders have a full grasp of what is taking place in the negotiation and they know what they are talking and where we are all going.

On this note, let me thank all of you also for lending me your ears in listening to my opening statement. Shukran and wassalam!

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Once We Commit, We Stand By It

Opening Statement during the 34th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on December 12-14, 2012

At the outset allow me to extend my heartfelt congratulation and felicitation for the appointment of Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel as the new government chief peace negotiator, replacing Dean Marvic Leonen who was appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court. I recall with utmost respect our hot and cold interactions in the negotiating table which ended in a milestone achievement when we signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Please extend to him my and my delegation's best wishes for his good luck and success in his new assignment in the Supreme Court.

I consider my good counterpart's appointment as new government peace panel chair, not only as a new milestone but also a great challenge in my long years in the peace negotiation and as chairman of the MILF peace panel for ten long years since July 2003. This is the first time that my counterpart in government is a woman, which I believe requires special adjustment in the way we deal with one another. However, let me tell you that even before she was appointed member of the GPH peace panel and as chairwoman now, we know each other long time ago during her involvement in the campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines, courtesy of the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines (PCBL) in conjunction with the Geneva-based Geneva Call, whose efforts led to the signing of a Deed of Commitment by the MILF in agreeing to ban the use of victim-initiated anti-personnel landmines.

Frankly, I am very confident that under her stewardship of the government peace panel, we would be able to move forward in strides in our current engagement in the negotiation. I am also optimistic that she will uphold all the solemn commitments of her predecessor, especially in relation to the President's Executive Order creating the 15-man Transition Commission, which is supposed to have been signed already by now, following the "Straight Path" policy of President Benigno Aquino III. After all, her appointment had anchored not only on the strength of her credentials but also to provide continuity and institutional memory on what has taken place and agreed on by the parties during the negotiation under the Aquino dispensation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, 2012 is about to end and the commitment by the two parties to finish the annexes especially power-sharing and wealth-sharing within this December is hanging by a hairline. I don't know if we can finish them during this

three-day meeting or we will be compelled to extend by one day or two. Normalization, however, is a different story. It is in its nature that if we can agree on the architecture or a good number of consensus points, then it is fair enough, or already very consoling. A good part of the issue is a continuing agenda that requires the participation of domestic and international players. The fourth Annex, Arrangement and Modalities, is yet to be deliberated by the parties by creating a two-man team from each side. Certainly, we have very little chance of finishing this during this meeting.

I am afraid that if we do not tighten our belts, the euphoria of the successful signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in Malacañang on October 15 will vanish in the air and frustration will ensue instead. Time is slowly ticking away and it is not coming back. To me, the only way to be on top of everything is to be serious, consistent, and honest to our commitment. More importantly, we must be truthful to the provisions of the FAB, which has provided the guidelines and parameter in handling the remaining issues in the negotiating table.

The MILF is a good partner in peace-making. Once we commit we stand by it; once we sign an agreement we fulfill it. We never had engaged or will ever engage in a double deal. Such is the way of the cursed. Similarly, we want our partner in the peace journey to do the same. Only through an honest-to-goodness deal will bring us to the successful conclusion of this negotiation. Any contrary way will bring us to disaster, which none of us wants.

Lastly, I thanked the Malaysian Government and its facilitator, HE Dato Tengku Ab' Ghafar bin Tengku Mohamed, as well as the Malaysian Secretariat led by Madame Che Khasnah for their all out support to make the GPH-MILF peace negotiation successful. I also thanked the members of the International Contact Group (ICG): the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC), The Asia Foundation, Conciliation Resources (CR), and Muhammadiyah for their unrelenting support in various ways to the GPH-MILF peace negotiation.

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Chapter 4:
Speeches from 2013

"I seek no personal gain nor glory in this process. I have been through the most difficult and painful years of our struggle for the right to self-determination. I, like thousands of our comrades in arms, years ago, have taken up arms to fight injustice and assert our inalienable right to determine our future. This has been the honorable way to respond to the call of those days. Today, I, like many of us in the armed revolutionary movement, am taking a giant leap of faith in trusting that the peaceful path is possible for us. We had put one foot in the path of peace, while we struggle to pull the other from the comfort of our mountain lairs. We are embarking on a gradual and calculated shift in our struggle from the barrels of the Kalashnikov into the mighty strokes of the pen."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**
Welcome Remarks on the Ceremonial Opening of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission on April 3, 2013 at Pasig City.

Any Failure Is Not Good For All Of Us

Opening statement during the 35th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on January 21-25, 2013

Twenty-one days after last December 31, the supposed timeline the two parties were to wrap up and sign agreements on at least three Annexes on Power-sharing, Wealth-sharing, and Transitional Arrangement and Modalities, the Parties failed to make this happen. This makes many quarters jittery and still so many others are asking why.

For some, the reason for this delay seems obvious. The issues are simply hard and contentious. Surely, this view is correct; it is true that the two annexes on power-sharing and wealth-sharing have bedevilled us for the last four months or so since we tabled them for discussion.

But is this the only reason? To me, as a way of explanation, I have great reservations on the current manner and rate we are conducting ourselves in the recent talks. It appears that there are many refrains, like a song, that should not have obstructed our way or discussed at all. I am referring to terms or concepts or powers already agreed in previous signed documents or those powers already conceded to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). They should not consume our time and effort, or tax the goodwill of the parties. These things should not be offered again and again. These are settled issues and are given.

Perhaps the other way to look at the slow process is to compare it with the time before the parties signed the 10 Decision Points on Principles on April 24, 2012. For almost a year, the parties did not make any headway, because they forced themselves to identify and agree on the various species of trees in the forest, instead of the forest first, so to speak. But when they agreed on the forest by signing this document, which is a bunch of important consensus points, the rest becomes very easy. This led to the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro on October 15 last year.

It seems we are at this gridlock again. This is clearly noticeable in the Annex on Wealth-sharing. While I pay tribute to what the two Technical Working Groups (TWGs) of the government and MILF have achieved so far, it seems they continue to lock up horns on the current dismal financial status of the ARMM and the perceived incapacity of any new Bangsamoro entity to rise above this pathetic situation especially in relation to administering the taxes especially the base and collection. It appears that the parties

cannot agree that the issue should be appreciated first in terms of principles and concepts (i.e., fiscal autonomy for the new entity), the power to tax which must be devolved to it in order to be able to stand on its feet, sharing of revenues and resources, and then the administrative or implementation aspect of whether or not the new entity is capable of. If it is capable, then let it do the tasks immediately, if not, then the parties can agree on the timetable.

Let us remind ourselves that our task in this negotiation is to address the Moro Question, which is mainly to entrench Moro governance through power-sharing and wealth-sharing within the larger Philippine state. If in the end of this negotiation, the two parties fail to put in place a viable Bangsamoro political entity, because the government by good or any other means succeeded to prevail upon the MILF who either by acquiescence or incapacitation failed to argue the case of the Bangsamoro people effectively, the consequence is fatal: the conflict would continue and the MILF would not only become irrelevant but also a hated organization. Do we want this bad situation to happen? I don't think this is good for the peace-making efforts in Mindanao.

Moreover, as in all negotiations, the mandates given to both the government and MILF negotiating teams, respectively, are ranged, perhaps, in a scale of one to three, or packaged as option 1, 2, or 3. To offer or let known the maximum position, understandably, is not a wise move in negotiation, but to put up a very weak offer, on the other hand, shies away the interest of the other side. Sometimes, it can be interpreted as lack of interest in finishing the process.

It is on this premise that I ask my counterpart in government to maximize their offer to the Bangsamoro people through this peace process. Any diluted offer is only slowing down the process. It is not helping us in any way. I also ask the TWGs of the two parties to engage in real problem-solving exercise: identity the still unresolved issues and find solutions, one by one, without losing sight of one basic principle in negotiation that one gains some and loses some.

Today, time is of great essence. Time is ticking away very fast. Before we realize it, 2013 will say "good bye" and 2014 comes rushing in.

Therefore, the challenge before us now is to come up with results. If we cannot finish all the Annexes, at least we can settle two of the Annexes. I am looking at Power-sharing and Modalities and Arrangement Annexes as possible areas of breakthrough. Any failure is not good for all of us especially to the party that appears unreasonable or recalcitrant.

The eyes of the public and the international community are staring at us intently. Surely, they do not want us to fail in this endeavour.

It is on this above expectation that I close my opening statement today that we rise above the situation together and bring home the good news that we have achieved much during this round of talks in Kuala Lumpur. Thank you very much and good day!

The Need To Outpace Potential Spoilers

Opening statement during the 36th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on February 25-27, 2013

One of the many fears and suspicions of negotiations is the idea that the other party is likely to be dishonest and will unfairly exploit any weakness displayed by an honest negotiator. This suspicion and fear may be overcome if a climate of mutual trust can be developed. One therefore should establish both trustworthiness and the ability to trust. We trust someone who seems willing to trust us. If we want to be trusted, we have to be able to show trust in return. Often, this trust will be reciprocated. It will encourage honesty and reduce negative costs from poor negotiation. In many cases, it will invite opportunistic exploitation of mutual benefits for both parties. As sound as this may seem, the process must still be managed very carefully. This we will nurse and nurture in the current negotiation!

So far, neither the government nor the MILF has ever bungled seriously on their commitment. If we observe the trend of things since President Benigno Aquino III and MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim met in Tokyo, Japan in August 2011 there has been tremendous build-up of trust between the two parties, which resulted in many achievements in the peace talks. The MILF and Chairman Murad had agreed to hold the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in Malacañang, the seat of the Philippine government. And he was not alone. He brought with him the core leadership of the MILF and if by chance any untoward incident happened to them, the MILF would be crippled. But the MILF took the words of the President for their safety. Similarly, President Aquino journeyed with his entire official family to the inauguration of the Sajahatra Bangsamoro Program at the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI) Training Centre in Crossing Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, a virtual place inside Camp Darapanan of the MILF, on February 11. He set aside the

negative advices of his advisers and proved them that he is right: the MILF can also be trusted. For what sensible reasons any of the parties can achieve, say committing treachery to the other party? Nothing, except condemnation, besides having to pay heavily for their crime. In Islam, a commitment made with non-Muslims is as sacred as the one entered into with Muslims.

It is on this momentum that we expect the parties especially the government to move the peace process fast and without delay. We must settle the remaining issues on power-sharing and wealth-sharing, if possible right away. All those powers already granted to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and by other laws should not be discussed at all. They are already granted and conceded by government. The FAB had already made provision for this, which we must not violate. We should focus on giving additional powers to the new political entity to make it real autonomous or self-governing, both politically and financially. Failure to give enough teeth to the new entity is like a doctor prescribing a weak medicine that would only worsen the ailment of the patient. Often a wrong prescription enables the bacteria to multiply in manifold and as deadly as ever. Surely, it is to the interest of the government in Manila that a viable and progressive Moro entity is in place in Mindanao. I don't think the government wants a Moro entity that is a baggage forever, begging, grieving, and complaining. Worse, it can become the hotbed of rebellious elements fighting the government.

Moreover, the Transition Commission (TC) should have been formally constituted now, so that it can start to work immediately. Any delay would only put it racing against time to write the Basic Law. We must also constitute the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) so they can monitor the compliance of the parties to all agreements. The TPMT will be the one to check and make sure that the parties are not remiss in their responsibilities and compliance.

Frankly, there is really need to outpace potential spoilers who are expected to be more active after the May polls. The sour-graping of the so-called heirs of the Sultanate of Sulu that they were not consulted in the ongoing peace talks is a kind of spoilage. They were consulted on many occasions. But the big question is: Why only make this noise now when for more than 40 years of conflict in Mindanao they have been silent? This brings out into the fore a pertinent observation: Is it not obvious that in the current controversy the heirs of the Sultanate of Sulu have focused on their personal interest alone that precludes the interest and welfare of the entire Bangsamoro people?

More than ever, the critical mass in support of the FAB and the peace negotiation must be secured by the government and the MILF. This is the reason why in spite of the

Storm rising, the MILF peace panel was not prevented from going to Basilan against the advice of the Philippine Coast Guard last February 19. We attended the peace process forum organized by the priests and nuns in Isabela City headed by Bishop Martin Jumoad, a very influential churchman, we were told.

This time we make it sure that no one criticizes us for not talking to everybody irrespective of ethnic tribal, belief, and party affiliations. We do not want to repeat the nightmares of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) which was bitterly criticized allegedly for lack of consultations, which we know is not true. In fairness to the GPH peace panel headed by Secretary Rodolfo Garcia, they had heavily conducted consultations not only in Mindanao but elsewhere in the Philippines.

It is on this urgent necessity that we want the international community to help the parties in whatever way possible in reaching out to everyone in Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines. We want to do it continuously and without let-up, but we have limitations especially in matter of logistics. This task will intensify as soon as the TC starts to write the Basic Law, which requires that the people must be on board the process, and they must be consulted.

Finally, let me state here that the parties should not overlook the fact that the current peace process has two tracks namely, negotiation or political track and the socio-economic track, which at all times be pursued in a sequential manner. The negotiation track must always be primary and the socio-economic track as supplementary. Any rearrangement of the sequence, even it is done with the best of intention, is to run the risk that the second track assumes the role of a counter-insurgency approach especially if they are designed to go to the people directly without a term of reference provided by the parties in the negotiation.

Thank you and good day!

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The Serious Repercussions of the Postponement of Talks

Message during the special session of the government and MILF peace negotiators in Kuala Lumpur on March 25, 2013

Ordinarily, negotiators do not make written statement during special or executive sessions. But in this particular chapter of our negotiations where so much has been invested by the parties and the peace talks is in the concluding stage, I see it incumbent upon me as chair of the MILF peace panel to explain why postponing the peace talks is laden with dangers and uncertainties. The MILF and I do not see the wisdom of postponing it, and for which reason my delegation and I have travelled directly from Japan for more than seven hours in order to be here today. If it takes unilaterally to be here in order to showcase our seriousness that the talks must not be postponed, then we will do it. However, if the reason of postponement is because we failed to get the final say of our Principals on any of the remaining issues, especially the Annex on Wealth-Sharing which we have already settled during our previous session here last February, then we the negotiators must be blamed for it. One month is enough for us to bring the matter to our respective Principal following the principle of ad referendum.

Frankly speaking, postponing the talks at this point in time is the least understood decision that we can make. The consequence could also be far more serious, if not entirely damaging, if it is tied up with the Sabah standoff, which to me is a bilateral issue between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Government of Malaysia. The Lahad Datu incident is internal to Malaysia. More concretely, the issue of Sabah is not part of the agenda of the peace talks which Malaysia has been facilitating since 2001. More seriously, a postponement has serious repercussions diplomatically, politically, and even militarily. Our people and fighters way back home would not receive it favourably.

I personally question the wisdom, if any, behind the so-called "Sabah intrusion". There is a better way -- if not the only way – to do it; and that is by peaceful and fraternal way. By this, it draws sympathy especially from a better-off brother.

Further, granting for the sake of argument that those who are behind it have compelling personal or family reasons to do so, the timing of the move gives us reasons to doubt and ask this question, "why did they do it at a time the GPH-MILF peace negotiation is about to conclude?" It effectively puts Malaysia, the Philippines, and the MILF in a very awkward situation. The case of the MILF is far more damning: damn if it supports the claim and damn if it does not. It is a perfect case of spoilage; perhaps the spoilers have been celebrating already.

Let me stress here that the MILF, as does the Aquino administration, I always firmly believe, will not allow the peace negotiation to be scuttled and held captive by few individuals whose motives are still suspect. In partnership with the Aquino administration, we will do whatever it takes to ensure that these negotiations stay on track and conclude successfully.

Finally, let me thank my good counterpart, Honourable Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, and her team for taking their time – and courage – to come and attend this special meeting of the two peace panels in Kuala Lumpur.

Thank you very much!

"For the MILF this journey to peace is a giant leap of faith"

Welcome Remarks on the Ceremonial Opening of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission on April 3, 2013 at Pasig City.

[All members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission were individually introduced]

Let me welcome you to this modest yet symbolic gathering to formally open the work of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission. This, indeed, is a historic day for all of us, especially for the Moros in Mindanao who have never tasted real and genuine peace in their entire existence since the coming of Spain in the 16th century. Again, I welcome you all to this very memorable occasion.

It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. For the MILF this journey to peace is a giant leap of faith, immeasurable and beyond the confines of time and space. Like the symbolism of today's occasion, we are taking a giant leap from the familiar grounds of the Pulangi into the unfamiliar plains of Pasig; from the comfort zone of our homeland to the home base of our opponents --- now our partners in search of genuine, just, and lasting peace in Mindanao; from the traditional means of our struggle through the barrel of the guns into the strokes of the mighty pen.

To be candid, today I am probably as nervous as I was when I first entered school, uncertain and anxious of the unknown. As we plunge into unfamiliar grounds, and

especially so, when one commits not only himself to a new direction but an organization and a nation, the fear and anxiety is compounded. I take comfort only in two things, one, trust in the guidance of Allah and second an almost instinctive ability of guerrillas to adapt to its changing environment, perhaps brought about by almost a lifetime of struggle.

Today also, I take comfort in the knowledge that Pasig is derived from a Sanskrit word "Passi" which means "a river flowing from one body of water into another," perhaps from Laguna de Bay to Manila Bay. I do not wish to draw familiar parallelism in Mao Tse Tong's notion of a guerrilla moving amongst the people as the fish swims in the river. But here today, I take a wish, nay a prayer, that the steps we take today is but a transition from one body of water (and I love to imagine it is our familiar Pulangi) full of dreams and aspirations, into another body of water (and like a good negotiator, I shall concede it to be Pasig for our counterparts) with the promise of dawn and of dreams fulfilled.

But let me momentarily disturb our dream or free boat ride from Pulangi to Pasig and quickly address the imperatives of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and outline the MILF view of the Transition Commission, thus:

First and foremost, the MILF views the Commission as its first initial partnership with the GPH. As such, it shall endeavour to reach consensus with representatives of the government on major decisions in the course of its work. We shall not work against each other but instead work with each other.

Second, the work of the Commission shall be devoted principally into transforming the Agreements of Parties, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), and its Annexes as well as other Agreements of the Parties, into a legislation envisioned to establish a new Bangsamoro Political Entity that embodies the political, economic, social and cultural aspirations of the Bangsamoro.

Third, the TC shall be open, transparent and participative in its approach. While the MILF acknowledges the fact that the major principles has been agreed by the parties in the negotiation, the specific translation of these into mechanisms, institutions shall be open to public participation. After all what we envision to build are institutions for our people and never solely for the MILF. Beyond this, as an organization, we are open to adopting new and innovative practices born out of principles that we all share, such as cutting edge and innovative ways in government service delivery that uses the latest information technology.

Fourth, the institutions we envision to create under the Basic Law shall feature mechanisms for inclusivity and public participation to ensure a dynamic and robust government able to engage with all stakeholders and address the concerns of its constituency. It shall further entrench appropriate measures of transparency and accountability to its people.

Fifth, the Basic Law shall entrench the new relations between the Bangsamoro and the Philippine government founded on the principles of parity of esteem, mutual respect, self-sufficiency and cooperation and continuing dialogue to further enhance this unique and special relations that both respects and recognizes our unique history but brave enough to face all possibilities in the future.

Sixth The TC, as the first formal engagement of the MILF with the government shall mirror some of the features we envision for the new Bangsamoro government such as:

- A lean but competent bureaucracy;
- Features of transparency such as an interactive website where people can send their suggestions and recommendations;
- Constant public consultations to build consensus and embrace divergent views to build a common and shared vision;
- Consciousness on the need to apply resources where it is most needed; and
- And more importantly able to partner with other institutions to move forward.

Seventh, the TC shall envision a government guided by the Quranic principles on religious freedom. Allah says: "Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth has been made clear from error. Whoever rejects false worship and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy, handhold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things." [***Sûrah al-Baqarah***: 256]

Eight, the TC shall be open for partnership both with local and international actors/ organizations. As we commence several transitions, from rebels to governance, from organization to government, from combatants to community builders, we recognize the imperative to see best practices, universal standards, and other peoples' experiences so that we need not continuously reinvent the wheels. However, we shall always keep in mind the principle that "context is king".

Ninth, The Basic Law must entrench the Bangsamoro not because it is supreme over the others but because it is an essential and indispensable heritage of this country, nay even of the world. The uniqueness of the Bangsamoro is the only meaningful contribution that we can contribute to the richness of this country or even of the world, for if we are just

all the same, like factory made apparels of the same size, fit and color, then we add no further value to our national heritage. If we are to truly contribute anything significant to the global village, let it be our uniqueness as a Bangsamoro nation. Let this not be a source of conflict but an important piece in our quest for harmony. As the Quran rightly said "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware." ***Surah al-Hujurat*** (49:13)

Tenth, the Transition Commission can only begin its substantial work when the Annexes are completed. The acts of completion must be undertaken immediately. It is therefore urgent that we complete the Annexes by taking the hard political decisions. The issues remaining in the negotiations have been simplified and the positions of the parties clarified. We must seize the moment now.

Let me call on therefore our partners from the government to work hand in hand with us in crafting an instrument that shall embody the Bangsamoro ideals and aspirations and create a new relations founded on the principles of parity of esteem and mutual respect. Indeed, what we shall do today shall shape our tomorrow.

I call on the honorable members of the Senate and the House of Representatives to help us hurdle the remaining stages of this arduous process that we so bravely face despite our foreknowledge of the challenges, dangers and pitfalls that it hides. To pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law is to affirm the possibility of political assertion and settlement and relegate the armed struggle into the domain of history.

I urge the international community to help us shepherd this peace process, so that we can demonstrate to the world that there is a peaceful path to every political aspiration and that the lessons that we may learn can hopefully help others make it through the difficult passage from war to peace.

Let me express the MILF's profoundest gratitude to His Excellency Benigno Aquino III for his continuing commitment to see through the completion of this process within his term after 16 years of negotiation. In return, we pledge the unwavering commitment of the MILF to be an effective partner of his government in this quest for peace in the south of the Philippines. Likewise, let me also express the MILF's sincerest appreciation and thanks to His Excellency Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib Mohammad Bin Razak and the Malaysian government for continuing to facilitate the GPH-MILF peace negotiation since 2001. It is our earnest hope and prayer that Malaysia shall continue to journey with us in these peace efforts in troubled Mindanao through to the end.

I seek no personal gain nor glory in this process. I have been through the most difficult and painful years of our struggle for the right to self-determination. I, like thousands of our comrades in arms, years ago, have taken up arms to fight injustice and assert our inalienable right to determine our future. This has been the honorable way to respond to the call of those days. Today, I, like many of us in the armed revolutionary movement, am taking a giant leap of faith in trusting that the peaceful path is possible for us. We had put one foot in the path of peace, while we struggle to pull the other from the comfort of our mountain lairs. We are embarking on a gradual and calculated shift in our struggle from the barrels of the Kalashnikov into the mighty strokes of the pen.

Your response, the government response, indeed the Filipino peoples' response, shall finally determine which step we shall ultimately take – the pen or the gun. Help us make the choice of the pen easy.

Thank you very much and good day!

Non-Muslim States Support to the Peace Process in Mindanao

Keynote address during the Thanksgiving Event at Crowne Hotel, Makati City, on March 31, 2013 organized by the Greenhills Muslim Traders Association, Inc.

Let me begin my address by expressing my sincere praise and appreciation for the efforts of the officers and members of the Greenhills Muslim Traders Association, Inc., in particular Engr. Nassif B. Malawani, president of this association, in sponsoring this thanksgiving in honor of the members of the MILF peace panel and Transition Commission. I also express our heartfelt gratitude to the Excellencies, who are members of the Muslim diplomatic corps based in Manila, for gracing this auspicious occasion this evening. This indeed is an enthralling experience that rarely happens in a lifetime.

Frankly speaking, addressing an audience like this, which is composed of eminent personalities, is both humbling and an honor. I must confess that in my entire life, I have never addressed an audience similar to this. The intensity of their personalities is so compelling that can easily mumble one's speech and blur one's thought. It is truly an occasion of its kind and the best any evening can offer.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I consider it very fortunate on my part that the organizers of this event has given me a subject close to my heart, a subject which I have been involved for the last 14 years since 1997. The only years that I was not directly involved in this undertaking was from the closing days of 2000 up to the middle of 2003. On July 29, 2003 I was back to the negotiating table with my appointment as chair of the MILF peace panel, a task that is not only challenging, but also oftentimes disheartening if we count the pitfalls in the process. A negotiator is sometimes like a voyager traversing the high seas for months with no land on sight and if he has not that motivation, determination, and perseverance to carry on, he would fall by the way side. Imagine that for 16 long years, marred by three major wars, 2000, 2003, and 2008, and almost countless minor skirmishes between our forces and that of the enemy, it is only now that we can safely assert that the proverbial flickering light at the end of tunnel is more visible and appears within reach, insha Allah. Today the GPH-MILF peace negotiation is gaining momentum and it is cruising the final stretch and with greater sincerity, determination, and efforts by the parties, the chance of signing the comprehensive peace agreement is greater now than any time in the past. Only three Annexes, power-sharing, wealth-sharing and normalization, remained in the agenda of the parties, which they hoped to settle most of which next month when they resume their 37th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur.

As everyone is aware of, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) was signed on October 15 last year. On December 15, President Benigno Aquino III signed Executive Order 120 creating the 15-member Transition Commission that will craft the Bangsamoro Basic Law. Two days later, on December 17, both Houses of Congress have issued their respective Resolutions expressing support to the act of the President. Henceforth, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was duly constituted. I am happy to note that all of the BTC members from the MILF are with us this evening. On April 3, the BTC will hold its first formal session here in Manila and thereafter in Cotabato City which is officially designated as the seat of the BTC.

Alongside the gains of the negotiation, the parties have also signed the Annex on Transitional Arrangement and Modalities, which provided for the creation of the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT). This body monitors and evaluates the compliance of the parties to all signed agreement. Former European Union Ambassador to the Philippines, Alistair MacDonald, was nominated to head the TPMT. I hope he will accept the nomination. The parties have also signed the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Study Commission on Policing and soon this will be constituted. The draft agreement on Annex on Wealth-sharing has been completed, but it is yet to be formally signed by

the parties. Likewise, the Annex on Power-sharing is almost completed. The Annex on Normalization is lagging behind, perhaps 60% has already been already settled. This is due to the hard issues contained therein, like decommissioning of MILF firearms and combatants, gradual redeployment of government forces in the future Bangsamoro territory, and establishment of the Bangsamoro Police are continuing agenda. Certainly, these are difficult issues but they are not insurmountable by two willing partners who are committed to solve the conflict in Mindanao. To unshackle some of the difficulties, the MILF is seriously thinking of proposing to the government to sign two exit agreements, one for political agreement and another for the military component. I hope the government will appreciate the wisdom of this idea.

I will also take this opportunity to inform you, Excellencies, of the growing support of the international community, both states and non-states, to the ongoing peace process between the MILF and the Philippine government. Without saying, the Government of Malaysia, which facilitates the peace talks since 2001, and for heading the 60-man International Monitoring Team (IMT), deserves our highest commendation. Malaysia is not only providing their good offices to the parties, but also spent so much resources, time, and efforts to ensure the success of the peace talks. Alongside it, the governments of Japan, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Brunei, Libya (in the meantime, it has not resent its contingent to the IMT), Norway, Indonesia, and the European Union also deserve our praise and gratitude. For the non-government organizations, we have several of them deeply onboard the peace process, among which are The Asia Foundation, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, Muhammadiyah, and Conciliation Resources. We also draw inspirations from the kind words and encouragements from the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, then US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, as well as OIC Secretary General *Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, who all prodded the parties to continue the talks until they succeed*.

In addition to these achievements and the strong support from both within and from without, the GPH-MILF peace negotiation is designed to succeed, particularly after the signing of the FAB. It would be very difficult for any of the parties to deviate from the peaceful track and abandon the peace parleys, lest it would be subjected to "blaming and shaming". More than that, if fighting resumes, the guilty party will be cursed and blamed.

There are five such safeguards built into the FAB that makes it totally different from the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement, which to this day its full implementation is very much the bone of contention between the government and the MNLF. The design

of the GPH-MILF peace architecture is entirely different from the GPH-MNLF peace deal model. Empowerment in the MNLF model is more for their leaders, whereas in the MILF, empowerment is sought for the entire Bangsamoro; in the first, MNLF combatants were integrated into the state forces, whereas in the latter, no firearms are to be surrendered but will be "put beyond use". Corollary, for every MILF firearm decommissioned, there is a corresponding government forces redeployed to other areas, and alongside it in parallel track is the setting up of a new police for the Bangsamoro, which will be professional and people-based.

What are the five safeguards to ensure that the GPH-MILF peace negotiation succeeds? First, even after the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement, the government and MILF peace panels will continue to exist and to discuss issues that come their way; second, there will be no unilateral implementation of the agreement or agreements by either of the two parties; third, the parties organized the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) to monitor and evaluate the compliance of the parties to all agreements; fourth, the parties also organized the Joint Normalization Commission, composed of the TPMT, the Malaysian facilitator, the government peace panel, and the MILF peace panel, whose main task is to make official findings and recommendations whether the parties or any of the parties faithfully comply with the terms and conditions of the Agreement or agreements; and if so, as fifth, it recommends to the parties the signing of the Exit Agreement signaling the formal termination of the peace negotiation because the parties have fully complied with their obligations contained in the comprehensive peace agreement and other agreements. In case the exit agreement is not signed, because one party did not comply, the full adverse consequence for not complying will fall of the guilty party.

Meanwhile, it is sad to say here, with the indulgence of the Excellencies, that many if not most of the rich Muslim countries especially those in the Middle East are not as enthusiastic in extending support to the GPH-MILF peace process in particular and to the Bangsamoro people in general. Of course, this is not to deny the many benevolent individuals from the Middle East who continued to pour millions of dollars to Muslims in Mindanao for the construction of mosques, clinics, madrasahs, and even schools. We take note of these kindness and concern wholeheartedly and sincerely.

But what we want to happen is for these states to make as official policy in helping the GPH-MILF peace negotiation in Mindanao. Surprisingly, non-Muslim countries especially Japan and those from the European Union are the ones providing active support to the peace process in Mindanao especially in terms of socio-economic development, as well as capacity building for future leaders of the proposed Bangsamoro political entity.

It would seem to me that because of the harsh conflicts taking place in many Arab states and the Palestinian problem, in particular the general attitude is perhaps anchored on priority in terms of immediacy and seriousness of the conflicts. Perhaps, the other reason --- I hope I am wrong --- is the dismissive attitude of some Muslims especially policy makers that like the MNLF experience, the peace deal between the MILF and the government would suffer the same fate of losing steam in the homestretch. It is unfortunate that such negative attitude is still pervasive.

I think this is not the right attitude that anyone can assume. First, we did not say --- and has never said --- that success of the current negotiation is an assured certainty. The truth is there is much to do in the peace talks and the obstacles along the road are still heavy and difficult. We need all the help that can be extended to the MILF and to our people. Who can say that the help that comes from Muslim brothers and sisters and states cannot make the necessary difference that would ensure our success in this negotiation?

Second, we are not seeking your help to overthrow the Philippine government by force of arms, which no legitimate government would even dare to do, but to support us in our legitimate and democratic right to struggle for just and lasting peace in Mindanao, which in many ways would also redound to the benefits of other people including foreign states.

Third, if non-Muslim states can support our peace-making efforts, which is a noble undertaking especially in the eyes of Islam, why can't Muslim countries?

And fourth, if the Arab League, on Qatar proposal, approved to set up a $1 billion fund for Arab east Jerusalem, which Palestinians want as the capital of an independent state under any peace deal with Israel, cannot the Muslim countries, not just Arabs, give the Bangsamoro a few million dollars to alleviate their sufferings and to help them succeed in the peace-making in Mindanao? Is this a too big deal to try and big chunk of money to give? More importantly, as Muslims, the wealthy ones have the obligations to help needy brothers like us who are struggling from the bondage of inequality and servitude.

Finally, once again let me express my thanks and gratitude to the Greenhills Muslim Association, Inc., for sponsoring this momentous event. I also thank the Excellencies for their presence and for lending their ears to what we have tried to impart this evening. I do hope that I have delivered the solemn message from the MILF Central Committee well and clear for the consideration of the Excellencies.

Thank you very much! Wa billahi taufiq wal hidaya, assalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

Acceptability Does Not In Any Way Mean The Right Of Veto power of the Majority

Opening statement during the 37th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in KL on April 9-11, 2013

Let me begin my opening statement this afternoon by stating that in any man's important undertaking, say in our case, the ongoing peace negotiation, the most difficult portions of which is how to begin and how to conclude it. The MILF had been in the sideline, or sidelined, for 20 long years, amidst war, destructions and displacements before the government had seriously decided to enter into peace negotiation with the MILF. Also we waited and persevered for another 16 long years in this negotiation before the parties can say that the negotiation has picked up momentum and the proverbial flickering light at the end of the tunnel is clearly visible. I think I am not wrong if I say that we are at this stage today.

Looking back into the past, the first difficulty that started the arduous peace journey in January 1997 had been overcome by the government and the MILF. The tremors that we have been experiencing since 2011 are part of the second difficulty to finish the process. This hardship does not only refer to resolving the substantive agenda of the talks, as well as handling the huge number of stakeholders on both sides, but also to weld together the very people involved in the whole process, say the central committee on the part of a revolutionary organization or cabinet on the part of government. Sometimes, decision already clinched during meeting with the central leadership or cabinet, as the case may be, will be discarded or questioned by individual members, for varied reasons. A situation like this requires the negotiator to deal with it effectively through the chairman of the organization or through the head of government or state. They are the only ones who have the authority and clout to deal with deviants and non-conformists.

I must confess now as I have confessed in the past that sometimes it is more difficult to negotiate with your own peers rather than to negotiate with your adversary. Worse, at times, one is virtually negotiating with himself or herself, because there are instances one disagrees with the decision of the principal and in this particular case, one has to choose: follow your own thought or toe the official line. This is a difficult moment in the life of a negotiator, which he or she has no way to resolve except to do the right thing:

make an appeal for the reconsideration of the decision, or he or she has to leave for good (with personal conviction intact). In the case of the MILF, we have had a number of our political or military leaders who disagreed with the leadership in some vital decisions regarding the negotiation, but practically, except one, we handled them in favour of the higher cause of the struggle. The higher interest must be upheld at all times.

At this juncture, the most relevant question is: "Can we conclude this negotiation now and proceed without delay to normalization, construction, and development of the devastated region of the Bangsamoro?"

Without appearing very simplistic, I think we are about to achieve this historic feat of signing the comprehensive peace agreement with the Aquino administration. First, for me, I am very hopeful that the Annex on Wealth-sharing will be signed by the parties because the text had been settled during the 36th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks last February 25-27. I don't see any reason why we cannot get pass through this issue without much hassle. For the Annex on Power-sharing, I am also upbeat that we can readily settle this, as there are only three or four issues remaining for discussion. For Annex on Normalization, I firmly believe that once we settle the first two Annexes, this will easily fall in place. A normal situation in Mindanao will necessarily ensue once the root causes of the conflict are addressed and the people are actively taking part in shaping their future, as well as fair share of the pie or the wealth of their homeland. When the land is peaceful, progressive, and the people are happy, who will be in need of guns anyway? It is not true to say that Moros loved their guns more than their wives. There is a bit of exaggeration here; if not an outright racist comment. If they wanted to possess and own firearms it is because their lives are always in danger. The issue of decommissioning, like gradual redeployment of government forces, as well as establishment of the Bangsamoro police, is vital to the normalization process, but we must see to it first that it has no stigma and consequence of surrender, leaving their individual and collective security at the mercy of chances.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the necessity of settling the remaining issues is the call of the hour. We cannot afford to suspend it any longer; there is no reason to justify it. The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) has already gone ahead by convening its inaugural session in Manila last April 3. This will be followed by regular meetings in Cotabato City, the official seat of the BTC, in order to start crafting the Basic Law and to study and propose amendments, if necessary, to the Constitution, among other tasks. It has also organized itself into committees, formed its secretariat, and assigned two of its members to draft the internal rules. After this, it cannot go any further unless the Annexes on power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and even normalization,

especially on policing, are settled and signed. This is the reason why we must settle these annexes now and not later.

Finally, let me remind ourselves that our peace negotiation has only one agenda: "How to solve the Bangsamoro Problem or more correctly, Bangsamoro Question."This agenda was decided by the parties at the beginning of the current peace talks in January 1997 and it has guided the parties since then. Therefore, all our efforts and agreements, though sometimes very incremental, are designed to address this problem especially the root causes. Therefore, to say that the solution that we envision to address this question "must be acceptable to all" must be taken in the context of acceptability by the people that such formula suits a particular group, in this case the Bangsamoro. Acceptability does not in any way mean the right of veto power of the majority because the formula does not suit their taste or redound to their direct benefit. A special problem requires special prescription; hence, the asymmetrical arrangement that the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) has envisioned.

Let me assure my counterpart in government that the MILF is fully committed to finish the process in order to establish real peace in Mindanao. I also restate here our continuing trust for the sincerity and commitment of H.E. President Benigno Aquino III to conclude the peace agreement with the MILF. I trust and pray that the Government of Malaysia, in particular H.E. Prime Minister Dato' Sri Haji Mohammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, will journey with us through to the end of this negotiation.

Thank you and good afternoon!

So That We Can Hopefully Transition Smoothly Into the Bangsamoro

Message on the launching of the Facility for Advisory Support for Transition Capacities (FASTRAC) on April 29, 2013 at Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem"!

Brother Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, Chairman of the MILF;

Her Excellency Luisa Carvalho, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in the country;

Mr. Ousman Dione, World Bank Manager on Sustainable Development Unit;

Mr. Motoo Konishi Country Director of the World Bank for the Philippines;

Brothers from the Central Committee, Members of the MILF Peace Panels, Members of the Transition Commission, representatives of other partners in peace, guests, participants, ladies and gentlemen, Assalamu Alaikum warahmatullahi Wabarakatuhu.

Good morning and welcome to Camp Darapanan for the official launching of the FASTRAC, or Facility for Advisory Support for Transition Capacities.

Let me hasten to explain briefly the Hadith I have just quoted so that we do not scare you or give the impression that we are partnering today with China, nor do we intend to travel and seek Chinese knowledge and technology for the transitions to the Bangsamoro. Let me be clear that FASTRAC, which we are officially launching today, is a partnership between the United Nations and the World Bank and the MILF for a facility for us to access and tap into the wealth of experience and expertise that these institutions hold, so that we can hopefully transition smoothly into the Bangsamoro. The Bangsamoro is a vision, or if you like, a project that embraces people, territory, government institutions, and a fiscal regime that we are currently building in partnership with the Government of the Philippines through the peace process.

China, during the days of our Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was the farthest and most advanced civilization of that age. Many inventions and innovations during the early days of Islam are from that part of the known world then. This hadith showed clearly the openness of the Prophet to modern and innovative knowledge that he encouraged his followers and companions to learn even if it be from the farthest part of the known world – China in this case. In fact, this hadith largely paved the way for the evolution of the Silk Road which was not only a trade route that connected the Muslim world to as far as Kashgar on the fringes of China, Africa and Constantinople in Europe, but a virtual information highway also that carried not only goods and services but of cultures, knowledge and philosophy as well. Today, the Silk Road is much like the World Wide Web, the modern information highway.

The MILF as a revolutionary organization and a follower of the Prophet believes in this injunction. We are therefore open to partnership that brings new knowledge, innovation, cutting edge technology that can contribute to addressing the challenges we face today.

The MILF does not intend to go to China, or travel to the UN General Headquarters in New York or even visit the World Bank Headquarters in Washington DC. Yes, we need

not travel the world. What FASTRAC provides is an unprecedented MILF, Peace Panels, Transition Commissions' access to global expertise and experience through Technical Assistance that the UN, the WB and other partners in peace can provide through this Facility. This technical assistance, coupled with an increasing capacity for the MILF and the ability to mobilize existing capacities in the Bangsamoro, can hopefully hasten the conclusion of the Annexes, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the completion and passage of the Basic Law and the ultimate establishment of the Bangsamoro. As we move gradually into the finish line in this peace process, the mechanisms and process becomes more complicated and the number of players increases, it becomes more imperative for us to be strategic in our thinking and approaches. While we recognize and certainly thank all our partners in peace in unselfishly rendering technical assistance to us, we should all recognize now that there needs to be a platform for strategic thinking on all these technical assistance and to map out both existing assistance and identify the gaps so that we do not only avoid duplicity in the assistance, but more importantly, focus on the gaps.

Given the time constraint also in completing the annexes and the Basic Law, technical assistance must also be well timed, well sequenced and well coordinated to maximize its efficiency. We hope that the facility will reduce transaction costs for the MILF so that we can focus more on the important tasks of the Peace Panel, the Transition Commission and the different agencies of the MILF.

These and more are what we hope the facility will achieve. But given the enormity of the tasks ahead of us, not a single entity can address all of these challenges. May I call on therefore to all our peace partners to support us in this noble undertaking so that we can complement, collaborate, and coordinate all our works. As the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) says, "Together we can make a difference."

Let me express our profoundest gratitude to the United Nations represented here by Ms. Liza Carvalho, the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations. Mr. Ousmane Dione, World Bank Manager on Sustainable Development Unit representing Mr. Motoo Konishi Country Director of the World Bank for the Philippines.

I cannot end this message without personally thanking a very special person, who late last year, approached us with a very innovative idea, Mr. Titon Mitra, former Minister Counsellor of AusAid and who was then working as Strategic Advisor for Mindanao of the UN. This facility would not have reached its fruition without his unselfish dedication to extend assistance in the peace process so that one day, we may all live in peace and contribute in humanity's quest for global peace. Mr. Titon Mitra is now in Baghdad, Iraq,

bringing the same sense of mission and dedication to global peace and development. Thank you very much, Mr. Titon Mitra.

Thank you everyone and wassalam!

Finding Creative Formula To Get Through Any Differences

Opening statement during the 38th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on July 8-11, 2013

It has been two months and 29 days since we met here last April 11 for the 37th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks where we agreed "to exchange notes on the coming days" and "to meet again after the May 13 Philippine elections." That did not happen. The peace panels have not met since except during a sideline meeting in Oslo, Norway during the Mediators' Forum sponsored by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC). Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, my honourable counterpart, in the presence of Secretary Teresita "Ging" Deles and the Malaysian Facilitator, Excellency Dato' Tengku Abd' Ghafar bin Mohamed, handed to us their latest paper on wealth-sharing. Of course, we were not there to negotiate the content of that paper but merely to receive it and deliver to our principal for their perusal.

During this long period of uncertainty in the talks, so much negative speculations have filled the air. It is not good to hear these, but they were all expressed loud and clear. To many, the impression is that there is an impasse of the peace talks. Truth is that the official explanation coming from government that they needed time to conduct a due diligence study on wealth-sharing is less discernible because, first, the annex on wealth-sharing, alongside annex on power-sharing, has been on the agenda since July 2012; and second, members of the two peace panels have initialed the annex on wealth-sharing on February 27, after no less than two from each peace panel led by their respective chair, had agreed on the final text of this annex during several rounds of executive sessions.

But a sigh of relief to friends of the peace process emerged after the Malaysian facilitator came in early June to Manila and proceeded to Darapanan to talk to key government officials and MILF leaders. Both camps declared that their commitment to solve the Moro Problem is as strong as ever and they are committed to do it sooner than later. This feeling of resolve was strengthened vigorously when MILF Chairman

Al Haj Murad Ebrahim decided to write President Benigno Aquino III reiterating the unwavering commitment of the MILF to resolve the conflict peacefully but politely informed him of the growing frustration of the people and some members of the MILF as a result of the delay of the talks. The problem was that the delay was perceived not from the MILF side but from government. The President responded positively to the letter. But I am so sorry I cannot disclose the content of the letter because I don't have the mandate to do so. Our chairman did not allow that copies be made except one that is intended for the Facilitator for the record of the Malaysian Secretariat.

In Oslo, Norway many of the foreign participants described the GPH-MILF peace negotiation as a "success story". We were so flattered and tempted to accept it, but Brother Bobby Alonto and I have politely made the correction. We told them that the parties had not yet finished the process; in fact, they were still treading the most critical stage of their peace journey. Besides, there were many spoilers who are waiting in ambush.

As a negotiator for more than ten years, I have learned a lot of hard lessons. My experience tells me that there is no easy part of any real life negotiation. For this reason, I know that the road ahead of the current peace talks is still full of humps and bumps. But this is no reason to cause the failure of these talks. Sincere and committed partners in peace process will always find creative formula to get through any differences. If they don't find one, this means one of the parties or both of them change policy from solving the conflict to not solving it.

For the nth time, I must mention here that we are solving the Moro Problem or Question, not the Philippine Problem. Remember that a "historic injustice" has been committed against the Bangsamoro, which must be corrected once and for all, in order to put to rest all future legitimate struggles against the Manila government. Therefore, any solution requires a major shake-up of the status quo. A mere resort to legal remedies not founded on negotiated political settlement will not hold water. Moreover, it is not symmetry or what is common to all peoples of the Philippines that is the problem; rather, it is what distinguishes the Bangsamoro from the rest of the inhabitants that we must address, and for which distinctiveness we have already discovered the formula: "asymmetrical relationship". This means the parties must find a political solution that is above the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and below independence. If we faithfully subscribe to this formulation, the parties can move the process very fast. There would be no back-and-forth movements like what happened for the last more four months.

In plain words, what we are negotiating since 1997 has been clearly for an autonomous political entity. The MILF agreed not to raise the issue of independence and the government not to peg its position on the Constitution and the territorial integrity of the Philippines. This moved the process to new heights, which reached the peak when they signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in October last year. The FAB provides the workable conceptual framework for real autonomy for the Bangsamoro, which entrenches political autonomy and fiscal autonomy. This is the real reason why we have on the table power-sharing and wealth-sharing discussions. Powers and resources must go together to be able to call a political animal autonomous. This is also the reason why we rejected the ARMM because it is not autonomous but an administrative region like the rest of the regions in the Philippines.

To fast-track the process, therefore, the government must not offer anything already granted to the ARMM especially by R.A. 9054 or by other legislations. For, these are givens that need no longer be negotiated on. On the other hand, the MILF must not demand anything reserved for an independent state. In order to aid them, they can learn from other models on state-substate asymmetrical relationship that are available around us.

Lastly, we are here today to continue the peace journey and possibly to sign anything we can settle, hopefully the annex on wealth-sharing. I don't think that if we agree on any of the annexes we still go back to our principals for their final say. I am sure we have the mandates to settle the issues at hand. Besides, I am certain my counterpart and I can call our respective principals when there is a need for it, as we effectively did with then Dean Marvic Leonen during the dying minutes of bargaining on the FAB.

Truth is that too much pressure is building against us, especially on government. The civil society organizations way back home have already sounded the clarion call that we wake up and finish the process. During the CSO Summit on the Bangsamoro Peace Talks in Davao City last July 4; they called on the government and MILF to "sign the peace agreement now" because "time is running out."

Finally, we express our grave concern over the reported government's changing policy on our relations with development partners and the GPH instruction to these development partners to slow down their engagements with the MILF. May we remind our esteemed partners that our engagement with international development partners have been mutually agreed by the Parties in 2001 as a result of the Tripoli Accord of Peace of 2001. This is furthered bolstered when we signed the FAB which said in Section VIII, Nos. 10 and 11, to wit: "The Parties agree to intensify development efforts

for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of the Bangsamoro, and institute programs to address the needs of MILF combatants, internally displaced persons, and poverty-stricken communities"; and "The parries recognize the need to attract multi-donor country support, assistance and pledges to the normalization process…." These engagements are essential for the success not only of the conclusion of this peace negotiation but more importantly of the implementation of the Peace Agreement that we may sign. Given the short period of the transitions for the MILF and the continuing delay in the completion and signing of a comprehensive peace agreement, it has become even more urgent that the MILF receives technical assistance, capacity development, development planning and resource mobilization to ensure that when it takes the reign of government it is able to deliver and meet the expectations of the Bangsamoro people. It is our firm conviction that a strong MILF is good for the peace-making in Mindanao, not otherwise.

Thank you very much for your indulgence!

Of Sincerity, Determination and Willingness to Learn

Closing statement during the JICA-BTC Signing Ceremony in Cotabato City on July 25, 2013

We are gathered here this morning to witness the historic signing of the Project Document for the Comprehensive Capacity Development Project for the Bangsamoro between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC). This indeed is a landmark deal that the Bangsamoro can be proud of and tell our countrymen that this early real autonomy is already at work. More are in the pipeline once the Bangsamoro government is fully established in Mindanao.

If we recall, the current JICA President, Mr. Akihiko Tanaka, and the world-renowned former JICA President, Madame Sadako Ogata, have paid courtesy calls to the MILF in Darapanan in May 2012 and in 2006, respectively. On both occasions, no less than Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and members of the MILF Central Committee welcomed and played hosts to both distinguished visitors. We can also recall that this humble representation, together with colleagues in the BTC and MILF peace panel, have also had the privilege to pay courtesy calls to both personalities during our official visit

to Japan last March this year. Even without saying, these events plus the birth of the BTC and the sincere commitment of President Benigno Aquino III to the peace process made this deal a reality.

Let me therefore assure our partners in the JICA that despite our imperfections, the Bangsamoro and the BTC will see to it that, insha Allah, we will not fail them. It is our sincerity, determination and willingness to learn that will make up for what we lack in in this deal. We know that our partners in JICA, fully aware of these inadequacies, are always there to help us stand on our own feet. Besides, our people are fully behind us in this endeavor.

It is said that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, but the second best time is today. Yes, we cannot turn back the hand of time. It has gone forever. But with real empowerment inherent in asymmetrical relationship given to our people and to be led by good and dedicated leadership, the Bangsamoro can rise from the ashes of poverty and impoverishment and of war to become, hopefully, one of the most developed parts of this country. This is not just a vision; to us, it has already taken the nature of a mission that we surely pursue and are pursuing. This deal can help us travel slowly to that destination.

Finally, let me close my statement with the expression of sincere thanks and gratitude to all of our esteemed guests from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Peace Process (OPAPP), and the International Monitoring Team (IMT) for being with us this morning. I also thank my colleagues in the BTC and MILF Peace Panel for their inspiring presence this morning.

Thank you and good day!

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Once the Agreement is Sealed, It Would Be Very Difficult For Them To Destroy It

Opening statement during the 39th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks on August 22-25, 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Fresh from our success in signing the Annex on Wealth-sharing last July 13 in this bustling City of Kuala Lumpur, we are here again to continue to hammer out the last two annexes on power-sharing and normalization which I believe our respective teams on those competencies have covered a lot of grounds during their two-day meeting here. I

congratulate Brother Jun Mantawil, head of our secretariat, who temporarily sits as team leader of the MILF panel team on power-sharing and, of course, Ghaafar Demaoden, who heads the MILF-Technical Working Group on Normalization, as well as all other members of their respective groups for their focus and dedication in doing the jobs given them. I also congratulate their counterparts from government, Undersecretary Chito Gaston and Deputy Director General Zenonidas Brosas, for their tenacity and determination to settle as much issues as possible on the two remaining annexes.

By the way, it is sad to note at this juncture that Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga, a regular member of the MILF peace panel, did not make it to this session because he was admitted into the hospital for severe shoulder pains. We do not know what caused the pains because the doctor's findings have not been released when we left Mindanao on the 19th of August.

It is so relevant to say here that because of the long and harsh nature of the peace negotiations that started in January 1997, stagnated or stunted by the breaches if not outright treacheries of past administrations, several members of the MILF peace panel, current and past, have either died or are incapacitated in the course of these sixteen years of peace engagement. The late MILF vice chair Aleem Abdulazis Mimbantas, who once headed our panel in 1999 to 2000, and lawyer Musib Buat have already died while Lawyer Lanang Ali, a mainstay in our peace team since 1997, is bed-ridden. This is not to mention middle level members of our team who also passed away like Lawyer Omar Umpar, Tony Falcon, Napis Biden, Ustadz Elias Macarandas. Ondel Meling, a member of the MILF peace panel secretariat, is alive but medically speaking he is a "living dead". He cannot sit nor stand and can hardly speak. As a sign of respect, we have not formally replaced him in the secretariat up to this time.

I believe this creeping reality is also true on the side of government. While I am not privy to the private lives of all those involved in the peace process, it is fact that former AFP chief of staff Joselin Nazareno, who was the first chair of the GPH Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), had already passed away many years ago while Maj. Gen. Orlando Soriano, who once headed the GPH peace panel in the domestic stage of the negotiation, has been bed-ridden. If it can only be arranged inconspicuously, we wanted to pay him a visit. Soriano is a reliable peace partner and a fine soldier. I am not aware also of the situation of Lt. Gen. Fortunato Abat, the first government chief peace negotiator during the Ramos administration and who wrote the book, "The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao," and Maj. Gen. Edgardo Batenga, who was government chief peace negotiator during the administration of President Joseph Estrada when he ordered the all-out war against the MILF in 2000. On two occasions

during this period, I acted as acting chairman of the MILF peace panel and I had a direct deal with him. Until now I can still remember vividly his stiff denial over the radio that government had any plan to attack Camp Abubakar despite the fact that bloody encounters had already been taking place in Balabagan in Lanao del Sur and Matanog in Maguindanao, the immediate fringes of the camp. This is not to mention the round-the-clock artillery and mortar barrages that fell into the camp.

Why am I making this narrative? It is simple! I just wanted to stress the need to finish this process soon. Any further delay is not only taking a toll on the very people whose lives are heavily invested on the peace process but more seriously, the various spoilers and enemies of peace are given the chance to spread their venom and to jump on our failures to stop dead the peace process on track. It appears nowadays that there is a conspiracy of all these anti-peace forces against us. This comes in various forms and uses diverse tactics to advance their evil agenda.

In order to nip in the bud their bad intention and agenda, I believe the answer is for us to finish the remaining issues and sign the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). Once the agreement is sealed, it would be very difficult for them to destroy it. More importantly, the partnership between the government and MILF will be strengthened and, in tandem, they can proceed to consolidate the gains of the process including the strengthening of all the organs of the peace process and finally those of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) and by 2016, hopefully, the Bangsamoro government will be put into place. Once this government is fully entrenched and functional, the problems that we are encountering now will gradually be eased out and those still opposing or fighting the government will be deprived of legitimacy and of popular support. "Take away the water," a famous Chinese revolutionary adage says, "the fish will die."

On the more urgent side, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) had already met four times and we are happy to inform you all especially His Excellency, the Malaysian Facilitator, my good counterpart from government, Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, as well as the Malaysian Secretariat, and members of the International Contact Group (ICG) that we have officially adopted and approved our internal rules, logo and calendar of activities. We have also formally organized the various committees of the BTC. Fully conscious of the need to move fast and race against time, we have already formally tasked the Committee on Fiscal Autonomy and Committee on Transitory Provision to work in full blast since all the necessary materials are practically at their disposal already. However, the three other committees (Political; Security, justice, and

culture; and Amendments) are on standby mode because much of the materials they need to craft that part of the Bangsamoro Basic Law are still tied up to the Annex on Wealth-sharing and Normalization.

It is in this context that the remaining annexes must be settled and fixed now by the parties. The BTC cannot write the BBL in its wholeness except when all the annexes or CPA is signed by the parties. As chair of the BTC, I appeal to the government and MILF to fast track their negotiation and, without delay, sign the remaining two annexes and finally the CPA. The year 2013 is about to end and very soon 2014 comes and similarly surely passes by. We cannot afford to delay the completion of the peace process. We must act now before it is too late. Time flies away and it never comes back.

Yet, while we in the MILF would like to see this done we also have to underscore the fact that every issue and every bone of contention in the peace negotiation have to be settled within the framework of justice so as to achieve an enduring peace. It is on this very principle that we have agreed from the very beginning of the political negotiation to engage the government on the negotiating table and eventually as our partners to address and resolve the Bangsamoro Question.

To me, the only barrier that we cannot do this or complete the process is if the two parties or either one of them is changing its course, say, it is no longer interested to finish it. By then, the remaining terms of office of President Aquino is so short and fleeting to just dribble the talks, which I firmly believe is never the case. Our trust in the President is fully intact. We know that he is as fully committed as the MILF in wrapping up the process soon and not later.

Frankly speaking, I am seeing a ray of hope that the Annex on Power-sharing will be settled and signed by the parties during this meeting. I see no clear reasons why this should be delayed any longer since it has been the subject of negotiation more than a year ago. Once this annex is settled, we can pour all our remaining stamina on normalization, an issue that is not too difficult to overcome by willing and committed peace partners. After all, the end state that we all desire in this peace process is for peace, justice, and development to reign in our lands.

Thank you and good day!

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Solving The Bangsamoro Question Is Not About Franchise

Opening statement during the 40th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on September 10-19, 2013

As we start today this 40th round of peace negotiation between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), MNLF forces under the leadership of Nur Misuari are creating pockets of disturbances especially in the coastal villages of Zamboanga City. This is an unfortunate twist of development, because first, this is totally contrary to the official pronouncement of MNLF spokesmen that they will not use force to back up their declaration of independence; and second, violence only begets violence. I don't think this would help the MNLF any way closer to their objective of whatever level or form of their aspiration.

I think it is time for all concerned parties to handle the issues of MNLF and Misuari in the most appropriate manner. It is not getting simpler as days go by. As mentioned, the declaration of independence and the indiscriminate planting of MNLF flags in many parts of Mindanao including the attempt to raise the flag at the City Hall of Zamboanga City are more than symbolic. I do not want to imagine it, but one clear complication, nay a casualty, is that the MNLF or at least Misuari has rendered the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement (GRP-MNLF FPA) of 1996 moot and academic. For all intents and purposes, by the very acts of declaring independence and their military adventurism in Zamboanga City, the MNLF or Misuari has unilaterally abrogated this agreement, and, therefore, cannot be invoked anymore, legally speaking.

Be that as it may, nothing is lost by our people and by our MNLF brothers in this "abrogation". The best of what is in the GRP-MNLF FPA are already subsumed or entrenched even in the GPH-MILF Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). Many more will be captured or fleshed out once the MILF and GPH sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), hopefully very soon. More importantly, our brothers from the MNLF have nothing to worry about because the MILF is inclusive and, God willing, we will see to it that the fruits of our struggle will benefit everybody.

For the MILF, solving the Bangsamoro Question is not about franchise. Whoever will be able to address it, we support it. It just happened that Misuari, after having been given the opportunity, failed to consolidate their gains and lost steam at the last stretch of their engagement with the government. The GRP-MNLF FPA lacked enough mechanisms to withstand the test of time and adversity.

It is in the light of this development that I appeal to the collective wisdom of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to consider revisiting its usual approach to the GRP-MNLF FPA. As pointed out above, Misuari has literally abrogated this agreement and to continue factoring this into the current peace talks is causing complications. Besides, "convergence" of the two peace processes is simply not attainable or practical because both in forms and developments they are not congruent. The MNLF track has been virtually consummated, while the MILF's is still a work in progress.

Meanwhile, the radical anarchists in Mindanao are also causing headaches for all of us. They do not want us to succeed for they do not believe in peace negotiations. They do not subscribe to any form of order brought about by any peaceful political settlement of the Bangsamoro Question except their own. The longer the peace negotiations drag on, the better they believe it is good for them. They merrily feast on our perceived failures.

However, the noises that they are creating nowadays do not mean they are getting stronger. Their very nature and the message they are espousing is not appealing or attractive to the vast majority of the people, especially their view that civilian casualties are a given in war. This is the reason they attack government forces and installations even in the middle of civilian populations. They don't care about them.

Therefore, the best way to deprive them of any opportunity to put into play their anarchist agenda at the expense of the peace talks is for the parties to conclude their negotiation and without delay sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). There can be no other antidote to these rumblings except through this way.

For the moment, the MILF has very limited capacity to effectively address these various problems. We are still basically an underground movement. Only through limited engagement that we are effecting this partnership with government, mainly via the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), Local Monitoring Teams (LMT) Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI), Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), Sajahatra Program, and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC).

The full potentials of our people can only be realized once their empowerment is realized through the formation of the Bangsamoro Government. With it come power, resources and technical skills, not to state of the full cooperation or mobilization of the people. I could only imagine how strong and effective this would be if the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government fully cooperate with each other in the near future.

For the MILF, however, addressing these multi-faceted problems require multi-track approach including, as a last resort, a firm and just use of force. Using force unnecessarily is creating more problems rather than solving one. One effective way to handle complex problems is to see it that the people are involved and they support it. It must be a popular decision with the people or at least their legitimate representatives are part of the decision-making.

Finally, in this round of negotiation, the parties will discuss normalization, alongside power-sharing. If power-sharing has been proved to be a hard nut to crack for more than a year, normalization, which has at its core individual and collective security, as well as that of the national government, is a sensitive and emotional issue. More than that, any haphazard handling will have far-reaching negative consequences for both sides.

For this reason, I would like to suggest that part of the discussion on normalization is about a honest-to-goodness risks analysis. Both the MILF and GPH have legitimate fears and concerns and clear vulnerabilities that have to be sincerely addressed or considered by the parties. As we all know, risk analysis is the process of defining and analyzing the dangers to individuals, groups, businesses and government agencies posed by potential natural and human-driven adverse events including defining the various threats, determining the extent of vulnerabilities and devising countermeasures should a threat or attack occur.

It is not real honest-to-goodness negotiation that we are in today if the parties do not face these harsh realities head on and offer solutions together with utmost sincerity, frankness, and partnership. And this partnership can only be proved lasting if it is firmly based on mutual consent and sound foundation based on truth, justice and realities. Any attempt of either party to short-change the other party will not only be known easily by the other party but it would not last long. We see this imagined grim scenario in what is unfolding before our eyes now in relation to the GRP-MNLF FPA, which is flawed in terms of content, implementation, and the actuations of the players. So, therefore, it is better to be honest all the way to the future.

In closing, it is my fervent hope that we would be able settle all the remaining issues on power-sharing and normalization, sign them, and bring home to our respective places and constituencies the good news of this historic success.

Thank you very much and good day!

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Rigidity Is Anathema To Successful Negotiation

Opening statement during the 41st GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on October 8-11, 2013

I have been asked many times by media especially about my expectation of this round of talks. As usual, I told them the road ahead is unpredictable. Negotiation is one human endeavor that is difficult to predict. I have been in this process for the last 14 years or so, but I refrain from making prediction. Whether positive or negative, it hardly helps; on the contrary, it muddles the issue instead.

Today, we are back to this bristling metropolis to try once again to settle the remaining two annexes of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) before the parties can sign the comprehensive peace agreement. While we admit the issues before us are tough, substantive, and sensitive or irritating, at times, but if we can mutually improve, as I said previously, on our respective internal working, I am optimistic that we can move forward quite faster. One way to do this is for the parties not to engage in too much legalism because the process is not a legal process but a political process. Much of what we intend to do to address the Bangsamoro Question is to think "out of the box", because the current Constitution of the Philippines is too narrow and restrictive to argue or entrench any real solution to this problem. A half-baked solution is not better than no solution at all. What we experience with the MNLF right now is a case in point. The GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of 1996 is flawed both in substance and in the implementation. The recent fighting in Zamboanga City would not have taken place at all if that agreement really addressed the Bangamoro Problem or Question.

To summarize, the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of 1996 is flawed in many ways, among which are: 1) the right to self-determination of the Moros was foreclosed; 2) only the government, in case of a controversy in the interpretation of the peace pact, has the final say; 3) MNLF combatants and firearms were mainly treated on the basis of the unprincipled doctrine of demilitarization, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) leaving, however, a sizeable number untouched like the forces of Commander Habier Malik, who attacked Zamboanga City recently; and 4) its implementation lacked effective monitoring mechanism to journey with the process and the parties through to the end. In short, it never gave the Moros real autonomy to govern themselves.

Be this as it may, the MILF has considered the GRP-MNLF Final Agreement as an achievement not only of the MNLF but an added feather on the long and protracted

struggle of the Moro people for their right to self-determination. The MILF is never remiss in this recognition. The MNLF must not fail to understand that what the MILF is negotiating with the government are those that are lacking in that agreement, which are diverse and compelling. And more importantly, the fruits of this negotiation with government will redound to the benefits of everybody including the MNLF. This is the reason that we appeal to them that if they cannot support the MILF, at least they must not stand on the way.

The other way to improve our system and be productive in this negotiation is to conduct our meeting in collaborative way as a problem-solving exercise. Both parties must swing from positional modes to putting forward our minimum positions without losing sight of the larger picture as well as the basic principles and concepts, which are not subject of negotiation. Rigidity is anathema to successful negotiation. This approach can also be supplemented by resorting to exchange of notes or formulations covering as many points as possible. This is to save time and tense moments. Sometimes the principle of being "soft to people and hard to issues" is often forgotten by the parties, and at times the process becomes a more personal engagement.

At this juncture, I would like to take this opportunity to urge the parties to resolve and finish, without delay, the remaining annexes especially power-sharing, because it seriously impedes the timeline of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to finish crafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law soon. If the three Honorable Congressmen, Deputy Speaker Pangalian Balindong, Rufus Rodriguez, and Jesus Sacdalan, who graced our meeting recently, were to be asked, they want the Basic Law finished by the BTC before January next year. On October 15, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) is already one year old, and we cannot prevent people from speculating that there is something serious in the process. More seriously, spoilers of the peace process are rejoicing for this delay and they are not only hoping for the failure of this negotiation but they are also undermining it by resorting to all forms of obstructions including violence and terroristic acts.

If I make this urgent appeal, it is not because the MILF is more interested in finishing this process than the government. That is beyond the point. The point is that it is to our common interest that we finish this process. The consequence of failing in this endeavor is hard to imagine. The road ahead is full of uncertainties. I am not an alarmist person, but I am sure many people can share my legitimate concerns. It is for this reason that the MILF is leaving no stone unturned if only to succeed in this process. We appeal to the government to do similarly, which, I think, is the cornerstone of the policy of President Benigno Aquino III.

On a more positive note, I also want to inform the parties, especially the Malaysian facilitator and secretariat and members of the International Contact Group (ICG) that the BTC had passed a resolution last October 4 authorizing the BTC Chair to enter into an agreement with members of the civil society organizations (CSOs) and other entities for the conduct of public engagement. The various stakeholders, both right-based and interest-based, and the people at large have to be engaged, informed, and their views sought in the writing of the Basic Law. I believe that some of the best ideas are down there among the people and these cannot be accessed until we talk to them with sincerity and frankness. In this regard, we have scheduled the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the CSOs, as initial partners, at the Office of the BTC in Cotabato City on October 17. These CSOs will help the BTC in reaching out to the people, as a necessary component, as earlier noted, in the crafting of the Basic Law, without prejudice to the BTC's prerogative to engage other entities to undertake the same activities. More importantly, the BTC would still do the most crucial public engagement especially those involving key players and agencies in government.

Power Is Very Hard To Give

Opening Statement during the 42nd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on December 4-7, 2013

December 2012 was supposed to be the completion or signing of all the four annexes of the Bangsamoro Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) after this was signed by the parties on October 15. But almost a year had lapsed since; we managed only to settle two annexes (Transitional Arrangement and Modalities and Wealth-sharing) leaving two other annexes (Power-sharing and Normalization) still on the negotiating table.

As I said repeatedly, the reasons for this hardship to finish these annexes on time, are varied: first, power is very hard to give; it is the nature of all governments especially those unitary and highly centralized states like the Philippines to be over-protective of their powers and resources; second, the MILF is making it sure that any agreement with the government will lead to the final resolution of the Bangsamoro Question, because any haphazard or half-baked agreement will only worsen the conflict in Mindanao; and third, while there is an encouraging and growing trust and confidence between the parties, the fear, mistrust, and suspicion of the parties with each other is not totally absent. From time to time, they become evident. But to me, this is not really bad; in fact, this feeling is

natural among former "enemies", which we must recognize, manage and overcome, if we want to succeed. Let us have a look at what really happened between the parties in the course of their 16-year peace negotiation. Before they ever thought of a ceasefire, only war defined their relationship. Then they entered into a very tentative truce especially during the time of the late President Corazon Aquino, followed by a formal ceasefire during the presidency of Fidel Ramos in 1997; then they started talking and signed several agreements, some implemented and others were deliberately breached especially during the administrations of Joseph Ejercito Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Under the current Benigno S. Aquino III administration, the relationship between the government and the MILF is at the highest level and still progressing. If we continue to be truthful and serious in this peace engagement, success of our common endeavor for peace will be ours, Insha Allah.

Today, we are gathered once again here in the bustling City of Kuala Lumpur to continue to hammer out details of the remaining two annexes. I am very hopeful that at least the Annex on Power-sharing will be signed by the parties, so that they can zero-in on Normalization until it is settled to give way to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Frankly, normalization is as important as the other annexes in the CPA. But of the four annexes, normalization is the youngest and newest on the agenda. If I remember it right, it was only in July this year that we started to discuss it and formed the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Normalization, while the other three annexes have been part of the discussion as early as July 2012. It is therefore natural and more reasonable that we settle power-sharing now without waiting for the normalization to catch up. There are two urgent reasons to do this: (1) crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by the BTC cannot cover most ground without this annex; and (2) it is confidence-building measure of sort to make up for the popular notion that the government is only interested in dismantling and disarming the MILF through a glamorized scheme called "decommissioning".

Rest assured that we do not impute such malicious thought on the Aquino administration, which has proved to be a reliable partner in peace. But, decommissioning is such a sensitive issue that once the MILF decommissions its combatants and firearms and put beyond use, this process will be irreversible. It is the first and last act. On the other hand, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) can deploy and redeploy, and cannot only come back anytime but its fire-power and manpower are effectively intact. Come to think it, this is a one-sided equation! But don't ever doubt the MILF complying with all signed agreements including decommissioning. Who is in need of a gun anyway

when there is no need for it or everything comes to normal? It is not fair to say that bearing firearms is part of Moro culture. The truth is that enemies from without starting from the Spaniards to the Americans and then to the years of Martial Law of Marcos forced Moros to defend themselves.

Because of the direct relevance of the subject above to the task of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) especially the crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL),

1. Meeting with FASTRAC (November 26 in Davao City)
2. Signing of the Minutes of the Meeting regarding the implementation of the JICA-BTC Memorandum of Agreement (November 28 in Cotabato City)
3. Meeting members of the Independent Commission on Policing (November 29 in Cotabato City)
4. Signing of MOA with Conciliation Resources (November 30 at the BTC Office)
5. 3-day Session of the BTC (November 30-December 2)
6. Meeting of the Various Committees:
   Committee on Fiscal Autonomy
   Committee on Transitory Provisions
   Note: Funding sources: BTC, JICA, FASTRAC
   Other Committees waiting for official go-signal to start formal work
7. Committee on Constitutional Amendment formally constituted
8. Communication Group formed
9. Socio-Economic Office formed
10. On December 10, the Coordinating Committee of the FASTRAC will meet in Manila to discuss and possibly approve all the pending requests for funding from various groups including BTC committees. Possibly we will also discuss ways and means to demarcate the line of engagements with other friends of the peace process especially those extending logistical support on the basis of the principle of "no duplication but more on supplementation and complementation".

Finally, after talking to some lawmakers in Manila, the BTC has set April in 2014 as the timeline that the draft of the BBL will be finalized and immediately transmitted to the Philippine Congress for their deliberation. I hope Congress, with their collective wisdom, would pass a "good legislation". Simultaneously, massive public engagements or consultations are underway in Mindanao and other parts of the Philippines especially Manila, which is the nerve centre of the government. These activities are undertaken by our partners in the civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as those conducted by partners of international non-government organizations (INGOs), which signed

memorandum of agreements with the BTC. More importantly, the BTC will also conduct its own public engagements or consultations with government agencies or officials, especially legislators, academe, and other sectors of society. Public engagement or consultation is an indispensable aspect of the writing of the BBL.

Thank you very much and wassalamu alaikum!

This Success Is Not Achieved In A Silver Platter

Closing statement during the signing of the Annex on Wealth-sharing at the Palace of the Golden Horses, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on December 8, 2013

I don't think there is any need for me to tell you how I feel now. For those of you who have continued and persevered to journey with us in this long and winding historic peace-making in Mindanao, would understand my feeling now. It is a mixture of joy, happiness, and self-fulfillment and a feeling of continuing heavy burden upon my shoulders, both as chair of the MILF peace panel and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which the government and the MILF tasked to craft the Bangsamoro Basic Law. The pressure and fleeting moment, especially in relation to the crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), has intensified and multiplied. I know that I would be at the center of criticism if the BTC, under my stewardship, cannot deliver and is remiss in its task of writing the BBL. On an equally urgent matter, by January next year we would have another round of negotiation. I don't think this is going to be easy. I know the issue of normalization is as difficult as wealth-sharing and power-sharing. But don't worry; we are only hard on issues but not on people.

This success could not have been possible had we, all of us, did not worked together especially during hard and trying moments. Personally, I would credit most this success to HE Tengku Dato' Ab'Ghafar Bin Mohamed, the Malaysian facilitator, and to both peace panels of government and MILF. The roles of the members of the International Contact Group (ICG) and the Malaysian Secretariat, headed by Madame Che Khasnah, are equally important factor for this success.

To our counterparts in government, especially Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, let me say here that this success is not achieved in a silver platter. We know how we literally "bloodied" each other, to use an exaggerated expression, for one year and a half before

we secure this for ourselves and for our peoples back home. But let me assure you that we will remain as friends, and our respect to all of you remain intact and unshaken for the years ahead especially when we start to discuss normalization.

The seriousness and commitment of both parties to finish the peace negotiation, especially this Annex on Power-sharing, is as strong as ever. The government sent two cabinet secretaries, Madame Teresita "Ging" Deles and Edwin Lacierda, and ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman; and to showcase the same concern and seriousness, the MILF sent three of its most senior members of its Central Committee.

The road ahead, despite this success, is still full of twists and turns. Sometimes, an impending success is aborted at the finishing line. We cannot afford to be complacent. We cannot throw down our guard even for a single minute; there are many spoilers along the way waiting to ambush this peace process. But, God willing, the unflinching commitment and sincerity of HE President Benigno Aquino and the MILF Central Committee headed by Brother Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, and the support of the Malaysian Government, under the leadership of HE Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, as facilitating country, the final success of this peace negotiation is a matter of time.

Thank you very much and wassalam.

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SAGISAG NG PANGULO NG PILIPINAS

Chapter 5:
Speeches from 2014

"We believe that the peace process is more than the end of war and a negotiated political settlement. Its goal is for all of us to live in mutual trust and security."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**
Speech delivered during Courtesy Call to Provincial Capitol, Amas, North Cotabato, January 2014

We Cannot Go On Hating And Hurting Each Other

Opening message during BTC courtesy call to North Cotabato Governor Lala Taliño-Mendoza on January 16, 2014

We come here to you to bring the message of peace, and we take the first steps towards genuine reconciliation. Let us face the future with hope and determination and leave no stone unturned in our quest for the real and lasting peace in Mindanao.

Perhaps, some of you would meet my statements with doubts and reservations. I cannot blame those who harbor these ruffled sentiments, because even from among the people we represent, the Bangsamoro, there are also those who continue to feel animosity towards some people of North Cotabato Province. History has not really been so kind to us by making us a highly polarized peoples or nations.

In mainland Mindanao, no other province has seen the worst of war between "Christians" and "Muslims" than the Province of Cotabato. But being Christian or Muslim is incidental; the confrontation was not about religion; instead, religion was merely used to justify it.

Certainly, we cannot go on hating and hurting each other. At some point in time we have to come to terms with each other. We believe the time has come and it is now. And that is why we are here. We pay our respects to North Cotabato Provincial Governor Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza whose friendship and demonstrations of support to the peace process we have no reason to doubt. We also praise Vice Governor Gregorio Ipong, Congressman Pingping Tejada, as well as all the members of the Provincial Board of North Cotabato who are with us today for journeying with us in our quest for genuine peace in Mindanao. I also pay tribute to other leaders of this province who are not with us today but who are as supportive to the peace process as anyone of us, and to the thousands of men and women who work for peace, in whatever way possible. Pardon me for not being able to mention their names.

The crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law is now at full speed. We in the Bangsamoro Transition Commission hope to finish it by April of this year and then submit it to President Benigno Aquino III, who in turn will transmit it to Congress as an urgent bill. We are very optimistic that the collective wisdom of Congress will ensure the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law without much hassle.

The Bangsamoro Basic Law is not only a document for the form of government that is to be established. By it, we would pursue the development that has long evaded us all; one that is for the people and friendly to the environment.

We have given our assurance to the non-Moros, the Christians and the Indigenous Peoples --- and I am reiterating it now --- that your basic rights, including all your vested property rights, will be protected. There is nothing to fear, because the future Bangsamoro Government is not vindictive or confiscatory in nature. We will approach the future and all the attending problems with utmost care, sensitivity, and understanding. We will ensure that the wheel of justice will run its course smoothly and justly. And we are not alone in the undertaking. We will always be in partner with the Central Government and all those who genuinely believe in and pursue the path of peace and reconciliation.

I appeal to you to be involved in the public consultations being organized by the Commission and civil society organizations. The people and all stakeholders, both rights-based and interests-based, have to be informed.

It is precisely for this reason that Bangsamoro Transition Commission has entered into agreements with more than one hundred civil society organizations in Mindanao and Manila, as well as with at least two international non-government organizations in order to conduct massive and sustained public engagements or consultations.

The Commission operates on the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and parity of esteem. We stand by these principles and we are committed to make them part of our way of life.

If by our visit here today we could have opened doors of reconciliation, then we would consider it as another humble contribution towards the genesis of a truly peaceful community for all of us.

Let us, therefore, give this peace process a chance to run its course and prove its worth. Let us also give the Bangsamoro all the chances to succeed and if in the end they fail, then they can blame no one but themselves.

Thank you very much, and good day to all!

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Let Us Build On Our Achievements

Message during the workshop of BTC at Waterfront Hotel, Davao City, January 20, 2014

It has been nine months since we had our first ceremonial session as a Commission in Manila. To be precise, it was on April 3 last year when we held this session. In that ceremonial session, I laid down ten imperatives in order that the BTC can successfully fulfill its mandates. I would like to revisit two of the ten imperatives today.

First, I described the work of the Commission as the first partnership between the Philippine government and the MILF and thus, we must endeavour to arrive at a consensus on major decisions. The commitment of the entire commission to this imperative is enshrined in our internal rules where we unanimously adopted consensus-building as our preferred and primary mode of decision making. As well, our work plan and committee structures and membership were adopted through consultations and consensus.

The second imperative is to be open, transparent and participative in the crafting of the Basic Law. Since we envision building institutions for the Bangsamoro people and never solely for the MILF, we should involve and gain the support of all stakeholders, whether rights-based or interests-based, as we translate the peace agreement into effective mechanisms and processes in the Bangsamoro Basic Law. This imperative was echoed by GPH panel head Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer in her speech during the ceremonial opening when she emphasized the importance not only of outcome but also of process. She quoted the principle that "the degree of transparency, accountability and participation provide three crucial benchmarks to evaluate the continuing health of a (peace) settlement".

We have no doubt that we accomplished a lot along this line. We have forged partnerships with international and local partners to promote public participation. In the pipeline are our website, social media presence and information and communication materials to inform the public on the work of the Commission. The flurry of committee meetings with experts and public hearings in the last weeks are a living proof of our commitment to inclusivity and public participation. I congratulate all the commissioners for this feat and in particular all the heads of the committees namely Commissioners Bobby Maulana Alonto, Raissa Jajurie, Asani Tammang, Hussein Munoz, and Johaira Wahab.

Yet, in any endeavour, there are always room and opportunities to be better. In the Tagaytay workshop, we created an image of our solidarity and our common vision for the Bangsamoro. We see this image projected on the screen. That thing is not only safely intact to this day; it is getting more and more energized and solidified.

In this session this afternoon what we intend to do is to celebrate our achievements thus far and identify gaps and challenges so that we can generate concrete steps to address them. Simply put, let us build on our achievements and plug the holes on where we score less. Certainly, in this exercise, we will not discuss internal and administration issues and concerns, because they have been pointed out, discussed, and settled this morning during our plenary session.

In the next days, weeks and months, we enter the crucial stage of drafting and deliberating the texts of the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law where both our individual and collective views will be put to test. But our collective wisdom and the clear guidelines set forth in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Four Annexes which will be signed soon, insha Allah, into a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), as well as our common commitment to establish a self-governing entity called Bangsamoro for all the peoples therein, I am sure the road ahead is full of glad tidings. Let our solidarity and this common vision, therefore, broaden our thinking and options and enhance our power of innovation and creativity towards consensus building.

I sincerely thank my fellow commissioners, the secretariat and staff for your cooperation and commitment to our mission. I also thank the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) for its financial and technical assistance to this workshop. In particular, I thank Brother Ali Saleem, CHD country representative to the Philippines, Dean Benny Bacani, and, of course, our good friend, Mike Alar.

Of Inclusivity And Transparency

Speech delivered during Courtesy Call to Provincial Capitol, Amas, North Cotabato, January 2014

We come here to you to bring the message of sincere peace, and we take the first steps towards genuine reconciliation.

Perhaps, some of you would meet my statements with doubts and reservations. I cannot blame those who harbor ruffled sentiments against us, because even from among the people we represent, the Bangsamoro, there are also those who continue to feel animosity towards the Christians of Cotabato Province. History has really been unkind to us by making us a highly polarized nation – Christians versus Muslims, Filipinos against Bangsamoros.

In mainland Mindanao, no other province has seen the worst of war between Christians and Bangsamoros than the Province of Cotabato. The scar of that war would be truly hard to heal.

We believe that the peace process is more than the end of war and a negotiated political settlement. Its goal is for all of us to live in mutual trust and security.

We cannot go on hating and killing each other. At some point in time we have to come to terms with each other. We believe the time has come.

And that is why we are here. We pay homage to Cotabato Provincial Governor Emmylou Talino-Mendoza whose demonstrations of support to the peace process we have no reason to doubt. We also praise Congressman Jesus Sacdalan for his open support to the peace process.

The crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law is now at full speed. We in the Bangsamoro Transition Commission hope to finish it by April of this year.

I gave my assurance to the non-Moros, the Christians and the Indigenous Peoples, that your basic rights are all well protected. I appeal to you to be involved in the public consultations being organized by the Commission and civil society organizations. The Commission operates on the principles of inclusivity and transparency. We stand by these principles.

The Bangsamoro Basic Law is not only a document for the form of government that is to be established. By it, we would pursue the development that has long evaded us all.

Our rightful share in our very own resources would be the lifeblood of our economic and material development that is for all to benefit from.

We are very confident it would finally usher in the peace that would set the tone for our total human development.

Let us then give this peace process a chance to prove its worth.

If by our visit here today we could have opened doors of reconciliation, then we would consider it another humble contribution towards the genesis of a truly peaceful community for all of us, Bangsamoro, Christians and Indigenous Peoples.

A peaceful and good day to all!

To Dream Of That Final Peace In Mindanao

Opening statement during the 43rd GPH-MILF Peace Negotiation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on January 22-26, 2014

Almost everybody back home smells impending success in our current peace talks, especially this 43rd round of negotiation. They say the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement is just in the corner. They have diverse reasons to entertain such belief and I cannot blame them for it. In fact, I sympathize with them but not necessarily taking their view at face value. But truth is that anyone like me who has been part of the peace journey since the beginning will exactly wish and long for the day of reckoning to come soon.

I ask everyone not to stay on the way of these dreamers. Many find solace in dreaming and, therefore, let them continue to dream of that final peace in Mindanao while we in the MILF and government continue to strive to overcome all that stand on our way leading to the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement.

However, this early as expected, the impending success of the talks is gaining many relatives, because success is relative, nay, it has also many fathers. This is a welcome development. It is far better to see droves of people supporting the MILF and declare oneness with it, rather than they join the spoilers and demolish the undertaking. After all, the fruits of the negotiation will redound to the benefit of everybody. This can include even the spoilers and all those who have never shown even a speck of support to the MILF in its four decades of armed struggle and 16 years of hard bargaining on the negotiating table. Truly, it is the nature of a popular struggle, nay jihadic, that except for few hardened outcastes of society everybody is part of the victory party.

Be this as it may, let me caution ourselves this early that the final destination of this journey of peace is not within immediate reach yet. We may be able to sign the comprehensive peace agreement soon as we wish, but that is not the end of the odyssey. Remember that the Exit Agreement that will formally terminate this negotiation will only happen if the two parties have satisfactorily complied with their part of the deal; in addition, not until after the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) and the two parties and the Malaysian facilitator finally certify that both parties have fully complied with their obligations in the negotiation. Ideally that day of reckoning will come our way on or before 2016.

But as a way of consolation to those who follow us and perchance including ourselves, it is not farfetched that during this 5-day session, we will be able to settle all the remaining outstanding issues on the Bangsamoro Waters and Annex on Normalization that block our way to conclude the talks and eventually sign the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) very soon. We have covered a lot of ground during our last executive session. Thanks to the openness and spirit of accommodation of the parties, the superb handling of the Facilitator, and the absence of rigidity as in formal negotiations! Moreover, the signing of the Annex on Power-sharing, as we stressed time and again, had effectively provided the parties the much-needed shot in the arm that triggered their adrenalins to shoot up and overcome what previously were held as difficult issues that haunted us for almost two years since July 2012. I am referring to the issue of Bangsamoro Waters.

At this juncture, let me inform my counterpart, the Malaysian facilitator and the Secretariat, and members of the International Contact Group (ICG) that the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) is working in full blast to fulfill its mandate. The BTC had just held its 8th regular session in Davao City on January 19-20; its various committees are also holding regular meetings and public hearings or consultations. Many of these hearings are scheduled to be held in the island provinces. This will bring the BTC closer to the people.

The crafting of the BBL had already commenced. The BTC set April this year as the deadline for the finalization of the draft of the BBL and by May it will be submitted to the Office of the President, who will transmit it to Congress as urgent bill. I trust that the collective wisdom of Congress will ensure the passage of Bangsamoro Basic Law very smoothly.

The BTC had also started paying courtesy calls on local executives in Mindanao. On January 16, they called on North Cotabato Governor Emmylou Talino-Mendoza and Maguindanao Governor Esmail "Toto" Mangudadatu, who both received the BTC

commissioners exceptionally well. They promised to support the peace process as well as pushing for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) once the referendum takes place. In February, the BTC will pay visit to governors of the Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan. The BTC is also seriously considering visiting Zamboanga City Mayor Beng Climaco. I do not know how she would react and treat this gesture of goodwill from our side, knowing well how she felt bitter, as anybody else of good sense, in relation to the Zamboanga siege last November. Perhaps, our good counterpart can advise us in this regard.

I am also happy to announce here that the BTC's Communication Group had been formally constituted and very soon its website (Bangsamoroonline.com) will join the cyberspace communication arena. The BTC has also organized the Task Force on Mamalu-Tabunaway whose functions include the conduct of dialogues between the descendants of Tabunaway and Mamalu, or more specifically, the Maguindanaons and T'durays, respectively, and to make recommendations especially on land issues in aid of the crafting of the BBL. I assure you, Insha Allah, that as long as the two groups remain reasonable and commit to balance between history and reality and cognizant of their roots as descendants of the two brothers, everything will be settled for the satisfaction of the parties.

On this note, let me thank everybody in this session for giving me the opportunity to render this opening statement.

Thank you, good day, and wassalamu alaikum!

Nothing To Fear In This Search For Genuine Peace

Message during the CSO Summit in Davao City on February 11, 2014

Let me tell you that despite my hectic schedules I find time to be with you this afternoon. I know how significant this occasion is for all of us in our common efforts to find lasting peace in Mindanao. I am also aware that your role in this undertaking is as precious as anybody's including those deeply involved in the peace process.

Let me congratulate all those behind this endeavor. I cannot mention all of them in this speech but a few namely, Atty. Mary Ann Arnado, Brother Guiamel Alim, Pastor Reu Montecillo, Prof. Octavio Dinampo, Sister Maria Arnold Noel, Bae Magdalena Suhat,

Ustadz Rahib Kudto, and Bai Lisa Saway. For those whose names are not mentioned, I seek your understanding and consideration.

I also wish to pay tribute to the unwavering and continuing contribution to this effort by our foreign friends and supporters especially the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the United Nations-World Bank through the FASTRAC. Some of their esteemed representatives are with us today: Mr. Masuda Shinichi and Sam Chittick of the UN-WB FASTRAC.

The theme of your Summit: "Developing Synergies and Enhanced Cooperation in Accompanying the Transition Towards Bangsamoro" is not only very timely but also very challenging. It speaks well of the need of pooling all our efforts, time, and resources towards journeying together in the realization of the Bangsamoro, which is not only a symbol of identity and a geographical space but also a real self-governing Bangsamoro.

This early let me tell ourselves that in all conflict resolutions around the globe, the transition is always the most sensitive part of the whole peace process. It can make or unmake the realization of the very goals of the peace process; i.e., to solve the conflict, normalizes the situation, and empower the people pursuant to the terms of the peace agreement. The transition determines what lies ahead after the parties agreed to concretize what they have settled on papers. This is the reason why the MILF had wanted for a longer transition, because it is during this period that much of the preparation especially institution-buildings will take place. But that did not happen because in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) it only provided for one year life span for the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). Within the BTA's brief stint, it has to draft and adopt, among others, a local government code, an administrative code, and an election code. The BTA has to put into place an infrastructure so that in 2016, after the regular election, the Bangsamoro Government will be born. This in a way makes the BTA assume the role of a superman or super body.

In reiteration, the responsibilities put on your shoulders are tremendous and with far-reaching consequences. The CSOs are indeed indispensable! First, through the CSOs we need to engage the people, so that they will support and be on board the peace journey. We need the people especially the qualified voters during the deciding moment when the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will be presented to them for ratification. Second, we need the CSOs in crafting of the BBL to ensure that the BBL does not only capture what are the agreed points in the FAB and its four Annexes (Transitional Arrangements and Modalities, Wealth-sharing, Power-sharing, and Normalization) but also to input

relevant and important inputs from the people. I am sure that some of those valuable data will be shared with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) during this Summit. And third, while we trust the collective wisdom of Congress, the House and the Senate, whose leaderships have fully committed to the passage of the BBL and the establishment of the Bangsamoro in 2016 to make a good legislation, but the ghost of a weak legislation that waters down the FAB and the its Annexes keeps haunting many sectors of the Moro society including many of the MILF leaders on the ground. In this regard, the CSOs have to engage opinion-makers, policy-makers, and more importantly, the legislators, upon whose hands the fate of the BBL primarily rest after the BTC has crafted the BBL and transmitted to the Office of the President and sent it to Congress as an urgent bill certified by the President. LET US THEREFORE NOT DEPRIVE OUR LEGISLATORS OUR SUPPORT ESPECIALLY DURING THE HOURS OF HARD DECISION-MAKING. Our legislators need us and we need them too to ensure that we journey together for peace through to the end.

Finally, let me remind you that our current painstaking efforts have two real objectives: to prevent the recurrence of war and put into place real and lasting peace in Mindanao and to help all the peoples of the Bangsamoro to stand on their own feet. Therefore, I urge all of you to return to the people, first with a clean heart that we serve them wholeheartedly, second, please tell them that the FAB and its four Annexes, without losing sight of the good points in the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in 1996, gives bright future for the Bangsamoro. For the non-Bangsamoro, please tell them that the dividends of peace will spill over to the rest of the country. There is nothing to fear in this search for genuine peace in our lands. Let us therefore brave the threats of the warmongers, shy away from the dirty tongues of doomsayers, and at the same time sincerely engage those who argue with their brain and whose primary agenda is for the attainment of the common good.

On this note, let me thank once again all of you for inviting me to this Summit and share some of my insights on how to proceed with what we have already started. I personally thank lawyer, Mary Ann Arnado, whose commitment to peace and fellowship of men, are beyond any doubt. I salute you all!

Thank you very much!

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We Are Still Here Bringing The Message Of Hope And Peace

Message during Courtesy Call to Zamboanga City Mayor Beng Climaco on February 12, 2014

In the spirit of peace and reconciliation, I and my fellow commissioners of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), as well as members of our staff, defied time constraint and multiple commitments to be with you today. I know that our courtesy calls to important government officials cannot be complete until and unless we talk to the people of this historic city which had been visited by an unfortunate man-made calamity recently. I am referring to the Zamboanga siege last November 2013, which we in the peace panels of government and the MILF have come out during our meeting in Kuala Lumpur with an official condemnation of the violence that affected the civilians of this city. No reason is enough to justify an act that put the civilians in harms' way.

Madame Mayor Beng Climaco, we are here with you today and we humble ourselves and seek your advices on how best we can move forward with the peace-making in Mindanao. This process has been battered from all sides but we are still here bringing the message of hope and peace so that the armed conflict in Mindanao will be settled to the benefits of everybody. We have seen the gory image of this conflict for more than four decades and I believe now is the time to terminate it. This is a difficult job, but I know that in the end the message of peace will triumph over those who continue for whatever reasons.

Let me remind ourselves that for more than three hundred years during the Spanish regime in the Philippines, the only relation the Spaniards had with the Moros was war. There had never been respite in that confrontation. We can still feel the heat of that animosity from both sides of the divide to this day. Do we want to continue this kind of relationship? Did it bring good tidings and progress to all of us?

Of all the places in Mindanao, Zamboanga City stands towering as symbol of contrast, nay diversity. We have Fort Pilar as symbol of the once Spanish authority in this region. We too have the edifice still standing to this day where the American governors of the Moro Province held their office, because Zamboanga then was the capital of the Moro Province. This province, then composed of five districts namely Zamboanga, Lanao, Cotabato, Sulu, and Davao, had more than 90 percent of its population were Moros and indigenous peoples.

Symbols are very powerful and can be extremely useful tools in the creation of people's worlds. The Ancients understood the power of symbols and used them extensively in and out of their culture for protection, fertility, wealth, crop germination, death and birth rituals.

Symbols can move people to tears and they can also unite people. Depending on how we used them, we need symbols in our lives.

One envying asset of the City of Zamboanga is its diversity. It is a melting pot of all tribes and of traditions. The Latin character of the city is very much alive. The influence of Islam is equally vibrant. The native Subanens may have undergone some form of transformation, but surely they are fully aware of their historical roots. In my grade school, I was taught to sing the song, "Don't you go, don't you go to far Zamboanga". Why were people especially the young ones forewarned to come here because this city had plenty of beautiful ladies, the mestizos, the offspring of the Castillans and the natives of this place.

Diversity is not be feared; instead, it has to be cultivated. The diverse colors of the rainbow make it very beautiful. It is time that we change our outlook from thinking only through prism of unity or where there is commonality among us to looking at where we differ and appreciate them, because that is what it is or what it was. It was and is the natural thing. We cannot change it.

Allow me to quote a verse in the Holy Quran that guides Muslims in their relations with fellowmen, to wit:

> *"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."*

May I ask therefore, what is there in diversity that we fear of?

I think it is our individual weaknesses that create this problem for us, if not our prejudices, hatred, idiosyncrasies, and perhaps the offshoot of our too intense love for this world especially things that glitter.

If I have to plead to you I must tell you, without fear of contradiction, that we have nothing to lose when we unite or at least understand each that after all we have as

much differences as we have commonalities. And this challenge is addressed to all of us especially to the leaders of men.

Finally, we deliberately did not make a power-point presentation relating to the GPH-MILF peace process and present it to you this afternoon, because Zambonga City is not a direct part of the equation in the current peace process. However, we would be happy to answer your questions later.

Thank you very much and good afternoon.

Only Unity Shall Guarantee A Common Future For Our Nation

Speech during BTC Courtesy Call to Sulu Governor and Public Consultation on February 13, 2014

I thank Allah SWT for guiding my steps and leading me again to an island that I once used as a way to reach the destinations of revolutionaries then across the Sulu Sea. I am also thankful that once again I am with a people I always consider as my own, both in ancestry and culture, in faith and practice, in vision and struggle.

You, Tausugs, are our brothers. We have one history. We have one faith --- Islam. We have struggled as one undivided people, differentiated only by the language that we speak.

You have a long and proud history, pre-dating even the formation of the Philippine state. When the rest of the Philippines, even before it was called Filipinas by the Spaniards, were just sleepy barangays, with the exemption of the Sultanate of Magindanaw, the Sultanate of Sulu had already developed a high political organization, a state by itself, and had established not only commercial but also diplomatic and cultural relations with the superpowers then, like China, England, Portugal and the Netherlands.

Because of such political organization and the inherent love for freedom of you Tausugs, and all the Bangsamoros for that matter, we have naturally resisted all foreign domination. You have laid the solid foundation for the right to self- determination the moment your valiant ancestors fought against the Spanish Captain Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa in 1578 in the first battle against the Spanish conquistadores.

Your kindred brothers in Magindanaw were one with your ancestors in exacting a heavy toll on the forces of Figueroa, who was killed by Magindanaw warriors after he sacked Jolo.

From then on we have a common purpose of preserving our religion, culture and distinct way of life.

Unfortunately, for more than 4 centuries now, we are forced by circumstances to assert our inalienable right to self-determination.

The Zamboanga Declaration of 1924 was just one of the many recorded formal outcry of our ancestors, which brought together the Tausugs, Magindanawns, Maranaws and other tribes of the Bangsamoro. That historic document has demonstrated the political consciousness of our ancestors as one distinct nation, and ascribed upon themselves the proud name of Bangsamoro. No wonder, we use the word Moro for our Liberation Fronts, both the MNLF and the MILF.

We acknowledge the invaluable role played by Prof. Nur Misuari in popularizing Bangsamoro in the international community and the global resistance movement. Under his leadership, the Bangsamoro achieved several historic milestones: The Tripoli Agreement of 1976, the Jeddah Accord of 1987, and the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement. All these are part of the rich history of our people that we will never forget.

We have one struggle, and if it maybe that through the course of history we have parted ways, it was not because we embraced a new one. We may have differed in perspective, principles and strategies, but the struggle to free our people from colonization remains even today.

The transition in which the MILF is just privileged to lead is nothing but a continuation of our struggle.

This are not just empty words. We have now secured for all the Bangsamoro a government that would be worthy of its name, truly endowed with powers of governance, and can stand on its own wealth and resources.

The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, the Four Annexes and the Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters can truly lead to our own government that is free from subservience to the dictates of the National Government.

We could have concluded the negotiations early on and easily if we did not take a hard line on the issue of Bangsamoro waters, the core of which is the return of the Sulu Sea to our people in due recognition that the Sulu Sea is your domain and from whence you derive your identity, in the same way that we Maguindanao derive our identity from the marshes of Maguindanao, that's why we are called as or the people of the flooded plain, and the Maranaos from Lake Lanao. Note that under the status quo, you Tausugs have no right over the Sulu Sea, but fishing magnates from Navotas and Zamboanga are exploiting it. You have no claim and share for oil resources since it is beyond the 15 kilometers municipal waters.

We wanted to secure this for you for only through this negotiation that we have the leverage to force them, for the central government to return to us our rights over our domain. We have secured Lanao through the provision on inland waters. We have secured our gas in Ligwasan marsh by it being a part of our territory. We struggled to secure Sulu Sea for you.

Under the current agreement, we will have a share in oil, we will have preferential rights over fishing, and you will have a chance to renegotiate ten years from now for enhancing this. We have fought for this so that you and your next generation will reap the fruits of this struggle.

We have sacrificed heavily for this. If we have abandoned this issue on Bangsamoro waters earlier on, we could have concluded the negotiations way back then, and lengthen the period for the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, the only mechanism wherein the MILF is guaranteed to lead, and only at a very short period of time. After that, it is free for all.

But because you are our own brothers and sisters, we have never abandoned your welfare and place it at the mercy of time. For us, the rights of our brethren Tausogs are as sacred as ours.

We come today to secure your advice on what we need to do in the future. We come to be one with you in Sulu. We are inclusive and there are mechanisms being proposed in the Parliament that would ensure a fair and proportionate representation for all in the Bangsamoro government. We will ensure that your voices are heard and represented. Already, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission has many voices coming from the island-provinces, in fact, five compared to Maguindanao two and Maranao three.

I therefore ask for a genuine unity for all the Bangsamoro tribes, especially you my dear Tausug brothers and sisters. We have built on what have been achieved in the past and we pay homage to those who have sacrificed, beginning with the burning of Jolo in the 16th century and to the massacre victims at Bud Dajo in the 20th century, as well as those who sincerely struggled and sacrificed for the Bangsamoro even up to this very moment.

I pray to Allah SWT that we can be working with everyone here, from the common man in the street to your respected rulers. As in the 70s when we really treated each other as brothers. So in the present, we wish that we can embrace each other again and pursue the ideals of the Bangsamoro.

I do not want to let this chance to pass by without extending to you the message of the Chairman of the MILF, Brother Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. With your permission and patience, let me read to you his message.

MESSAGE OF UNITY
Murad Ebrahim, Al Haj
Chairman, MILF

Assalamu Alaykum Warhmatullahi Wabarakatu.

Let me begin by quoting the famous verse of the Holy Quran:

"And hold fast all together by the rope by which Allah
(Stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourselves;
and remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you;
for ye were enemies and He joined your Hearts in love
so that by His grace ye became brethren;
and ye were on the brink of the pit of fire
and He save you from it.
Thus, doth Allah make His signs clear to you,
That ye maybe guided. "(Verse 112 Surah Aali Imran)

I speak to you today as a brother and I seek your indulgence to lend me your ears.

Today, we stand at a crossroads in our search for a successful conclusion to our struggle as a people. In the long history of our struggle for our inalienable right to self -determination, we have had moments of triumph and of tribulations. A cursory

examination of our past would readily reveal that our forebears succeeded in building our nation and in defending it against colonialism by unity. The difficult periods in our history were caused and marked by the success of the colonialists in sowing disunity amongst our ancestors. The Spaniards were at times successful in sowing intrigues among the rulers of our Sultanates that resulted in debilitating dynastical wars and at other times in pitting the Moros of Sulu against their fellow Maguindanao Moros. It is no accident then that the peak of our nationhood under Sultan Mohammad Dipatuan Kudarat had been characterized by a period of consolidation and unity.

In the more recent past, our resistance against oppression and the abuses of the central government that reached its peak during the Martial Law years has been successful because of our unity. That which has led to our inability to partake of Allah's promise of victory is known to all and sunders- our disunity.

Our nation, the Bangsamoro nation today is faced with many challenges that are equaled only by the opportunities it presents. Primary among these challenges is disunity that is slowly rearing its ugly head as we near the end of the road to our search for peace. As with every great nation faced with challenges and possessed with ideals of freedom and the desire for common good, we may differ in our views and in our approaches. We may belong to different organizations and affiliations. We may be MILF or MNLF. However, no matter what organization we belong to or how we may differ in our views, we cannot deny the fact that we share a common vision for our people; a vision shaped by our common history and enriched by our lived realities and an unshakable belief in freedom, justice and peace. But whether by force of logic or by leap of faith, now, more than ever, we must realize that this vision for our people may only be achieved if we match our dedication to the cause with our unstoppable resolve for unity.

As we move closer to concluding an agreement with the Government of the Philippines, our desire for what is best for our people may intensify and we may debate on how best we can achieve peace and development for all. At times, we may even disagree on the approaches we take to lead us to the vision we share. During this these trying times, I call upon our people to present their views in a more reasoned manner on these important issues confronting us. I do not claim to possess all the answers to your questions nor pretend to hold the single solution to all the ails of our time. But you shall find me listening to your views and consulting everyone so that together, we may realize our dream for our people, achieve our shared vision, and move towards peace, justice and development. Only unity shall guarantee a common future for our nation.

I ask our people to journey with us towards just peace. While we forge greater unity amongst the Bangsamoro people, we must now be prepared to take a leap of faith to embrace a common future with our Filipino brethren. The accident of history and the divide between us erected by the colonialists must be torn down to give way to our greater resolve to heal the past and build a future. A future dedicated to honoring our brave history and a dream for a greater nation. The Philippines stands at the threshold of great economic progress. I have faith that the Philippines will be destined for greatness and our people shall not stand in the way of its progress. Nay, we even desire to contribute in the fulfillment of that dream. All we ask is the honor and dignity of allowing us to decide our destiny much like the dream once held by Filipino patriots when the Philippines was under the yoke of colonialism. We can stand together as brothers in one country but proud of our distinct identity, history and culture. Let us begin to imagine a shared future for our people.

Let a Peace Agreement between us then be the foundation of mutual respect and recognition.

Let a Peace agreement heal our past.

Let a Peace Agreement propel us to greater development and prosperity.

Let a Peace Agreement be our covenant that henceforth we will only journey together.

Let a Peace Agreement be our gift for our future generations.

Let a Peace Agreement be our contribution to global peace.

May Allah always guide us all!

The BTC as an Avenue For Dialogue

Speech delivered during the launch of the Primer on the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and the Bangsamoro Basic Law, Manila, February 24, 2014

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

To my good counterpart from the Government, Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer; the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines, Ambassador Guy Ledoux; to the Regional Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Mr. Michael Vatikiotis, to my colleagues and fellow Commissioners, to our friends from the media…. Ladies and Gentlemen Good evening!

It has been more than 16 months since the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro was reached and over a year since Executive Order 120 was released by President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, thereby creating this Commission which I now head. Since this Commission was fully able to constitute its rules and structure, we have endeavored to work following three basic principles of transparency, consensus building and popular participation. We have also worked to ensure that the Commission becomes an avenue for dialogue where all stakeholders can let their voices be heard.

Today, we launch an instrument that is envisioned to help the Commission further encourage popular participation in drafting the Basic Law. This primer, which has been translated to 6 languages (Tagalog, Cebuano, Maranao, Maguindanaon, Teduray and Tausug), along with our public hearings and consultations, is part of the Commission's effort of reaching out to as many stakeholders as possible so as to ensure that the draft Basic Law will mirror the needs and aspirations not just of the MILF, not just of the 15 members of the BTC, but of all Bangsamoro people.

Tomorrow, the country commemorates the EDSA revolution that rescued democracy from the fangs of a dictatorship 28 years ago. The Bangsamoro people also suffered immensely during that dictatorship and our suffering continued even after the fall of the regime in 1986. Thus, our struggle for a chance to fully determine ourselves, which is not unlike the yearning of the people amassed a few hundred meters from this hotel in 1986, continued to this day. EDSA was a popular revolution, ours is guerrilla in nature but supported by the people. But with the success of the peace negotiations thus far, we have been given a chance to transform our struggle into a democratic and popular one through the drafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

This Primer is significant towards this end as it will provide more people, especially those from grassroots communities who may not be able to attend our public consultations, access to the Commission. The primer provides them not only with information about the Commission and its work but also how they can reach the Commission to express their fears, concerns and even send their submissions.

In behalf of the Commission, we express our gratitude to the friends of the peace process that have stood by our side during the negotiations and have continued to support us now that we are at a crucial stage of implementing agreements reached at the negotiating table. Our gratitude goes to the European Union and to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

In advance, let me thank as well, members of the media for helping us spread the word about this primer and about the Commission's website -- www.bangsamoroonline.com -- where they can freely download and reproduce the primers in all seven languages. Come to think of it, you the media are a very important stakeholder in this process. In fact, you could make or break this. We, thus, ask for your support and assistance in spreading word about our work.

Thank you very much. Asalaamu alaikum warakhmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

No Risk Taken or Leap of Faith Made Greater than the Cry for Justice and Self-determination

Message during the Social Call to Members of Congress on February 26, 2014

It is a great honor and a personal privilege for the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to make this social call to the Honorable members of the House of Representatives. As Chair of the Commission, I would like to thank the House leadership led by the Honorable Speaker Feliciano Belmonte for the kind invitation and the warm welcome your Honors have extended to us.

I am gratified that we are meeting today in a casual and less formal setting. I sigh in relief that we are not in Congress because we are summoned by any of its committees to appear under pain of contempt.

Instead, we are being welcomed as your partners as we journey together towards achieving the long sought peace and prosperity in Mindanao.

The BTC is the product of the partnership between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. It is the same olive branch of peace and partnership that BTC is extending to Congress today.

Please allow me to imagine our partnership from the lens of the BTC.

Our partnership is founded on our common aspiration that sustainable peace and development will reign in Mindanao and the whole country. In legislating the soon-to-be-signed Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), Congress will

most likely be besieged by many interest groups and individuals who will raise a myriad of issues ranging from the constitutionality and legality of the agreement, to political considerations and practicality and viability in implementing the agreement.

These may be valid concerns. Yet, we should not lose sight that there is one supreme consideration that stands above the rest and that is addressing the root causes of the long-drawn Moro rebellion.

What is the use of a measure that passes all constitutional and legal tests but fails to address the root causes of the Mindanao conflict, and worse, becomes a source of new and more virulent fissures? What is the use of measures that may be politically expedient but will only further entrench the very system that fuels the armed conflict? What is the use of sleek, practical and viable measures when they cannot be implemented in an environment of instability and insecurity?

The root causes of the Moro rebellion were aptly articulated among others by someone who is not a Moro but a Christian leader whose family are settlers not indigenous to Mindanao. I am referring to the newly installed cardinal of the Catholic Church, His Eminence Orlando B. Quevedo.

The good Cardinal summarizes the roots causes of the Moro rebellion into three: first, injustice to the Moro identity; second, injustice to the Moro political sovereignty; and third, injustice to Moro integral development.

The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the annexes and the CAB recognize the long history of injustice to the Moro people and have laid down the principles, modalities and infrastructure for redressing their grievances. I urge Congress to exercise its plenary legislative powers to translate the peace agreement into a law that is faithful to the spirit and intent of the peace pact.

As Chair of the Commission, I respectfully submit that the FAB and its annexes assert that justice for all is the basis for sustainable peace and prosperity in the Bangsamoro. On the other hand, law, in the words of Martin Luther King, "exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress".

As the attainment of social justice is the ultimate aim of law, Congress is urged to pass a Basic Law that is no less than a "legislated peace agreement"---a Basic Law that is faithful in letter and spirit to the CAB.

I apologize for touching on a serious subject on this light and casual occasion. It is precisely your generosity in welcoming us as friends and partners that I can speak out from the heart.

Amidst the different discourses on the role of the Congress in legislating the peace agreement, I feel that I have to speak out and urge the Honorable members of Congress to be the "enablers" that will make the agreement of the parties for sustainable peace and development in Mindanao come to fruition.

Let us be partners, the BTC and Congress with the whole of the Philippine government in addressing the historical grievances of the Moro people. Some quarters are saying that the MILF is taking a big risk and a leap of faith in partnering with the executive branch and now with Congress. Let me say that there is no risk taken or leap of faith made greater than the cry of our suffering people for justice and self-determination.

Let us continue not only to open but also to widen even more the lines of communications we have started to put in place today. Your BTC will continue to engage Congress and its committees so that we can build mutual understanding of the peace agreement, the context by which it has been forged and the real intention of the parties.

Thank you and good day.

Giving Justice Must Be The Heart Of The Whole Undertaking

Message during the Sajahatra Bangsamoro's Service Presentation Ceremony at BLMI Training Center in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao on March 4, 2014

Today's event is historic if we reckon on the manner of how we reach this point of partnership between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). As everyone of us here knows, the government and the MILF, nay the MNLF, started their engagement with each other with so much hatred and mistrust that led them to agree to go to war that claimed the lives of at least 150,000 people since 1972, not to speak of the billions of pesos spent on the battlefield and the losses to government and civilian properties. That was more than 40 years ago. We were then called "wata" or children. But now we are called "matua" or elders.

Material things can be easily replaced but it is hard to heal a wounded heart or feeling. Just forgiving and forgetting is a simple menu, but surely it won't last long. Giving justice must be the heart of the whole undertaking.

Frankly, it takes too long, to be exact 17 years, before this trust and confidence that led to this partnership happen. And it takes an Aquino --- President Benigno Aquino III --- to let this happen, which is evenly matched by the sincerity and commitment of the MILF led by Brother Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. Therefore, it is but morally upright and for every practical reason that we value and nurture this partnership between the government and the MILF.

This, however, would not remain as such but it has to find consummate realization in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which my good counterpart and I will sign very soon, insha Allah. But this realization cannot remain on paper either but it has to be implemented on the ground by the parties, in partnership with all the supporters, sympathizers and friends of the peace process who have invested so heavily in terms of time, effort and resources in order that this pacific journey will succeed.

Real peace is now within reach. But, as a word of caution, the remaining portion of the journey is not a paved one. It is still full of humps and bumps. Many a conflict resolution efforts fall on the wayside at this stage. Therefore we cannot afford to bring down our defenses. Vigilance, struggle and this partnership must proceed with renewed vigor and speed.

We are here for the Sajahatra Bangsamoro Presentation Ceremony for the various recipients of this initiative, which is President Aquino's concrete, socio-economic initiative aimed to uplift the health, education, and livelihood conditions of MILF communities. The MILF agreed to this project with the firm belief that this project is in support of the peace process and not in any way similar to the previous government initiatives, which were solely counter-insurgency measures. And we are seeing that indeed this is not the kind of thing that we dreaded before.

I therefore appeal to all the recipients of this program to take this trust with utmost care and responsibility. Our people cannot afford to be like a mendicant forever. Somewhere and sometime in the future we have to stand on our own feet while remaining to be truthful and loyal integral part of this country.

Thank you very much and good day!

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The Future Of Our People Lies In The Approval Of The BBL

Message during the Courtesy Call to Lanao Del Sur Gov. Mamintal Adiong Jr. on March 10, 2014

We come here as brothers in Islam. We come here as nearest of kith and kins. The people of the lake and the people of the flooded plains were inseparable in history. We come here to rally one another to work as one body and soul for our collective well-being and future of our people. Rest assured that together with our brothers and sisters in the provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Zamboanga, and Davao, as well as the indigenous peoples, the emergence of a new nation, the Bangsamoro, is forthcoming.

Indeed, the challenges ahead are both promising and daunting. We must face them with hope and determination. Blessed are those who dare; for success or victory belongs to those who persevere.

But we are not here to discuss those challenges or any other serious matters. We are here to pay our courtesy to the Honorable Governor of Lanao del Sur. This has been long overdue. But it is only now that this becomes a reality. Whatever is the reason, justified or not, we apologize just the same for the delay.

Thank you Governor for the warm welcome and for receiving us with open arms. We cannot ask for more. In fact, we take great pride for this great reception.

The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which I happen to be the chair, is crafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). During our courtesy call to President Benigno Aquino III last January 30, he called us to finish the task on or before March 31. We accepted the challenge and we are working on this timeline.

Frankly, we do not know whether we can beat the deadline or not. But as striver for the last more than 40 years or so, I could only accept failure after I tried my best. For me, no failure is wholly taken as such. Failure can be the jumping board to success. Any man or woman who refuses to accept failure will never succeed in life. Failure is a necessary ingredient of success.

Let me assure all and sundry that insha Allah we can and will finish crafting the BBL this month. After which we will engage the Office of the President and thereafter Congress of the Philippines, both the Lower House and the Senate. We look up with great hope that the collective wisdom of the congressmen and senators, they will pass a

good legislation. Eventually, the BBL will be submitted to the people in a plebiscite, so that it becomes the fundamental law of the Bangsamoro.

I appeal therefore to the Honorable Governor, Vice Governor, members of the provincial board, the mayors of the various municipalities of this province, other local government officials, and the people of this province to vote yes resoundingly for the approval of the BBL. The future of our people lies in the approval of the BBL. It will not be a perfect law but certainly it is much better than the current laws that applied to our people. We must nurture it and let it mature in the course of time.

Finally, let me personally thank the Honorable Governor of Lanao del Sur and his colleagues and the people of Lanao Del Sur in general for receiving us warmly.

Thank you very much and wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

The Greatest Hope For Real Peace Is In Our Hands

Bismallahir-rahman-nir-raheem. Assalamu Alaikum WTWB.

To our distinguished guest speaker, the Honorable Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, the Honorable Governor Mamintal Alonto Adiong, Jr. of the Province of Lanao del Sur, my good counterpart Honorable Chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer of the GPH, members of the Government peace panel, fellow Commissioners of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, and to relatives and friends from this part of Lanao del Sur, let me greet you a pleasant morning.

Dear brothers and sisters of Lanao, thank you for taking the time to listen to us and letting your voices be heard in today's Consultative Assembly. Special thanks also to the core group who planned and coordinated this joint consultation between OPAPP, BTC and the Provincial Government of Lanao del Sur—Commissioner Robert Alonto, his staff, and the Provincial Government of Lanao del Sur.

As most of you know, the GPH and the MILF are set to forge the ultimate agreement, rightfully called the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, at the most immediate time. In a few days from now, the greatest hope for real peace is in our hands. And before we commit the future and destiny of our people to that Agreement,

we have come here to you, dear people of the Lake, to solicit once again your blessing and support for that most historic event.

Over the years, our people have invested their sweat, blood and tears (to borrow the words of Winston Churchill) in the quest for real and lasting peace in Mindanao. I believe that the return on these investments have been one of our best: That we have reached this point, hand in hand with our partner, the Government of the Philippines, so that we may be able to put an end to injustices and secure for ourselves and our posterity that ever-elusive peace.

Let me share with you my current thinking about this journey towards peace.

The MILF and GPH panels are well-positioned to take up this challenge – the challenge of solving the Bangsamoro Question, and what steps to take best to achieve success in this endeavor.

The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro reaffirms the understanding between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Government of the Philippines on the core issues that had been fully negotiated and completely settled in instrumentalities, such as the Framework Agreement and its Annexes as well as all other prior agreements entered in relation to this exercise. Both the MILF and the GPH panels, therefore, have an over-arching commitment to finally answer the Bangsamoro Question, and to ensure that it will be on a path to economic security, stability and success for the future generations of the Bangsamoro.

We continue to believe that the establishment of the new Bangsamoro political entity will pave the way for good governance and will result in a stronger, better-resourced, autonomous region, suited to the way of life of the Bangsamoro. "Autonomy" is the language we speak as we frame our efforts to push for greater support for the Bangsamoro at the local and national levels.

We seek to establish the new Bangsamoro political entity with due regard to individual and collective rights, democratic, and representative of the diversities we embrace in the territory. We are guided by the principles of subsidiarity and parity of esteem under an asymmetrical political relationship with the Philippine State.

To state the obvious, we know that we, the MILF and the GPH, cannot do it alone. We look to all of you, as one Bangsamoro, to help us weave the most important tapestry of tomorrow that embraces inclusivity and celebrates diversity, and as together, we shall

strive to sustain peace in Mindanao. Each one of us is a strand, none more important than the other.

The road to lasting peace is only as exciting as the journey itself.

We are indeed privileged and honored to have an interesting gathering of Lanao people in this venue as partners in this crucial stage.

Thank you and Wassalam.

An Achievement Of A Lifetime

Speech during the adoption of the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) at the BTC Office in Cotabato City on April 20, 2014

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatulahi Wabarakatuh and good afternoon to one and all. I deemed it a great privilege to welcome our honored guests one by one.

I must confess that after the signing of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by the Commissioners, we have overcome the greatest challenge faced by the Commission. We have beaten the timeline set for us to submit the first formally adopted part of the BBL to the Office of the President in Manila last April 14. Now, we have the full text of the proposed BBL and this will be transmitted to the Office of the President immediately.

Indeed, this is not only an achievement of a lifetime; it is a history in the making.

I thank my fellow commissioners for this feat that forced them to use the limit of human endurance. Without their cooperation and contribution, this task will not have been made possible. I would like to personally thank Commissioners Robert Maulana Alonto, Akmad Sakkam, Asani Tammang, Raisa Jajurie and Hussein Muñoz for unwavering support in making this historic document a reality. This is not, however, to gloss upon the valuable contributions extended especially by the other commissioners like Melanio Ulama, Talib Benito, Ibrahim Ali, Said Shiek, Abdullah Camlian and Pedrito Eisma.

Now the next challenge for all of us is to bring this engagement into high gear in Congress. We will engage them so that the political document contained in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) that initially transformed into a

legal document such as in BBL will result in "good legislation" passed by the Congress. I believe in the collective wisdom of Congress in passing a legislation based on the agreement of the parties as contained in the CAB without curtailing into the plenary power of Congress over legislation.

On the other hand, we don't view our impending engagement with the Office of the President as something worrisome. The government and MILF, after the signing of the CAB, are partners; therefore, the engagement is one of problem-solving and partnership. It is their common interest to ensure that a mutually acceptable BBL be transmitted to Congress, so that they can work together to ensure the smooth delivery of the bill, certified urgent by President Benigno Aquino III. More importantly, we believe in the trustworthiness of the President to deliver the BBL as his legacy to a nation in distress for more than four decades.

Honored guests and visitors, it is time to close ranks---and journey together for the sake of peace in this country.

I also called upon everybody to work hand-in-hand with each other so that the elusive peace in Mindanao is achieved through the BBL. I urge the Muslims, Christians and the indigenous peoples to cooperate with each other so that there would be peace, harmony and progress in Mindanao. For me, this is the only way forward. I hope everybody shares this view.

In the BBL, there is a new beginning for all of us. It is not a perfect basic law since there is no such thing as perfect basic law. But it has passed through all levels of deliberations and decision-making, which are transparent and democratic. Many of our sessions were open to the public. And more importantly, all decisions especially major ones were decided in the plenary sessions.

It is incumbent upon all of us to undertake the task of protecting the gains that we have made in this undertaking. Before I end this message, let me quote Eleanor Roosevelt who once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams". Those dreams, a prospect of a brighter future, are in the BBL, and therefore, we must nurture it and protect it from the evil whispers and acts of spoilers, who are clothed sometimes with sheepskins. Let us again work hand in hand towards this end and beyond.

Thank you very much and good afternoon!

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In the BBL, There Is A New Beginning For All Of Us

Welcome Address during the BBL Signing Ceremony at the BTC Office on April 20, 2014

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Afternoon to one and all. I deem it a great privilege to welcome our honored guests one by one.

I must confess that after the signing of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by the Commissioners, we have overcome the greatest challenge faced by the Commission. We have beaten the timeline set for us to submit the first formally adopted part of the BBL to the Office of the President in Manila. We did it last April 14. Now, we have the full text of the proposed BBL. This will be transmitted to the Office of the President immediately.

Indeed, this is not only an achievement of a lifetime; it is a history in the making.

I thank my fellow commissioners for this feat that forced them to use the limit of human endurance. Without their cooperation and contribution, this task will not have been made possible. I personally thanked Commissioners Robert Maulana Alonto, Akmad Saccam, Asani Tammang, Raissa Jajurie, and Hussein Munoz for their unwavering support in making this historic document a reality. This is not, however, to gloss upon the valuable contributions extended especially by the other commissioners like Melanio Ulama, Talib Benito, Ibrahim Ali, Said Sheik, and Abdulla Camlian.

Now the next challenge for all of us is to bring this engagement into higher gear in Congress. We will engage with them so that the political document contained in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and initially transformed into a legal document such as in the BBL will result in "good legislation" passed by Congress. I believe in the collective wisdom of Congress in passing a legislated agreement based on the agreement of the parties as contained in the CAB, without curtailing into the plenary power of Congress over legislation.

On the other hand, we don't view our impending engagement with the Office of the President as something worrisome. The government and MILF, after the signing of the CAB, are partners, and therefore, the engagement is one of problem-solving and partnership. It is their common interest to ensure that a mutually acceptable BBL be transmitted to Congress, so that they can work together to ensure the smooth delivery of the bill, certified urgent by President Benigno Aquino III. More importantly, we believe

in the trustworthiness of the President to deliver the BBL as his legacy to a nation in distress for more than four decades.

Honored guests and visitors, it is time to close ranks --- and journey together for the sake of peace in this country.

I also called upon everybody to work hand-in-hand with each other so that the elusive peace in Mindanao is achieved through the BBL. I urge the Muslims, Christians, and the indigenous peoples to cooperate with each other so that there would peace, harmony, and progress in Mindanao. For me, this is the only forward. I hope everybody shares this view.

In the BBL, there is a new beginning for all of us. It is not a perfect basic law since there is no such thing as perfect basic law. But it has passed through all levels of deliberations and decision-making, which are transparent and democratic. Many of our sessions were open to the public. And more importantly, all decisions especially major ones were decided in the plenary sessions.

Before I end this message, let me quote Eleanor Roosevelt who once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." That dreams and future are in the BBL, and, therefore, we must nurture it and protect it from the evil whispers and acts of spoilers, who are clothed sometimes with sheepskins.

Thank you very much and good afternoon!

To Say That Rido Is Part of Moro Culture Is Highly Unfair

Closing Remarks during the Launching of the Book on Rido in Davao City on April 30, 2014

Dr. Steven Rood, Country Representative of The Asia Foundation
Dr. Moctar Matuan
Mr. Jowel Canuday
Prof. Rufa Guiam
Participants to this Conflict Mitigation Forum
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon to all of you who gathered here today:

Thank you very much for inviting me to this Conflict Mitigation Forum and to the launching of the book on rido. Despite my hectic schedules and the recent special meeting in Kuala Lumpur last April 24-25, I find it necessary to be part of this occasion. I simply cannot say "no" to the invitation of a good friend, Dr. Steven Rood, who has been one of the most resourceful and steady friends of the government-MILF peace process. The Asia Foundation, after becoming a member of the International Contact Group, is now part of the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT), which monitors the full implementation of all the agreements of the government, and MILF. Together with the GPH and MILF Peace Panels and the Malaysian facilitator, the TPMT holds the key to when the exit agreement, terminating the GPH-MILF peace negotiation, will take place.

Ladies and gentlemen, my role here is to say my closing remarks, a task that I consider not so difficult. After the closure, everyone will of course bid good bye to each other.

But before that allow me to say a few words on the subject of the forum today, which has direct relevance to the peace-making endeavor in Mindanao. As I listened to the various inputs and recommendations from the participants, it reminds me of the urgency of addressing the phenomenon of the so-called rido or "grudge fight". Its menace is clearly evident wherever and whenever it takes place in any locality in the region.

Given the word rido as forming part of the Moro language and it is the subject of various studies, and in fact, books have been written about it, it is not fair to negate its existence. Facts of its occurrences are not rare in Mindanao. However, to say that rido is part of Moro culture is highly unfair and ridiculously exaggerated. It had never been and will never be one. The Moros, who are Muslims, know that whoever kills anybody without morally justified reasons has committed a mortal sin that no amount of prayers can cleanse one's guilt. Hell is the necessary abode of murderers.

To me, rido feasts on certain false or distorted values of individuals or groups, whose main concept of right or wrong is anchored on ego and family pride. Those involved in rido are in the minority among the Moro population. If we look at where rido is prevalent, the pattern is clear that largely it is occurring where it used to take place more frequently. In that sense, it forms part of the psyche of the people in those communities. Second, rido is the direct offshoot of the failure of justice. When people are offended and nowhere can they get help to redress a wrong done, chances are that they will take the law into their hands. Thirdly, the cause of rido is due to weak governance or the lack

of it. And it goes without saying that leaders in those affected areas or communities are either ineffective or never cares for the people at all.

What is the solution or antidote to rido? Without sounding over-simplistic, I think the first approach is to raise the moral values of people that killing and counter-killing is not only a sin but also counter-productive. It gets people to nowhere and makes their lives miserable. They are the first and last victims. This is the reason that almost all ridos were settled amicably after the prolonged killings and counter-killings. Sense has returned after the senseless acts. Education, although a long process, is still the most effective way to effect value transformation. Learned people seldom involve themselves in senseless killing. This can be coupled by making the community productive. Generally, those who engage in productive life especially in business are less prone to rido. Second, the justice system has to be strengthened and must be responsive: the civil courts that cater for all, the Shariah Court for the Muslims, and traditional justice system for the indigenous peoples. And finally, governance must be firmly established and strengthened. While it is true that there is government in existence in the Bangsamoro from the region, province, municipality, and barangays, but largely the people do not consider them as their own. There is so much alienation of the people from the government.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not want to prolong this discourse. I am not here for that. My part here is simply to render a closing remark. So therefore, let me close this program by thanking everybody for their presence.

Again, good afternoon to everybody!

An Investment That Only The Succeeding Generations Will Fully Enjoy

Keynote Speech during the Forum sponsored by the ARMM's Department of Agrarian Reform Entitled "Consultative Forum on Sustainable Rural Communities in the Bangsamoro" in Davao City on May 8, 2014

At the outset, let me thank the organizers of this forum for inviting me to speak on a subject close to my heart, a subject which has been made more personally attaching and attractive after the MILF and the Philippine Government signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) last March 27. In particular, I am thanking the Honorable Secretary McMillan Lucman of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) of

the Autonomous Region in Muslim (ARMM) and Commissioner Fatmawati Salapuddin of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) for this invitation. Thank you sir and madam!

Let me say here that serving the people and promoting and safeguarding their interest are a lifetime commitment of every real revolutionary, nay mujahid, which this humble representation has pledged unto himself to carry on to this day. It comes only second to what every Muslim's earnest and lofty intention to please Allah and hopes to get reward as recompense. Truth is that I am still technically a revolutionary to this day, because the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) which I chair is not only the offspring of the Executive Order No. 120 signed by President Benigno Aquino III but also of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) which was signed by the MILF and the government on October 15, 2012. But with the signing of the CAB, this struggle has shifted from armed to what the late Salamat Hashim described as the most practical and civilized way to solve the Bangsamoro Problem or Question in Mindanao, which is through peaceful means. In short, the MILF-led struggle is getting more and more, and finally in the offing, democratic.

Clearly, both the FAB and its four Annexes, which virtually were signed into the CAB, contained many provisions that promise good future for the Bangsamoro, both in terms of peace and security and development. In the CAB, the theoretical foundation for a sustainable Bangsamoro community is firmly set and soundly expressed. The immediate problem, however, is whether this political document can be translated into a legal document called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to be enacted by Congress. The long-term problem is how to implement it satisfactorily on the ground and redound to the benefits of grassroots communities.

For its part, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) had already fulfilled its mandate of crafting the proposed BBL, which it submitted immediately to the Office of the President last April 21, which in turn would transmit to Congress as an urgent bill. It is Congress' turn now to fulfill its part in the search for genuine peace in Mindanao

I can cite several provisions of the CAB, which clearly point towards Bangsamoro's sustainability in the future especially in the rural areas. In Section IV, number 8, of the FAB, it provided that sustainable development is crucial in protecting and improving the quality of life of the Bangsamoro people. To this end, the Bangsamoro shall develop a comprehensive framework for sustainable development through the proper conservation, utilization and development of natural resources. For efficient coordination and assistance, the Bangsamoro legislative body shall create, by law, an intergovernmental

body composed of representatives of the Bangsamoro and the central government, which shall ensure the harmonization of environmental and development plans, as well as formulate common environment objectives.

In Section VIII, Number 10, of the FAB, it said "The Parties agree to intensify development efforts for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of the Bangsamoro, and institute programs to address the needs of MILF combatants, internally displaced persons, and poverty-stricken communities.

In the Annex on Wealth-sharing, in its prefatory statement, it highlighted the need to bridge the financial gap between the Bangsamoro's prospective needs and the revenues being created therein.

In the Annex on Power-sharing, the Bangsamoro has also exclusive power on special development programs and laws for women, the youth, the elderly, labor, the differently-abled, and indigenous cultural communities.

In the Annex on Normalization, Section G, on Socio-Economic Development Program, Number 4, it already provided for a sound policy guideline: That the socio-economic programs should be community-based and reinforce social cohesion, and strengthen and preserve the unity of the communities.

In addition, the CAB also provided for wide-ranging opportunities or privileges, if not powers, for sustainable community and the Bangsamoro in general, such as the following provisions:

The Central Government shall provide the Bangsamoro block grants, based on a formula which in no case shall be less than the last budget received by the ARMM immediately before the establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. The block grants shall be released automatically. However, it shall be subject for review after ten years, on the basis of need and actual revenues generated.

The Central Government shall also provide for a Special Development Fund to the Bangsamoro for rehabilitation and development purposes.

The Bangsamoro has also the authority to contract loans, credits, and other forms of indebtedness with any government or private banks and other lending institutions, except those requiring sovereign guarantee, which requires Central Government approval.

The Bangsamoro is also authorized to issue bonds, debentures, securities, collaterals, notes and obligations to finance self-liquidating, income-producing development or livelihood projects pursuant to the priorities established in its approved development plan.

The Bangsamoro can also avail of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to achieve inclusive growth and poverty reduction, particularly through the implementation of priority development projects.

Over and above, the Bangsamoro is not only entitled to a fair share of the revenues collected in its territory but also given the power to collect most of the taxes levied by government, some of which shall pertain to it in entirety. Wealth creation or revenue creation and sourcing is very much a power of government in the Bangsamoro as in the Central Government.

Be this as it may, as the organizers of this forum rightly said, that the CAB is a significant breakthrough in the peace and development efforts not only in Mindanao but in the whole country as well. It marks a historic milestone in Moro's quest for genuine peace to achieve inclusive growth and development.

But it is also equally true, as the organizers also clearly pointed out, that considerable work has to yet to be done to transform the peace and development process into tangible realities in the lives of the Bangsamoro. Agreements and even laws would not implement themselves. It requires the intervention of men and women, who are not only good and capable but more importantly are morally-upright, to implement them for the people. Between a good man and bad law and bad man and good law, I would choose the first. A good man would make a bad law into a good one, or at least, he neutralizes the ill effects of such law, while a bad man would not only unmake the good law but also defiles everything his hands lay on.

Similarly situated, even granting that the BBL will be passed into law by Congress, as I firmly believe they will, the so-called utopian state that many imagined in the Bangsamoro is not going to happen overnight or say in a year or two or several years. It is an investment that only the next one or two generations will fully enjoy the fruits of what we are sowing today. But this is and has always been the nature of this undertaking. An old adage has aptly puts it that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, but the second best time is today. Had we not started the struggle more than 40 years ago and the negotiations almost 17 years ago, I would not be speaking in front of you today. After three months of sailing in the high seas without any sight of land, Magellan told his men,

"sail, sail, and sail". On March 16, 1521, they landed in Limasawa in Central Philippines. Victory belongs to those who persevere.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me end this speech by summarizing its basic substance into simple and concrete ideas and means to achieve what this forum aims to attain: "**A Sustainable Rural Communities in the Bangsamoro**". First, the BBL must be passed by Congress; second, enough good leaders must occupy the helm of the Bangsamoro Government; those who think of themselves not in the forefront in times of plenty and first in times of crisis; third, the bureaucracy in the Bangsamoro must be chosen on the basis of competence and skills and not on the basis of patronage; fourth, policies and programs especially socio-economic must prioritize those marginalized sectors of the community, who are the overwhelming majority of the population; fifth, accountability is not only to laws and men but more solemnly to God, Who knows whatever we think and do; sixth, the Central Government must fulfill whatever it committed to the Bangsamoro; and seventh and last, Allah says in the Holy Qur'an that man shall have nothing except what he strives for; meaning, everyone must strive to earn a living and save. In Islam, obligation takes precedence over right.

Thank you very much for lending me your ears and I hope that in a very little way I have contributed to this noble intention of the organizers to achieve a sustainable rural communities in the Bangsamoro.

Wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh!

Give Us The Chance To Prove That In The Bangsamoro, the IPs Have A Bright Future

Speech during Solidarity Event with IPs at EDSA Sharingri-la Hotel on May 23, 2014

Courtesies!

I welcome you all to this event of celebration, solidarity, and hope. I thank you all for your presence in this solidarity event.

We celebrate today the consensus reached in the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) of the proposed public policies governing the Indigenous People in the Bangsamoro.

This consensus was possible because of the historical kinship that all indigenous people in Mindanao share for centuries of struggle against all forms of colonization. This solidarity and kinship makes us hopeful and confident that we will overcome more challenges in our collective and continuing assertion for self-determination.

The provisions on the IPs in the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) are consistent and build on the terms of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). Let me provide you the main features of the draft provisions.

The heart of this section is the recognition by the Bangsamoro government of the rights of the indigenous peoples and it is mandatory that it adopt measures to protect and promote IP rights particularly the following:

1) The right of the IPs to their native titles and/or fusaka inged, indigenous customs and tradition, justice systems and indigenous political structures;
2) Right to an equitable share in revenues from utilization of resources in their ancestral lands;
3) Right to free and prior and informed consent;
4) Right to political participation including at least two (2) reserved seats for the IPs in the Parliament;
5) Right to basic services and;
6) Right to freedom of choice as to their identity.

The reserved seats in the Parliament were expressly identified as allocated for the Tedurays, Lambangian, Dulangan Manobo, Blaan and Higaonon. The customary processes of these IP groups will generate a list of nominees from which the Chief Minister will appoint the IP reserved seats representatives.

The proposal further provides that it is mandatory for Parliament to enact the mechanisms for the equitable shares of the IPs to exploration of natural resources in their ancestral lands subject to their exercise of their right to free, prior and informed consent. The Parliament will also have to legislate a justice system appropriate for the indigenous peoples as defined by them.

The proposed BBL reiterates the obligation of the Bangsamoro government as provided for in the CAB to protect the rights of the IPs in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The proposal also provides that the Parliament may create an appropriate office or ministry for the IPs which shall be part of the Bangsamoro cabinet to develop and implement the programs for the IPs.

The Parliament may create appropriate local government units in the areas inhabited predominantly by the IPs subject to the criteria it may set forth in the Bangsamoro Local Government Code.

I make the following observations on these proposed provisions:

First, they provide guarantees for the protection and promotion of the rights of the IPs in the Bangsamoro. When the Bangsamoro government is in place, the IPs should be confident that their native title and/or fusaka inged over particular areas is recognized and within these areas, they will enjoy broad rights.

Second, the provisions are broadly formulated to allow the parliament enough flexibility to evolve the mechanisms for the full protection and promotion of the IP rights in the context of the Bangsamoro.

Third, the provisions do not make any distinction as to Islamized and non-islamized IPs to promote unity and kinship among the different IP groups founded on shared vision, principles and future. The only instance that particular IP groups were mentioned is with reference to the reserved seats for IPs to forestall any doubt that those seats were indeed reserved for these IP groups.

Fourth, the provisions clearly establish the strong foundation for continuing dialogue and the assertion of the IPs of their rights on one hand and the concomitant obligation on the part of the Bangsamoro government to protect and promote IP rights guaranteed under international and domestic laws on the other. In the end, guarantees and protection in law are good only up to the extent that the IPs themselves are able to assert and demand respect for their rights. On the other hand, the Bangsamoro government will have to enact policies to ensure that the IP's right to their native title are effectively exercised.

The IP provisions in the proposed BBL provide only the general principles. Mechanisms, structures and processes have to be fleshed out in legislations in Bangsamoro parliament. The BTC understands the predicament of the IPs under the ARMM where applicable laws and mechanisms for the exercise of their rights were vague, inadequate and when recognized, were poorly implemented. It is for this reason that the BTC has

formed a multi-stakeholder task force on indigenous concerns to begin even at this early stage a consensus-building process for putting in place the mechanisms and processes to implement the IP provisions in the Basic Law. The task force is mandated to complete the following tasks before the BTC ends its term:

1. Build support of all stakeholders to the IP provisions in the Draft Basic Law.
2. Continue to explore and dialogue on the best mechanisms and processes to implement the IP provisions that include among others the identification of IP areas and tenurial instruments for submission as legislation to the BTC, BTA and to the Bangsamoro Parliament.
3. Conduct confidence-building measures to foster understanding and cooperation between and among IP groups.

The establishment of the task force concretely demonstrates our commitment to respect and promote the rights and welfare of all IPs especially the IP groups that continue to feel marginalized in the autonomous region. Reaching a consensus on this roadmap for the IPs has not been easy. The IP issue has been one of the most difficult and complex concerns I addressed as Chair of the BTC. Understandably, groups held on to unshakeable ancestral domain claims backed by clashing interpretation of international and domestic legal and political principles.

Yet, a zero-sum, take no prisoners' approach in addressing this complex issue proved counter-productive and destructive of relationships that are key to building peace in our communities. We made progress only when we took on a new lens and develop a new language that will foster unity not division in our communities. With this new lens, we can now imagine a Bangsamoro where all groups equitably and mutually reap what have been gained in our quest for self-determination on top of the rights already enjoyed by each and every person or group. We should focus our energies to weaving our beliefs, laws and rights towards forming a tapestry of peace, unity and progress in the Bangsamoro.

Let me call on the IP stakeholders and champions to engage the BTC task force and continue the dialogue we began in the BTC towards realizing the vision behind the IP policies in the proposed BBL. For those who believe that the Indigenous Peoples' Right Act (IPRA) answers the long struggle of the IPs to protect their ancestral domain claim, rest assured that we respect that stand. There is no rancour in our heart. It is part of their right to self-determination. In the same vein, I am appealing to them also to respect the view and stand of the MILF, clearly contained in all signed documents and in the proposed BBL, that there is only one ancestral domain in the Bangsamoro, which is

owned by Moros and IPS. Give us the chance to prove that in the Bangsamoro, the IPs have a bright future. This we will prove once the Bangsamoro is in place.

Let me thank the two IP representatives in the BTC, Commissioner Froilyn Mendoza and Commissioner Melanio Ulama who were both passionate in articulating the sentiments of the IPs in the drafting of the law. I thank them for their openness to explore avenues for cooperation and consensus. I would like to thank all my fellow commissioners for exerting the effort to understand the complex subject of the IPs. My gratitude to the IP experts and advocates who helped us explore possible options moving forward.

Finally, let me thank the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) with support from the European Union (EU) for providing technical, facilitation and logistical support to the consensus-building process. CHD will continue to provide assistance to the Task Force on IP Concerns.

Thank you.

The Most Pressing Challenge Faced By Our Movement

Opening remarks on Political Transition Workshop for MILF Leaders held in Cotabato City on June 1-3, 2014

Allow me to welcome the delegation of the United Nations Development Programme led by Mr. Chetan Kumar, Team Leader of the Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Recovery of the UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Hassen Ebrahim of the Standby Mediation Group of the Department of Political Affairs of the UN and who I understand is a member of the African National Congress in South Africa which successfully made a transition also after the fall of the Apartheid Regime in that country, Alma Evangelista of UNDP Manila and the rest of the Team. Welcome to the Bangsamoro homeland.

Let me extend my appreciation and also welcome my brothers from the leadership of the MILF led by the First Vice Chairman Ghazali Jaafar and the members of the Central Committee, the different agencies of the MILF, the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, the heads of the mechanisms and organs of the peace process such as the CCCH, AHJAG and others, senior commanders of the BIAF, our leaders from the different provinces including those delegates from Tawi Tawi, Sulu, Lanao, Basilan, and the Zamboanga Peninsula.

Today, we are gathered, and thanks to the facilitation of the United Nations, for an important occasion to discuss the most pressing challenge faced by our movement, the MILF leading the transition until the Bangsamoro regular government is established, hopefully, in 2016. I say it is the most important challenge we face today because it presents both threats and opportunities for us. At one extreme, it can bring an end to the movement that we have sown with all our hope and nurtured with our own blood, sweat and tears. At another, it can move us to the vision that we all have dreamed of, that of a peaceful and productive community that nurtures our belief and provide equal opportunities for us all that we can fashion and mold with our own hands, free from the unreasonable interference of other people. If we succeed, victory belongs to all but if we fail we can only largely blame ourselves for it.

I urge each one of us therefore to contribute our ideas and actively participate in the workshops so that together we can examine the challenges, dissect the problems, learn lessons from one another, and hopefully come out of this meeting prepared to face the challenges of the transition.

Without pre-empting the discussions in this two-day workshop, let me humbly outline quickly the challenges of the transition as I see it. The following are the practical challenges that we, the MILF, faces during the transition:

1. Building a core of bureaucrats who will have the needed skills and core competencies to run a ministerial/parliamentary government. And let me be candid that this is not easy as we have been trained our lives as guerillas and not as bureaucrats. Hence, capacity development may not be sufficient and that we may need to resort to capacity mobilization;
2. Establishing institutions and setting up institutional relations with development partners and the central government for receiving and managing funds for the different programs in the transition such as development and rehabilitation fund, normalization fund, scaled up regular government programs, and programmatic funds jointly designed with donors;
3. Creating a mechanism for collaboration with other organized groups such as the MNLF, Moro Professionals, IPs, and other groups in the development of a common "Bangsamoro" vision or agenda;
4. Transitioning our combatants into other roles such as "public security providers" and other creative roles that they may appropriately play;
5. Transitioning the MILF into a social movement or other forms of aggrupation while maintaining its core values and advocacies;

6. Transitioning many of our organs and agencies and instrumentalities into "legal, regular and effective machineries for our public advocacies and the pursuit of our vision for our people";
7. Redefining a new relation with agencies of the central government and LGUs;
8. Transforming the MILF camps and communities to productive civilian communities and ensuring that our people do not end up just being laborers or workers in their own communities;
9. Developing a program for the families of our fallen comrades. We must ensure that no one is left behind, and especially those who have been left behind by our fallen comrades. They, more than anyone deserves our care and attention;
10. Bringing everyone onboard this peace process;
11. Providing a space and opportunity for deserving Bangsamoro outside of our membership to participate in fulfilling the Bangsamoro dream without making our members feel being eased out in the process;
12. Creating a mechanism for continuously learning from other revolutionary movements in the world which have successfully transitioned from revolution to governance;
13. Shifting the locus of engagement with government from the negotiations to implementation.

These, I hope, would help our discussions and workshops.

Thank you and wassalam.

Peace Process on the Bangsamoro: Significant Experiences

Speech during the International Conference of Cotabato on Peace is Living Together at the Notre Dame University, Cotabato City on June 6-7, 2014

Seventeen long years of hard and protracted peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines (GPH) is by any standard not a short engagement. Certainly, a lot of significant lessons, both good and hard, have been earned because of this engagement.

Every conflict is unique by itself. Each one offers a unique combination of factors––the sources of the conflict; its history; the positions and interests of the players, and so on. Therefore, experiences learned from other conflict peace resolutions or the conflict

itself can only be shared and studied but not copy paste and apply to the Bangsamoro. The Peace Process in the Bangsamoro is a model by itself, but not yet fully a success story. There are still many challenges ahead and more importantly, the "Exit Agreement" marking the closure of the negotiation, has not yet been signed by the parties. When will be that day, I do not know exactly, although theoretically, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) says, it would be in 2016.

Allow me to be candid in my recounting of personal experiences first as a member of the MILF peace panel for three and a half years and, second, as chair for more than 11 years. I will therefore discuss them here, as I see them, setting aside, as much as possible, the official view of the MILF as an organization and the MILF peace panel as a whole. It is the nature of storytelling that same event appears differently to as many people present, at times out of conviction, and often by improvisation or embellishment.

Indeed, there are hard and soft lessons learned from all kinds of negotiations whether political or business in nature, like you don't get all what you ask for -- you get what you negotiate or when the other party says no to an offer, it is the start of the real negotiation, etc. I will not discuss them here; they can be learned from written books and articles, which dealt with them more thoroughly.

Objectively speaking, the nature of people, nature of government, and the well-entrenched status quo benefitting the chosen few and the overwhelming majority with the minority and marginalized groups at the receiving end would require a long haul not only on the success of the revolutionary struggle but even of the peace negotiation itself. Two things emerge to be too hard to share and give by the state: power and resources. Add the hatred, mistrust, prejudices, enmities between and amongst peoples and communities, and the oppressive and exploitative laws and policies of governments, expect, as we experienced and suffered excessively therefrom, the consequence can hardly be doubted: a hard and protracted peace process.

The personal factor in the peace negotiator plays an important role on how the peace process develops and is being pursued. Individual styles, background, and views can either hasten or impede the flow of the negotiation and its outcome. It is not true to say that military men are not good negotiators. My experience tells me that they can be as good as any negotiator of other profession or training. However, the most effective negotiator is one who fully understands the nature of the problem to be addressed and is fully committed to solve it. Of course, the success still depends on the policies of the parties' principals. They are the real decision makers.

It is very hard to read real intention. But even in the case of good ones there are always those that go beyond in terms of consequences, good or bad. Therefore, in negotiation there is little difference, if any, between what appears to be good and bad intentions. Both require anticipation, vigilance, and good planning, and well-studied counter-move. Successful negotiator's motto is: prepare, prepare, prepare.

There is little room to doubt that the GPH-MILF peace process started, on the part of government, not really to solve the Bangsamoro Problem despite its billing that it is intended to solve it. However, for the MILF, the intention was pure and untainted, but it was also fully aware that the process is going to be long and hard. Therefore, it was more of a tactical move especially on the part of government to use the pacific undertaking as image-building and to gain time including strategic advantage over the MILF militarily while the MNLF was put to the helm of power and groomed to deliver or lose direction as a consequence of the never-before-experienced complex situation. Any revolutionary movement, which has lost its core values in the various transitions, or changes that take place in the course of time, or those that have none at all, will certainly be eaten up by the system that it sought to replace.

Failure to comply with obligations solemnly entered into by the parties stipulated in agreements is a betrayal of trust and deserves retribution, the least of which is shaming and blaming. Sometimes, however, this non-compliance results in the aggrieved party's gain. For instance, the all-out war waged against the MILF resulted in the elevation of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation from a domestic undertaking to the diplomatic stage with third party facilitation. The second all-out war against the MILF in February 2003 paved the way for the coming in of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT), which monitored the effective implementation of the GPH-MILF ceasefire agreement. The third all-out war between the government and the MILF, as a result of the failure of government to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in August 2008, brought about the International Contact Group (ICG) which is tasked "to exert proper leverage" to the party that is remiss in its compliance. I don't know what happens next after the GPH and MILF signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) if one party deliberately refuses or fails to comply with its obligations. Of course, first, the Exit Agreement, marking the closure of the peace process, will not be signed and the party at fault will bear all the curses and condemnations. What will happen next, I do not know; we have to hope and work for the best. But my experience teaches me that achievement gained through political means has to be asserted through political means.

Friends or supporters of the peace process naturally develop from among cause-oriented groups (COGs) than say, politicians and businessmen. But contrary to their billing, some COGs that are supposed to take a clear stand on an issue are sometimes taking the wrong side of history. Some adopt an ambivalent attitude and ultimately shows off it true feathers all the way to uncover the nature of the hands that organized them. Actually there are still other COGs that are virtually guilty of outright practice of double standard of morality or justice especially on the issue of the ancestral domain claim of the indigenous peoples (IPs). When on the other side of the controversy are Moros, these COGs adopt a very critical approach, as if they are the saviors of the IPs, but when Christian migrants including mining companies intrude into the lands of the IPs they look somewhere. Their lips are sealed.

All individuals, groups and organizations can be trusted; it all depends on the level of engagement and the amount of trust invested. However, absolute trust is a myth even among the closest of friends and groups. This gives way to the adoption of a policy of "need to know basis" to protect the unnecessary and unintentional disclosure of information and, without stating, including betrayal of comrades.

This willingness to trust people and engaging them wholeheartedly is perhaps the reason why, borrowing the words of my esteemed counterpart in government, Prof. Miriam Ferrer-Coronel, the MILF is the "most organized revolutionary group" in the country today. The top leadership of the MILF unearths the power of trusting people. Trust begets trust, goodwill, and cooperation of people. Similarly situated, one's character and attitude are more appreciated by people rather what one said or wrote.

Alongside trust, truth is also an effective weapon in dealing with the strong and the powerful. "Truth hurts," the Bible says, "but it sets you free." The truth is as hard to tell, as it is to hear, but fairness, consistency, and strength flow from it.

"You can't handle the truth!" That's the famous line from A Few Good Men, a play by Aaron Sorkin produced on Broadway in 1989 and as a movie in 1992. Thirteen years later, the American Film Institute named this line the twenty-ninth greatest American film quote of all time.

The MILF's boldness to engage even the most powerful states and multilateral grouping like the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the European Union in the search for real and just peace in Mindanao is anchored on this. We believe in the ultimate truthfulness and legitimacy of the Bangsamoro people's Cause and therefore, we are not afraid to engage anybody, groups or states.

There is also the ever-itching penchant of people in negotiation, usually the stronger party, to take back whatever is conceded in signed agreements through various means. The attempt to dilute or water down agreement always appears enticing to some negotiators. Because of this, the basic lesson in the art of negotiation that nothing is agreed until is agreed is not enough guarantee, as per our experience, that there is full agreement already, so that what we did is to add the long dash (---) and signed. Some negotiators hold the view that all is fair in negotiation, as in love and in war.

Finally, sometimes it is hard to negotiate with your own peer rather than those sitting on the opposite side of the negotiating table.

Thank you very much and good morning.

Challenges for the Bangsamoro Future: Post-Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB): An MILF Perspective

A paper read during the Consolidation of Peace (COP-6) sponsored by JICA in Hiroshima, Japan on June 23-25, 2014

In every post-agreement period, there are always hard challenges ahead. The case of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), signed between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on March 27, 2014, is not an exception. In fact, with its complex and multi-tiered approach, not so much seen in other conflict resolution models in other parts of the world, expect the challenges ahead to be also complex and stunning. The parties should not expect a short haul. This early, I must confess, we are already feeling the heat.

First and foremost of the hurdles is for the successful implementation of the CAB; because the CAB is merely a piece of paper, it will not implement itself. It takes the intervention of people and their sincerity and decisiveness to make sure that this agreement will be implemented true to its letter and spirit. Many a good agreement fails to address a particular problem and halt the conflict, because in the end, there is that tendency especially of the powerful partner to dilute the content of the political document like the CAB when the legislated form takes place. The consequence would be that the other party usually the insurgent side will be forced to swallow the hook, line and sinker offered to it or reject it outright. On both scenarios, the conflict will continue to exist, oftentimes

with much more fury, because in the first case, other armed groups usually the more radical ones which do not believe in peace negotiation will condemn the perceived sell-out and will carry on the struggle. In the second scenario, rejection of the watered down legislation would be the handiest recourse of the other party, say the MILF.

But right now I still have that faith with President Benigno Aquino III that he would not allow the impending full success story of the GPH-MILF peace process to just be waylaid by circumstances. Real peace in Mindanao is truly befitting his legacy to the nation at large and the generations yet to come.

Therefore, the possibility of a watered down BBL is perhaps more in the mind of people rather what he intends to do, in partnership with Congress. After all, it was he who said time and again that he will not sign an agreement that he cannot implement. The MILF is holding on to this commitment of the President.

However, the fear of people that Congress would pass a weak version of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) as crafted by the MILF-led Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) always lingers on. There is no way we can dash it away. It is like a Damocles' Sword hanging over us especially to members of the BTC and the MILF in general. In such a possibility, the post-agreement scenario does not appear very bright, because a diluted version BBL is no better than "no BBL" at all and, surely, the MILF will not accept it.

Anent to this is the lingering possibility that the next president sitting in Malacañang Palace will not pursue the policy of President Benigno Aquino III of putting to rest the armed conflict in Mindanao. This is not to say, however, that the MILF negotiation with the government is with the executive branch of government only. The deal has always been with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and whoever is elected as president is duty bound to honor and implement any agreement entered into and signed by the GPH and, in this case, the CAB with the MILF.

Be this as it may, but experience tells us that every president who came to power has diverse policy formulations on the conflict. Some merely used it to buy time; others either resorted to it as image-building as peace-makers or to prove a thesis that the problem in Mindanao can be settled purely by military means; still other, in the case of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, had the virtue of sincerity to solve the conflict but seriously lacking in the will to push it. Instead of saving the peace process, she chose to save "her neck" by not signing the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in August 2008.

There are other challenges ahead of us, but I am sure the moment a good BBL comes out of Congress, everything gradually falls into place and becomes easy. This is especially true to the issue of decommissioning of MILF firearms and forces and putting them beyond use, which the MILF considers as an ultimate sacrifice for the sake of just settlement of the conflict in Mindanao. Ultimate interest of the Bangsamoro, which is securing for them a real self-governing entity, requires an ultimate sacrifice.

The truth is that while decommissioning is not about surrender or destruction of firearms, which is no-no for the MILF, but just the same, it is about parting away with something that the MILF and the Bangsamoro people had banked on effectively in defending their limbs and properties especially during the height of Martial Law from 1972 to 1986. More importantly, without the military power of the MILF, its political power is greatly suspect and will be reduced to a pushover organization.

Other problems such as the disbandment of private armies, creeping-in of feudalism, as the direct offshoot of the impending introduction of plantation economy, drug trafficking and addiction, etc. can be handled well with the growing partnership between the Bangsamoro and the Central Government. All is well as long as trust and confidence are with the two partners and they journey together through to the end. Insha Allah, there is nothing to worry very much!

Thank you very much and good day!

Current State of Peace Negotiation Between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)"

Statement read during a forum on peace process in Istanbul,Turkey on June 26-27, 2014

The peace negotiation between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is almost a success story. The two parties have already signed the most significant agreement in their 17 years of protracted negotiation, which is the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) last March 27, 2014. This agreement provides for the negotiated political settlement of the armed conflict and Bangsamoro Question in Mindanao that claimed the lives of about 150,000 lives since 1972. There are no more substantive issues left in the pipeline of the negotiation for the parties to discuss except when new problems, mainly on the implementation

aspects, crop up from time to time that require a meeting of the peace panels in Kuala Lumpur.

The good thing in the GPH-MILF peace process, unlike other peace processes especially the GRP-MNLF peace process, is that even after the signing of the CAB, the peace panels are not disbanded and would continue to engage each other when necessary until all the signed agreements are fully implemented and they signed the "exit agreement". This agreement will mark the termination and end of their formal negotiation, so that in the regular operation of the Bangsamoro Government all problems with the Central Government shall be resolved through the inter-governmental relations mechanisms involving several layers of government.

To date, what remains to be done by the parties to complete the process, aside from the normalization of the previously conflict-affected areas and their transformation into peaceful and progressive communities, is to translate the CAB, which is a political document, into a legal framework to be passed by the Philippine Congress. For this purpose, the two parties have created the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) whose main mandate is to craft the proposed basic law called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which will become the governing law for the future Bangsamoro political entity. However, in order to do it legally feasible and executory on the side of government, President Benigno Aquino III had signed an Executive Order No. 120 creating the BTC, which upon its creation in late 2012, started to work on its mandate immediately so that on April 22, 2014 it had submitted to the Office of the President (OP) the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law for submission to Congress as certified as urgent bill to fast track its enactment into law.

The BTC's proposed BBL mainly copy-pasted the essential elements of the CAB, pursuant to the provision of the same, to wit: "The mechanisms and modalities for the actual implementation of this Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, including the ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law pursuant to Article V. Territory of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, are spelled out herein. The Parties shall mutually take such steps for its full implementation leading to the establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and the regular Bangsamoro Government ..." in 2016.

The rationale behind this approach is simple. It is simply to avoid or minimize debates and oppositions especially from the government itself, knowing fully well that not all in the government service are fully on board the peace efforts of President Aquino. Besides, spoilers abound everywhere and ready to spew their venom at the first opportunity that occurs.

Sad to note, however, that only after two months, to be exact 61 days, while I was in Hiroshima, Japan on June 23 that this humble representation, as Chairman of the BTC and the MILF peace panel, had received a copy of the proposed BBL bearing the remarks and comments from the OP, which heavily diluted the original proposal coming from the BTC. A lawyer of the MILF, commenting on the remarks of the OP on the BBL, said that when a law is crafted out of it, the ensuing law or BBL would be worse than the Republic Act No. 9054 that created the so-called Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which in every bit is an administrative arrangement. No less than President called the ARMM as a "failed experiment".

Now the challenges ahead appear daunting. Unless the Parties and the supporters and friends of the peace process come to the timely rescue and prevent the foreseeable collision of approaches of the two parties, the much-heralded signing of the CAB in Manila, Philippines last March will be over-shadowed by bickering, blaming, and shaming. The direct consequence would be that the BBL will not be submitted to Congress on July 28, in time for the State-of-the Nation Address (SONA) in Congress of President Aquino, or the government would proceed to submit the BBL without the concurrence of the MILF.

The position of the MILF on the proposed BBL is very simple and straight forward. All those explicitly expressed and provided for in the CAB will no longer be the subject of negotiations. They are finished and settled. It is therefore nonsensical to raise them anew. However, all those, which are not expressly provided but fleshed out by the BTC, as part of its mandate, could be the subjects of subsequent engagement between the Parties. If reasons and consistency prevail, there is no way this controversy cannot be settled.

Be this as it may, but the MILF has been with this kind of situation before and emerged out of it head high. After the breakdown of the ceasefire and the peace negotiation in 2000 at the behest of the Estrada administration, which launched the all-out war against the MILF, the peace negotiation, which was then on a domestic stage, was elevated to the diplomatic stage with the participation of Malaysia, as third party facilitator, upon the invitation of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2001. In 2003, while the peace negotiation was also moving modestly, the government ordered another all-out war against the MILF under the pretext of running after so-called kidnap-for-ransom groups. After the last bullet was fired, and the Parties reengaged in their peace journey, the International Monitoring Team (IMT) came in to oversee the effective implementation of the ceasefire, thereby creating an atmosphere of tranquility for the peace negotiation to proceed undisturbed. Again, in August 2008, after the government reneged by not

signing the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), after it was initialed on July 27, 2008, and another full-blown war erupted, the International Contact Group (ICG), earlier designed to act as "international guarantee", was organized to help the Parties comply with their obligations. Their exact mandate is to "exert proper leverage to the parties" to make sure that all is well and followed.

Today, we are on the verge of a similar situation. But I don't think we are in a hopeless situation. I don't think the parties will allow the situation to degenerate into something we do not like. I still have confidence on both sides' determination to overcome the perceived hardships ahead of us. The almost sudden visit of President Aquino to Japan to discuss bilateral issues with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and then proceeded to Hiroshima to speak before delegates to a peace forum organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), mostly coming from the MILF including Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and this humble representation is a timely occurrence at the precise moment when many a member of the BTC and the MILF is irritated, if not infuriated, by the almost total disregard of the proposed BBL crafted by the BTC. What is amazing is that the very government office tasked to oversee the conduct of the peace process, on the part of government, that led to the signing of the CAB, instead of defending the essence of this historic document or at least inhibited itself out of delicadeza, virtually led the review team of the OP to overhaul almost the entire proposal of the BTC, tasked by the two parties and by the President himself through his Executive Order No. 120 to craft the BBL. Before he spoke to the delegates, President Aquino met first with Chairman Murad and the undersigned at the Sheraton Hotel, which lasted for about 25 minutes. While I cannot disclose the details of the meeting, but suffice to say that it was mainly about the way forward vis-à-vis the BBL.

Moreover, the infrastructures of the peace process, especially after the signing of the CAB, are so well-knitted and all-embracing that any sign of fissure can be addressed well and promptly. We have the third party facilitating country, which is Malaysia, we have the International Contact Group (ICG) composed of the United Kingdom, Turkey, Japan, and Saudi Arabia, representing the states, and Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), Conciliation Resources (CR), Muhammadiyah, and Community of Sant'Egidio, representing the international non-government organizations (INGOs), we have the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) headed by a foreign eminent person, which monitors and validates the compliance of the parties, we have the Joint Normalization Committee (JNC), we have the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) headed by an eminent person nominated by Switzerland, the Independent Decommissioning Body (IDB) composed of Brunei, Norway, Turkey, and two representatives each from government and the MILF, and many more others.

Finally, let me state here that no matter what happens to the BBL, enacted or not by Congress, the MILF will remain focused on pursuing the Bangsamoro people's right to self-determination at all cost. The MILF will also leave no stone unturned in exposing the true state of things surrounding the BBL, which must be faithful to the letter and spirit of the CAB. Truth must be pursued and error must be shunned. More urgently, the MILF will continue to capacitate our people, including building of institutions, linkages, networks, and alliances, so that they will have greater clout and power in asserting their right to self-determination.

Thank you very much and wassalam.

Our People Must Be Made To Understand How the BBL Would Impact on their Lives

Speech during the Media Round Table on the Bangsamoro Basic Law on September 22, 2014 at the Ateneo de Manila University

It is with pleasure that I relay to the organizers and participants my personal appreciation for the conduct of this Media Round Table on the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

It is but timely and proper that after the proposed BBL has been officially transmitted by the President to the House of Representatives and Senate, we now ask the question "What now?"

A part of the answer to that introspection is public engagement via the media.

We in the BTC have been keenly aware that since April 22 of this year, when the original draft of BBL was submitted to the Office of the President, people from all walks of life have been asking for copies of the draft.

On hindsight, and taking into consideration the marathon sessions and workshops that became necessary and must be convened after the OP returned the draft to the BTC on June 23, it was more prudent to settle everything first before the draft was made available to all. After all, it was, and technically still is, a work in progress.

But now that there is already a mutually accepted version of the BBL and that it is already an official public document in the form of a legislative bill, the public now has unfettered access to the contents of the draft BBL.

The MILF leadership, including the eight of us who sit in the BTC and have the legal mandate to the draft the Basic Law, has fully agreed to the draft BBL because it conforms to the letter and spirit, text and context of the March 27, 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

Thus, the story of the draft BBL is inextricably linked to the 17-year old political negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF. As such, each of the 18 articles and the 242 sections, including the preamble and appendix, nay, each letter and word, has a context that must be told and be made understandable.

Ours is a struggle for the restoration of our identity and dignity, the restoration of political rights that we have always enjoyed even before the time of conquest and colonization, and the restoration of territories where we dominate since time immemorial.

In the pages of the draft BBL is reflected the story of that struggle and the recognition of the legitimacy of said struggle.

But more than the contents of the draft, our people must be made to understand how the BBL would impact on their lives.

This, I think, is the direction that this media roundtable ought to pursue.

I need not belabor the obvious point that media is the most potent conveyor of information, or even misinformation sometimes. Public perception and opinion are certainly influenced and shaped by the stroke of the pen, or by the airwaves, or by the pervasive social media.

I certainly welcome then this initiative on the part of MindaNews to gather respected members of the so-called fourth estate, being as we are now in the grove of the academe, particularly here in the Ateneo de Manila University to whose officials I must say thank you for the warm reception.

Lest I may forget, I also thank the Conciliation, Resources, the International Organization for Migration, Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, the National

Union of Journalists in the Philippines, the Philippine Press Institute, the European Union and the UK Aid.

I look forward to a productive discussion with you.

Thank you.

Let Peace Be Our Lasting Legacy

Speech given during the BBL Briefing for the Senate Committee on Local Government on September 23, 2014

Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to address the esteemed members of the Senate and talk about what is very important to us: the establishment of the Bangsamoro.

Why does the establishment of the Bangsamoro matter? Why should we build the Bangsamoro? This is important because the establishment of the Bangsamoro will end the long-standing conflict that has been the scourge of our people. The conflict has caused untold pain and misery. It has brought poverty and insecurity to our people. It has cost thousands of lives. Let us end this situation. Let peace be our lasting legacy.

Every person has a right to live a happy and meaningful life. Let us grant this right to our peoples in the Bangsamoro. Life is meant to be lived in freedom and in pursuit of meaning and significance. Instead, the conflict has caused our people to live in fear and in want. Today, we have a singular opportunity to end suffering, poverty, illiteracy, impunity and lawlessness. Let us work hard to make this happen. Let peace be our lasting legacy.

But there is more. The Bangsamoro will not only liberate the Bangsamoro people from insecurity and poverty. It will also build the country. It will make the Philippines whole. For the longest time, the Bangsamoro have been kept at the margins of Philippine national life, the Bangsamoro will grant us the opportunity to participate as real, active citizens of this country.

The Bangsamoro will also strengthen the stability of this country and will be our best antidote against rising radicalism, as it will show that there is space for the Bangsamoro in the Philippines.

The Bangsamoro will also spur this country's development, as it will become an economic hub in an area adjacent to Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. With peace that the Bangsamoro will bring, there will be more investments, more jobs, more education and more opportunities not just for the Bangsamoro but for the whole country as well.

Lastly, the Bangsamoro will also strengthen our geopolitical status in Asia. Whereas before our country was divided, now we are one.

Those opposed to peace in the Bangsamoro will claim that the Bangsamoro Basic Law is (1) unconstitutional, (2) will divide the country and (3) is merely a ploy for independence on the part of the MILF.

The Constitution, among other things, is a toolkit for solving intractable social problems. There is enough flexibility in the Constitution that will accommodate real solutions to ending the conflict in Mindanao. As long as there are men and women of good will that seek peace, the Constitution will never be a hindrance.

Instead of dividing the country, the Bangsamoro will unite the country. What divides a country is neglect, lack of respect and lack of appreciation of diversity. What unites a country is respect and celebration of the richness of our different histories, cultures and faiths. This is what the Bangsamoro brings.

The Bangsamoro is our best insurance against independence. If the Bangsamoro works to bring peace, development and security to the people then independence becomes less attractive. People will only leave a relationship when they are treated badly. But if they are treated well, there will be no reason to aspire to be independent. Look at the result of the referendum in Scotland where the no vote for independence outvoted the yes for independence. The same applies to the Bangsamoro.

Once again, we would like to say that we have given the best years of our lives to securing a better future for our children, a future that is peaceful, secure and prosperous. Given the circumstances, we would gladly do it all over again. This is our solemn commitment.

But now we have a chance where our children need not make that kind of sacrifice again. Help us make that happen. Let us build a future where our children will spend the best years of their lives pursuing their highest dreams in peace and prosperity. Let peace be our lasting legacy.

Finally, I trust the collective wisdom of the members of Congress, both in the Senate and the Lower House, to pass a good legislation in the form of this proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law.

Thank you very much!

The Pursuit Of Peace Is About Engaging Peoples Of Diverse Nationalities

Opening statement during the farewell dinner of UNDP Country Representative Luiza Carbalho in Cotabato City on November 1, 2014

Honorable UN Resident Representative Madame Luiza Carvalho
IMT Deputy Head of Mission, Brig. Gen. Roshaimi bin Zacaria
Chetan Kumar, Ms. Alma Evangelista
Sam Chittick of the UNDP
Matt Stephens of the World Bank
Fellow BTC commissioners, guests, BTC officials and employees
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome you to a dinner in honor of our most esteemed visitor, UN Resident Representative Luiza Carvalho.

Today, I am most pleased that I personally, as Chairman of the BTC, am able to receive you, Madame Carvalho, as well as the rest of our guests. I find it somewhat refreshing to host occasions like this for our partners who have generously extended their assistance to the BTC in particular and the MILF in general for the past year and a half. It helps take our minds off serious matters and reminds us of the value of people relations.

It was more than a year ago in August 2013 when I visited the United Nations office at the RCBC Tower in Makati City, together with some members of the MILF. The commitment to provide support and technical assistance that we received then, from the United Nations and the World Bank, following the approval of the FASTRAC Work Plan by the Consultative Committee, still resounds until today.

The past two months have prominently put the issue of the Bangsamoro Basic Law in the spotlight, both presenting either positive messages of support or the opposite.

But we are steadfast in our desire to see this through, to march on towards the needed transition, to prove the naysayers wrong. And by forging continuous and productive partnership with the UN, among others, we remain optimistic that the end will justify our struggles.

We feel sad by your departure. The short years that we have been dealing with each other with mutual respect and principled engagement have taught us a lesson that the pursuit of peace is about engaging peoples of diverse nationalities. Surely, the pursuit of peace has no frontiers.

But we feel also relieved because we are sure that the UN would send someone like you. We hope to meet him or her soon.

Again, welcome, Ms. Carvalho and the rest of our guests, to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission. We hope you enjoy the night with us and the modest dinner we tender in your honor.

Thank you and good night!

To Make Ourselves As Khilafa Or Vicegerent Is Our Development Goal

Speech during the launching of the Bangsamoro Development Plan at Darapanan on November 2, 2014

MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim
OPAPP Sec. Teresita Quintos-Deles
HE Dato Tengku Ab' Ghafar bin Tengku Mohammed
Budget Secretary Butch Abad
United Nations Resident Coordinator Luiza Carvalho
JICA Country Director Noriaki Niwa
World Bank Country Director Motoo Konishi
Fellow members of the MILF Central Committee
Friends, Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen:

We give so much importance today to another historic document that would chart the future for the Bangsamoro.

The Bangsamoro Development Plan outlines the specific course of actions needed to rehabilitate, reconstruct and develop a region whose people, environment and resources were destroyed by decades of war.

We have concluded political agreements, with the CAB or the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro as the complete catalogue of every major milestone in a 17 long years of negotiations.

We have commenced with an equally tedious legal process, starting with the drafting and completion of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, and the ongoing Senate and Congressional hearings.

Now, the technical requirements of another longer journey, that of genuinely improving the lives of our people, has been started as well, and hopefully a very good beginning today with the formal turnover of the finished Bangsamoro Development Plan.

This is not yet the official development plan of the Bangsamoro Government, because that would happen the moment the Bangsamoro Transition Authority is established, hopefully, in 2015. Strictly speaking, this plan is the MILF development plan for the Bangsamoro.

Be this as it may, the importance of a development plan, nay its indispensability is obvious. It is an instrument that no government can ever afford to neglect.

Such a keen awareness has driven us in the MILF Peace Panel to give prominence in the Annex on Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing a particular provision for the formulation of development plans, starting with this Bangsamoro Development Plan. Premised on our own unique needs and aspirations, the Bangsamoro Development Plan shall be our guide in meeting the economic and social imperatives of our war-weary, impoverished and marginalized communities.

This is consistent with national development goals since we are also equally aware that the economy of the prospective Bangsamoro is inextricably linked to Mindanao as a whole and to the rest of the Philippines.

More than material progress, our goal is total human development, a development that is centered on man, his relationship with his Creator, and the rightful discharge of his God-given role as vicegerent on earth. To make ourselves as Khilafa or vicegerent

is our development goal, being a reflection of our religious belief and our identity as Bangsamoro.

To better understand this goal and role, we need a liberating education. To be able to harness the wealth of nature, we have to embrace science and technology. To be able to harness them rightfully, justly and rationally, we have to do it in the confines of faith and morality.

It's always nice to go back to basics, for life after all is basically simple. Food, shelter, clothing, health, study, roads, markets, places of worship, centers of government and other social institutions, and occasional leisure with family and friends, above all peaceful co-existence with everyone --- these are the basic elements that can drive us further into better heights of individual and collective achievements.

There would always remain in us a nostalgic remembrance of the distant past when the Sulu and Maguindanao were vibrant centers of trade and commerce with Arabs, Chinese, Malays and even the Dutch. The valiant sea-faring Iranons and Badjaos and the "people of the lake", our brothers Maranao, cultivated their crafts and wares, and provided manpower and skills to what was an incipient service economy unfortunately nipped in the bud by the onslaught of colonization.

Now, we do not only have historic documents in our hands; we also have, and probably the most important one, the historic opportunity to bring back the glory of our past and build our lives in decency, security and progress.

The formulation of the Bangsamoro Development Plan is already an exercise in development planning, a power included in the 58 exclusive powers of the Bangsamoro. But as a famous line in a movie goes, with power comes greater responsibility.

Indeed, with the completion of the Bangsamoro Development Plan, greater responsibility is now given to those who would be privileged to implement it. We should never lose sight of the fact that the Bangsamoro Development Plan is not an end in itself. This should not turn out to be just an academic exercise, as happened to not so few entities that favored form over substance, text over action.

The next big step, the next big responsibility, is to implement the plan. Like the old adage, a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. That journey for the MILF starts today.

But for today's occasion, let us content ourselves with the celebration of this achievement.

I congratulate those who worked so hard in a short time to produce the Bangsamoro Development Plan.

I thank the United Nations, the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency, the European Union, the Asia Foundation, and the various aid agencies in the Philippines for the material and manpower assistance, as well as for the continuing commitment to assist further in the implementation of this plan.

I also thank the leadership of the Central Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for the trust and support given to me and the Bangsamoro Development Agency for the stewardship of the Bangsamoro Development Plan.

Thank you very much!

The Bangsamoro Struggle Is Forever Evolving And Changing

Opening statement during the meeting of the Bangsamoro Coordination Forum (BCF) between the MNLF and MILF in Makati City on November 12, 2014

WE COMMEND our brothers in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) for reaffirming our common aspiration for the "liberation of one people and one homeland." Indeed, the task of liberation is the common project of each and every Bangsamoro seeking freedom and justice. The journey has been long and arduous but the goal remains the same: the liberation of our people from endless tyranny. The totality of the struggle invites us to value and give credit to all who have joined us in this enterprise and to see gains of agreements like the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the Tripoli Agreement of Peace of 2001, and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), among others, as part of the totality of our success. Like the mighty Pulangi -- fed by number of small torrents, streams and ponds and then merging into one great river - the Bangsamoro struggle is forever evolving and changing.

WE WELCOME the good faith and spirit to which the Position Paper of the MNLF was anchored upon: "MNLF's humble contribution on how the autonomous set up should

look like in the Bangsamoro Basic Law." We, in the MILF, believe that we all should listen and seek guidance and contribution from all stakeholders in the Bangsamoro, especially those from our brothers in the struggle.

WE NOTE IN SOLIDARITY the difficulties and challenges that the MNLF is encountering in their review process with the Government of the Philippines in the Tripartite Review of the Implementation of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement on the matters of territory/expansion, plebiscite and strategic minerals, among others. We wish that the Government of the Philippines and the MNLF find a just way out of the current bind they find themselves in. While the MILF was not and is not part of that very important conversation, we understand that like a silk cloth, that process is intrinsically wedded to ours as we both desire to liberate our people.

WE ASSURE our brothers in the MNLF that, as the MILF leads and directs the implementation of the CAB, we are seriously looking at their proposals as animated by the desire to make sure that the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) fulfill the "CAB's promise of peace" and not "become a mere palliative that losses its effect in the long term.

WE WISH TO FURTHER NOTE THAT while the CAB is an agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF; the BBL is the work of the independent and principled members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission who only had the Bangsamoro's welfare in mind. The provisions of the BBL are the product of consultations, deliberations and research. There is wisdom in every provision which we must take into consideration when proposing changes and recommendations.

WITH RESPECT TO SPECIFIC PROPOSALS, we made two papers: one, containing our response to the MNLF Position, and two, a matrix showing how the GPH-MNLF Consensus Points are adopted, subsumed, related or reflected in the BBL.

Thank you and wassalam.

MILF's view of the Peace Process and Its Hope and Vision for the Bangsamoro

Speech during the Forum entitled "Piecing Consensus for Peace: The prospects of the Proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law" held on November 27, 2014 at the University of the Philippines, Diliman

At the outset, I am relaying to the organizer of this Forum my appreciation for inviting me to this event which is rightly called "Piecing Consensus for Peace: The Prospects of the Proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law". It is indeed an honor for me to be with you this morning at the most prestigious state university in this country.

As you may know, we are again at another historical crossroad, especially for the people of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, more particularly for the Bangsamoro, the settler communities and the indigenous peoples. The right direction to take at that crossroad, which we have labeled as the roadmap, is clear and unambiguous. That roadmap points to a better prospect, nay I would say the best prospect for an enduring peace for all of us and another ray of hope to bring the age-old yearning for prosperity in a much blighted land.

But to best understand why we have gotten to this point in history, of why we now have the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law or BBL, which is a very important point in the roadmap, allow me to go back briefly to the past so that, as is often now said, we can only understand the present by looking back to what happened in the past.

The Bangsamoro has a very long tale of resistance against colonization. It has fought 320 years of war against the Spaniards, four decades against the Americans, five years against the Japanese during World War II, and then against the changing Filipino Government since July 4, 1946.

The lands of the Bangsamoro have never experienced real peace since the last quarter of the 16th century. As with the Spaniards, the Americans and the Japanese, the government in Manila had invariably used brute force to earn peace in Mindanao. All these wars were forced upon the Moros. The consequence is that we were not only persecuted, oppressed, and marginalized but virtually become strangers in our own lands.

In 1969, the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF was founded. It was the radical response of student activists against the "minoritization", marginalization, widespread discrimination, oppression and genocide that were sponsored and perpetuated by the

Filipino Government against the Bangsamoro people. The influx of Christian settlers in Southern Philippines, land-grabbing, setting-up of vigilante-groups like the Ilagas, and the infamous Jabidah Massacre, were just some of the social factors that gave birth to another cycle of armed uprising by the Bangsamoro.

The Philippine government and MNLF started peace talks in 1975 that led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on December 23, 1976. The Tripoli Agreement did not, however, bring stable peace because then President Marcos was never serious in honoring his government's commitment. Instead of creating only one autonomy, he created two, one for Western Mindanao and another for Central Mindanao.

It took about 22 years of on-and-off GRP-MNLF negotiations for the Talks to come to a close with the signing of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement in Manila.

Amidst this backdrop, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front took a different ideological line from the MNLF. When the MILF saw the inadequacies of the 1996 FPA and upon the invitation of the government, it pursued a peace negotiation more faithful to the Bangsamoro's original struggle for their right to self-determination.

Grounded on the view of the late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim that the most civilized and practical way to solve the Bangsamoro Problem or Question is through a negotiated political settlement of the conflict, the MILF has withstood 17 long years of peace talks, often punctuated by skirmishes and big wars. Up to the time of former Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, three major wars happened in the years 2000, 2003 and 2008. While a ceasefire between the government and the MILF was in place since 1997, it was more honored in the breach than in the fulfillment thereof.

Be this as it may, the participation of the international community in these off-and-on peace negotiations had given it resilience to withstand the test of time and adversity. As stated, this external involvement started as early as February 2001 when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, as her first foreign travel, invited Malaysia as the third party facilitator of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation.

When President Benigno Simeon Aquino III came into power, mutual trust and confidence soared high between the parties. The meeting between the President and MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim in Tokyo, Japan in August 2011 paved the way for the signing of three very important agreements, namely the 10-Decision Points on Principles in April 2012, the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the March 27, 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

On December 17, 2012 President Aquino III issued Executive Order No. 120 creating the 15-man Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) whose main functions are to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law, propose amendments to the Constitution, assist in identifying development projects in Bangsamoro communities, and conduct public consultations.

The proposed BBL was adopted by the BTC on April 20, 2014 and transmitted to the Office of the President two days later. On September 10 it was submitted to both Houses of Congress as a certified urgent bill. It is now under intense deliberations.

The case for the BBL is self-evident. It is a comprehensive formula for peace and unity of the Bangsamoro, the Christian settlers and indigenous peoples. An unbiased perusal of the pages of the proposed law would show that the contemplated government is not exclusive to the Bangsamoro. The other inhabitants have definite participations in governance; in fact, they have reserved seats in the Bangsamoro Parliament, in the Council of Leaders, and in the Cabinet. The proposed law is very much explicit in stating that all fundamental rights guaranteed under the Philippine Constitution and relevant legislations are to be respected, protected and promoted. Being a Bangsamoro does not confer additional special political, social or economic rights over Christians or indigenous peoples. Even in the exercise of preferential rights over the exploration, development and utilization of natural resources, the only qualification is that one must be a bona fide resident of the Bangsamoro, the latter term referring not to identity but to the name of the territory. Without fear of contradiction, we say that it is very inclusive to all, be they Muslim Bangsamoro, Christian settlers or non-Moro indigenous peoples.

It is a sure antidote to secession. The struggle of the Bangsamoro in the last century onwards to be separated from the Philippine body politic was triggered in high degree by the injustices committed against our identity, our governance that pre-dated even the coming of Spaniards, and the miserable lot that befell us due to widespread dispossession of our ancestral lands.

Now that our legitimate grievances are being addressed by the BBL, what logic and cause are left for those who want or continue to wage war against the Manila government?

With the brightest hope for genuine political and fiscal autonomy now in the pages of the BBL, socio-economic development is within reach not only for the Bangsamoro but also to all of the people of Mindanao and the entire country. We would have the control of our own resources and use it for our own priorities, which, for a very long

period of time, were set for us by outsiders. Our resources were also exploited by and only for outsiders. It is high time to put an end and correct the unjust status quo.

Again, we are all buoyed up by the continuous and increased participation of the international community, especially so that the MILF's blueprint for development, the Bangsamoro Development Plan, is now a formal document and was publicly presented in the recent Philippine Development Forum in Davao City.

But, of course, more than anybody else, the BBL needs the support of the entire Filipino nation. Both legal and political conservatism should give way to innovative arrangements that can solve the problem, which by its very nature is a political one. The rape and plunder of natural resources have been going on for several decades. Those who have parochial economic interests --- interests that have been satisfied exponentially already without benefits to the native inhabitants --- should now let the management and regulation of natural resources be returned to the native sons of the soil.

What we now expect is that Philippine government and nation will do all its best efforts to rectify the historical injustices committed against us and truly, without reservation, restore to us our historic identity, our right to govern ourselves, and establish an asymmetric relationship guided by the principles of parity of esteem, equality of peoples, democratic way of life and social justice to all.

Finally, let there be no mistake, the future through the BBL is bright. God willing, it is the way forward. Let us come together to support this historic document.

Thank you and good day!

Imperatives for CSOs Working for Peace in Mindanao: The BBL and Beyond ~From the Lens of the Moro Rebellion"

Speech during a forum organized by Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) held in Davao City on December 3, 2014

Thank you very much for this invitation. It gives me pleasure to speak on a subject matter close to my heart. As a rebel for more than four decades, I keep asking myself, "What lies ahead after we started a struggle that we never had the idea on how and when

it would end itself. It is like travelling in the vast ocean without any land on sight. It is sheer conviction that we firmly believed in that once a struggle is started, it will move on and on until it concludes itself.

Today, after 17 long years of hard and exhausting bargaining in the negotiating table, the Parties first signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and then followed by the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). Now the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) that translated into legal form the letter and spirit of the FAB is being deliberated in Congress. These in themselves are achievements of a lifetime that we, collectively, can be proud of.

The role of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in making these achievements happen, while I cannot exaggerate, is of common knowledge. For one, I am privy to it, because I dealt with them on countless occasions. They journeyed with us through thick and thin. They were there when their presence was most needed.

Of course, there are few exceptions that do not deserve to be classified as CSOs. But we will not deal with them here; it belongs to another category of discussion in some other time. Let us not spoil our day with this issue.

At this juncture, let me remind you that the role and responsibility of the CSOs have not ended with these achievements. We cannot simply sit on these laurels. We have to nurture these gains and build on them and proceed with fixed vision and purpose, because the road ahead is still plagued with complications. Let us remember that not everybody is happy with these successes and that change, which is an antidote to status quo, is sometimes not wholesome to some, because it snaps out privileges and conservatism.

I therefore call upon the CSOs to continue journeying with us to ensure that the BBL will not only pass Congress but will also be ratified during the plebiscite and, more importantly, must be implemented on the ground. Documents are documents; they are pieces of paper --- they will not implement themselves. They need the intervention of men and women, the sincere and the committed, to implement these agreements, and so too, the BBL. Many a good document, agreement, or even a set of laws, are lying dormant in filing cabinets because people or leaders of men did not care about them; they are just relegated to the dustbin of history. We do not want the BBL to suffer the same fate, because it is meant to solve the Bangsamoro Problem, a problem that has run through decades or even centuries and at the expense of so many lives and billions worth of properties.

I am not a doomsayer – and will never ever be one – but I must tell you that if we fail to solve this problem through the passage and implementation of the BBL, I think the future will be very bleak. The MILF will suffer a fall-out and most probably new and more radical leaders will emerge from the horizon and carry on the torch of the struggle, whether via the legitimate way or through the improbity of a weird approach. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while we have no love lost with the group, is borne out of the chaos and blood-letting in the Middle East, a courtesy of the Western Powers. This monster is eating the hands of those that created it, directly or indirectly.

It is on this reckoning that I urge and appeal to the CSOs to double their efforts and see to it that what we have started together; i.e., to plant the seed of peace, will continue to grow until everybody partakes of its fruit. The resolution of the problem through the BBL will undoubtedly redound to the benefits of not just the Bangsamoro people, the indigenous people, and the migrant settlers in the Bangsamoro territory, but also to Mindanao and the country as a whole. There is no need to overstress this point. Even right now, the country has already achieved 6.4 annual growth rate for 2014, thanks to the improving peace and order in Mindanao and the growing trust and confidence of the international community.

Specifically, I stress here that it is important for the CSOs to undertake, if possible, all of the following steps:

1. Institutionalize the participation of civil society in deliberations of the BBL in Congress;
2. The spirit of volunteerism must be upheld at all times. This virtue is considered as a defining characteristic of the organizations that constitute civil society;
3. Continue to bridge peoples, communities, and religious divides;
4. Help stabilize post-conflict zone through building new institutions, educational and health infrastructures;
5. Help build Bangsamoro capacity to increase its legitimacy;
6. Assist in developing the rule of law systems and public administration;
7. Help capacitate the Bangsamoro to manage conflicts peacefully and promote socioeconomic development;
8. Help develop a civil society and private sector that can represent diverse interests and challenge the state peacefully; and
9. Finally, find diverse means to engage the Central Government through democratic and legitimate manner so that the excesses of the past including the repelling of laws that were oppressive and exploitative, like the Public Land Act No. 141 which once entitled a settler in Mindanao to apply for and own

24 hectares while allowing non-Christian tribe only four hectares, will never happen again. Let there be no seed of enmity once again sown in any part of Mindanao or elsewhere in the entire country.

Thank you and good day to all!

Bangsamoro: Road to Peace for Mindanao and the Nation

Speech during the NGO Forum held in Davao City on December 4, 2014

I, too, am human. I get tired; I worry, and tend sometimes to have doubts. But when peace in Mindanao is at stake, I will always have the energy, I am confident, and I firmly believe that it will succeed. This explains our staying power for more than four decades of harsh struggle in Mindanao.

Let me state that the road to peace in Mindanao has been long, arduous, and elusive. To this day, the road is still faced with obstacles. There may be those who choose not to tread this road, refusing to see the goodness in it, and creating more barriers along the way. This is inevitable. There will always be opposition, and some of them may even claim that such opposition does not equate to being against peace. We can tolerate their position, but also fervently hope that few people listen to their dissidence.

Like in all other things, the peace talks started from somewhere. The peace negotiations took us 17 years to finally reach this point of resolving disputes through peaceful means. Guided by the core teaching of the late Chairman Salamat Hashim, may Allah accept his sacrifices, that the most civilized and practical way to solve the conflict in Mindanao is through peaceful negotiation, this pacific approach has not failed us to reap its fruits beneficial to all. This is what the Bangsamoro Basic Law seeks to deliver.

We are now at the forefront of efforts to pave the way and build a strong foundation for the future Bangsamoro, as we make our commitment to sustainable progress, stability and confidence-building in support of political and normalization transition outcomes. The Bangsamoro Basic Law is a formula of development, peace, and unity. It is the most effective antidote to secession and to the radicalization of the conflict in Mindanao. It opens the Philippines especially Mindanao to the world especially neighboring states for commerce and trade.

The Bangsamoro Basic Law is the route into achieving peace in Mindanao, and when positively received by the whole nation, would powerfully resonate its benefits on a collective level. Rest assured that the Bangsamoro Basic Law is advanced in the pursuit of peace and solidarity. It shall, by the will of the Almighty and the support of our constituents, withstand scrutiny.

The Bangsamoro Basic Law is the product of numerous discussions between the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and the Government of the Philippines, through the Office of the President, with high regard to inputs and contributions of our constituents in affected areas and even those who are not, from our international and domestic partners, our friends from the civil society, and most importantly, the people in the Bangsamoro. We must embrace this moment and take charge of our destiny to end the decades-long problem in Mindanao. Now that we could almost see the finishing line where the Bangsamoro Question is resolved, we must see to it that we take full ownership of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. We must have faith in our democratic institutions and leaders. We must become enablers of peace and development by offering our solutions to the problems.

We can go all day talking about the many perspectives on the history of the Bangsamoro struggle, but what we almost always miss to realize is that the Bangsamoro struggle is not so much uncommon or different from the known Filipino struggle. The ordinary Filipino is also stricken by the pangs of poverty, suffering, illiteracy, impunity, oppression, and exploitation, as do the Bangsamoro people. We all dream of a better life, a more stable economy, a safer community, and a responsible government. In order to go forward, we ought to stop being backward.

It now clearly becomes the concern of everybody including the entire Bangsamoro and Filipino peoples to contribute and nurture our peace dividends. For the MILF and the GPH, the only option is the peace option. Therefore, this option requires the support of everybody including the international community. The civil society organizations have a clear role and responsibility to see to it that peace shall stay.

We are presented with a path, a road that ought to be traversed in the interest of peace and solidarity. Our gains are your gains; it is the nation's gains. There is no other greater opportunity than today to work together towards achieving a common goal; for the success of the Bangsamoro will be the success of the entire Filipino nation.

The Nigerian democracy activist Hafsat Abiola once said, "Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are."

As a final note, let me call on all and sundry, especially the civil society organizations, that now that we have found the correct and straight pathway to prosperity, unity, and peace, let no man, woman, or groups put it asunder. In unison, that way is through the passage, ratification, and implementation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law in the Bangsamoro. This is the way and the only way for all of us to tread to make this country great.

Thank you and good day to all!

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SAGISAG
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Chapter 6:
Speeches from 2015

"Peacemaking is never a one man's effort. It is the collective effort of men and women of good will who seek a better and peaceful future for the next generation."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**
Acceptance speech for the Fr. William Francis Masterson, SJ Award given on March 26, 2015 in Cagayan de Oro City

We Trust The Collective Wisdom Of Congress To Pass A Good Legislation

Opening Statement during the Roundtable Discussion of BBL sponsored by MindaNews in Davao City on January 8, 2015

I consider it an opportune time to be able to meet and share thoughts with the media community of Davao City in this Roundtable Forum which is the second one in several cities that are intended to be covered by MindaNews, in coordination with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and with the assistance of donor agencies, more particularly the Canadian Aid.

We are now in a new Gregorian year, 2015 to be exact. This year is very important to us and deserved to be watched intently. In the agreed roadmap for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Political Entity, this year must usher in the creation of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) --- the interim government and the one that would replace the ARMM. But we know that that can only happen right after the plebiscite and ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

As we speak, the House of Representatives Ad Hoc Committee on the BBL has to conduct two more public hearings. The first will involve all the local government executives in Mindanao and the second members of the MNLF, all factions, the so-called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) and the MILF. We were also informed that the Senate would do one in Jolo, Sulu. Both chambers of the Congress of the Philippines are still on recess and would resume session on January 19.

As always, questions abound. Will the BBL be passed within the first quarter of this year and that, as Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. said few days ago, the plebiscite will happen by June? Will the BBL that Congress would pass be acceptable to the MILF? These, and many others, are often-repeated queries nowadays, which we, prudence dictates, have no ready answers, except to repeatedly say that we trust the collective wisdom of Congress to pass a good law in the form of the BBL.

Frankly speaking, even to this day, the MILF has never wavered in believing in the sincerity and commitment of the Aquino Administration to deliver its parts of the deal contained in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). That commitment has been made consistently and on almost countless occasions. Specifically, the commitment was and still is: "The GPH will not sign an agreement that it cannot implement." This is the reason that the

GPH Peace Panel saw to it --- and the MILF understands the wisdom of it--- that all the provisions of the FAB and CAB do not violate the Constitution. This is also the reason that the MILF consistently maintains that the Moro Question or Problem, which the two Parties agreed to solve right at the outset of their peace negotiation in 1997, cannot be addressed through the confines only of the current Constitution, which is too restrictive and shallow. More importantly, this issue has never been a legal question but political in nature. Hence the BTC is also mandated to propose amendments to the Constitution to ensure that the agenda of the talks, which I repeat is to solve the Moro Problem or Question, will be fully settled.

Two mornings ago, a lady and male commentators over a nationwide-broadcast radio program (they are not from Davao City) criticized the draft BBL as being not a total solution to our problems and it is unconstitutional.

In the first place, there would never be perfect agreements or laws that would serve as panacea or cure-all for our problems. But the FAB and CAB and eventually the BBL offers us a relief from which we can begin solving socio-political and economic woes that have been the unfortunate burdens of Bangsamoros, IPs and settlers alike for several decades now. This is the promise of the BBL that deserves fulfillment.

The key to this bright future, we believe, is for Congress to pass a good BBL. The BBL is not an ordinary legislation. The BBL was crafted by the BTC and had passed through multi-layered engagements with the letter and spirit of the FAB-CAB taken into full account. These two historic documents did not come so easily; they came into being after 17 long years of harsh and prolonged negotiations, interspersed with three major wars and almost countless number of bloody confrontations between government and MILF forces.

I am quite sure that you in the media community would want to convey more stories other than that of war, crimes and violence. But so long as systemic and/or structural defects are not addressed once and for all, the cycle of mutual antagonism will continue on its destructive path. The enough good men and women will not be able to stop the onslaught of enough bad men and women, whose appetite for more blood and destruction in Mindanao would be fed by the failure of those who wholeheartedly and persevered in the way of peace. The truth is that it is hard to construct but so easy to deconstruct.

After 17 long years, we have come up with a new formula for peace and development in the shape of the FAB-CAB and the BBL. Let us not miss this rare opportunity to

establish peace in Mindanao. Therefore, I personally appeal to all especially members of the media to support the passage of good BBL in Congress.

Thank you and I look forward to warm discussions and fellowship ahead of us in this program.

How Best to Implement Peace Agreements

Paper read during the International Conference on Peacemaking held in Jakarta on February 11, 2015

Let me share with you my personal experience on the successes, challenges and difficulties faced by negotiators and their principals on how best to implement peace agreements.

For the most part, I have been involved in the 17 long years of negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that made me conclude that negotiation is indeed not a picnic. For the most part, it is a battle of nerves and perseverance that only one's selfless commitment to a sacred cause and, on the part of government, to ensure that the national interest are always served, rather than otherwise, to continue engaging in the negotiating table. However, it is only during this current administration of President Benigno Aquino III that true and sincere commitment and principled negotiation has taken place, which explains the impending success story, I hope, of this peace negotiation between the GPH and MILF. I say almost a success story because the enactment of a legal document in what is now called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), as part of the unilateral responsibility of the GPH to make true its compliance to the GPH-MILF Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) proves very difficult to push forward. Seriously adding to this difficulty, aside from the stiff oppositions of some legislators both from the Senate and the House, is the outburst of emotions of many Filipinos including some legislators, writers, and opinion-makers, whose deep-seated prejudices, biases, and hatred against the Moros that started during the Moro-Spanish War in the 16th century came to fore as a result of that tragic incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25, 2015 where 44 members of the elite Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police (PNP) were slain in an encounter with MILF fighters, who also suffered 18 dead and 14 wounded. Three civilians also died during the firefight.

What makes for a successful transition from negotiations and agreements to implementation?

Implementation is a multi-tiered undertaking. It is also multi-dimensional.

One, as I said, is the compliance of the two parties in relation to what they have signed. That compliance almost always requires a new round of negotiations between the parties where framework or comprehensive agreements are fine-tuned and given specificity. The goal is to work out the details and mechanics to facilitate implementation of the comprehensive agreement. Second, after compliance of the parties, the capacitation of those who are supposed to take the rein of government will start immediately, alongside institution building, resource and manpower mobilization, and an effective mechanism addressing the needs of former combatants. These are the overarching needs that must be undertaken immediately.

In my view, implementation of agreement is where most failures occur. Agreements are mere scrap of papers; they will not implement themselves. People make them. Thus, the parties to the conflict, affected societies, and external partners must be mobilized to undertake implementation, from planning and managing to monitoring and enforcing. Implementation plans should anticipate both the immediate transitions out of violence and long-term post-conflict peace building.

The FAB and CAB, plainly speaking, are plan of action. Their implementation demands that extraordinary courage and determination, not only from the direct parties but especially the people themselves. The FAB and CAB proposed a schedule for a series of measures related to governance, political, humanitarian, socio-economic as well as military and security issues. These were to be implemented by a range of mechanisms and infrastructures, institutions including joint bodies, administrative and legal processes, either jointly or singularly especially by government.

What structures/mechanisms have helped in monitoring implementation of a peace agreement in the region? How can these be applied in ongoing conflicts in the ASEAN region?

Third parties, such as allies or neighboring states, can help to ensure that promises will be kept, timetables will be respected, and matching commitments will be fulfilled. Third-party tasks may include overseeing and monitoring cease-fires, weapons stockpiles, prisoner releases, and the return of refugees. Having such guarantors in place as part of an implementation plan enhances confidence in the settlement and encourages parties

to take the risks that progress toward peace entails. For instance, in the case of the GPH-MILF model, the third party facilitation, the ceasefire committees, International Monitoring Team (IMT), Local Monitoring Team (LMT), Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) and International Contact Group (ICG), both are multinational bodies, Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) whose task is to isolate and interdict criminal and terrorist groups in Mindanao, and many more joint bodies composed of foreign experts as well as domestic. All of which are designed to make and ensure that the parties would comply with their part of the bargain and more importantly to make the peace negotiations succeed.

Can this model work in ASEAN countries?

The answer cannot be a straight yes or no. Every conflict is unique by itself. There are similarities as well as dissimilarities. As many as there are peoples, ethnicities, religions, narratives, etc. so are their dissimilarities and similarities. Therefore, a serious study is deemed necessary in order to examine the arrangements being in place in the GPH-MILF model and those that have relevance, say for instance to the South Thailand and Myanmar conflict resolution efforts, may be adopted. In fact, several forums have already been conducted in those states and resource speakers from both the GPH and MILF have been invited to share their experiences and how they relate and are of relevance to these conflicts.

Through the facilitation and aid of the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB) as well as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the European Union (EU), the British, Swiss, Malaysian, Turkish, and Norwegian governments, The Asia Foundation (TAF), Conciliation Resources (CR), Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), the MILF also shared its experiences by participating in formal events and by hosting delegations from or by dispatching their own delegations to societies currently struggling to build peace especially Aceh in Indonesia.

What economic measures are needed to underpin a sustainable peace and promote prosperity? What role can the private sector play? How can peace agreements link to local communities? What has worked in ASEAN countries?

Socio-economic intervention is indispensable in every successful conflict resolution. According to a study conducted by the United Nations, a state subjected to or devastated by war would require 20 years before it can rebuild itself, which, without saying, requires all the necessary help especially from the international community to stand on its own feet. Therefore, a network of donors, including governments, aid organizations

and reconstruction agencies, has to be in place and help pay the bills of implementation. Funds will be needed both for immediate tasks such as decommissioning of combatants, returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and affected communities and for lengthy reconstruction efforts. Peace will not take root if funding is not provided or is prematurely terminated. Donors' willingness to coordinate their activities and determination to stay the course are essential to success.

Normalization does not only require socio-economic help from the government and the international community. The private sector has a definite role in it. One simple affirmative action is for individuals especially those working overseas and earning dollars to start putting up businesses in any part of the conflict areas where the peace and order has firmly stabilized. This serves many purposes: earning a profit for the investors and creating jobs for the local population.

As stressed, the private sector can also be directly involved in the economic reintegration of combatants; traditional justice mechanisms or religious practices can be adapted to enable reconciliation; local materials and labor can be utilized in reconstruction; local human rights monitors can help safeguard returning refugees; local stewards can keep watch to prevent corruption and waste; and local media can keep the community informed about all these practices. Societal actors should be involved in ways that make them stakeholders and guarantors of the agreement instead of passive onlookers.

At this juncture, let us not forget also that insurgency cannot be sustained without the support of the people. The people are the source of their support especially in terms of food, security, information, and, more importantly recruits. Therefore, any peace agreement will never hold water except when the people are also made part of the whole peace settlement. The local community members shall be involved in varied ways; all geared towards building social capital which, as a consequence, solidifies local ownership thereby increasing society's stake in the implementation.

While implementation tasks should not go beyond the technical, managerial, and personnel capacities of the local community, full participation in the process can expand such skills and capacities. Implementation frameworks should therefore include local input in planning and design, optimize use of local resources in implementation, and incorporate means to provide progress reports and evaluations to the community.

Among ASEAN countries, only in Aceh, Indonesia can we search for best practices. However, as in any other models, there is no such thing as perfect model. For one, the Aceh model is still struggling to cope with many challenges that include several

provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian Government still not satisfactorily implemented. Besides, the negotiation that produced the MOU happened only after a brief negotiation of only six months after a devastating tsunami that killed several hundred thousands of people in Aceh alone.

How best to help former combatants find suitable economic livelihoods?

There is now little doubt that development cannot be sustained without political stability, socio-economic intervention, and underlying security. The desired end result would not be sufficient if former combatants are not factored-in and their needs are not well-considered.

As pointed out earlier, the lack of sufficient funding could spell disaster especially during the normalization process (DDR in other context though not really so) where combatants are having a hard time coping with their new life, that of virtually a civilian life. It is a fact that in many post-conflict situations, former combatants appeared attractive for recruitment by those who, even without a legitimate cause, choose to continue fighting the government for whatever reasons. The lawless elements including radicals and so-called terrorists will also vie for new recruits. Thus, an alternative livelihood beyond the combatant identity is called for. This will discourage recidivism and promote peaceful communities.

Thus success can only be assured with a good comprehensive program including sufficient socio-economic package for the combatants. This will proceed in the order of priority:

- Programs should include material assistance that includes basic package of supplies (mattresses, pots/pans, blanket, etc.) to assist them in the immediate transition period.
- Prioritize job acquisition as the first building block for success, followed by large-scale job skill training programs for ex-combatants as part of their transition.
- The need for transitional centers, which extend support beyond emergency assistance and seek to address wider needs, including psychosocial challenges, shall also be extended. The ex-combatants were trained to fight and that orientation will not easily fly away. “Old habits are hard to die,” says an old adage.

Success can also be more assured if the ex-combatants and their respective communities participate in the design of programming rather than relying on outside professionals. Moreover, the package should be community-based and reinforces social cohesion, and strengthen and preserve the unity of the communities.

Let Us Be Partners For Peace

Opening statement of during the Senate hearing on the Mamasapano clash held on February 12, 2015

Let me speak straight from the heart.

First, the encounter between the MILF and the SAF was an unfortunate encounter. It was something that nobody planned or wanted. We thought that we have effective protocols and mechanisms in place that would prevent things like these from happening. In the end, 44 SAF, 18 MILF, and many more died in that encounter. We must honor them by making sure that their sacrifice would not be in vain. While we cannot change the past, we can do something in the future. We can work together to make sure that something like this will not happen again. Thus, we are already investigating the conduct of our men during that encounter to see it anyone violated the rules of conduct.

Second, the MILF was not the only group that was present in the area. The SAF fought other armed individuals belonging to different networks and groups – BIFF, private armed groups, local militias, etc. The delicate task of finding out who did what, especially the reported atrocities, cannot immediately be blamed on the MILF. That would be unfair. We need to investigate. On the part of the MILF, aside from our own investigation, we push for a truly independent group that would conduct a fair and impartial investigation of the incident.

Third, the MILF was immediately working to effect the ceasefire as early as 6:30 in the morning. But because of the limitations in communications and because of the on-ground situation of battle, the ceasefire was obtained only in the afternoon. MILF members who were part of the joint ceasefire committee risked their lives to effect the ceasefire. We were trying to save those men.

Fourth, credit must be given where credit is due. Through the efforts of the MILF, 28 SAF were rescued from imminent death that day. The 28 SAF were part of the first team and holed up in an area one kilometer northeast of Tukanalipao. Unidentified armed groups were already firing them upon. The 28 SAF are alive today because of the efforts of the MILF and finally, it is the will of God.

Fifth, the MILF is against all forms of terrorism. We have made a solemn vow to fight terrorism in our areas. Terrorism is inconsistent with Islam and has no place in the orientation and principles of the MILF. Our previous actions bear witness to our commitment against terrorism. To tag the MILF as a terrorist group is unfair.

Sixth, the MILF did not harbor Marwan or Usman. The MILF has no links with these terrorists and terrorist organizations. Marwan or Usman were in areas outside the MILF-controlled areas.

Seventh, the MILF and the BIFF are different organizations. We do not share the same goals and objectives. There is no truth to the allegation that we are conniving with each other.

Eighth, we are committed to peace. We have been in negotiations with the Philippine Government for 17 years. Our present partnership with President Aquino has been durable – there have been no recorded armed hostilities between the government and the MILF since 2011. We signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, and the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law. Each of these agreements is a testament to our commitment to pursue our objectives through peaceful means.

Ninth, the peace process is important to us – and to everybody. It has brought us the promise of a good life for our people – free from fear, want, and discrimination. It contains our hopes and our dreams – it is not for us, for our children. We have waited for this opportunity for 17 years. We promised our people that peace would be our legacy. We seek your help in making this promise possible. We cannot do it by ourselves. We ask you to help us live in peace.

Finally, justice is at the core of our struggle. We have been seeking justice for a long time. Thousands of our brothers and sisters have died pursuing this cause. We see an opportunity that peace can be established. Please do not let this unfortunate incident

be used to derail 17 years of hard work and lessen our resolve for peace and justice. Let peace be our legacy. Let us be partners for peace.

Maraming salamat.

MILF Negotiating Peace: Challenges and Directions

Paper Read at the Youth Peace Summit held at the GSIS Museum, Pasay City on March 14, 2015 with the theme "Kabataan: Kaakibat ng Pamilya, Komunidad at Bansa sa Kapayapaan". A project of the Rotary Club of Manila Bay, the Rotaract Club of Manila Bay and the Rotaract Club of Up ICTUS

Negotiating peace is not an easy endeavor. It takes not just sincerity to make this journey successful or move forward. Perseverance makes the real difference. Truth is that there are more downs than ups in real negotiations. Challenges are more daunting than opportunities. Even if the parties in conflict resolution are in the last stretch of their peace-making, chances that even a single incident, say the tragic incident in Mamasapano in Maguindanao last January 25, can be a game changer. Those who are against the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) are riding on the prejudices, biases, hatred, and outburst of emotions of many people created by the tragic incident in order to derail the process and to demonize the proposed law and the Moros in Mindanao. The message they want to pursue seems clear that they want peace in Mindanao by perpetuating the war that already claimed 150,000 lives and about the same injured.

In this discussion, I will limit the scope on the experience of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in dealing with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) since 1997. I will not delve into other experiences, except when they have direct relevance to this discussion.

What are the challenges in negotiating peace with the Government of the Philippines (GPH)?

The first challenge is whether to agree to sit down with representatives of the GPH, whose track record has been a dismal failure since the signing of the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Not only this agreement was not sincerely implemented but also the ceasefire, which was supposed to create an

atmosphere of tranquility, was more breached than honored. Instead of creating only one autonomy for the Bangsamoro people, as clearly provided for in the Tripoli Agreement, the government under President Ferdinand Marcos created two so-called autonomous regions: Region 9 and Region 12.

The second challenge is whether the end-result of the peace negotiation would address the aspiration of our people; or it is just another exercise in futility knowing fully well that most states conduct peace negotiation mainly for three reasons: to pursue peace to gain time on the insurgents, as public relations opportunity in order to be pictured as peace-loving, and to dupe the leaders and members of the insurgent group into believing that their deliverance is awaiting at the end of the process.

Except one, all the presidents from Fidel Ramos to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to Benigno Aquino III exhibited levels of sincerity in solving the armed conflict in Mindanao. Although Ramos was more interested in silencing the guns, to have only one agenda of the peace talks: "How to solve the Bangsamoro Problem or Question" was a testament that he knew very well that the final resolution of this conflict was not military but a political one, which he knew also that the heart of it is giving self-governance to the Moros (within the sovereignty of this country).

In the case of Arroyo, her sincerity and resolve to solve this conflict was no match to her fear of the backlash, say the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008, on her person and administration. In the final reckoning, she chose her neck over her integrity and the legitimacy of her administration by not defending the MOA-AD in the Supreme Court. Contrastingly, Estrada, as shown by his pronouncements and actions, had never wanted peaceful means to solve this conflict, as clearly illustrated when he declared all-out war against the MILF in 2000. And when the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) captured the lower portion of Camp Abubakar, he and other government and military officials feasted on roasted pigs and literally swam on river of intoxicant, as if to celebrate the triumph of good over evil. But wonder of all wonders, it was during his time that the seven major camps of the MILF were acknowledged by government, without thinking that such an act was tantamount to recognizing the belligerent status of the MILF. However, to the MILF, it was never its intention.

But the real taste of a true partner in the peace process has been exhibited by President Benigno Aquino III. During his presidency, the peace process has gained tremendous strides and successes and the law that would provide legal effect to the political documents signed by the Parties, such as the Framework Agreement on the

Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), in the form of the proposed BBL is already under deliberation in the Congress of the Philippines.

The third challenge is how to stay on course the way of peace after the series of major wars against the MILF waged by the government. Frankly speaking, this made it extremely difficult on the part of the MILF leadership to convince itself, more so the radical elements within, that the pacific approach is still the preferred way forward. As a matter of fact, the call to return to armed struggle concept was very strong and it was echoed everywhere especially by the young and the more militant section of the MILF. But the MILF resisted all these calls and continued to pursue the path of peace, and militarily, it adopted a generally defensive posture. Practically, all the fighting including the major wars, 2000, 2003 and 2008, were initiated by the government.

Why is this posture so? First, the MILF believes that war is temporary and peace in the end shall always prevail, for man is essentially peaceful. This was intrinsically entrenched and reinforced by the thought of the late MILF Chair Salamat Hashim. He said the most civilized and practical way to solve the conflict in Mindanao is through a negotiated political settlement. And second, the government had tried force ever since but the MILF did not only survive but emerged much stronger, in terms of experience, legitimacy and popular support after every major war launched against it. The support of the international community, as part of the global commitment to make the world safe for everybody, finds many avenues to help the Parties especially the MILF to resolve this conflict peacefully.

And the fourth challenge is posed by what we are experiencing right now in relation to the backlash of the Mamasapano Incident and the rough sailing of the BBL in Congress. Is this country still ready to embrace the Moros and share with them the blessing of living together in one roof? Is it still possible for the majority to trust the Moros and vice versa?

However, if we look at what has been written, said, and portrayed in newspapers, radio stations, and televisions, it appears the Moros are already cursed, demonized, and not fit to be human beings. Even the so-called learned, civilized, and elites of this nation, their biases and prejudice are beyond belief and throwing invectives even to their own kind defending the BBL and the Moros. In all these, it seems the future is bleak and there is no hope for real conciliation. The call for all-out war against the MILF reverberated again and in fact has dwarfed the call for peace.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the direction of the peace process, as far as the MILF is concerned, is never jeopardized or blunted. It was and still is the option for the peaceful resolution of this armed conflict in Mindanao. Instead of resorting to pure armed struggle approach, the MILF continues to advocate the non-violent means to pursue the Bangsamoro people's inherent right to self-determination until a genuine and lasting solution is achieved.

The dream for a little space in Mindanao where the Bangsamoro people can chart their own destiny and live in peace and prosperity with the rest of the inhabitants of this country is still a powerful motivating factor among them. The current generation of leaders might not live long enough to see the final realization of this dream but they know that it is not a doomed case. They know that this aspiration is cast in stone, nurtured by a strong historical narrative, strengthened by decades of systematic deprivation, suppression, and persecution, and wholeheartedly supported by the people cannot be snapped out by any weapon on earth. All what is needed is continuous assertion.

However, what happened in Mamasapano in Maguindanao on January 25, if not handled well and cautiously, is really a deal changer. Like a speeding vehicle, after hitting a big hump on the road, the peace process and the need to pass the BBL in Congress had swerved away from the straight path. It is proved to be extremely difficult for both the government and the MILF to immediately set it on course. Public sentiments, fueled by a powerful anti-Moro, anti-BBL, and anti-Aquino lobby, is simply too strong to tread right now. Under the guise of giving justice to the "SAF 44", they want not only vengeance but to scrap the BBL altogether. Here, more than ever, we are witnessing the twisted logic and the bigotry of many individuals, among whom were graduates of the best universities in the United States and Europe. While they push to give justice to the SAF 44, they totally forgot or ignored that the MILF also suffered 18 dead and 14 wounded, as if that only the former is entitled to justice and the latter does not deserve at all. They accused the MILF of savagery and of committing a war crime allegedly by finishing off a wounded SAF commando, but they totally ignored that the SAF can also be guilty of the same crimes by shooting four MILF forces who were sleeping soundly inside a mosque in Tukanalipao in Mamasapano. They also cut-off the finger of dead Marwan and reportedly submitted to the Americans for DNA test in order to determine whether Marwan was really the dead man. I do not know whether this has something to do with the $6 million reward money put on the head of the "dead terrorist".

In truth, the MILF is the aggrieved party in the Mamasapano Incident. The SAF-PNP Commandos willfully violated the GPH-MILF Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities and the provisions of the Terms of Reference of the AHJAG, which require

prior coordination in situations like the conduct of military and police operations. The MILF was also classified as "enemy" in the planning of the operation. The SAF is not only guilty of these three counts. They also undermined the government policy of the primacy of the peace process. Perhaps, the only extent of liability of the MILF, if it is proved true that it had committed a "war crime", is in relation to the application of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). As a non-state actor (NSA), the MILF has certain responsibilities in the application of this international law.

To sum it up, there is no change in the direction of the MILF in solving the conflict in Mindanao through peaceful means. We believe in the ultimate rightness of this approach. There is no turning back in this direction and we will pursue this through to the end. On the contrary, the Mamasapano Incident and all the rumblings associated with it have given the MILF (and I am sure the GPH also) more reasons to strive vigorously to overcome all these obstacles.

Thank you very much and good day!

Women Moving the Peace Process Forward

Roundtable discussion on the topic "Women Moving the Peace Process Forward!" sponsored by Institute for Governance and Autonomy, UNICEF, AUSAID and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Makati City, on March 23, 2015

In the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, where instability and insecurity have continued to hamper development for over 4 decades, women have been part of the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The MILF had included at least four women in its peace negotiating delegation to Kuala Lumpur. The government had more women in its delegations; more importantly, the chairperson is a woman.

However, on the global scale, women's participation in the formal peace process and political arena was limited. This is also true in terms of vulnerability to other risks or disasters. Here are some of the findings:

1. Women are far more exposed to disasters than men. If a disaster strikes, more women will be the victims, because they usually stay at home;

2. According to UN Population Fund account executive Lamar Dawson (Manila Times, March 17, 2015), globally women (and children) are up to 14 times more likely than men die in a disaster;
3. Research shows that when women are included in negotiations, they regularly raise key issues otherwise ignored by male negotiators, such as security on the ground, long-term reconciliation and human rights;
4. Women are good in facilitating cross-conflict talks on the margins of formal negotiations that cultivate public investment in negotiations. When formally involved, women often help talks gain traction;
5. Involving both men and women in rebuilding communities and in making decisions, peace is most likely to be lasting; and
6. Women can be leaders and influencers. They can help address global issues if given the chance. Beyond being a part of a changing world, women can also help other men and women realize that they, too, can make a difference.

Cognizant of the foregoing, I consider the following as very important recommendations:

1. Need to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
2. Need to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations;
3. Need to provide training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace-building measures;
4. When negotiating and implementing peace agreements, need to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements; (c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women, particularly as they relate to the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;
5. All parties to armed conflict to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, especially as civilians, in particular the obligations applicable to them under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977, the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol thereto of 1967, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 and the Optional Protocol

thereto of 1999 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the two Optional Protocols thereto of 25 May 2000, and to bear in mind the relevant provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

6. Calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and to take into account the particular needs of women, including in their design; and
7. Encourages all those involved in the planning for decommissioning or in the context of the UN, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents.

We Should All Immerse Ourselves In The Problems Of Our Times

Acceptance speech for the Fr. William Francis Masterson, SJ Award given on March 26, 2015 in Cagayan de Oro City

Father Roberto C. Yap, President of Xavier University, members of the Board of Trustees, members of the faculty and staff, honored guests, graduates and their proud parents, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is truly a distinct honor for me to receive this Fr. William Francis Masterson SJ Award. It is truly exciting that I am one of those awardees this morning. I promise you; I will not fail you, God willing!

I am aware of the difficulty and the conversations that ensued within your community as a consequence of your decision for conferring this award.

Frankly speaking, since I was informed of this award, I have never stopped asking myself whether or not I am worthy of this recognition. Reading on the life and work of Fr. Masterson who was a man of exceptional foresight that even the great General Douglas MacArthur was said to have invited him to Manila to set up a relief program for children that distributed medicine, clothing and food stuffs, one can feel a little bit awed. I am however consoled by the fact we share the same sentiments when he once said that we had no right to exist unless we immersed ourselves in the problems of our milieu.

I guess that this is the challenge to every one of us who had the opportunity to go to school: once we have acquired the rudimentary skills and knowledge in school, we should all immerse ourselves in the problems of our times, for what good is education if not to solve the more complex problems of our times.

Looking back at my own personal journey, after I defended my thesis and was awarded my master's degree in political science in 1972, I went straight to immerse myself in the milieu of my time: the Bangsamoro problem.

I headed straight into the jungle and joined the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Initially, I was a foot soldier and then rose to become a political officer. We even were forced to not to use our legal names and use aliases to protect our families and friends from retaliation and retribution by the Martial Law regime. Our goal however was fundamental: to defend the lives and properties of the Moros, who were then already the object a genocidal campaign by the Martial Law regime in Manila.

To go to the forest and take up arms was not an easy decision to make. It was not for sheer desire of adventure or the need for limelight and fame that pushed me to barter a life of safety in the city to one that is laden with dangers in the jungle. On at least three occasions that I had a brush with death. On the lighter side, food was scarce and at times none at all. At one time, my group and I had to survive by eating "kangkong" for three straight days, because we were sealed off to the outside by government troops.

Furthermore, it was not bravery that made me stay to this day in the service of the MILF. It was rather my commitment to the cause of my people for deliverance that made me persevere in all those four decades of trials and tribulations.

In the beginning, the word "peace" was never part of the vocabulary of the day. Of course, as a Muslim, I know the value of peace, because it is ingrained in Islam, which means "peace". I knew also that war is temporary, because man is necessarily peaceful.

At that time, the only things the government offered to us were bullets and bombs or surrender. By then thousands of Moros had already died in the hands of state forces and their paramilitary allies. This started from the massacre of 64 Moro trainees in Corregidor Island in March 1968 to the onslaught of the so-called fanatic group called Ilagas (rats) in 1970 to 1971. These mass slaughters worsened since the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972 and onward.

It is true that peace negotiations had commenced as early as 1975 that led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in Tripoli, Libya the following year. This culminated in 1996 when the GRP-MNLF Final Agreement on Peace was signed between the government and MNLF. But judging from what had ensued therefrom, those agreements were not meant to solve the armed conflict in Mindanao and secure permanent peace therein but rather they were used to perpetuate the effective strangulation of the Moros.

In the case of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), to which organization I belonged to since 1977, we waited for 20 long years before it had the chance to talk peace with the government. This happened in January 1997 when President Fidel Ramos offered the olive branch of peace to the MILF. Perhaps unknown to most of you, the ceasefire agreement was signed here in Cagayan de Oro City on July 18, 1997.

Frankly speaking, peace negotiation is not an easy endeavor. The truth is that it is easy to make war than to make peace. In war, one party can start war but in peace-making, it requires both parties to agree to talk.

The GPH-MILF peace negotiation, interspersed with fighting and three major wars, 2000, 2003 and 2008, has dragged on for 17 long and hard years. It encompassed four presidents (Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo, and now Aquino), 11 government peace negotiators, and about 100 or so signed documents.

Is this too short a period and easy engagement that many people including some legislators can easily call for a new negotiation? The proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) is a solution that came out of 17 years of negotiations and problem solving. Should we disregard history and the long and hard work put into crafting the BBL? These are tough questions which every Filipino and Bangsamoro must answer in the next few days.

And all of these work, commitment and sacrifice are for people like you. Come to think of it, my dear graduates! It is you, the youth and young of today, who will reap the fruits of peace in the future. It is not us, your elders, who will benefit from this. I urge you, therefore, to join our journey of peace! Speak up and be heard! Ask questions. Propose solutions. The future is yours. You have a stake in it.

Finally, let me say once again my heartfelt gratitude for this recognition of our efforts at building peace. I say "our" because while I personally accept this award, I accept this on behalf of all those who seek and strive for peace — both Bangsamoro and Filipino. Peacemaking is never a one man's effort. It is the collective effort of men and women of good will who seek a better and peaceful future for the next generation.

To end, let me paraphrase a quote from Thomas Paine: "*We fight not to enslave, but to set a nation free and to make room upon the earth for honest men and women to live*."

As you graduate from formal schooling this morning, let that be our common resolve: not to enslave but to make space for honest men, women and children to live their lives in peace, in abundance, in faith.

Thank you very much and good morning to all.

EDUCATION: A Key to Peace, Progress, and Development

(Courtesies)

A school is where critical thought is properly nurtured, and it must not be divorced from its immediate society. It is not shielded from the events of society, and it should never be like a vacuum closed from the intrusion of the outside world.

Your graduation from college is rightly called a commencement exercise because in truth, you will begin to enter another stage in your life. This is the life of the adult where a thousand and one things are more anticipated, with good reasons, by your family, peers and other members of the community.

You will now enter the world of labor, where you either end up in the statistics of the employed, the underemployed, and the unemployed. There are stark realities that you must now independently face.

But landing in a job is not the primary end of college education. College education is actually for the cultivation of the life of the mind.

The genuine quality of college education, and even the lower branches of schooling, such as secondary and basic education, is to evolve a person that can separate the truth from falsehood, between knowledge and ignorance. Other schools of thought may disagree, might even contradict us, but we believe education ought to perfect morals and ethics. That is what Islamic education is all about.

We promote an education that is really an indispensable segment of the ideology of Islam. We aspire to instill mental acuity among students, but we aspire more to instill the cherished and timeless values of our faith.

If we can see it in your daily conduct, if you practice them in your homes and outside of one's abode, then no one can say that this school, the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST), has failed in its mission.

It has been told that the founder of this school, the late Bai Matabay Namli Plang, while she was still as a teenager, saw and realized how schooling benefited the Americans with their sophisticated weaponry and management tactics while they administered the Moro Region.

That I think was what inspired her to get foreign education by traveling to the United States as a "pensionado," or government-sponsored student. She dreamt some day that she too would found a school of her own. She saw the Berea College, a small work college in Kentucky, USA which did not charge tuition fees and was distinct for its inter-racial and co-educational make-up and for funding students from low-income families. The rest, they say, is history. And you are a part of that history.

Of course, it is very evident how formal, advanced and sophisticated education can lead men and women into heights of achievements.

We may also inquire among ourselves how this education that we have can transform us into better individuals and communities, of how the education we have can lead us, first into peace that we genuinely need, and later on into progress and prosperity.

Education in conflict-situation would never be good for us. We have seen this in the Bangsamoro areas where, every now and then, the schooling of our children is interrupted as people flee from armed encounters and schools are transformed into evacuation centers. ARMM has the lowest cohort level, meaning out of those who enrolled in Grade 1 very few make it to high school. This is the same thing for those who enrolled in freshman level. Very few would finish high school.

This sorry state of education in the Bangsamoro is of course calling for drastic reforms, as in fact practically all our aspects of our existence call for real changes.

Even before, this sorry state of general affairs of the Bangsamoro was what drove us to pursue radical and revolutionary goals beginning in the 60s.

I am sure most of you are already familiar with the history of our struggle, from the then undivided MNLF towards the formation of the MILF to which I belong. One of the businesses of education is actually to make every individual become acquainted, and ideally to be learned and wise, with the events that he is inevitably and inescapably tied to.

Even as the MILF concentrated on its four pillars of Islamization, self-sufficiency, organizational development and military build-up since its inception, it didn't close the door to formal negotiations to arrive at a negotiated political settlement. After the signing of the GRP-MNLF FPA, top-level initiatives to revive the peace negotiations with the MILF started. The exploratory talks turned into formal peace talks over a period of seventeen years, beginning officially on January 1997 up to the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014.

Few days ago, I also told the graduates of Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro that it is irrational to just neglect the almost two decades of mutual negotiations and start with another one, as some biased and unknowledgeable politicians suggested, just because something tragic happened in Mamasapano.

The search for a solution to the Bangsamoro question, which was always the agenda of the MILF, really requires a considerable length of time because the problem has already become complex. But because of trust that has gained through the years and the concrete manifestations of both MILF and GPH to really come into a negotiated political settlement, milestones have been achieved, with the CAB as complete articulation of all the aspirations and legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro.

As it happens, we are again at another critical junction of history, especially for the people of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, more particularly for the Bangsamoro, the settler communities and the indigenous peoples. The right direction to take at that crossroad, which has been labeled as the roadmap by virtue of the agreements made, is clear and unambiguous. That roadmap points to a better prospect for an enduring peace for all of us and another ray of hope to bring the age-old yearning for prosperity in a much-blighted land.

But of course that roadmap is continuously being challenged in all angles. The BBL, more than ever, is portrayed in the worst form that can be imagined by its spoilers. Let me just tell you what it really is and how it came into being.

The proposed BBL was adopted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission or BTC on April 20, 2014 and transmitted to the Office of the President on April 22, 2014 which must be submitted to Congress and certified as an urgent bill.

However, due to unexpected turn of events, the life of the proposed BBL originally adopted by the BTC was cut short following revisions thereof by the Office of the President Legal Team whose revised draft was referred back to the BTC on June 21, 2014, but officially received by myself, in my capacity as BTC Chairman, on June 23, 2014 in Hiroshima, Japan.

Thus, in a BTC Resolution adopted in plenary on July 3, 2014, the body agreed to elevate the process to the GPH-MILF Peace Negotiating Panels for clarification, discussion and resolution of issues that may have been affected by the revisions in the proposed BBL. The premise of this resolution was that there were serious concerns expressed by the BTC over some major revisions, modifications and alterations that deviated from the significant contents of the CAB duly signed by the GPH and MILF.

A rigorous and continuous schedule of negotiations thus followed between the GPH and MILF peace panels on account of the referral back of the proposed BBL for resolution of issues, starting July 7, 2014 but taken over by the Office of the President headed by Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr. and Chief Presidential Chief Legal Counsel, Alfredo Benjamin Caguioa, and on the part of the MILF-BTC by Mohagher Iqbal and Abhoud Syed Lingga (who was replaced by Lawyer and BTC Commissioner Raissa Jajurie on August 26, 2014) and Esmael "Mike" Pasigan, as note taker, and ending finally in September 7, 2014. In a turn over ceremony on September 10, 2014, President Aquino personally handed the BBL to the Congress leaders and gave the assurance to the public that said piece of legislation would be beneficial to all. Hence, the proposed BBL is now filed in Congress as House Bill 4994 and Senate Bill 2408.

The case for the BBL is self-evident. It is a comprehensive formula for peace and unity of the Bangsamoro, the Christian settlers and indigenous peoples. An unbiased perusal of the pages of the draft law would show that the contemplated government is not exclusive to the Bangsamoro. The other inhabitants have definite participations in governance; in fact, they have reserved seats in the Bangsamoro Parliament, in the Council of Leaders, and in the Cabinet. The draft law is very much explicit in stating that all fundamental rights guaranteed under the Philippine Constitution and relevant legislations are to be respected, protected and promoted. Being a Bangsamoro does not confer additional special political, social or economic rights over Christians or indigenous

peoples. Even in the exercise of preferential rights over the exploration, development and utilization of natural resources, the only qualification is that one must be a bona fide resident of the Bangsamoro, the latter term referring not to identity but to the name of the territory. Without fear of contradiction, we say that it is very inclusive to all, be they Muslim Bangsamoros, Christian settlers or non-Moro indigenous peoples.

Despite the January 25, 2015 Mamasapano Clash that led to the death of 44 PNP Special Action Force (SAF), both Houses of Congress must continue with the deliberations of the BBL. The agreed timeline that details the achievement of important milestones is already delayed. Normalization as a process is also very much affected, especially the decommissioning of MILF forces, which would not happen without the passage of a BBL that is acceptable to the MILF. Decommissioning, as another separate track in the normalization process, can only be effected "parallel and commensurate" to the implementation of other agreements. Decommissioning is the gradual and process through which MILF forces and weapons are put beyond use.

The MILF will pay the ultimate sacrifice of foregoing the legitimate aspiration of the Bangsamoro for independence. What we now expect is that Philippine government and nation will do all its best efforts to rectify the historical injustices committed against us and truly, without reservation, restore to us our historic identity, our right to govern ourselves, and establish an asymmetric relationship guided by the principles of parity of esteem, democratic way of life and social justice to all.

At the close of this academic ritual, I am quite certain that the bonding of each one to another, after years of common zest for knowledge in the same institution of learning, shall soon pave the way for individual pursuits in tackling face to face the challenges crossing the path of each one.

The individual pursuits each one shall take-on shall depend largely on how you have prepared well through the course of your studies ----- and your preparation while in school shall spell a difference between succeeding and failing later in life.

Again, my warmest congratulations to all graduates and may Allah guide and bless you.

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The Case For BBL Is Self-Evident

Speech Delivered during the forum organized by the House of Representatives Committee on Metro Manila Development, Quezon City on April 7, 2015.

At the outset, I am relaying my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to the members of the House of Representatives Committee on Metro Manila Development for inviting me to this affair. I thank the Committee Chairman Honorable Winston Castelo for extending the invitation for me to be able to address the honorable members of the Committee and, hopefully, to enjoy your fellowship.

As you may know, we are again at another historical crossroad, especially for the people of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, more particularly for the Bangsamoro, the settler communities and the indigenous peoples. The right direction to take at that crossroad, which we have labeled as the roadmap, is clear and unambiguous. That roadmap points to a better prospect, nay I would say the best prospect for an enduring peace for all of us and another ray of hope to bring the age-old yearning for prosperity in a much blighted land.

But to best understand why we have gotten to this point in history, of why we now have the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law or BBL, which is a very important point in the roadmap, allow me to go back to the past so that, as is often now said, we can comprehend the details of the present.

Who are the Bangsamoro? Who are these people that has continuously asserted their identity, resisted all attempts of colonization, and want a restoration of their territory and government, even if only on the remaining few provinces where they still dominate? Who are we?

Those who at the time of conquest and colonization were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands including Palawan, whether of mixed or of full blood, and their spouses, and descendants are considered as the Bangsamoros.

The Bangsamoro has a very long tale of resistance against colonization. It has fought 320 years of war against the Spaniards, four decades against the Americans, then against the Japanese during World War II, and then against the Filipino Government which annexed Mindanao and Sulu on July 4, 1946, the date when the United States granted independence to the Philippines.

Looking back, the lands of the Bangsamoros have never experienced real peace since the Spanish colonizers started to set their feet in Mindanao in the last quarter of the 16th century, particularly in 1578 when the Spanish Captain Esteban Rodriquez Figueroa attacked Jolo in Sulu. From then on, all wars were forced upon the Moros and the best evidence that the Moros were not the aggressors is that all those wars were fought in Mindanao and nowhere else.

As with the Spaniards, the Americans, and the Japanese, Philippine government forces sought to earn peace in Mindanao through the barrel of the gun. The consequence of all these imposed wars on the Bangsamoros is that we were not only persecuted, oppressed, and marginalized but also virtually transformed into strangers in our own lands.

In 1969, the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF was founded. It was the radical response of student activists against the "minoritization", marginalization, widespread discrimination, oppression and genocide that were sponsored and perpetuated by the Filipino Government against the Bangsamoro people. The influx of Christian settlers in Southern Philippines, land-grabbing, setting-up of vigilante-groups like the Ilagas, and the infamous Jabidah Massacre, were just some of the social factors that gave birth to another cycle of armed uprising by the Bangsamoros.

But even while Mainland Mindanao and Sulu were literally in flames during the 70s, the search for a pacific settlement to the violent armed conflict was also an option.

The Philippine government and MNLF started peace talks in 1975 that led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on December 22, 1976. The Tripoli Agreement did not, however, brought stable peace because then President Marcos was never serious in honoring his government's international commitment, the Agreement being an Organization of Islamic Conference-brokered peace pact.

It took about 22 years of on-and-off GRP-MNLF negotiations for the Talks to come to a close with the signing of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement in Manila. A decade earlier, the Jeddah Agreement was also signed.

Amidst this backdrop, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front took a different ideological line from the MNLF. When the MILF saw the inadequacies of the 1996 FPA, it pursued a peace negotiation more faithful to the Bangsamoro's original struggle for its right to self-determination.

Beginning in January 1997, the GPH-MILF peace engagement had an initial shot in the arm when then President Fidel Ramos sent Executive Secretary Ruben Torres as his emissary to the MILF.

Grounded on the belief of the late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim that the most civilized and practical way to solve the Bangsamoro Problem or Question is through a negotiated political settlement of the conflict, the MILF has withstood 17 long years of peace talks often punctuated by skirmishes and big wars. While a ceasefire between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the MILF's military wing, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), was in place in 1997, it was more honored in the breach than in the fulfillment thereof.

Up to the time of former Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, three major wars happened in the years 2000, 2003 and 2008. A long anecdote of bloody confrontations interspersed with the 17 long years of protracted negotiation.

The role of third-party facilitator as well as the inclusion of foreign governments and institutions in the over-all "peace infrastructure" cannot be understated. The invitation of ex-Pres. Arroyo to Malaysia in 2001 to host and facilitate the talks, and later on the mutual establishment of International Monitoring Team, the International Contact Group and Third Party Monitoring Team, all pushed forward the peace process.

When President Benigno Simeon Aquino III came into power, mutual trust and confidence soared high between the parties. The meeting between the President and MILF Chairman Alhaj Murad Ebrahim in Tokyo, Japan on August 2011 paved the way for the signing of three very important agreements, namely the Ten Decision Points on Principles, the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the March 27, 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

On December 17, 2012 President Aquino III issued Executive Order No. 120 creating the 15-man Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) whose main functions are to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law, propose amendments to the Constitution, assist in identifying development projects in Bangsamoro communities, and conduct public consultations.

The proposed BBL was adopted by the BTC on April 20, 2014 and transmitted to the Office of the President two days later. On September 10 it was submitted to both Houses of Congress.

The case for the BBL is self-evident. It is a comprehensive formula for peace and unity of the Bangsamoro, the Christian settlers and indigenous peoples. An unbiased perusal of the pages of the draft law would show that the contemplated government is not exclusive to the Bangsamoro. The other inhabitants have definite participations in governance; in fact, they have reserved seats in the Bangsamoro Parliament, in the Council of Leaders, and in the Cabinet. The draft law is very much explicit in stating that all fundamental rights guaranteed under the Philippine Constitution and relevant legislations are to be respected, protected and promoted. Being a Bangsamoro does not confer additional special political, social or economic rights over Christians or indigenous peoples. Even in the exercise of preferential rights over the exploration, development and utilization of natural resources, the only qualification is that one must be a bona fide resident of the Bangsamoro, the latter term referring not to identity but to the name of the territory. Without fear of contradiction, we say that it is very inclusive to all, be they Muslim Bangsamoros, Christian settlers or non-Moro indigenous peoples.

It is our sure antidote to secession. The struggle of the Bangsamoro in the last century onwards to be separated from the Philippine body politic was triggered in high degree to the injustices committed against our identity, our governance that pre-dated even the coming of Spaniards, and the miserable lot that befell us due to widespread dispossession of our ancestral lands.

Now that our legitimate grievances would be addressed by the BBL, the avenues to pursue and assert our valid historical claims in peaceful and civilized ways are being opened widely by the draft BBL. What more logic can there be to engage in wars of liberation when the legitimate grievances can be addressed peacefully and honestly?

With the brightest hope for genuine political and fiscal autonomy now in the pages of the BBL, socio-economic development is within reach not only for the Bangsamoros but also to all of the people of Mindanao and the entire country. We would have the control of our own resources and use it for our own priorities, which for a very long period of time, was set for us by outsiders. Our resources were also exploited by and only for outsiders. It is high time to put an end and correct the unjust status quo.

We are all buoyed up by the continuous and increased participation of the international community, especially so that the MILF's blueprint for development, the Bangsamoro Development Plan, is now a formal document and were already publicly presented in the last Philippine Development Forum in Davao City.

But, of course, more than anybody else, the BBL needs the support of the entire Filipino nation. Both legal and political conservatism should give way to innovative arrangements that can solve the problem, which by its very nature is a political one. The rape and plunder of natural resources have been going on for several decades. Those who have parochial economic interests --- interests that have been satisfied exponentially already without benefits to the native inhabitants --- should now let the ownership, control and management of natural resources be returned to the rightful possessors.

The MILF will pay the ultimate sacrifice of foregoing the legitimate aspiration of the Bangsamoro for independence. What we now expect is that Philippine government and nation will do all its best efforts to rectify the historical injustices committed against us and truly, without reservation, restore to us our historic identity, our right to govern ourselves, and establish an asymmetric relationship guided by the principles of parity of esteem, democratic way of life and social justice to all.

Thank you very much.

As long as the Moro Question or Problem is not satisfactorily addressed, the MILF will continue its assertion to the end

Keynote address delivered during the opening program of the 41st National Quran Reading Competition sponsored by the National Commission of Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) held on April 28, 2015 at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman, Quezon City

It is truly a fascinating experience for me to address this year's National Qur'anic Competition sponsored by the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) here in the University of the Philippines. As a rebel, nay a mujahid, who has been working silently on the ground for more than four decades, engaging openly can be challenging. But this is the way forward; we have to change our mindsets and our old ways of doing things. If we want peace, we need to change.

I would like to particularly thank Secretary Yasmin Busran-Lao of the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos for this invitation. To my Muslim brothers and sisters, my solemn Islamic salutation of: "Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh;" and to the other guests, "a very pleasant good morning."

The Qur'an is very important to Muslims. It is the holy book of Islam which contains the real words of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Angel Gabriel (Jibril). Reciting the Quran is an important worship that provides Muslims with peace and comfort and brings them closer to God. In addition, the Quran:

- Calls for worship of Allah (God), the one and only God, with no partner and no companion and no son
- Corrects previous faiths and previous holy book texts from alterations introduced by human
- Describes ritual worship and relevant obligations
- Sets God commands as for what to do and what not to do
- Lays down basis for true faith and right path to God
- Relates tales of old nations for gaining lessons for true faith and good life
- Gives scientific statements that were only validated by current technologies and discoveries to provide evidences on the authenticity and miracle of Quran as God revelation and not human written text.
- Reminds us with the Day of Judgment to be prepared for it; and
- Describes the second life and the certainty of paradise and hell fire.

To reiterate, the Qur'an was revealed by Allah, may He be glorified, as a law and a reference as to what is permissible and prohibited, what is commanded and what is forbidden, for people to follow, so that they obey its commands and inhibits from its prohibitions, take what it allows as permissible and shuns what it prohibits. The Qur'an tells us about what happened before and what is yet to come, and it is a reference for judging between us. The whole gamut of human life is covered in the Qur'an.

One of the most important qualities of the Qur'an is comprehensiveness. The Qur'an contains everything the people need in their current life and in the next, as it includes the goodness of the world and the Hereafter. Many verses denoted this comprehensiveness, such as Allah saying: "We have neglected nothing in the Book, then to their Lord they (all) shall be gathered." [Surat Al An`am: 38]. The meaning is: We have not left anything of religion but we denoted in the Qur'an either explicit or implicit, explained by the Prophet (peace be upon him), and confirmed by consensus or by analogy."

Again, the Qur'an says in Surat An-Nahl, 89: "And We have sent down to you the Book (the Qur'an) as an exposition of everything, a guidance, a mercy, and glad tidings for those who have submitted themselves (to Allâh as Muslims)."

Relate this to the historic narrative of the Moros; it is this strong belief in Islam that had actually saved the Moros in this country from being subjugated and Christianized. Their bravery and their maratabat (honor system) did not save them. Had they not been Muslims, they will easily fall prey to the Toledo blades of Spain, which was a superpower of the time.

Therefore, it is not correct to say, as some asserted, that the Moros saved and preserved Islam from the Spaniards. The contrary is correct, which means that it was Islam that saved the Moros and Mindanao from the scourge of the Spanish colonialism. Remember that it took only eleven years for the Spaniards to subjugate the non-Muslims, then called Indios, in this country, but we - Moros - have remained unconquered for more than 300 years.

Brothers and sisters in Islam, the Muslims in the Philippines are currently passing through a very difficult moment in their life. The proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which is hoped to provide a breather for them, is battered from all sides. The enemies of peace and those who do not want our people to live in normal life like any other ordinary inhabitant of this country are resorting to all means, fair or foul, to stop the BBL dead on its track. They have demonized the process by feeding the public with misinformation driven by prejudices bordering on Islamophobia. They also tried to destroy the credibility of those working for peace, both on the sides of government and the MILF. They accused the government chief peace negotiator of being a traitor and a weak negotiator who bartered away the country's sovereignty to the Moros." Even the MILF chief negotiator was not spared. A minor matter of the use of an alias or nom de guerre was questioned bitterly and subjected to intense grilling for hours in Congress.

The situation of the BBL became more complicated with the Mamasapano incident which happened on January 25. The centuries of distrust and hatred that started during the Moro-Spanish War in the 16th century had resurfaced. Bigotry and hate against the Moros, the MILF, as well as Muslims in general came to fore. Some legislators or politicians, media people, and a significant portion of the majority population expressed varied negative or twisted views on this incident.

But mind you all; the Mamasapano incident is clearly ceasefire-related but rendered complicated by the so-called war on terror. The SAF commandos, under cover of darkness and using night vision goggles, entered an MILF community while deliberately ignoring the time-tested protocols that have been agreed and in place for a long time. The result was disastrous as well as tragic.

Until today, after almost three months since the incident, the Parties are still trying to set the BBL to its precise direction. But at this point, we can ask ourselves: "Is it really the Mamasapano that is preventing the BBL to move forward? Or is Mamasapano becoming a convenient excuse? The answer can probably be bordering from yes to no. What we are facing in the aftermath of the Mamasapano appears to be a highly systematic and well-oiled demolition work. It should not be simply considered a spontaneous emotional reaction to the Mamasapano incident, because both sides suffered heavily in the fighting.

Frankly speaking, I do not know what the oppositors of the BBL are up to. Are they advancing war as a solution to the conflict in Mindanao or are they outright spoilers? The truth is that we have tasted the horrors of war for several decades and we do not want it to happen again especially to our children and children's children, because nobody wins in war; all are losers. But in the same vein, let me state here for the record that as long as the Moro Question or Problem is not satisfactorily addressed, the MILF will continue its assertion through to the end. We have no choice but to resist the continuing tyranny over our people. This is the reason that we are preparing the next generation to carry on the struggle after us until we succeed. It might not be violent because real and genuine revolutionary movement does not condone "violence" to attain its objectives but surely the assertion will proceed.

This is the reason that the MILF consistently asserts that it will never accept a diluted or watered down BBL, which is worse than no BBL at all. Such will only prolong the sufferings of the people in the Bangsamoro; it will also bring the MILF down to its bended knees. Better off we had accepted the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which was offered to the MILF three times, than to settle for something like or lesser than the ARMM. It would be a shame!

However, the BBL is not yet a lost case. In fact, it is slowly going back to life. The strength of reason and the demand for peace outweigh the outpouring of bigotry, hatred and biases and the deafening call for war. The international community including agencies of the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are rallying behind the BBL. The Catholic and Protestant Churches in the Philippines, the Makati Business Club, the Mindanao Business Council, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the various civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs) are also solidly on board. Also, the eighteen surviving framers of the 1987 Constitution and such moving or high profile personalities like former SC Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr., Businessman Jaime Augusto Zobel de

Ayala, Father Joaquin Bernas, Cardinals Luis Tagle and Orlando Quevedo, and former Ambassador Howard Dee, and OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani, who met leaders of the MNLF and MILF in Davao City recently, have expressed strong support to the BBL. Most if not all of the local government executives in the ARMM are also backing up the BBL.

At this juncture, let me clarify that the BBL is a legal instrument that would enable the political agreements of the Parties especially the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) to be implemented. A political document as such to establish a legal entity for governance cannot be implemented by the government except by following a legal process; in this case, Congress has to make that law. Understandably, therefore, the delivery of this piece of legislation is the sole responsibility of the government, and strictly speaking, the MILF, which is still a revolutionary organization, has limited role in this process. However, once the BBL is passed and is implemented, the MILF will cease to be a revolutionary organization and will join the mainstream society and pursue its aims solely through democratic means.

As my final note, if the MILF reaches this far in our striving, it is mainly by the factor of Islam. Islam has provided us not only the direction of our struggle but more importantly it has given meaning and importance to whatever we did and have done during those 42 years of harsh and long struggle. Any struggle that has no ideological guidance will easily lose its way and disintegrate in the course of the hard conflict. Pure materialism or nationalism is not enough to make people stay on course. At some point in their journey, they will either fade away or succumb to the prodding of the self for easy life or the enemy's threats or offer of things that glitter.

And to the Quranic reading contestants, let me urge you to purify your niyyah or intention. Think of nothing in this engagement; think only of the rewards from Allah for every letter, word, or verse you mention or read; for reading the Qur'an in Islam is a form of worship. This is the teaching of our religion. We have to follow it.

Good luck to all of you! Assalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh!

We Seek Nothing Else But To Be Ourselves

A speech rendered during a luncheon with Metro Manila congressmen held in Quezon City on May 7, 2015.

We are at a crossroads.

We have journeyed long, hard, and harsh. While our troubles have roots in the deep past, the present negotiations started 18 years ago or on January 7, 1997. We share a common dream of peace and prosperity for our people. While we may have different terminologies, we all want the same thing -- a future that is secure and abundant for our children and our children's children as well. We are now at this point, trying to find ways to help each other, to understand each other, to trust each other. Mind you, it was not easy and the challenge remains to be huge. What is it that we really seek? What is it that we ask of the Filipino people? Simply, to let us be ourselves. To let us govern ourselves. To let us chart our destiny as a people. To give us the freedom to live out our lives in consonance with our deepest spiritual values. Yes, even to let us commit mistakes or even to fail. Autonomy is an essential right and yearning of every human being. The autonomy to chart his or her life is a God-given gift. We seek nothing else but to be ourselves.

Should the Filipino people be afraid of giving the Bangsamoro genuine autonomy? It should not. To allow us to be ourselves should not be something to be feared. To grant us autonomy will enrich the Philippines. Autonomy to the Bangsamoro will make this country stronger, not weaker. The potential of the Philippines for economic growth is affected by the problems in Mindanao. The Philippines will never achieve its potential as long as there is insecurity in Mindanao.

Thus, we are now at a crossroads: are we going to be ruled by the past and by hate or shall we put our faith in a shared future and be animated by mutual respect and esteem? That is where we are right now. We are not different from you; we all belong to the Malayo-Polynesian race. We are moved by the same emotions. We watch the same telenovelas. We like basketball. We cheer for Manny Pacquiao. We love our children. We want them to go to good schools and be lawyers, doctors and whoever they want to be. We seek peace. We want to live in peace. We are the same. Most important of all, we are all human beings.

Injustice is a product of men's actions.

The problem is really injustice. Injustice to our identity, to our dignity as a people; we are deprived of what used to be ours, the right to govern ourselves. Whereas before we were ruled by our rajahs, then by the various sultanates, and then during the American regime, the Moro Province was set up to administer Moro affairs separately from Luzon and the Visayas.

Injustice, I repeat, because we were dispossessed of our lands and patrimony. Injustice because of discrimination and of being treated as second-class citizens. Injustice in terms of inequities -- political, economic and social. Worst, the Manila government once tried "genocide" as solution to the so-called Moro Problem in Mindanao. Thousands of our people died from 1968 and onward, especially during the advent of Martial Law in 1972.

But the more important thing to understand is that this injustice -- in all its forms -- is man-made. It is the result of the actions of men. It is not natural or ordained by fate. There was a time in our lives when we Moros lived in peace, prosperity and free to dream big dreams. There was a time in our lives as a people when we were full of pride and we need not have to strongly assert ourselves because we have the esteem of the great powers of the time. That is not the case today; that is a thing of the past; it is history.

Injustice, being man-made, can be corrected. It can be corrected by the very same actions of men. That is what we seek and we earnestly ask of you: undo the injustice. Undo it by actions of justice. Undo it by laws of justice. If injustice is found in laws, create new laws. Create new laws that will bring peace, esteem, pride, security and development. Pass a law of justice. That is why we appeal to you to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) because the said law, for us, stops the injustice and gives back to the Bangsamoro their pride, their self-esteem and their God-given right to determine the way we want to live their lives. That we want to govern ourselves should not be a cause of concern to the rest of the Filipino people. We do not seek to impose ourselves on others. We respect. While our freedoms were not respected in the past, we do not want other people to undergo what we suffered. Injustice must stop. To bring justice, the Bangsamoro will be just.

Will the BBL push us farther apart? Or will it bring closer unity, respect and friendship? I believe it will bring us closer. The BBL will not lead to independence. The yearning for independence is a desperate cry of a people suffering tyranny and oppression.

If the BBL is passed, then the tyranny and oppression will stop. And there will be no fire in a call for independence. Thus, the BBL is the single important legislation that signals to the Bangsamoro people that there is a space. Former Education Secretary Edilberto de Jesus, a member of the citizens' council stressed this point: "The best guarantee that would deter the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from seceding was the passage of the BBL and its effective implementation to provide the environment that would allow the Bangsamoro region to develop as part of a diverse Philippines."

Mind us all, a happy and contented people would never think of secession. The cases in point are the French-speaking province of Quebec in Canada and Scotland in the United Kingdom. They were asked in at least four times in referenda, three times for the former and once for the latter, whether they wanted to become independent states or to remain with their mother states. In all these chances, they shunned independence; they chose unity with their motherlands.

We want to participate in the body politic of the Philippines. Yesterday, we filed our formal application for the accreditation of our political party in order to participate in the elections in the Bangsamoro. And yet the BBL needs to be passed in order to bring the completion of the undoing of injustice and the ushering of a new age of friendship, esteem and cooperation of all - Filipino, Bangsamoro and the indigenous peoples. The BBL will stop the continuing injustice.

This country has been wracked by disunity and dissension for a long time. This disunity has stifled our growth as a country. This is the time to make this country whole. This is the time to live closer together as distinct peoples. Let us celebrate that diversities and work on together to promote harmony and solidarity. The rainbow is beautiful because it is made up of seven colors. Let us not wait for another 18 years. Pass a good BBL. This is my appeal to the honorable members of Congress from Metropolitan Manila.

Thank you very much and good day!

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Let Us Be Guided By Our Reasons And Not By Our Emotions

Opening statement for "Tapatan" Forum held at Aristocrat Restaurant, Roxas Boulevard, Manila on June 8, 2015

As I repeatedly say the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) is battered from all sides. But it is not yet dead. Those supporting it including President Aquino are still hopeful that at the end of the day, it will pass Congress.

What needs to be done to pass it safe and sound? This is a difficult question to answer.

The truth is that only President Aquino and his allies in Congress have the authority and means to secure the passage of the BBL in Congress. All other actors assume supporting roles. In the case of the MILF, it can only play a limited role at the sidelines, especially as a result of the Mamasapano Incident on January 25. The MILF has since been the object of ridicule and detestation. It seemed the aggressor became the hero and the aggrieved, the MILF, is pictured as the villain. Much of this distortion has been painted black by some members of the media who are identified with the previous administration.

By and large, most members of the Lower House of Congress especially those identified with the administration are supportive of the BBL. But those opposing it, while they are fewer in number, appeared to be organized and backed up by a powerful lobby group. In the Senate, except for about four senators, there is almost deafening silence. Frankly, I do not know the real sense in the Upper House. May be some of you here can share us some of your insights.

Why is it important to pass the BBL?

1. First, the BBL is a menu for unity of this country. More importantly, it is an antidote to secession. What sends people to secede is if they are deprived, oppressed, and persecuted. A contented, happy and developed population will think twice or thrice before they would embark on a bloody adventure where everybody is a loser;
2. The BBL has addressed most if not all of the legitimate grievances of the Moros against the government. Therefore, any armed group especially new ones will have no valid reason or cause to fight the government. They will not succeed because the people will not support them anymore;

3. The passage of the BBL will promote peace and security, progress, and development not only in the Bangsamoro and Mindanao but also for the entire country. Those monies used to buy weapons and ammunition will be used to build roads, irrigations, clinics, etc.; and
4. Once the BBL is passed, the MILF, which is the largest and strongest revolutionary organization in this country, will rejoin the mainstream society and they will become productive. More importantly, they can be a very reliable and effective partner of the government both in nation-building and defending this country.

On the other hand, if the BBL is not passed:

1. The MILF will eventually weaken and those espousing for radical agenda will become stronger, because they have proved the MILF wrong in pursuing the path of peace; and
2. It will also result in widespread frustration that can generate new anti-government activities, even granting the MILF will stay faithful to what it had stated time and again that even if the BBL will not pass Congress, it will always pursue the path of peace in the resolution of the Moro Problem or Question in Mindanao. Besides, local and foreign radical groups will make Mindanao their safe havens.

Ladies and gentlemen, come to think of my assertions here. Let us be guided by our reasons and not by our emotions. Remember that those who wish for war in Mindanao are those who never tasted the horror and devastation of war. Remember also that we need to settle our internal problems before we can ably confront external threats.

Thank you very much!

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If You Want Peace; Prepare For Peace

Message during the Ceremonial Turnover of Firearms held on 16 June 2015 at Old Capitol Gymnasium, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao

We are at a crossroad. After over 17 years of hard and long negotiations -- and now bound by strong partnership -- we are confronted with the reality of two situations.

The first road leads to a dark and fearful Bangsamoro area - without hope, without peace, without justice. It leads to Bangsamoro where people's lives are shorter, where children do not have good education, where young men and women have no jobs, where natural resources are exploited to the detriment of the Bangsamoro people. It leads to a Bangsamoro where fear and insecurity reigns and tyranny continues. It is a sad and terrible wasteland. This is the preferred scenario painted by those who do not want a good Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to pass into law.

The second road leads to a Bangsamoro that is prosperous and free. It is a Bangsamoro where children can dream to be whoever they want to be and are given the opportunity to reach their dreams. It is a Bangsamoro where people are healthy and live their lives in accordance with their deepest values and religion. It is a Bangsamoro that is at peace and one with their brothers and sisters Filipinos. It is a Bangsamoro with a bright future. This is the hope and aspiration of the Philippine government under His Excellency President Benigno Simeon Aquino III and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) led by Brother Chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. This is also the hope and sincere expectation of the Government of Malaysia, as third country facilitator, under His Excellency Prime Minister Dato' Sri Haji Mohammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak.

Now the question: Which Bangsamoro do we choose? A dark and insecure Bangsamoro? Or a Bangsamoro that is happy and peaceful.

We, in the MILF, have made a choice. We choose a Bangsamoro that is happy and peaceful. We choose security over insecurity. We choose freedom over tyranny. We choose development over poverty. That is our choice. We choose it freely. We choose it for the Bangsamoro. We choose it as well for all Filipinos who seek peace. And that choice is concretized by deeds and not simply words. Today's ceremony is about that deliberate and serious choice of the MILF to be true to our agreements.

Frankly speaking, this decision is one of the most difficult decisions we have made so far in more than four decades of harsh struggle. Whereas throughout the course of history, we have always armed ourselves in defense of our homeland, people, Islam, but today we have reversed the natural flow of that long narrative. We have agreed to undertake this symbolic decommissioning of our weapons and put them beyond use. We want to show to the world that the MILF will and will always comply with obligations set forth in signed peace agreements.

Today, we say to the whole world: "if you want peace, prepare for peace."

This is the start of our preparation for peacetime in the Bangsamoro by taking this serious move of decommissioning. It is a first of the many steps towards the achievement of peace.

People sometimes commit the mistake that firearms are our main strength. They are wrong. Firearms are not the source of our main strength. We are a minoritized and small nation. We do not have armies. We do not have navies. We almost have nothing. **And yet, our main strength is the love, affection and faith of the Bangsamoro People**. As long as the Bangsamoro People support us, we shall persevere and we shall struggle. It is for the Bangsamoro People that we do everything. The Bangsamoro People is the beginning and the end of our struggle. In so doing, we beseech the Almighty to reward us in the Day Hereafter.

Once again, we say with more vigor: **If we want peace, prepare for peace**.

Thank you and good day to all!

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The Opposite Of Peace Is Not War; It Is Fear

Message during the awarding ceremonies for the European Union Peace Journalism Awards held on July 8, 2015 at the Intercontinental Hotel, Makati City.

To the European Union Ambassador to the Philippines, Ambassador Guy Ledoux, our partners in the Government of the Philippines, members of the European Union, Jury Members, to our remarkable Finalists, distinguished Guests, Friends of the Peace Process, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

Indeed, time flies so fast. And these are crucial times.

I vividly remember some nine months ago when we all gathered in Cotabato City for the launching of the First Peace Journalism Awards, and called on all talented, wise and dedicated peace lovers to join and take on journalism as a tool for social change and transformation.

The amount of entries we received for these Awards is the best indicator of how much support our peoples have for peace and confidence-building in this country.

Peace advocacy is not an easy theme. You cannot just simply fake it. You cannot claim to be for peace if you are selective of its application. As a peace advocate, one has to be personally fully committed to peace and wholeheartedly believe that everybody should give peace a chance. Writing about peace is a whole other arena as I myself, having written books on the struggles of the Bangsamoro, found it to be rather challenging to faithfully convey the ideas in a way that is understandable, informative and conflict-sensitive with a call for action.

Although nine months have passed since we launched this Peace Journalism Awards, so little or so much, depending on which side of the glass you are looking from, has become of the fate of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) in the Lower and Upper Houses of Philippine Congress.

Along these lines, I have come to a revelatory realization that contrary to popular beliefs, the opposite of peace is not war; it is fear – and to be very particular in the case of the BBL, it is the fear of the unknown. Many appear to fear the changes that the BBL

will bring about not only in Mindanao but to the whole country. Whatever kind of fear one has of the BBL enormously overpowers their desire to give peace a chance. But we must not be defeated by fear. Peace over fear, like good over bad, must always prevail. Although what becomes of the BBL is still unknown, we will not let this rob us of the opportunity to speak of peace, to spread goodness, and to foster unity and harmony among our countrymen in whatever form and manner.

What keep us going are stories of hope and dreams -- of positivity and grace -- of love and support – and of brotherhood and togetherness. Never have we felt that we are left alone in this endeavour because we chose to pay more attention to the words and gestures of support from the local, national and international communities who share our dreams to achieve genuine and long-lasting peace in Mindanao.

Today, as much as you, the winners, are celebrated for your achievement, you deserve more recognition for making peace win as well. In the strongest terms, through your words, imagination, pursuit of truth, persistence, hard work, and love of mankind, you made it possible for peace to prevail. Congratulations for a job well done and may you continue to be great shapers in the field of peace-building in this country.

To those who joined but did not have the good fortune of taking home the prize, please know that we are equally proud of you and your contributions. Take comfort in the idea that what matters most is your purest intention of being instruments of peace through your work. The mere acts of joining and submitting your entries advocating peace already speak so much of your characters as journalists. Let me convey my heartfelt thanks to all of you for your entries.

All in all, I am pleased that we have succeeded in getting the message of the Mindanao Peace Process across to our audience with this year's contest. With this remains the ever illuminating hope that the message of passing a BBL that is faithful to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) will also succeed in the end.

We all have our parts to play during these tough and trying times. Let me reiterate that it is very comforting to know that we have you, dear journalists, to capture, write, and talk about peace and its over-arching benefits to this country. You are visionaries in your own rights, and we are proud of how far we have matured and grown as a country in terms of peace journalism.

Allow me to also extend my Congratulations to Ambassador Guy Ledoux and the European Union for the successful run of the First Peace Journalism Awards in the Philippines. Your valuable assistance to the peace process is always cherished and appreciated, and we hope that you will not tire of lending support to our activities.

In ending, I would like to believe, with all humility, that in my own small ways, I have contributed in molding the story of peace in Mindanao in my lifetime. Whether the story ends with a period or a comma, I ultimately may never know with certainty. But it would be good to retire knowing that people will continue writing beautiful stories about other people in the context of peace-building for the next generations to learn from.

Thank you, and once again Congratulations to the Winners and other Finalists. Enjoy the rest of the day, and Wassalam.

The Responsibility of Working in a Peace Process

Paper read during the forum sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio and Notre Dame University in Cotabato City on July 22, 2015

It is often said that forgiveness is the highest form of closure for conflict. When you forgive somebody, you are spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride. Forgiving, they say, is setting yourself free.

There is so much wisdom in this view. But the Mindanao conflict is not about individual bitterness and wounded pride. It is about people who have been wronged for decades after decades; it is their collective survival and future that are in the direct line of fire. By merely forgiving all those who have caused these miseries and destructions is as if we are permitting them to enjoy their spoils and to commit the same mistakes or crimes again and again. More seriously, it is as if we say that we stop the search for solution to this conflict and end the current peace negotiation.

The historic injustice committed against the Bangsamoro people is very serious. This requires immediate restitution. However, this settlement is not only about giving justice to where it is due but for all practical purposes there has to be genuine healing process and effective closure formula to the Mindanao conflict. The bleeding, in terms of lives and economic losses, has been staggering. The conflict with China is not only in the

figment of imagination. It is real; it has started already, albeit it is still a word war. A huge country with a huge population needs huge resources and huge military launching pads and maneuver areas. The history of the world is replete with wars waged by powerful nations over weaker ones. Recalling recent and memorable events, and comparing them with past events, will help us understand.

From 1971 to 2001, the cost of the war had reached nearly P2.013 trillion, an amount almost equivalent to the 1915 national budget. The decades of fighting had killed nearly 160,000 people, excluding the tens of thou sands of wounded from both sides and civilians caught in the crossfire. In terms of social welfare disruption, 982,000 were displaced during the 2000 all-out war. In addition, the county incurred economic losses amounting to a staggering P640 billion or PhP20 billion per year from 1970 to 2001 in terms of damages to businesses and properties, potential investments and businesses in the region had there been better security.

Men and women of goodwill, irrespective of confessional affiliations, tribes, or stations in life, must work together to find a way out of this mess. This is a collective and individual responsibility. But in the order of precedence, it must start with each of us. I, you, and everyone need to take the first step. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "We must be the change we wish in others."

Within the context of the peace process, every side must have the moral courage to acknowledge that we share in the responsibility of seeing to it that the ship docks at a safe port.

I, as one, am doing and fulfilling my share of the responsibility. As a peace worker for the last twelve years or so, I have learned so many hard lessons in dealing with the government, my peers in the MILF, and the various stakeholders of the peace process in Mindanao. Frankly speaking, the responsibility of working in a peace process is tremendous and oftentimes very delicate. I can enumerate some of them here:

First, a peace negotiator has to control his/her emotions. A pique has little space in negotiation. A negotiation is like war. You are up to all kinds of pressures and even dangers. In war, a combatant can die anytime but in negotiation no one dies of it, but when a negotiator agrees to sign something inimical to his group, then he had not only compromised himself but the group he represents and the people at large.

More than control, I should say, managing is perseverance. In the Qur'an, God did not promise victory to the brave but only those who persevere in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.

One time, I was asked by a member of a foreign delegation trying to learn from the MILF experience in negotiation about the secret of our success in talks with government that led to the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). I cannot think of any answer to the question except by saying: "We manage to control our emotions, persevere in the course of the long and hard negotiations, and we stay consistent to all signed agreements of the parties".

Second, negotiating for solution is not only having to compromise in order to move the peace process ahead; it is more than that. The underlying basic principles that a liberation movement or any similar groups stand for have to be upheld at all times. You can compromise on methods and approaches, but not on principles, because principles are non-negotiable. For instance, a real autonomy for the Bangsamoro has to have real power and access to resources; otherwise it is not autonomous but a mere administrative organ of government.

Third, the trust and confidence of your principal, say in my case, the MILF Central Committee, has to be ensured at all times. Of all the agencies of the MILF, I think it is the peace panel that has never drifted away from the mandate given to it. No major decision was made without the clearance of the MILF Central Committee; and I cannot recall of any instance that we were reprimanded or warned. Of course, this is not to say that we and I have not committed lapses. As chair of the MILF Peace Panel for twelve years, I have never said to myself that I did a perfect job. It is just that we always find time to criticize ourselves and review our path with our principals in order to avoid making hasty or unjustifiable decisions.

Fourth, a perfect balance between confidentiality and transparency has to be instituted throughout the peace process. The parties in negotiation have to agree when to be secretive and when to be transparent. Confidentiality is an important factor in ensuring the success of the exercise. This is the reason that the government and MILF have resorted to various modes of engagement from direct face-to-face discussion to back-channeling, proximity talks, and not-talking at all. On the other hand, transparency has it not only in the course of the exercise, but in the end, because the people, the ultimate stakeholders and arbiters, have to know about the whole undertaking.

Fifth, allow me to express with due respect and candor that it is very difficult to learn to trust those representing the government, which after all have caused the miseries, sufferings, and hardships of the Bangsamoro people. But no negotiation will ever succeed if not a good level of trust and confidence in your counterpart are achieved. One has to understand that it is government that makes policies not individuals; and more importantly, in the case of the GPH-MILF peace process under President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, it is designed to solve the Mindanao conflict. If this peace process has gained tremendous achievements, it is lodged in the high level of trusts and confidence built over the years since the Aquino-Murad meeting in Tokyo on August 4, 2011.

Be this as it may, vigilance is always a ready weapon at the disposal of a successful negotiator. Your partners in negotiation may be good persons, but the agenda he/she pushes forward is certainly not the kind you want. Each party starts from a position and from where they try to work out a compromise. If there is away, each party wants the flow of the engagement in its favor. This is natural and has to be accepted as such.

This is not to say, the parties are engaged in trickery, which most negotiations are. It is not, but this is the nature of all negotiations. I can cite one clear example. The Tripoli Agreement of December 23, 1976 is not a bad agreement. But the rider inserted to it by government that its implementation follows a "constitutional process" spoiled the whole search for real autonomy for the Moros in Mindanao. President Ferdinand Marcos used it to delay and misimplement the agreement.

Sixth, sometimes it is more difficult negotiating with your own peers than those of your counterpart in government. The difficulty is rendered more difficult if the bone of controversy is over tactical aspect of the engagements. Academicians, especially so-called experts, are rigid; and therefore, they are virtually one-sided in outlook and orientations. If given the chance, they would want to hijack the whole process.

I hope I am not mistaken to mean that they are ill-motivated. They can be as pristine in their thoughts as anyone who has been involved in the struggle throughout their entire lives. It is the manner that they want it to happen which is not done the right way. Anyone can, including experts, say, suggest, or propose, but official decisions especially major strategic are made by the political leadership of the MILF, or by the peace panel, and not by individuals.

Finally, nothing is agreed until it is agreed. This is the normal experience of negotiators. But in our case, enduring so many bad experiences in the past of so many agreements violated, we added a long dash and then put the "and signed."

In the long run, negotiations test our values as individuals and as an organization. The responsibility that rests in our shoulders as the front liners in the pursuit of peace is most vital. That is why we need everyone to be on board with this exercise.

Each Filipino has the individual responsibility to have a stake at the current peace process. I, along with the other speakers in this event, may be the faces of this exercise but the real movers are not just a selective few, but all of us. This becomes a collective effort bearing assigned responsibilities as we push for the successful implementation of the signed Agreements.

The GPH-MILF peace negotiations started as a political exercise, resulting in the signing of a political document, that is, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and its Annexes, as well as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. As added premium for legitimacy, the path we embarked on required that the political document be converted into a legal document, which was the legislative bill transmitted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission to the Office of the President, and recently deliberated on in the House of Representatives. I am sure that you are familiar with the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

The responsibility to ensure that the Bangsamoro Basic Law that passes the Philippine Congress is true and faithful to the agreements indubitably lies in our legislators and most especially, the Executive Department. After submitting and transmitting the Basic Law to the Office of the President, the role of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission has unreasonably been limited.

Change Starts In Our Hearts

Message for the Rotary Club of Cotabato on the start of Rotary Year 2015-16 with the theme "Be a Gift to the World" delivered in Cotabato City on July 22, 2015

I am happy to be one in spirit and purpose with the officers and members of the Rotary Club of Cotabato City as they commence the Rotary Year 2015-16 with a fresh leadership and new commitment to the ideals for which the prestigious Club has been organized.

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak during this historic occasion of the Rotary Club of Cotabato City. This is really an honor on my part. Again, thank you very much!

Actually, this is not my first rendezvous with the Rotary. The first was in the Mall of Asia three years ago, the second at the Heritage Hotel last year, and the third in Baguio City, also last year. But in Baguio City, I only sent my video message and could not make it in person, in consideration of the security concerns brought about by the Mamasapano incident last January 25. Many of the fallen SAF commandos in that tragic incident hailed from the Cordillera. I really wanted to go, because the incoming president was former deputy chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, who was my counterpart in government when the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was initialed in July 2008 and subsequently declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in March of the same year. How exciting to meet a former "nemesis" (in quotation mark) in peace negotiation in another engagement where no controversial issues are taken up.

Our desire to be of service to our fellow human beings is natural. We find meaning and satisfaction in doing good to others. Oftentimes we are not contented doing it all by ourselves but with and in the company of others of equal conviction and dedication. That is why throughout the ages, men and women have organized and dedicated themselves to the betterment of their fellowmen.

The Rotary Club is one such formal organization that has been constituted to be of service to others. Without doubt, everyone has something to give—whoever we are, whatever our place in life. We can give our talent, our knowledge, our abilities, and our effort; we can give our dedication and our devotion. We can also give part of what little or big we have in life. I believe that one's only share in his/her wealth, no matter how rich one is, are those given to people with all sincerity. Everything left you leave them in this world.

Since its formation in 1905, we have seen how primarily businessmen and professionals have joined the Rotary Club International and embraced the now very familiar motto of "Service Above Self." This philosophy is simply serving fellowmen without expectation of reward in this world.

I would like to believe that the continuing existence of Rotary Club International, here and elsewhere, owes in fact to that kind of goal that people can easily relate with.

Accompanying the aim to benefit others, to "be a gift to the world" as this year's theme proudly declares, is also the desire to create positive change in ourselves and in the communities where we live.

Of course, creating positive change can be both easy and difficult. In our youth, we always aspire for the ideal, for the things we really believe in. We want to create a world according to our ideals, but as we grow and mature we find out that idealism is only a state of the mind. The real world is not really about perfections but a process of undergoing series of changes from bad to good and from personal focus to community service. There are also changes that plunge mankind back in time. This is the real world we live in, not the one in dreams.

Change is a catalyst. Sometimes we tend to oppose it and welcome it at the same time. And oftentimes in our haste, we forget that change is not really acceptable to all. Some would never want any change. They want the status quo to perpetuate, because they enjoy and have the most out of it.

I want to repeat. Change is not new; in fact, it is the only permanent thing in this world. But this change must start in ourselves --- our perspectives. Our biases and prejudices must ultimately yield to the voice of reason, objectivity, tolerance and justice.

Change is reconstructing the paradigms that we have become too comfortable in, and acknowledging that we cannot solve our current issues with the same mindset that brought us those issues in the first place.

There is too much simplicity to this gem of wisdom. But truly, as all successful agents of change have discovered, the starting point for lasting change is no other than ourselves. The Qur'an amply said of this: "God does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in their hearts." Man earns virtue or evil by his freewill.

This change needs not be monumental or heroic. Heroes are least needed nowadays. We want a good company. The formula can be very simple. Even just the keeping of good relations with others is one positive step towards change in empowering ourselves. A simple smile is enough to start it.

Why? Because it develops goodwill and unity --- something all of us need and can be proud of. This is one of the most profound legacies we can share to our people especially those generations coming after us.

We are passing through a crucial moment when rare opportunities present themselves for all of us to make positive and phenomenal change in our communities. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) offers us a way out of the conflict and into the time for healing our blighted past and truly working for the welfare of our people in a regime of peace and development.

Apparently, there are those who do not want this law to pass, using all pretexts to batter it from all sides. Their main argument is that the BBL is unconstitutional but clearly forgetting or patently ignoring that at the heart of the 1987 Philippine Constitution is social justice for all. It is about giving more to those who are lesser in life.

At this juncture, let me appeal to the officers and members of the Rotary Club in Cotabato City to join the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in spreading the message of peace and solidarity in Mindanao through the passage of the BBL. This law is a menu for peace and development; more importantly, it is the template for the unity of this country. Not solving the Moro Question or Problem is perpetuating unpeace in our midst.

With unity, cooperation, dedication and commitment, we can make a lot of things possible, in much the same way that you have made it possible to be awarded as the Most Outstanding Club. I congratulate all of you for that!

I also congratulate the outgoing officers for that wonderful achievement and especially to your Immediate Past President (IPP) Gapor "Gappy" Quituar.

And I hope that your Incoming President Gabriel "Gabby" Calungsod would be given the dedication and direction to steer the Rotary Club of Cotabato to its true purpose. In my personal knowledge, as a friend, I know he can deliver what is expected of him. He can make a difference. You have made a correct decision to choose him as your next president of the Rotary in Cotabato City.

Good night and again thank you very much!

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All Of Us Must Start The Positive Change In Ourselves

Message for the Rotary Club for Rotary Year 2015-16 with the theme; "Be a Gift to the World", July 2015

I am happy to be one in spirit with the officials and members of the Rotary Club of Cotabato as they commence the Rotary Year 2015-16 with a fresh leadership and new commitment to the ideals for which the prestigious Club has been organized.

Our altruistic desire to be of service to our fellow human beings is natural. We find meaning and satisfaction in doing good to others. Oftentimes we are not contented doing it all by ourselves but with and in the company of others of equal conviction. That is why throughout the ages, men and women have organized and dedicated themselves to the betterment of their fellows.

The Rotary Club is one such formal organization that has been constituted to be of service to others. Since its formation in 1905, we have seen how primarily businessmen and professionals have joined it and embraced the now very familiar motto of "Service Above Self.

I would like to believe that the continuing existence of Rotary Club International, here and elsewhere, owes in fact to that kind of goal that people can easily relate with.

Accompanying the aim to benefit others, to "be a gift to the world" as this year's theme proudly declares, is also the desire to create positive change in ourselves and in the communities where we live.

Of course, creating positive change can be both easy and difficult. In our youth, we always aspire for the ideal, for the things we really believe in inspite of any impracticality at the prevailing time.

We want to create a world according to our juvenile wishes then. I say there is nothing wrong with that.

But sometimes in our haste, we forget that change is not really acceptable to all. Some would never want any change, probably out of the comfort they derive from prevailing conditions.

We are in a crucial moment when rare opportunities present themselves for all of us to make positive and phenomenal change in our communities. The Bangsamoro Basic Law offers us a way out of the conflict and into the time for healing our blighted past and truly working for the welfare of our people in a regime of peace and development.

Apparently, there are those who do not want this to happen. Instead of service to others, they want to propagate servitude of others to their base desires – political ambitions, economic dominance and even religious bigotry.

What I just want to repeat, because essentially this is not really new, is that all of us must start the positive change in ourselves --- our perspectives, biases and prejudices must ultimately yield to the voice of reason, objectivity, tolerance and justice.

There is too much simplicity to this gem of wisdom. But truly, as all successful agents of change have discovered, the starting point for lasting change is no other than ourselves.

It need not be monumental or heroic. Even just the keeping of good relations with others is one positive step towards empowering ourselves.

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With unity, cooperation, dedication and commitment, we can make a lot of things possible, in much the same way that you have made it possible to be awarded as the Most Outstanding Club. I congratulate all of you for that!

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And I hope that your Incoming President Gabriel "Gabby" Calungsod would be given the dedication and direction to steer the Rotary Club of Cotabato to its true purpose.

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The amendments would directly thwart the exercise of genuine autonomy, which is deemed the real answer to the Bangsamoro problem

Message during the Luncheon Meeting with House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. on August 11, 2015 at the Batasan Complex, Quezon City

Good morning. Thank you very much for allowing me to address you on this very urgent matter. My purpose this morning is to state gently and clearly our thinking and concerns on the developments relating to the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) so that we can help and cooperate with each other in attaining peace and development in Mindanao and in the whole country.

At the onset, let me thank you for all the hard work and the patience you have invested in coming up with the current version of the BBL. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This confirms to us that we are truly partners for peace.

Admittedly, it is more often that I and my colleagues would only get glimpses of sentiments of members of this august body from what are written in the dailies, when in truth, we have so much to talk about. I wish gatherings like this could be more regular, where we could engage in intelligent discourse about the BBL to eliminate any miscommunication in the end. That is the true essence of collaboration; being able to see the interests of everyone from all sides, with the end in view of arriving at a desirable situation.

Sometimes, it is hard to be straight-forward in dealing on hard issues of the day. Some people might see it as undiplomatic if not an outright incivility. But lawmakers, I would dare say, are the most trained and experienced in discussing issues even the most difficult ones without any tint of hesitancy; otherwise, they cannot be good legislators and they cannot legislate.

Therefore, forgive me for going straight to our message: the current version of the BBL, House Bill No. 5811, with all its amendments, departs substantially from the just agreements between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Philippine Government as contained in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). House Bill No. 5811 is, thus, repugnant to the aspirations and dreams of the Bangsamoro People and to the MILF. Therefore, we urge Congress to remain faithful and pass instead the draft of the BBL as contained in H.B.

No. 4994 which was submitted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to the Office of the President.

We have stated in our letter to the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Philippines our detailed comments and objections to more or less 28 substantial modifications. Let me address the bigger picture as to why the current draft, House Bill No. 5811, appears to be greatly inconsistent with the signed agreements.

The peace negotiations between the MILF and the Philippine Government have only one single agenda, which is to "solve the Bangsamoro problem". This so-called Bangsamoro problem is political in nature and is about the unjust annexation or the incorporation of the Bangsamoro people into the Philippine state without its consent. Thus, the Bangsamoro problem is about the imposition made on the Bangsamoro people on how to live out their destiny as a people, including their political, economic and social institutions. The solution to the unjust imposition without consent is precisely to grant the dominated Bangsamoro people the power to exercise their right to self-determination. The solution to the problem of imposition is the free exercise of choice with regard their political status and to freely determine its own form of political, economic, cultural and social development.

Will the current draft, House Bill No. 5811, grant the Bangsamoro people the free exercise of choice to determine their own form of political, economic, cultural and social development? I would beg to differ, on two counts.

Firstly, the drafting itself of the BBL as contained in House Bill No. 4994 is the direct exercise by the Bangsamoro people of their right of choice. Thus, the document and the process that led to the drafting of the document is in itself the beginning of self-determination. If Congress does not place premium to the choices made by the Bangsamoro people through the BTC and in fact, dilutes those choices, then the right to self-determination is denied and thwarted already from the very beginning. The author of House Bill No. 4994 is the Bangsamoro people themselves. It is not the MILF, not the BTC, not the Office of the President. When Congress dilutes the provisions of House Bill No. 4994, it denies the Bangsamoro people their right to self-determination. It rejects the choices of the Bangsamoro people.

Secondly, collectively the amendments contained in House Bill No. 5881 do not grant the Bangsamoro people the freedom long denied them. With due respect, the amendments would appear to prolong and continue the stranglehold of the Philippine

state on the Bangsamoro people. **The amendments would directly thwart the exercise of genuine autonomy which is deemed the real answer to the Bangsamoro problem. The amendments would seem to strengthen the status quo**. If the current version, House Bill No. 5811, is passed into law, then the problem will remain unsolved. And if the MILF accepts this law, then no doubt we will not only be cursed by our people but the MILF loses its legitimacy and currency. We will be relegated to the dustbin of history.

With all humbleness and humility, I dare to say here again that the only appropriate issue to be of common concern is whether there are indeed constitutional issues or infirmities in the original BBL, which I believed have already been addressed in all levels of engagements from the BTC to the peace panels and to the Office of the President. Perhaps, wisdom could tell us that it is better to leave those, if any --- which I believe there is none --- to the Supreme Court to determine and decide.

We concede that Congress has the plenary power over legislation. There is no argument about it at all. This is the reason we make this appeal, to give space, to accommodate the exercise by the Bangsamoro people of their right to self-determination by passing the spirit and form of House Bill No. 4994. Please improve it but do not dilute it. Do not water it down. This is our sincerest and noblest appeal, in particular to the Honourable Speaker of the House, Sonny Belmonte.

This must be stated gently and with all respect, the Bangsamoro people and the MILF feel and stand ground that the current draft House Bill No. 5811 will not reflect the essence of the peace negotiations and more importantly, the signed agreements, if it is passed into law. Let us respect the wisdom and efforts that both Peace Panels poured into this whole exercise by passing the BBL in its original form. Let us respect the wishes and dreams of the Bangsamoro people. We look up to Congress especially the Lower House as protector of the legitimate interests and aspirations especially of the weak, marginalized, and often "oppressed" sectors of society like the Moros and the indigenous tribes.

Thank you very much

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The Bangsamoro Question Is Not A Wound That Can Be Bandaged As A Palliative

Paper read during the Forum on the Bangsamoro Basic Law held on August 12, 2015 at the NCCP Grounds, EDSA, Quezon City

To the organizers of this event, fellow peace advocates: **GOOD AFTERNOON!**

It is with great pride that I stand here today to talk about the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) and its significance as a step in ending the decades-long armed conflict in Mindanao. I would like to express my grandest respect for everyone who grace this occasion. We are all proof of how faith-inspired peace building works to bridge people towards understanding the many facets of our struggle before reaching this crucial point.

Let me begin by stating two quick facts, and perhaps common knowledge: FIRST, the Philippines is the only Christian-majority country in Southeast Asia, and SECOND, for decades, Mindanao has suffered the most conflict as opposed to the other two major islands of the Philippines, and this conflict partakes the nature of ethno-religious divide.

However, through the years, we hope we have gotten one important point across: THAT THIS CONFLICT IS NOT ABOUT RELIGION. We are blood brothers and sisters, regardless of faith, ethnicity, race, colour and creed.

Since the early '70s, the war in Mindanao has cost the lives of approximately 160,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands, if not millions more. This is a serious matter that needs to be dealt with seriously.

The Bangsamoro Question is something that is deep-seated, tracing back from the illegal and immoral usurpation of the Bangsamoro freedom and independence, and the annexation of the Bangsamoro people and homeland when US granted independence to the Philippine Republic in 1946.

The conflict can be categorized as political in origin; hence, the Bangsamoro Question requires a political solution, that is, the restoration, regaining, and recognition of the Moro identity, homeland, and right to self-governance.

The MILF, as one party to the peace negotiations, agreed to broker a peace pact with the GPH with the sole intent of addressing the root cause of the Mindanao conflict,

which is the continued denial of the historic and legitimate right of the Bangsamoro people to self-determination.

The MILF believed that the most civilized, practical and democratic way of resolving this conflict in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Question is through principled negotiation resulting to a peace settlement that is comprehensive, honourable and just, and mutually beneficial to all the concerned and affected peoples and parties, especially the oppressed and marginalized Bangsamoro people. Thus, the peace process between the GPH and the MILF started in 1997.

Admittedly, the peace negotiations in Mindanao involving the various liberation fronts had remarkable hits and misses.

Through time, we also have been tested. Who could forget the "All-Out War" waged by former President Joseph Estrada against the MILF in March 2000? Again, by the first half of the year 2003, there was a rise of violence which resulted in a government military action against Buliok complex in Pikit, North Cotabato. There was also all-out military offensive in August 2008, under the term of Gloria Arroyo, and more recently in January 25, the Mamasapano mishap.

I would not want to relive those days especially at a solemn dialogue such as this one.

And then the deal on the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was sealed in Malaysia on July 27, 2009. The agreement provided for a "Bangsamoro Juridical Entity" (BJE) which would be formed after some constitutional amendments under the initiative of the government. The MOA-AD was a document that was a product of 3 years and 8 months of negotiations between the GPH and the MILF. The basic principle of the undertaking was the recognition that there is no alternative solution to end the decades-old Mindanao conflict but to address the very root of the Bangsamoro Problem through a politically negotiated settlement.

We know the fate that beset MOA-AD. It had been initialled but not signed because a Temporary Restraining Order issued by no less than the Supreme Court of the Philippines in August 2008 halted the supposed signing. Finally, the same Supreme Court declared the agreement to be unconstitutional on several counts in October 2008. For this reason, conflict in the area was renewed with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reaching more than 600,000. The prospective BJE would have fulfilled the Bangsamoro

people's struggle for self-determination, which was begun by the MNLF and pushed to completion by the MILF.

When President Benigno Simeon Aquino III stepped into office in 2010, his administration gathered enough political will to continue negotiations with the MILF. He defied the advices of some Doubting Thomases to go to Tokyo, Japan and talked to the leadership of the MILF with the intention to jumpstart the ailing GPH-MILF peace process. Building from the gains of previous agreements entered into with Moro Liberation Movements in the past, the MILF and the GPH sought a real solution to the Bangsamoro Question and envisioned an end to the conflict-stricken days in the Bangsamoro homeland.

On October 15, 2012, the parties signed the historical Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) that brought hope and enlightenment to the people who patiently followed the peace process. The FAB laid down the many components that made up the substantive issues tackled in the negotiations, and it was therein explained by the GPH, thus, "the status quo is unacceptable and that the Bangsamoro shall be established to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The Bangsamoro is the new autonomous political entity (NPE) referred to in the Decision Points of Principles as of April 2012."

Shortly after the significant signing of the FAB, President Aquino issued Executive Order No. 120 on December 17, 2012, creating the 15-man BTC whose main functions are to draft the BBL, propose amendments to the Constitution, assist in identifying development projects in Bangsamoro communities, and conduct public consultation. Almost simultaneously, both Houses of Congress issued their respective Resolutions in support of the decision of the Executive Branch of Government. Meanwhile, the Annex on Transitional Arrangements and Modalities was signed on February 27, 2013, while the Annex on Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing was inked on July 13, 2013. Not long after that, the Annex on Power Sharing was signed on December 8, 2013 while the Annex on Normalization was signed on January 25, 2014 together with the Addendum to the Annexes on Power Sharing and Wealth Sharing on Bangsamoro Waters. Finally, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was ceremoniously forged on March 27, 2014.

The parties believed that the establishment of the new Bangsamoro political entity will pave the way for good governance and will result in a stronger, better-resourced autonomous region suited to the way of life of the Bangsamoro. "Autonomy" is the

language in framing the efforts to push for greater support for the Bangsamoro at the local and national levels.

The BTC, which I happen to chair, was able to complete its task of drafting the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law in April 2014. However, a subsequent review by the Office of the President Legal Team resulted in a stalemate, and we found ourselves in an unfortunate situation of having to elevate the matter again to the Peace Panels which never accomplished much after 20 days of intense bargaining in four separate venues and schedules which again virtually forced the OP and BTC-MILF to take over the discussion until the final product was formally and officially turned to the OP on September 6. On September 10, in a ceremony in Malacañang, President Aquino turned over the proposed law to Senate President Franklin Drilon and Speaker Sonny Belmonte Jr.

The BTC exerted all efforts to ensure that everyone was properly apprised of what was happening with the drafting of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), involving people in the government, both local and national, civil society organizations, communities directly affected by the proposed law, the academe, and all others who had interests in the process. With the help of our generous comrades from the international community along the lines of technical, human resource and logistical assistance, we were able to hurdle the tumultuous phases of consultations all over the Philippines.

The product of this concerted effort became House Bill No. 4994, which underwent the rigorous deliberations in the House of Representatives, and Senate Bill No. 2408, which is still being undertaken in the Senate of the Philippines. Perhaps regrettably, however, the timelines set by our leaders in the Legislative Department have never been met, and the fate of the BBL is left hanging with the election fever just around the corner.

The provisions in the original BBL that the BTC transmitted to the Office of the President are all consistent with the FAB and its Annexes, and the CAB. In fact, most provisions had been copied word for word in order to ensure that we do not deviate from the signed agreements.

So for academic discussion, allow me to limit my discourse to the BBL in its original formulation.

Why is there a need to codify all of these into the form of a law? We need to understand that it is only through this law that we would be able to legitimately establish a political entity, provide for the basic structure of government in recognition of the

justness and legitimacy of the cause of the Bangsamoro people, and make known our aspiration to chart our political future through a democratic process that will secure our identity and posterity and allow for meaningful self-governance.

Under the proposed BBL, the Bangsamoro Territory would cover the present geographical area of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao; the **6 Municipalities** in the province of **Lanao del Norte**: Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal; the **39 barangays** in the Municipalities of Kabacan, Carmen, Aleosan, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Midsayap in North Cotabato; the Cities of **Cotabato** and **Isabela; and those qualified for inclusion in the plebiscite, by way of resolution or petition**.

Some of the very good principles reached at the negotiations between the GPH and the MILF were the Principle of Parity of Esteem which basically means that the Central Government shall respect the exercise of competencies or exclusive powers of the Bangsamoro Government, and the Bangsamoro Government shall respect the exercise of the competencies and reserved powers of the Central Government, and the principle of **Asymmetric Relationship**, meaning that the relationship between the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government is asymmetric. This relationship is reflective of the recognition of their Bangsamoro identity and their aspiration for self-governance consistent with the exercise of the right to self-determination. This makes it sui generis and distinct from other regions and other local governments.

Pursuant to these principles, we agreed to put up a mechanism called the Intergovernmental Relations, which is provided for under Article VI, Section 4 of the proposed law. In said section, the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government shall establish a mechanism at the highest levels that will coordinate and harmonize their relationships. For this purpose, a primary mechanism shall be a Central Government – Bangsamoro Government Intergovernmental Relations Body to resolve issues on intergovernmental relations. All disputes and issues relating to these intergovernmental relations shall be resolved through regular consultations and continuing negotiations in a non-adversarial manner.

What, then, is the extent of the general powers of the President over the Bangsamoro Government? Consistent with the Principle of Autonomy and the asymmetric relation of the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government, the **President** shall exercise **general supervision** over the Bangsamoro Government to ensure that laws are faithfully executed.

On the other hand, the Bangsamoro Justice System recognizes four (4) main systems, namely: Shari'ah Courts, Traditional/Tribal Justice System; the regular or local courts; and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

The justice system in the Bangsamoro shall consist of Shari'ah law which shall have supremacy and application over **Muslims only**; the traditional or tribal justice system, for the indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro; the local courts; and alternative dispute resolution systems.

All citizens are guaranteed the basic right to the redress of grievances and due process of the law. In addition to this basic right already enjoyed under the Constitution, the Basic Law further provides for justice institutions in the Bangsamoro. The formal institutionalization and operation of the Shari'ah justice system, the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts and competence over the Shariah justice system shall be established in the Bangsamoro. **The supremacy of Shari'ah and its application shall be only to Muslims**. When necessary, the Basic law may institute measures to improve the workings of local civil courts. Aggrieved parties residing in the Bangsamoro may have recourse to the local courts, or among Muslims to the Shari'ah district or circuit courts. The Basic Law expresses respect for the right of the indigenous peoples to the settlement of conflicts through their own tribal laws, and traditional systems. The Basic Law shall also recognize other indigenous processes as alternative modes of dispute resolution.

I could sometimes be overzealous in discussing the BBL in detail, and I say thank you for giving me this opportunity.

I would also like to share that we in the BTC are lucky that various international NGOs extend valuable support and assistance to our undertakings in advancing our cause for the passage of the BBL. One initiative that we greatly appreciate is the publication of a Primer on the BBL by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The Primer lists down some Frequently Asked Questions with, of course, answers and they are phrased in very simple ways to be able to reach out to everyone, in layman's terms.

Now, let us do a reality check.

Reading through the signed agreements, and comparing them with what is now being offered by the Ad Hoc Committee on the BBL as House Bill No. 5811, it is glaringly obvious that a lot of critical items, provisions and legitimate intent in the source

documents have been dissipated in the new house bill. The new legislative measure seems to be short of disregarding the pains and efforts of those who actually sat on the negotiating table to come up to terms with each other's position.

This is why it is important to look back, analyze and understand the context of the peace process through revisiting the signed agreements.

I cannot overemphasize that the new Bangsamoro Political Entity should never be less than the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM); it should not be equal or similar to it, either. For what reason we will accept an entity lower than or similar to the ARMM, which was offered to the MILF three times in the past? It is as if we are to say those 18 years of hard and long negotiations are wasted only to accept something which we rejected several times.

The BBL should remain faithful to the letters and intents of the FAB and its Annexes, and the CAB.

The more delay or denial of the right to Self-Determination of the Bangsamoro people, the more costly it shall be to both sides. As the saying goes, "One can kill the dreamer, but never the dream." The passage and effective implementation of the BBL based on the spirit of the FAB is an acid test to Filipino statesmanship as to the choice between two (2) options: first, constant conflict within the household; and second, a growing, peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood.

Verily, the situation calls for a resolution and not mere management of the Mindanao conflict. Even with the unfortunate happenstance of intervening events, the parties should not allow the peace process to be hijacked by political posturing and opportunism. While it is commendable that the Aquino administration is ready and willing to divest itself of substantial powers and invest the same to the Bangsamoro and allow them to chart their own destiny, genuine autonomy and lasting peace cannot be attained unless the nation opens its eyes to recognize the need to address historical injustices that left the Bangsamoro behind in all aspects of development.

The Bangsamoro Question is not a wound that can be bandaged as a palliative.

We cannot afford a BBL that does not represent the true aspirations of the Bangsamoro as a people. We have suffered enough. We have been continuously suppressed and denied our Right to Self-Determination.

All of us in this room are living witnesses to how peace-building is as a universal concept, for as long as we share the moral warrants to oppose injustice, and are willing to persevere for the success of the cause.

Let us, once again, be partners in securing the ever-elusive peace in Mindanao by advocating and supporting the BBL in its original form. **This is the way to peace!**

Thank you and good afternoon.

Knowing the collective opinion of the Bangsamoro aids us in our work of designing and building peace in Mindanao

Speech delivered during the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Social Weather Station (SWS) in Quezon City on August 15, 2015

Good afternoon.

First of all, let me join in congratulating the Social Weather Station (SWS) on its Thirtieth Anniversary. It is an honor and privilege to be with you this afternoon in order to be able to express my personal, as well as the Bangsamoro Transition Commission's felicitation for the continued success of the SWS for the many years to come.

But surely this congratulation does not begin and end with the SWS, as an institution, but the men and women behind this, especially the founding fellows, are very much in the forefront in this success. The truth is that what can an inanimate institution can do without the men and women, who are the real catalysts for change and success? In particular, allow me to mention Dr. Mahar Mangahas, currently SWS President and Chief Executive Officer, whom I knew before we meet each other at the University of the Philippines (UP) not many months today. His name or pictures comes out regularly in the media.

It has been asserted that the SWS's mission is to regularly do scientific social surveys for the sake of education, so eyes may see social conditions; conscientization, so hearts may feel social problems; and analysis, so minds may understand their solutions. Its vision is to set standards of excellence in the practice of "Statistics for Advocacy" within a democratic context: using a socially-oriented agenda, making practical technical innovations, communicating findings to the general public, and teaching the technology to other

institutions. Its basic functions include: social analysis and research, with stress on social indicators and the development of new data sources; design and implementation of social, economic, and political surveys, including public opinion polls; and the dissemination of research findings through publications, seminars, briefings, and other channels.

For any democracy to work, the people must be able, among others, to express their collective opinions and perceptions on the issues that matter them. Without access to their collective opinion and perceptions, the people will not be able to influence policy and government. Indeed, the SWS provides a very important service for Philippine democracy to work - that of providing the Filipino people access to the collective opinions and perceptions of key groups and constituencies. SWS provides a platform to the ordinary Filipino to express his or her views which otherwise, in the normal course of things, would never be heard. With the work of SWS, the thinking and feelings of ordinary Filipinos can now shape public policy and programs for the good. Otherwise, only the powerful and the important would have a voice and influence in public policy.

For us in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who are committed to social change and innovation to uplift the life and future of the Bangsamoro people, we knew from the start that the road to freedom and liberation will be hard and difficult. And precisely, one of the badges of our being dominated as people is our lack of voice in the great debates of the Republic. And worse, lawmakers and policy-makers usually prescribe medicines, so to speak, for our problems, which we know more than anyone else. Look at the two versions of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) now under deliberations in Congress. If they are the ones made into law, surely the whole mess in Mindanao will continue.

Thus, one of the aims to our liberation as a people is precisely to acquire once again our voice as a real partner of the Filipino people. For the longest time, our voices have been stifled, muffled and scrambled. We have been relegated to the margins of the national life and discourse. We have been rendered as if we were invisible. That is one of the reasons why we do not have peace.

It is because of this struggle to be free that we look positively and welcome the work of institutions like the SWS. While we still have to acquire our full voices as a people, the work of the SWS is a good start. With surveys and polls of the SWS on issues relating to the Bangsamoro, slowly and surely, the collective voices and opinions of the Bangsamoro, long silenced and disregarded, are now being heard by the rest of the country. Our opinion and thinking on the issues closest to our hearts - our hopes and fears - are now being recognized and valued. For this, we are thankful to the SWS.

But providing access to the Bangsamoro people's collective perception is not just good for the Filipino nation. It is also good for us who serve the Bangsamoro people. Knowing the collective opinion of the Bangsamoro aid us in our work of designing and building peace in Mindanao. We are aware that surveys and polls are snapshots of perceptions of certain segments of the population at a given time. However, perceptions can change. We see the surveys done by SWS as tools for policy and social change for social innovators like the MILF. The purpose of surveys is not to maintain the status quo but a change for the better. In other words, it is liberation. The work of SWS gives us inputs on how to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves. Surveys are starting points, not endpoints. We will use them in designing a better future.

It is my earnest hope that in the near future, people would start to look at the Bangsamoro people with objectivity and not in disdain, as some people especially in the media, some of whom are still sporting the mindset of the 16th century. After all, we are as human as anybody else, or as intelligent or lack of it as anyone in any society.

Again, let me congratulate the SWS on its Thirtieth Anniversary celebration. May you continue with your work of giving voice to the ordinary people, the voiceless, and the marginalized.

Thank you and again good afternoon!

Our Diversity Is A Blessing

Message during the Peace Exhibit on the Bangsamoro Basic Law at the Gallery of the House of Representatives in Quezon City on September 15, 2015

"You only live twice or so it seems one life for yourself and one for your dreams." This is the first line of the song of the same title and of the film of the same title. It is the fifth spy film in the James Bond series, and the fifth to star Sean Connery as the fictional M16 agent James Bond.

I likened this afternoon's activity to one real life for the BBL simply because we have with us the main pillars of the Lower House of Congress, the Honourable Speaker Sonny Belmonte Jr. and, of course, Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the BBL, Honourable Congressman Rufus Rodriguez, as well as the other stalwarts of the Lower House in whose hands one half of the fate of the BBL are put firmly.

Frankly, I never imagined the BBL as one of a dream, as the song says so, because President Benigno Aquino III, as well as the leaders of Congress have long committed to have peace reign in Mindanao and to pass a good law in the form of the BBL to solve the armed conflict in Mindanao. Up to now, despite the difficulties and rigorous process we see in the House especially, I still trust the collective wisdom of Congress to pass this law.

In the first part of the program, a supposed video presentation was made. The title is "Who are the Bangsamoro". If I were to answer that question I would say the Bangsamoro are Filipinos, all rooted in the Malayo-Polynesian sub-race of the great Mongoloid race. Examine our more than 100 dialects, all the basic terms are practically the same or similar with each other. For instance, a Maguindanaon, Maranao, or Iranon, or even a Tausog --- of course with slight variations --- would count: isa, dua, telo, pat, lima, nem, pito, walo, siyao, sapulo, while a Tagalog or some other tribes would say: isa, dalawa, tatlo, apat, lima, anim, pito, walo, siyam, sampo. Being a Bangsamoro does not confer extra privileges to the Bangsamoro except a matter of identity, as all of us are either known as Ilocano, Ilonggo, Pampanggo, Igorots, Bisaya, etcetera; or in the larger sense, as Filipinos or Indigenous peoples.

It just happen that we are Muslims, most Filipinos are Christians, and the IPs are basically clinging to their traditional beliefs. But for us Muslims, this should be no reason to divide us or cause debate. In Islam, this issue was settled by the Qur'an 1,400 years ago by this surah: "There is no compulsion in religion; unto you your religion and unto me my religion." Where therefore is the issue of religious conflict as far as we are concerned?

To me, our diversity is a blessing rather than what other people might think otherwise. Remember the rainbow; it is very beautiful. It is made up of seven colours: Red, orange, yellow, green, violet, indigo, and blue. Also remember an orchestra or even this ensemble. There are so many players, each touching a particular key of different sounds but in the end, they make music.

Finally, let me hope that this exhibit is the best evidence that the BBL is alive and kicking. The problem with the lack of quorum is a fleeting one and eventually this will be addressed by the House leadership. I have full trust and confidence that the House leadership will be able to address this soon.

Thank you and good afternoon.

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I Completely Stopped Analysing

Opening statement during the Press Conference on the Prospects for and the Status of Passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) at the Lower House of Congress on October 7, 2015

To me and perhaps to everybody else, this Press Conference on the Prospects for and the Status of Passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) at the Lower House of Congress is very crucial and timely. First, it shows how strong the partnership of the Parties to push for the passage of the BBL in Congress; and second, which is more compelling, it is a wakeup call to all concerned, including the two branches of Congress to do some last-ditch belt-tightening measures, otherwise the passage of the BBL is a foregone conclusion. We have witnessed how the various timelines for passing the BBL fell on the roadside: December 2014, June 11, this year, September-October, this year, which will end tomorrow. The only window of opportunity is the next deadline, if I may call it as such, which will be in November-December. After that, it is all politics that fill the air.

Of course, we can explain why the BBL has not made it through in Congress in all these attempts. But we will not revisit them anymore, lest they will bring back hard memories. On the positive note, we witnessed how everybody joined hands to push for the BBL: The government, the MILF, the international community including the United Nations, European Union, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the World Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Catholic Church of the Philippines led by Cardinals Orlando Quevedo and Luis Antonio Tagle, the various Protestant Churches in the Philippines, the civil society organizations and non-government organizations, both domestic and international, and many more including eminent personalities such as those belonging to the Friends of the Peace Process the likes of former Supreme Court Justice Hilario Davide Jr., Jaime Zobel de Ayala Zobel, Christian Monsod, and Father Joaquin Bernas. And of course, on top of this list and without saying, is President Benigno Aquino III, whose clout with the MILF leadership is still very much intact to this day. We know how he put into the BBL both his personal and official capacities to ensure its passage.

What should be done, therefore, to save the BBL from being relegated to the dustbin of history? Who are the lead actors in this process of passing the BBL? For me, there is no need to state what is obvious; instead, I am making these humble propositions:

First, I appeal to the honourable members of both Chambers of Congress to rise up to the occasion and be statesmen even for one moment in the history of this country. The

fate of the BBL is in your hands, and history will judge you on how you dispense with the BBL, which is the key solution to the Bangsamoro Question, a problem that has pestered us not only for decades but even for centuries.

And second, I see now the wisdom of certifying it as urgent bill. Certifying a bill as urgent exempts it from the "three-day rule", or the requirement that bills are to be read three times on separate days. It would also mean that the House or the Senate could pass the BBL on second and third readings on the same day. Both the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) have provided that the BBL should be certified as urgent bill. Without glossing over the validity of the reasons advanced by government by not doing this yet, but I think this time, the BBL should be certified as urgent bill in order to fast tract its passage in Congress.

Frankly speaking, we have hard time explaining to our constituents why up to this time the BBL is not certified as urgent bill, in spite of the fact that this is part of official agreement of the Parties. It is only our trust of President Aquino, which has been built over the years, which we use to keep at bay those trying to entertain serious doubts on the legislative process right now. Good, they still take our words for it.

I strongly believe that genuine peace with justice is within our grasp. This is through the passage of the BBL. Let us not lose this golden opportunity, so that the long years of conflict will never happen again. Let us bury this hatchet and face the future with renewed hope and true happiness. Let us hasten the path towards real reconciliation.

However, sad to say, many people including some so-called leaders of society and media practitioners are making this reconciliation very difficult to succeed. It seems they want no less than we humiliate ourselves and bow in surrender to them. Sometimes, we feel that this country is not really ready to extend to us the olive branch of peace.

Will the BBL make it in November-December this time? I cannot answer this question; I can only hope, not do anything beyond that, because, personally, I completely stopped analysing. The future is not for me to determine. I just do what is required of me as chairman and member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) that crafted the BBL.

Thank you and good afternoon.

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Preserving The Gains of the 17 Long Years of Peace Negotiations

Opening Statement during the Third European Ambassadors Forum on the Challenges to the Mindanao Peace Process at the Sofitel Hotel in Manila on October 13, 2015.

In general, the real challenge to the Mindanao peace process is how to preserve the gains of the 17 long years of hard, harsh, and protracted peace negotiations contained in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). I hope the Supreme Court would not rule on the CAB as unconstitutional.

In particular, the most immediate challenge to the Mindanao peace process is how to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) into law by Congress. The chance of passing it diminishes every day. Congress adjourned last October 9 without both Houses even reaching the period of amendment. One reason for this is the consistent lack of quorum.

Both Houses are still in the period of interpellation. This will be followed by period of amendment, and at least five more steps before the BBL becomes a law.

Anent to this is how to engage Congress effectively. Much of the delay of the BBL is caused by fears, prejudices, and even hatred of the Moros, which did not exempt even some legislators. The Mamasapano tragic incident on January 25 suddenly reignited this long-held antipathy against the Moros, and the immediate and helpless victim is the BBL.

Therefore, the engagement should focus on those who are championing the cause of the BBL in the halls of Congress. They should be helped in every way possible. Those hardened anti-BBL legislators should also be in our radar screens. More importantly, the leaderships of both Houses must exercise decisiveness.

The second challenge is how to manage the rising frustrations among the Moros in Mindanao, admittedly including some elements of the MILF. Frustrations can be an effective weapon at the disposal of radical elements to fan further hatred against the government and foment troubles in Mindanao.

In this regard, the MILF, as partner of the government in peace-making, needs help to increase its capacity to parry off these challenges and rally the Moro population to

the cause of peace and promote inclusivity in its advocacy and programs. To increase the absorptive capacity of the MILF, therefore, is very important and a priority.

The third challenge is how to ensure that the government and MILF hold on to their commitment to promote the path of peace no matter what happens to the BBL. Also the high level of trust and confidence between them shall be maintained. And without saying, the various infrastructures of the peace process should remain intact and effective and the various programs especially on normalization will proceed not at the expense of any of the parties. In addition, all parties should be aware and affirm that socio-economic interventions cannot solve a problem that is political in character; on the contrary, it can make things more complicated. They can be seen as pure counter-insurgency measures.

On the side of the MILF, there is continuity of leadership and policies especially on the primacy of peace-making, but what about the government. Suppose a new president will adopt a more hawkish policy? It is necessary that additional measures shall be thought-out to ensure the Parties comply with their commitments and obligations, say, holding of an international conference in support of the peace-making in Mindanao. If possible, high profile personalities would be invited to speak during the conference, highlighting the importance of peace-making over other so-called modes of settling conflicts.

Fourth, how to maintain and increase the level of support of the international community and other players including the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, the World Bank, and others. They should continue to journey with the government and MILF in the pursuit of the peace settlement of the conflict through to the end.

And fifth, a sustained comprehensive advocacy campaign shall be pursued vigorously in order to educate the people, as well as other sectors of society about the BBL and the importance of the peace process. Ignorance of the BBL and the history of the struggle of the Moros make people including lawmakers to make wrong decisions. And more importantly, not solving the Moro Question is a bad decision and will lead to more complications now and in the future.

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Lessons Learned from the Peace Process In Southern Philippines

A paper read at Enryaku-ji Temple, Kyoto, Japan on November 13, 2015

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has learned so many hard lessons from its 17 years of hard negotiation with the Government of the Philippines (GPH). Without its patience and perseverance, no doubt it cannot endure in those long years of protracted engagement in the negotiating table, and signed those 100 or so agreements especially the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) without the clear guidance from the MILF Central Committee and the consistency of its position from day one up to this point in time.

The first lesson is that a weaker party is not immune to the dictates of the stronger party if it does not stand pat to consistency based on principles and signed agreements, and is willing to risk everything if only to demonstrate that it is serious and cannot be bullied. What it lacks in material power, it fills it up with moral authority.

Some of the hard lessons we learned from these long years of negotiations with the Government of the Philippines are as follows:

- Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This is the lesson learned by other negotiators around the world especially those in Northern Ireland. But in our experience, this is not enough, so we added to it, after a long dash "and signed."
- Sometimes, it is hard to negotiate with your own peers rather those of the other party. Sometimes, any member of the panel presented another view or stand which has to be settled first before the talks can proceed.
- That egos are essential elements in the conduct of the successful negotiation, not only with the other party but even with your own peers. One can use this modestly to bolster the chance of an agreement.
- Suspicions, fears, hatred, and prejudice are as hard to overcome as the substantive aspects of the negotiations.
- The participation of the international community is a very effective means to ensure the stability and legitimacy of the peace process.
- The most difficult aspect of the engagement is when the subject is about power and resources. Powers and resources are the heart of the sovereignty of a state; so it is expected.

Now, I will proceed to discuss the points set forth in the invitation, as follows:

First, from pure armed struggle (1972-1997) to political struggle (1997 to present). If the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will be passed by Congress, the political struggle of the MILF will shift to democratic struggle; meaning, there will be elections in choosing leaders of government and society.

Second, the exercise of the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro will always result in what form of self-governance they wish and design for themselves, which is genuine autonomy. This is contained in the proposed BBL. They will also determine their social, cultural and economic development.

Third, both during the negotiations and the BBL, inclusiveness was ensured. Ethno-linguistic and geographical representations were observed in choice of the members of the peace panel. The BBL is also for everybody namely, Moros, indigenous peoples, women, settlers, MNLF and other sectors of the Moro society. The MILF will only stay at helm during the transition mechanisms and after that it is free for all; meaning there will be election to choose who run the government.

Fourth, the most challenging is how to stay in the course of negotiation despite the long length of time and the double-talk tactics resorted to by the other party. Related to this is the difficulty to return to the negotiating after every major military engagement.

Fifth, Principles are not subject of negotiation or compromise. One can negotiate on methods or approaches but not the essence, for instance, of autonomy. This means that provisions of the law that would establish a real autonomous entity must corresponds to powers suited to that entity.

Sixth, ISIS is the offshoot of the turmoil in the Middle East and the wrong foreign policies of the countries involved therein, especially in relation to the control of oil and the hegemony of Israel in the region. The ISIS is condemned as "un-Islamic" by Muslim scholars and states.

The possibility of ISIS having a foothold in Mindanao is very remote. But what is possible is the radicalization of ideas as a result of the non-passage of the BBL.

Seventh, at present the most difficult challenge is the implementation of the political agreements into a legal document. I will deal on this lengthily on my paper to be presented in the next session.

Thank you!

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Negotiating and Implementing An Agreement

A Paper read in a Forum sponsored by Osaka University, Japan on November 13, 2015. Parts of this speech was also delivered during the open public seminar "The Peace Process in the Southern Philippines: Its Challenges and Prospects" which took place November 15, 2015, at, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan.

One of the hardest lessons learned in our peace process with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) is that it is difficult to negotiate an agreement but the implementation of the agreement is much harder to realize. Agreements are pieces of paper and they will not implement themselves, but implementation involves definitive and corresponding actions and programs for the Parties, as part of their commitments and obligations, including legal process on the part of the government. Besides, there are already so many players of varied orientations, approaches, and motivations.

The two concluding agreements, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which are political documents that seek to create a genuine autonomy for the Moros, cannot be implemented unless an internal legal process through the enactment of a law, in this case, the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), will be passed by Congress. This legal process is a unilateral responsibility of the government, which the MILF has no direct or official participation. I will discuss this in more details, as follows:

Let us discuss negotiation first. Negotiation, as the word implies, is not an easy matter. Getting people to compromise is usually not a wholesome offer. An idea you think will work will not click to others. The challenge is rendered more difficult if the agenda of the negotiation is not about simple matters, like changing rules in an office or doing some adjustments on the salary scales of employees, but, in the GPH-MILF peace negotiation, it is about solving the Bangsamoro Problem or Question, which is about the "historic injustice" committed against the Bangsamoro people. This is practically a centuries-old conflict that is complex and complicated, encompassing political, military, religious, social, cultural, economic, etc.

In this engagement, it took the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) seventeen long and harsh years of negotiation, 11 government and four MILF negotiators, virtually involving five Philippine presidents, and interspersed with three major wars, before they were able to sign the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014.

To illustrate one instance of this prolonged hard negotiation is the case of the botched Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), which was first tabled for deliberation in December 2004 and only to be initialed on July 27, 2008. It took the Parties three years and eight months before they agreed on the final text of the document. But their efforts did not pay-off, because the Philippine Supreme Court subsequently declared it unconstitutional. As a result, war ensued that displaced around one million people.

Our negotiation with the government passed through difficult processes and bitter experiences, such as impasses, withdrawals, cancellations, delays, walkouts, shouting matches, no-showups, proximity engagements, back-channelling, etc. Even the choice of negotiators and the personality of the facilitators were not totally left to the discretion of the concerned party. Worse, sometimes, while we were facing each other in the negotiating table, the armies of both Parties were already engaged in battles in many frontlines in Mindanao. From 1997 up to the remaining period of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2010, the ceasefire agreement was more breached rather than honoured, and, as expected, the violations were mainly at the instances of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and its allies, the Police and paramilitary forces.

Now, let me deal with the harder part of the peace process in Mindanao: The implementation of the agreements. Since we started the peace negotiation in 1997, the government and the MILF had signed more or less 100 agreements or documents, which culminated in the signing of the two most important ones namely, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014. All these agreements including the FAB and CAB are political documents and therefore, as far as the establishment of the autonomous Bangsamoro is concerned, as proposed in the FAB and CAB, a legal instrument, in the form of a law, hence, the proposed BBL, will have to be enacted into law by Congress. This legal process is a sole responsibility of the government. The MILF has no direct role.

Up to now, the BBL is still languishing in the halls of Congress and under the mercy of lawmakers, and oftentimes, tyrannized by anti-Moro lawmakers through their endless and sometimes pointless interpellations. Clearly, some of them are already filibustering the passage of the BBL.

Let me further explain in details this difficulty, especially in term of the legal process, as part of the implementation of the political agreements. Here is the road map of that legal process:

1. The 15-man Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was created through an Executive Order signed by President Benigno Aquino III in December 2012. Its tasks, among others, is to draft the proposed BBL, which will be the governing law for the Bangsamoro political entity;
2. The BBL was submitted to the Office of the President (OP), which, after two months, revised about 60 percent of the original draft; returned it to the BTC, which in turn elevated it to the MILF and GPH peace panels to settle the outstanding differences; and like the BTC, the peace panels have attempted but in vain to fix the differences. Subsequently, the OP headed by the Executive Secretary and the Chair of the BTC and MILF peace panel assumed the discussion. After four meetings, two in Davao City and another two in Manila, they have settled all, except seven, items which were elevated to President Aquino and Chairman Murad to settle, which they did in September 2014;
3. On September 10, 2014, in a formal ceremony in Malacañan Palace, President Aquino, together with the Chair of the BTC and other high government officials, officially turned over the BBL to the leaders of Congress, both the Senate and the Lower House. This signalled the official legislative process to enact the BBL into law, but until now Congress is still deliberating on BBL with very little hope of passing it soon. November-December is the fourth and probably the last deadline Congress can still do it before President Aquino leaves office on June 30, 2016;
4. Granting the BBL will pass in Congress and signed into law by the President, this will still be subject for ratification by the people of the proposed autonomy. If they ratify it, then it becomes a law; if not, then the law is dead;
5. Upon ratification of the BBL, immediately the BTC will be phased out and the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), which is vested with legislative and executive powers, will be organized, which will act as the government, during the transition period. Similarly, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) will also be abolished; and
6. The BTA will exit immediately after the election for the regular Bangsamoro Government takes place.

The status of the BBL, as pointed out earlier, is clouded with uncertainty. We do not know whether it will pass Congress or not or whether a bad BBL is in the offing. The main reason for this, citing the statement of Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, is the fears, hatred, prejudice, and paranoia of the majority Christian populations against the Moros that are shared by many if not most lawmakers. They feared that once Moros are given powers and access to resources, they will secede from the Philippines and form an independent state.

In the House, it is plagued with continuous lack of quorum. Sometimes, out of more than 240 members only 12 or 30 appeared in sessions. In the Senate, several senators asked so many questions, some of which were very basic and should not be asked at all.

If the BBL does not pass, the political settlement of the armed conflict in Mindanao will also be put on hold. Consequently, frustrations of the people especially Moros will also rise up which can lead to many uncertainties.

Of course, both Parties are expected to pursue the path of peace and maintain the ceasefire on the ground, but the legal process will not take place immediately after the new president gets into office in July 1, 2016. The new president might change policy that is radically different from his or her predecessor.

The MILF's clout and legitimacy will also be put into question. Frankly, the decision of the MILF to enter into negotiation with the government is not a universal consensus. Many viewed the government as "enemy" and therefore cannot be trusted. Expectedly, the so-called radicals and foes of the MILF will take advantage of this situation to denounce the government of insincerity and the MILF for adopting a wrong approach in settling the conflict in Mindanao.

Thank you very much and good day to all!

Of Strong Partnership And Mutual Trust

Opening statement of Mohagher Iqbal during the Joint Briefing with Government Peace Panel at the US Embassy in Roxas Boulevard, Manila on November 30, 2015

The peace process between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) reached a successful climax and won international acclaim with the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014. Aided by the international peace and development partners, the parties have reached a comprehensive peace agreement comprising twelve earlier agreements and addenda in addition to various guidelines, terms of reference, and joint statements recognised by the parties. The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was formed in the early part of 2013 as a major part of the initial implementation of the

2012 Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB). The Commission was tasked with drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

Before I touch upon the political aspect of the BBL and provide an update, please allow me to share some of the important aspects of the security and development mechanisms which parties have agreed to move our partnership from signed documents to the communities. Launching of development initiatives such as Sajahatra Bangsamoro, Socio Economic aspects of the Normalisation process, Camps Task Forces and various other adhoc service delivery mechanism are in place to provide urgent relief and improve lives of conflict affected communities. MILF has been on the forefront of these development initiatives alongside its government counterparts to respond to compelling needs of communities in the Bangsamoro proposed territories. However, the needs are enormous and so are the expectations.

On the security aspect, after successfully implementing the ceasefire agreement for over seventeen years since 1997 through our Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), as well as the International Monitoring Team (IMT), the Parties have proven this to be one of the most robust models of peacekeeping in any context. Moreover, the ceasefire mechanism also provided civil society groups and other local actors the opportunity to work as independent monitors and ensure that the respective security forces of the GPH and MILF uphold and respect the ceasefire agreement and guidelines.

Both Parties have jointly travelled through some bumpy roads but I am pleased to share that due to our strong partnership and mutual trust we were able to pursue the path to peace. We are in the process of strengthening the Joint Peace and Security mechanisms such as Joint Normalization Committee (JNC), Joint Peace and Security Committee (JPSC) and Joint Peace and Security Teams (JPST), which will ensure that political achievements translate into a climate of peace and security on the ground. We hope to work together to improve the situation of rule of law and human security.

On the political front, the BBL is crafted as the implementation of the CAB and the legal basis for the creation of a new autonomous political entity that will replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The BTC developed a draft that is composed of legal interpretation of signed agreements and based on sentiments and views shared during broad-based consultations, submissions and public outreach activities in the proposed Bangsamoro territory and other places. The resulting BBL draft was submitted to the Philippines Congress on September 10, 2014. We fully trust

that under the leadership of H.E. President Aquino, and the collective wisdom of both Houses of Congress, a good and CAB-compliant BBL will be passed very soon.

At this juncture, I will take this opportunity to emphasize what are the key principles enshrined in the BBL and why it is so important for Bangsamoro, the Philippines, the ASEAN Region and in the global setting.

1. BBL is the legal implementation of the signed agreements, which serves as one of the most **significant attempts** to find a peaceful resolution to an armed conflict.
2. The BBL aims to create new institutions and further strengthen existing governing bodies that promote and practice good governance, transparency and accountability and the Rule of Law.
3. Through the necessary transition to be introduced by virtue of the BBL, it is envisioned that the new Bangsamoro government will be able to protect the rights and values of its constituency - Moro, Indigenous Peoples (IPs) or Lumad and Christian settlers - and can effectively and honestly use public resources and authority to pursue widely accepted socio-economic and development goals, delivery of basic services and ensure justice, peace and order.
4. I would like to reiterate the MILF's position that Bangsamoro is not for the MILF alone. We are working with the government to solve the armed conflict in Mindanao or what we jointly described as Moro Problem or Question.
5. I must share that protracted conflict and its related complications have resulted in extremely fragile context. Unfortunately, delay in implementation has given extended lifeline to criminal groups engaged in activities such as drugs, kidnapping, etc. MILF believes that full and speedy implementation of FAB and CAB will allow us to work with the Central Government to improve law and order situation on the ground, improve human rights protection mechanisms and effectively deal with the menace of criminality, terrorism and organised crime like drug rackets. We heavily rely on our international partners to develop those capacities.
6. Fortunately, Mindanao Muslims generally practice and believe in an enlightened interpretation of Islam. Signed documents and mechanisms proposed in the BBL are reflective of that reality. Our aim is to ensure that reconciliation, forgiveness, tolerance and respect for human dignity remain the core principles in the functioning of Bangsamoro government. Our efforts to capitalise on the halal market and Islamic Finance show our desire to be part of multi-billion dollar industry in the world to create sound financial basis for the Bangsamoro entity.

7. Having said that, there remains presence of pockets of violent extremist ideology that are currently isolated and weak due to ongoing peace process. These pockets have existed in Mindanao due to political aspirations, economic deprivation, and cultural and social exclusion of the Muslims in Mindanao. We must work together to isolate these elements and stop the moderate population from swinging towards them. In our joint effort, moderates must prevail in their struggle and resolve the political issues, socio economic needs and aspirations of the public, which have been identified as triggers of radicalisation in Mindanao. Most pressing concern is the education of the youth, who are more susceptible to radicalised thinking. As complement to the Shari'ah Justice System and effective community centered law enforcement mechanisms, alternative dispute mechanisms (e.g. conflict resolution) can help limit the space for violent and extremist activities and help empower communities to have a stake in their own security.
8. Perhaps, Bangsamoro can be a workable formula to deal with similar issues in the other parts of the world. Successful implementation of CAB and FAB will be a disincentive to use arms in resolution of conflicts in Bangsamoro.
9. Finally, allow me to deal on the status of the BBL, which, I think, is the main focus of this joint briefing. Sad to note that the BBL is still languishing in the halls of Congress. We do not know whether it will pass at all or will find its resting place in the archive of Congress. Lawmakers especially in the Lower House simply do not have time for it; they have other matters that are important to them. But if there is any ray of hope until now, it is what government says that they are committed to pass BBL and they give November-December as the third or fourth timeline. We never wavered in trusting the government. This is the main reason why the GPH-MILF peace process has reached this point.

However, if a good BBL does not pass Congress, what lies ahead of us? This question has been plaguing us ceaselessly and continuously. On the part of the MILF, we will continue to seek and work for the final peaceful settlement of the conflict in Mindanao. In particular, we will continue to ask government to comply with its unilateral obligation to enact a law that would give life and realization to the letter and spirit of the FAB and CAB. The gains of the peace process especially the FAB and CAB should also be preserved.

Thank you and good day to all!

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Chapter 7:
Speeches from 2016

"The retelling of the Bangsamoro narrative could be painful, but it is necessary. Collective amnesia as well as denial can only lead to more injustices. While the distant past is temporally removed from the consciousness of many, one must never lose sight of the truth that the Bangsamoro Question is grounded on history. It is only by returning to historical antecedents that we can find solutions to our social problems, as do the FAB and the CAB, of which transitional justice is very well an important part thereof."

– Mohagher Iqbal
Speech during the Public Launch of TJRC Report at Alnor Convention, Cotabato City on 15 March 2016

Sharing Of Personal Insights From The Peace Negotiations

A short message read by Mohagher Iqbal, chair of the MILF Peace Panel and Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), during the launching of the "Journey to the Bangsamoro: A Compilation of all signed agreements from the GPH-MILF Peace Process," at the Makati Shangri-La Hotel, on January 25, 2016.

If one wants to enjoy life, never spend it as a negotiator. Negotiation is never fun. It isn't easy as it is generally a trait that has to be developed rather than inherited.

Frankly, I didn't desire to be a negotiator, much more as head of the MILF negotiating team. For several years, there were more lawyers in the team than those of the other professions. I find it more challenging, nay more difficult, dealing with lawyers, than those of the other members. But without a lawyer in the team, I don't know if we can reach this far in the negotiation. Lawyers are indispensable part of the endeavor.

There are times that emotions run high in the course of negotiations. I consider this as the most difficult thing in any negotiation. Uncontrolled emotions will wreck the engagement and destroy goodwill among men. But once one succeeds to make sure that he/she strips himself/herself of the emotion and deal with the facts, then we see opportunities more objectively, and the engagements thus become more and more productive. This is also due to the fact that parties are more anxious to agree than to disagree. Disagreement is never generally considered an achievement.

People or groups negotiate because they are in disagreement over certain matters. But those who learned to disagree without being disagreeable have discovered the most valuable secret of negotiation. Both sides have a lot of this in the course of our more than 17 years of harsh, hard, and protracted negotiation.

It is the nature of man to fear the unknown. Fear of the dark is not only common among children, but sometimes, even adults are not immune to it. But this fear is not fear of darkness itself, but fear of possible or imagined dangers concealed by darkness.

Fear is not absent in negotiation, especially when those of the opposite side include prominent or brilliant personalities. But the late American President John F. Kennedy had this advice: "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."

I confessed that there are far more bitter memories of the negotiation than the good ones. In fact, we cannot reckon all these bad memories, but the good ones can be counted in our fingers.

I used to act as acting chair of the MILF peace panel from the years 1999 to 2000. While government troops were already pounding the fringes of Camp Abubakar with mortars and artillery and ground troops closing in, a government negotiator (I do not want to name name) still insisted that they had no plan to enter it. The rest is part of the narrative already.

Yes, it is true that in negotiation, like in war and in love, everything is fair. But to do it in such a crafty or ingenious way is not so pretty to be appreciated.

There is no doubt that the hardest part of the negotiation happened from 2012 up to 2014. It started with former Dean and now Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Marvic Leonen. While both Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer and I cannot claim all the credits for the successes in the engagements --- maybe just a modest part of it --- but it is a fact that those crowning achievements took place during our stewardships of the respective peace panels. In these defining, nay tumultuous, moments, I find her as steady and as committed to overcome all the trials, tribulations and obstacles along the way to pave the way for the signing of the four Annexes of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), the Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters, and finally the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). I salute her and all the other members of the GPH and MILF Peace Panels for this feat of a lifetime. I also share this success with the other members of the MILF Peace Panel and Secretariat, and all those part of our negotiating team or delegation.

More importantly, the guidance and wisdom of the MILF Leadership, especially Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, and above all the Will of the Almighty God, allowed us to steer the negotiations through its end.

Of course, the facilitation made by the Government of Malaysia has proven to be indispensable for the peace talks.

My only concern is that the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which translated the political documents, the FAB and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), into a legal document, is still pending in Congress. Chances are high that it will not pass at all.

Finally, let me express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) and the European Union for making this compilation possible. In particular, I thank former CHD Country Representative, Ali Saleem, and Atty. Bong Montesa, CHD Senior Programme Officer, former EU Ambassador to the Philippines, HE Guy Ledoux, and current EU Ambassador to the Philippines, HE Franz Jessen. This is indeed a great effort.

Thank you and have a good day!

Commencing A National Concerted Effort Towards Understanding And Acceptance

Speech during the Public Launch of TJRC Report at Alnor Convention, Cotabato City on 15 March 2016

Transitional justice is healing the wounds of the past. And just like any pain, it can only disappear when it is properly remedied.

The legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoros, the historical injustices committed against them, and the violations made against their persons, properties and dignities can now be completely retold to the whole Filipino nation and the world.

That the Report of the Transitional Justice & Reconciliation Commission or TJRC is made public today is an occasion to start accepting sincerely the responsibility, accountability and moral obligation for rectification.

It's true the retelling of the Bangsamoro narrative could be painful, but it is necessary. Collective amnesia as well as denial can only lead to more injustices. Three days from now, we will remember again the March 18, 1968 Jabidah massacre. It, and several other atrocities, will always be a grim reminder of the injustice that we have to prevent from occurring again. While the distant past is temporally removed from the consciousness of many, one must never lose sight of the truth that the Bangsamoro Question is grounded on history. It is only by returning to historical antecedents that we can find solutions to our social problems, as do the FAB and the CAB, of which transitional justice is very well an important part thereof.

While the MILF is highly appreciative of the TJRC Report, it does not entertain the illusion that the next concrete steps would come in handy. A very big part of the FAB remains unfulfilled, most importantly the enactment of the BBL. But although the matrix on normalization pegs the implementation of the TJR programs on Phases 3 and 4 --- where we are unfortunately still far off --- we believe that we can start preparatory works as early as now for the plans and programs enunciated in the TJRC Report.

The publication of this Report must now gradually reach the awareness of the public --- be they Bangsamoro, indigenous peoples and/or Filipinos. Beginning today, a national concerted effort towards understanding and acceptance must commence.

The Bangsamoros have already endured countless loss of lives, limbs, properties, dignity, a good life and a secured future for their children. Colonial and neo-colonial policies have pitted us one against the other. Centuries of occupation and resistance have hardened our mutual hatred, bias, prejudice and contempt. Truly, these are no small matters to overcome.

But we have to make efforts; we have to struggle more. We have struggled for and gained the recognition of the justness and legitimacy of our cause. We have to struggle further to see that justice and legitimacy pervade the conduct of our affairs.

As it is often said, a journey always begins with a single step. We have made hundreds, if not thousands of steps already. But our journey towards peace, towards justice, towards reconciliation, is indeed a very, very long one. Many of us may not even reach the destination.

The paramount importance is we begin the healing process. This Report is a prescription for healing the wounds of the past. Let us follow the prescription, and I am confident the hurt and pain would slowly recede with the passing of time.

In closing, I congratulate all the officials of the TJRC for this historic Report, and also to all of those who have contributed to the making of this document. That was a hard work indeed, but done successfully. Let us now brace up for more hard work ahead of us.

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Long Live the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB)

Welcome Remarks during the commemoration of the Second Anniversary of the Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on 28 March 2016 at the Notre Dame University, Cotabato City

In almost all occasions that I have attended after both Houses of Congress failed to enact the Bangsamoro Basic Law, the common question raised is what to do now. Even after the Special Meeting of the Peace Panels in Kuala Lumpur last February 10 and 11, and even after MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim issued an official statement on February 18, we are still hard pressed to explain to our fellow Bangsamoro the ways forward.

That they have journeyed with us in every step of the peace process only raised their expectations. The public consultations, advocacies, various information dissemination methods, and the glaring coverage of both traditional and social and mainstream media have all contributed to the high awareness over the BBL that it will pass into law. That is why, when hopes were raised, with good reasons of course, and then those high hopes were dimmed or shut-out, we have a flurry of frustrations, anger, doubt, and fear over a future that is becoming uncertain again. At the back of their mind, they see this country as not wanting genuine and permanent peace at all.

This commemoration of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro is not spared from mockery and opposition. There are those who see no need, meaning and wisdom over this commemorative event. For them, the non-passage of BBL totally diminishes the value of the CAB.

There may be a kernel of truth to this opinion. We are all in agreement that without the BBL, the CAB will never be fully implemented. While some aspects of CAB can be started, we will never agree that we just only observe the ceasefire and socio-economic initiatives without seeing the fulfillment of the political track. Without the BBL, the CAB can never become the solution to the Bangsamoro Problem or Question.

At this juncture, a question has to be asked: Who caused the non-passage of the BBL in Congress? Many explanations, nay alibis, were offered, but the truth of the matter is that the vested interests groups caused the defeat of the BBL in Congress. They all ganged up together and worked their way triumphantly. Who are they? They are those who are insatiable with wealth and power, and those still enslaved by religious bigotry.

Given this situation, and I would say it is a worrying situation, there are actually only three options left for the MILF and the Bangsamoro: one is to do away with the peace process and revert to armed struggle; to pursue further the peace process, the BBL especially; and not to do anything at all.

Nowadays, one can be easily swayed by emotions, rhetoric and agitations. There are calls for war, as well as the passive acceptance of this fate of the BBL by some sectors. The MILF chooses neither of the two options.

Instead, we are more determined to assert the full, unconditional implementation of the CAB, especially the enactment of the BBL. This is a commitment of the Government of the Philippines, whoever becomes its Chief Executive on June 30. This is a commitment that we will ask from all the organs of the Government of the Philippines which, in its entirety, is the signatory to the CAB, in the same manner that the MILF, also in its totality, is a signatory to that historic agreement as well.

In commemorating the CAB today, I take this occasion to appeal to all Bangsamoro, the migrant communities, the indigenous peoples and the Filipino nation in general NOT to take for granted the value of the CAB. The CAB is very much alive. Even though we suffer the setback in the BBL, it is not the end of the road. It was the BLBAR that died, not the BBL that is based on the CAB.

I also take this opportunity, and I do hope it would reach them or their campaign strategists at the very least, to appeal to all our presidential candidates and senatorial aspirants to take their unequivocal stand on the CAB and the BBL. You will surely inherit this political problem. We urge all of you to clarify to us the policy that your administration will pursue vis-à-vis the CAB and the BBL. The Bangsamoro votes may pale in comparison to the votes of Christians, but even a single vote can make a difference.

Many of us shed tears when the CAB was signed, something hardened warriors never do in public and rarely in private. But the CAB is the summation of all our aspirations and emotions. Now that our legitimate grievances and aspirations have already been recognized and affirmed not only by the Government of the Philippines but by the nations of the world, do we have to stop in our struggle just because the moment is not favorable to us? No, and I personally urge everyone to **"Stand Up for Peace! Long Live the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro"**!

Accept my warmest welcome to all of you.

Thank you and good day!

MILF Will Always Be Guided By Protocols And Mechanisms

Mohagher Iqbal Message during the book launch of "Mindanao:The Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity" on 19 June 2016 at Discovery Primea, Makati City.

The peace process in Mindanao, and perhaps elsewhere in the world, has been likened already to a journey. Prof. Paul D. Hutchcroft's book, titled as "Mindanao: The Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity", is obviously a work that also subscribes to that metaphor.

In 2007, Mr. Salah Jubair (perhaps he may be known personally to some of you) also came up with a book of quite similar title as the one we are launching today. His book was entitled "The Long Road to Peace: Inside the GRP-MILF Peace Process."

Journey. Road. Undoubtedly these two words are most fitting descriptions to our aspiration and endeavor we call peace, and the process we undertake to achieve that.

For those who have journeyed this road for more than 40 years, like myself and countless others, we have come to mark the milestones by the advent and exit of Philippine presidents – from Marcos, Aquino the mother, Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo, Aquino III and the new President Rodrigo Duterte.

Each of them has made indelible marks on the peace process, with the exception yet of Pres. Duterte with whose administration the MILF has yet to engage FORMALLY in the continuation of the peace process.

By FORMALLY, I mean the engagements must be done through the Peace Panels of the MILF and the GPH. The MILF Peace Panel remains constituted as to its authority and membership. We are waiting for our counterparts in the GPH side.

Of course, there were already non-official, informal, backchannel dialogues made by and between the new President and MILF key officials, including our Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. These low-key talks are, as in the past, proving to be very useful in establishing mutual confidence and hastening continuity of the process.

As may be clear already to all, the MILF will always be guided by protocols and mechanisms established by signed agreements. The continuity of the peace process will, in great respect, proceed along lines already mutually agreed upon, most essentially those stipulated in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB).

We are aware though of the lessons of history and experience. Almost every administration from Marcos onwards had peculiar approaches towards the Bangsamoro Problem or Question. With the exception of Marcos and Estrada, and Arroyo to a certain extent, everyone else showed concrete measures to achieve negotiated political settlement rather than going to war as a national policy. Even then, it was during Marcos' time that the 1976 Tripoli Agreement was signed; it was in Estrada's time that MILF camps were officially acknowledged and recognized by the government; and it was to Arroyo's credit that we signed with government the Tripoli Agreement on Peace in 2001, considered the mother of all agreements signed with government by the MILF.

We are fortunate that under the leadership of former Pres. Benigno Aquino III, the peace negotiations between the MILF and GPH that started in 1997 were technically completed with the signing of the CAB on March 27, 2014.

The implementation though of the signed agreements is proving to be as difficult, or more difficult, than the negotiations.

I would surmise this new book by Prof. Hutchcroft has delved on issues related to the under-achievement of the projected stages of implementation mechanisms we all commonly and conveniently referred to as the roadmap. I say under-achievement because we have yet to have a Bangsamoro Basic Law, a plebiscite for that, the establishment of Bangsamoro Transition Authority, the regular Bangsamoro government and finally the conclusion of the Exit Agreement.

Of course, we in the MILF are also aware that the new President is embarking on a shift to a federal form of government for the entire Philippines. The implications of this policy on the implementation of the CAB are already being studied carefully by the MILF. Even this early, however, we already know that the shift to federalism, WHILE WE

ARE SUPPORTIVE OF IT, is not one of easy picking. The powers allowed by the status quo and those enjoying it will always have a hard stare at it. Anent this, it is our firm view that the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) should be passed first, as promised by the President during his campaign for the presidency and make it as template for federalism in this country. I am upbeat that the President can do it smoothly for several reasons. He is extremely popular, the time factor is on his side, and he is not anti-Moro – in fact, he has a Moro blood running in his veins – and finally he has shown so far that he is a decisive leader. As the old adage says, "there is no rocky hill for an iron will."

Truly, the peace process is once again in an interesting time and on the spotlight.

It is thus opportune that a new book on this old topic is coming off the press.

As Mindanao, in particular, continues on its hard and winding journey to peace and prosperity, there would always be events that would be an issue or pose as a challenge. Sometimes they are so surprising and overwhelming that we are momentarily lost for explanations, such as what transpired in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25, 2015.

There are confluences, nay divergences, of interests, forces and events that call for sober, methodical, and dispassionate analysis that oftentimes are within the luxury of those in the academe. The direct actors or participants in this unfolding of events would do so well as to reflect on the works and contributions of those in the academe.

I believe this book of Prof. Hutchcroft would be another useful volume towards a better and objective grasp and understanding of the Bangsamoro Problem or Question.

Certainly, we in Mindanao have a long journey to take. We don't know when and where it ends. But as the same Salah Jubair also wrote in his book, "Success, including that in the peace talks, always takes the long and winding road: this is the only way."

In closing, I congratulate Prof. Hutchcroft and the other contributors for coming out with this book. We appreciate the interest you've taken on a subject that is so close to our hearts.

Thank you.

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Presentation of the BTC Final Narrative Report to President Benigno Aquino III

Mohagher Iqbal Opening Statement during the Final Audience of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to President Benigno Aquino III to Present Him the BTC Final Narrative Report on June 22, 2016

Bismillahir Rahmaanir Raheem!

Your Excellency President Benigno Simeon Aquino III; dear colleagues in the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

Good afternoon.

First and foremost, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for taking the time to receive us this afternoon. Not too long ago, we were at this very same place in the Presidential Palace, paying our courtesy call to you. At that moment, we thanked you for entrusting us the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), a body that you tasked to draft the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). We pledged to fulfill our duties with utmost integrity and competence as we committed to pursue the best interests of the Bangsamoro people. We hope that we did not disappoint.

The BBL, which was crafted by this group before you today, was the product of numerous discussions between the BTC and the Government of the Philippines, through the Office of the President and the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. We give high regard to inputs and contributions of our constituents in affected areas and even those who are not, from our international and domestic partners, our friends from the civil society, and most importantly, the people in the Bangsamoro. The BTC never wavered in standing by its version of the proposed BBL amidst all the challenges and adversities that we faced. We know that we are on the safe side of the raging debate.

You will remember that the BTC has continued to engage the Office of the President and OPAPP during the tedious deliberation phase of the proposed BBL in both Houses of Congress. Despite the many changes in the timelines set for the passage of the bill, we remained hopeful that the version we submitted to this honorable office will remain intact and finally become a law. We know that it did not happen, and the reasons for which were varied. But we are unfazed. The struggle continues, and we will pursue the path to peace because the commitment to do so lives on in each of us.

While we did not secure the CAB-compliant BBL during your term of office, please know that the BTC is grateful for the support you gave us through the years. Of the 15 members originally comprising the BTC in 2013, two (2) have moved on to take on equally important roles in the Philippine bureaucracy. They are Atty. Johaira Wahab and Comm. Fatmawati Salapuddin.

It was an honor to work with this tremendously talented group of people in the BTC. As a collegial body, we had our fair share of disagreements in the course of performing our tasks. There had been episodes of frustration, dissonance, tension and outpouring of mixed sentiments in some of our plenary sessions. But there was a wealth of knowledge and lessons that we were able to draw from these experiences, especially when decisions had to be made. As a result, we have had the most amiable and effective working relationship in the BTC. Indeed, your choices of Commissioners were a good blend with the choices of our leadership in the MILF.

In ending, on behalf of the entire Bangsamoro Transition Commission, its membership, officials and staff, I wish to convey our best wishes to you as you step down from office on June 30, 2016. We hope that you will continue to contribute to our quest to bring just and lasting peace to Mindanao in whatever capacity or role you take on in the future.

Thank you and good afternoon!

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The Chance Of Success Is Very Much Reachable

Mohagher Iqbal presentation during the forum sponsored by Communication Foundation for Asia held at Sta. Mesa, Manila, Philippines, on September 23, 2016.

Status of Peace Process:

The peace process under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte has resumed and the peace panels, now renamed peace implementing panels, have met twice already: First in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on August 13 to 14, and second, in Davao City on August 29 to 30. Earlier on the first day of the meeting in KL, the two implementing panels were launched and several senior officials from the government, MILF, and host country graced the occasion. In the afternoon, the two panels met for the first time and they continued on to the next day. Among others, they have decided to meet regularly in the Philippines. However, when important agreements are to be signed or any major decisions to be made, they still do it in Kuala Lumpur and in the presence of the third party facilitator. The facilitator always signs any and all formal agreements. They also agreed that the GPH panel will work actively for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) in Congress while the MILF panel will monitor it closely. They also agreed to increase the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) from 15 to 21, as well as creating the Bangsamoro Assembly for the purpose of consultation and consensus-building in relation to the new BBL.

Most members of the two peace panels knew each other well even before they were appointed and faced each other. At least three members of the government peace panel were involved directly in the peace process with the MILF or MNLF: GPH Panel Chair Irene Santiago, OPAPP Undersecretary Jojo Andot, and OPAPP Undersecretary Nabil Tan. Assistant Secretary of OPAPP Dickson Hermoso was with government ceasefire committee.

Strictly speaking, there will be no more negotiation between the parties after they have signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which contained the political solution to the Bangsamoro Problem or Question. Their present tasks are mainly to implement their agreements specifically on ceasefire-related activities, normalization process, and the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which will be discussed lengthily later.

It is being viewed that as long as the two Parties are consistent with all signed agreements and remain sincere and continue to be problem-solvers, they can travel far and well in the pathway to peace, because all the agreements were signed already. The chance of success is very much reachable.

Challenges:

The real challenge now is how to pass the BBL during the 17th Congress to become a law, which is mainly a government responsibility. The MILF does not have direct role in it, except through the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) which will craft the new BBL. Eleven members thereof including the chairman are from the MILF while the government has 10. But all of them are to be appointed by the President.

Key players in this process are the President and Congress. The President should push hard for it, including certifying the BBL as "urgent." The certification will short-cut the process, and it should be made simultaneous with the submission of the bill to Congress. The President should also give clear line to congressional leaders that the BBL is an administration bill.

However, before the above happens, there are priority steps to be undertaken. The Executive Order creating the BTC should be issued without delay, so that members, after being appointed by the President, can buckle down to work and start drafting the new BBL immediately. The government especially the Office of the President and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, are duty bound to defend the draft bill.

In Congress, members of its Lower and Upper Houses should fully support the proposed bill. The "whip" or presidential liaison should be identified, as well as the champions. They should also make sure the proposed bill is always a priority in the deliberation.

There are two other challenges, which have to be addressed also, because they are crucial to the passage of the bill: public support and stable situation on the ground. The first is a mutual responsibility of government and MILF through the BTC. The MILF can also help in some ways, because passing the bill is the responsibility, as earlier stated, of government. The second is largely the responsibility of the government especially by upholding the primacy of the peace process. The Mamasapano tragic incident should

not happen again. The MILF should also uphold at all times the ceasefire agreement and primacy of the peace process.

For public support:

- Good communication plan. If possible, hire professional help especially from popular figure.
- Continuous education or dialogue involving the different communities.
- Need for talking heads with stature who could shape public opinion.
- Concentrate on or engage spoilers.
- Focus on areas where there is less support to the proposed bill.
- Engage people who are enjoying the status quo. Make them realize that the change brought about by the propose bill is good for everybody.

Maintenance of stable situation on the ground:

- Effective maintenance of the ceasefire on the ground.
- Effective close coordination among agencies of government and MILF, especially AHJAG on drug related government operations.
- Release of MILF political detainees who have been in jails for years.
- Resolution of conflicts on the ground especially the so-called "ridos".
- Calibrated socio-economic projects on the ground consistent with agreements of the parties especially on normalization.
- Transitional justice.

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Transitional Justice Has Been Engendered By The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)

Speech during the "Roundtable Discussion on Transitional Justice and the Mindanao Peace Process" held in Cotabato City in September 2016.

At the outset, I would like to thank and commend the Bangsamoro Study Group for organizing another important forum aptly called "Roundtable Discussion on Transitional Justice and the Mindanao Peace Process". I would also like to relay my personal appreciation to our esteemed discussant today, Dr. Djorgje Djordjevic, as well as to all the participants who, I believe, would further enrich our understanding of what Transitional Justice is all about.

Admittedly, the issue on transitional justice has been engendered by the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro. More particularly in the section on normalization, item number 12, it is stated there that "The parties agree to work out a program for transitional justice to address the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, correct historical injustices, and address human rights violations".

Conceptually, this may be novel to most of us. The idea of justice that we are most familiar with is the existing legal framework and what is usually labeled as traditional justice system. But as long experiences have amply demonstrated, sometimes the prevailing justice system is a source of grave inequities and tool for repression and oppression. In fact, the legitimate grievances of our people are hardly addressed by the existing laws. Thus, we have to look for other paradigms.

For communities like ours which are trying to emerge from conflict situations, from abnormal conditions to normalized ones, we have to ensure that both judicial and non-judicial measures are effected to give true justice to victims of state-sponsored, state-abetted, or state-consented violence and, equally important, to guaranty that no repetition of such violence by state apparatuses would be repeated.

This is where, I believe, the concept of transitional justice becomes applicable to our present situation. This is our overarching theme in our attempt to give justice to victims of human rights violations, to the rectification of massive land grabbing policies and practices, and the eventual vanishing of discrimination, to cite just some specific concerns.

The contemplated program for transitional justice is very much a work in progress. As I've mentioned earlier, it is subsumed under the normalization process and would form part of the Annex on Normalization.

It goes without saying that we welcome constructive ideas on transitional justice. Just like in the numerous issues contained in the FAB, we also want to achieve more learning and eventually the needed wisdom on practically all the details that would form the larger picture, or to be more official, the Bangsamoro Basic Law. And so I am really hopeful that our resource person today can educate us further on transitional justice. May we mutually learn from each other so that the tasks laid upon our shoulders by history can be discharged with competence, guidance and wisdom.

Thank you and a good day to all of you.

Optimism Has Been Rekindled

Remarks of MILF Peace Implementing Panel Chairman During the Signing Of The Executive Order Reconstituting The Bangsamoro Transition Commission on November 7, 2016 At Malacanan Palace

His Excellency Pres. Rodrigo Roa Duterte, MILF Chairman Alhaj Murad Ebrahim, OPAPP Sec. Jesus Dureza, GPH Peace Implementing Panel Chairwoman Irene Santiago, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant afternoon to all of you.

On December 17, we would be marking the fourth year since the first executive order was signed creating the Bangsamoro Transition Commission or BTC.

Optimism, especially among us Moros, was so high because of the then newly signed Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro or FAB on October 15, 2012 and the issuance of what would be officially cited as Executive Order 120, which was later amended by Executive Order 187 on 2015.

We thought and anxiously anticipated that before the 16th Congress would adjourn, the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law or BBL would become a law. But, as everyone here knows, the bill did not even make it to second reading in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Today, that optimism has been rekindled with the signing of the much-awaited executive order that would reconstitute the BTC.

This new executive order would give a renewed hope for the early passage of the BBL. When that happens, Insha Allah, we would be witnesses to the resolution of the more-than-four decade of conflict in Mindanao during the term of President Rodrigo R. Duterte, a fellow Mindanaon with Moro ancestry.

With this executive order, the task of enhancing the BBL is expected to officially commence sooner than we can anticipate.

As the membership of the reconstituted BTC has been expanded, we expect the representation of various sectors of the Bangsamoro society so that the process of enhancing the BBL would be more inclusive and embracing, just as it was in the previous BTC that I had the privilege to lead.

As chair of the MILF Peace Implementing Panel, I therefore call on all Moro groups to work together to come up with a BBL that would establish a real and genuine autonomy for the Bangsamoro people, which is faithful to the March 27, 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and enhanced and improved by other agreements or Solomonic ideas or wisdom.

On this another historic stage in our common struggle to pursue the Bangsamoro's right to self-determination, let us set aside our selfish, parochial, tribal and/or organizational interests and make paramount the collective interests of the Bangsamoro who just demand the restoration of their identity, correction of historical injustices committed against, and the resolution of their legitimate grievances.

I also sincerely appeal to the Filipino people at large for their support in the establishment of lasting peace in Mindanao. Just give the Bangsamoro the chance to truly govern themselves in the genuine autonomous manner as stipulated in the signed agreements, and we would work very hard for peace and development because that is what everyone of us wants to achieve.

I would like to state in advance my appeal to the current Philippine Congress, to our honorable senators and congressmen, to fast track the legislative process in passing the BBL. As I have consistently stated, and I reiterate, that we in the MILF trust the collective wisdom of Congress in passing the BBL. We still hold that trust. Please do not fail us

the Bangsamoro --- and those who wish to have genuine peace among us, especially in Mindanao.

At this juncture, I must say to everyone and sundry that the passage of the BBL is a national interest of this country. It would put to rest this longest running conflict in the world today.

Lastly, we thank President Duterte for his efforts in moving forward the peace process. We have no doubt that Your Excellency really wants to end the conflict in Mindanao. Rest assured that the MILF would always remain committed to the peace process and the signed agreements engendered by it.

Thank you very much.

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Chapter 8:
Speeches from 2017

"Peace and justice in Mindanao are not only for the benefit of the Bangsamoro but the whole Philippine nation as well. Through the establishment of public institutions that are guided by principles of good governance and responsive to Bangsamoro's needs, the BBL would usher in development and progress in Mindanao as well as help effectively obstruct the rise of violent radicalism in the region by addressing historical injustices. I am confident that the majority of the Filipino people would prefer to stay the course in pursuing a peaceful solution to the Bangsamoro question, which the BBL aims to do by entrenching the CAB in the Philippine system."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**
Message during the "Week of Peace Celebration" in Sarangani on November 30, 2017

MILF Responses to Violent Radicalism

Mohagher Iqbal's Opening Statement during the Conference on the Role of Bangsamoro Youth in the Pursuit of Peace in Mindanao on January 12-13, 2017

Islam is not a religion of extremism. Allah says: "… Whosoever kills an innocent human being, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind…" Qur'an 5:32

"And fight in the way of Allah those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits." Qur'an 2:190

"But if they cease, Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful," Allah says further in the Qur'an, Chapter 2, Verse 192.

Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), as narrated in Hadith Sahih Bukhari, said: "On the morning of Al-Aqabah, while he was on his mount, the Messenger of Allah said to me: "Pick up (some pebbles) for me." So I picked up some pebbles for him that were the size of date stones or fingertips, and when I placed them in his hand he said: "Like these. And beware of going to extremes in religious matters, for those who came before you were destroyed because of going to extremes in religious matters."

There are many more verses of the Qur'an and sayings of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) that warn and tell Muslims not to be extremists not only in religious thoughts but in all aspects of our lives, because Islam is a religion of moderation.

I will not deal on this issue any further because there is another session for this. The resource persons for this specific session are more authoritative than me.

Let us proceed.

Because Islam is basically the ideology of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), it is therefore not an extremist organization. And it can never be one. In fact, it can be rightly described as a moderate organization. We believe that the Bangsamoro Problem or Question can be resolved politically through negotiation and by enacting a good law that addresses the historic injustice committed against the Moros in Mindanao.

This is also the reason why the MILF undertook measures to combat and stop the rise of violent radicalism in Mindanao and if possible also elsewhere.

What are these measures or responses?

First and foremost, we came up with an official declaration that we are against any form of violent extremism whether religious, political, economic, cultural, etc.

Second, the MILF has formed a task force to study and combat the spread of violent extremism especially religious, in the light of the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group also made extensive research on the history of this group and the personalities around it especially Abubakar Al-Bagdhadi.

It was said that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the nom de guerre –- or battlefield alias -- of Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri. He was already known to the U.S. and Iraqi officials when he named himself as the Caliph in 2014.

During the Iraq war, al-Baghdadi was held for ten months at American-run detention centres in Iraq, including Abu Ghraib and Camp Bucca.

After the death of Abu Musab Zarqawi, the successor of Osama bin Laden, in 2009, Bagdhadi was released from prison by the Americans.

The question is why? Is it a failure of U.S. intelligence like that of the non-existence of weapons of mass destruction at the arsenal of Saddam Hussein, that Baghdadi would later be the number one enemy of the U.S. in the Middle East?

Third, the MILF sparingly uses dialogue to reach out to known radical individuals or their relatives and explain to them the stand of the MILF on Islam, the problem in Mindanao, and global injustice. Our main focus are young people in and outside of schools, colleges, and universities. We also use the social media in many aspects. In a modest degree, we have scored some successes.

Fourth, we signed with government some agreements specifically the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) to interdict and isolate kidnap-for-ransom groups and other criminal gangs operating in or near MILF communities. Kidnapping is almost zero for years in areas where the MILF is strong especially in Central Mindanao.

Fifth, our catch-all approach is to strengthen the MILF in all aspects, because a strong organization can deal with anyone or anything in a position of advantage. If there

are no open areas and the strength of, say MILF, is greatly felt, then newcomers cannot linger on. This is a very difficult challenge; even government hardly has it, but the MILF keeps moving.

We also strengthened the Da'wah Committee, which deals on the study and teachings of Islam, and also the youth agency of the MILF. The youth are most attracted to new ideas and militancy. It is their nature that they are idealist and are usually not at peace with the status quo.

I can cite myself as an example. I joined the MNLF in 1972 because our elders then were basically doing no concrete steps except lip-service to what had been a choking if not a bloody situation confronting our people, including the massacres of thousands of our people starting in 1969. But more than 40 years of hard and harsh struggle, my idealism has gradually given way to reality that now, modesty aside, I am able to differentiate idealism from reality; and my world is one of the real world, without losing sight of the basic principles that made me part of the present struggle.

And finally, let me state here, without fear of contradiction, that once a good law is passed, on the basis of the letter and spirit of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and to be enriched, improved, and enhanced – and made more coherent -- by other agreements like the GPH-MNLF Final Agreement of 1996, Republic Act 9054, and other laws, the problem in Mindanao will gradually improve and peace, a real one, will start to be felt in our midst, and the threat of radicalism will progressively wane because they have no more legitimate grievances to raise and fight the government.

Thank you and good morning!

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Dr. Rood Is Dr. Rood and There Is No Other Dr. Rood

Mohagher Iqbal's Tribute to Dr. Steven Rood during the Testimonial Dinner in his Honor at EDSA Shangrila Hotel on January 19, 2017.

Last month, the Implementing Peace Panel of the MILF held a modest program in honor of Dr. Steven Rood in Cotabato City. In connivance (pardon me for using this term) with his own staff, we tried to keep it secret from him until the start of that program. He thought he was simply to give some words of wisdom to the members of the peace mechanisms on the side of the MILF who had been assembled for an expanded Panel meeting that day.

What I have said before and during that particular program on Dr. Rood would probably be what I am going to say here tonight. I believe it would be worth your time to know how I personally and the leadership of the MILF cherish the relationship we have cultivated with Dr. Rood since 2008.

You may find it curious why a Moro rebel, nay revolutionary, organization holds in high esteem an American who even happens to be country head of The Asia Foundation.

Well, for one, the MILF welcomes the participation of individuals and institutions in the search for political settlement of what we call the Bangsamoro Question. Dr. Rood and his office have shown genuine desire to partner with both the MILF and the Government of the Philippines as the two parties keep the pace of the peace process moving. He and The Asia Foundation never stayed disengaged to this day.

During the formation of the International Contact Group in 2009, it was even the MILF, which insisted for the inclusion of The Asia Foundation represented by Dr. Rood. We also appreciate the transfer of Dr. Rood to the Third Party Monitoring Team where we hope to meet him occasionally even after his retirement from TAF. We hope that the implementation of signed agreements between the MILF and GPH would not need decades of waiting so that Dr. Rood and his peers in the TPMT could have an early conclusion of their works.

However, Dr. Rood had tendered his resignation from the TPMT recently, for reasons we fully understand and respect. Seriously, this saddens us very much; because to me and I am sure also to the MILF, Dr. Rood is Dr. Rood, and there is no other Dr. Rood.

Let me also mention that Dr. Rood was instrumental in the publication of the two-volume compilation of signed agreements between GPH and MILF from 1997 to 2016, as well as capacity trainings to the Bangsamoro Leadership & Management Institute (BLMI). The impact of these efforts, of course, cannot be over-emphasized, but truly they are important and indispensable.

It is for such and other valuable engagements that the MILF is very grateful to Dr. Rood. Your contributions to the peace process would always be remembered.

On a personal note, I am thankful that I have been given this chance to be a part of this farewell event for Dr. Rood. I sincerely wish that you would find success and happiness in whatever undertaking that you would engage in after a long, fruitful service in The Asia Foundation and in the search for the elusive just and lasting peace in Mindanao.

You have mentioned your plan of writing a book on the Mindanao peace process. I hope you would now find an ample time to do it. I am sure it would be very objective.

It hurts to say "good bye", Dr. Rood, but life is like that. Sometimes, what must come must go.

Good luck, and all the best Dr. Rood!

Thank you very much!

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You Have Become the Mouthpiece of the Voices Drowned by Violence, Conflict and Injustice

Mohagher Iqbal's message during the TJRC launching of its 2nd and 3rd report at Dusit Thani, Makati City on February 20, 2017.

My courtesies to:

- Her Excellency, Ambassador of Switzerland to the Philippines, Madame Andrea Reichlin
- Esteemed TJRC Chair Madame Mo Bleeker
- Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Secretary Jesus Dureza
- GPH Chair Irene Santiago
- Members of the MILF and GPH Peace Implementing Panels and their Secretariats
- Other TJRC Officials and staff
- Esteemed Officials of the Government
- Guests, ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning/afternoon!

I am honoured to be here today to witness the launching of the Land Report and the Listening Process Report by the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission, under the determined and able leadership of Madame Mo Bleeker, with great support from the Swiss Government. Indeed, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front take this as a positive development in our efforts to continue the search for genuine and lasting peace in Mindanao.

In the course of the Bangsamoro struggle for the right to self-determination and the Bangsamoro peace process, I consider the establishment of TJRC as one of our greatest achievements. The historical injustices in the Bangsamoro context could easily be overlooked in the Philippine narrative, and truly, not every Filipino understands the root causes of conflict in our region.

It had been a year after the formal turn-over of the TJRC main report to the GPH and MILF Panels in February 2016 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and to this day we have not been lucky enough to see some concrete realization of the recommendations of the TJRC contained in that report.

The publication of the TJRC's main report in 2016 was a litmus test to how receptive and open the Filipino people are towards acknowledging the painful legacies of the past and in helping with the nation's healing. It may be difficult to accept the findings in the report, and I quote "the issues are the result of three interlocking phenomena – violence, impunity, and neglect – which, in turn, are rooted in the imposition of a monolithic Filipino identity and Philippine State by force on multiple ethnic groups in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago that saw themselves as already pre-existing nations and nation-states." But these are indubitable facts that came out of the process of truth seeking. Therefore, it is only rightfully just to confront these truths and do something about them.

Among the 90 recommendations in the TJRC main report, I emboldened to re-endorse and recommend the establishment of the National TJRC for the Bangsamoro (NTJRC-B). I believe that in order to reach wider awareness and create more meaningful impact, having a visible, accessible, and institutionalized NTJRC-B could jumpstart the whole process of dealing with the past, effecting reparations and institutional reform, and ultimately, forging reconciliation.

In this regard, I find enough reasons that under the administration of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, who repeatedly acknowledged the historical injustices committed against the Moros, there is a greater chance of having this body created. I hope it would be soon and not later.

However, for the rest of the recommendations, I am requesting the GPH Peace Implementing Panel for a special focus discussion to examine them thoroughly and adopt appropriate decisions or actions. Implementation of agreements should not be unilateral to any of the parties but is always done bilaterally, which is in keeping with the ideals of inclusivity, transparency and justice; and more importantly, that is what the parties agreed specifically in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). Lodging the proposed functions of the NTJRC-B to the various agencies of government, as attempted before, is not the proper way to do it.

As with the TJRC main report, these succeeding two reports, which we are launching today in Makati City and on February 22 in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, should be looked at by the parties with relevant discussion points in order to come up with possible actions for adoption or implementation. At the forefront of discussions, I would like to share that we consider the idea of creating a five-person Technical Group, with Madame Mo Bleeker as Chairperson, and with two members each from the GPH

and MILF, to study ways for the implementation of all the recommendations, as a welcome initiative to move forward.

It is in the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the TJRC that we continue to engage with this body even on consultation mode until all the agreements of the parties including the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) shall have been complied with by the parties and they sign the Exit Agreement. While it might be true that the bulk and primary recommendations of the TJRC Reports are addressed to government, but if they are pursued faithfully as recommended, then the MILF will have no issue at all, but if they are not, then the parties through their peace panels will have to revisit the matter and adopt appropriate decisions.

We acknowledge and give great weight to the efforts poured into this endeavour by the individuals and groups involved with the TJRC initiative. May your sacrifices and good will be rewarded a hundred-fold. Undeniably, you have become the mouthpiece of the voices drowned by violence, conflict and injustice. You have succeeded in putting in writing, for everyone to read, know and learn about, the almost forgotten stories, claims, and legitimate grievances of our people, through these TJRC reports. For this, please accept our immense gratitude and congratulations for job well done.

In closing, allow me to express my sincere thanks to Madame Mo Bleeker, who never gave up on peace, and never faltered despite the trying times and uncertainties of the process. Thank you as well to Her Excellency, Ambassador Andrea Reichlin, the Swiss Government and their people, for their unparalleled support to the GPH-MILF peace process. Our sincere gratitude likewise goes to the individuals and groups behind the TJRC reports for your tireless work on the continuity of this endeavour. Finally, to our fellow Bangsamoro and the Filipino people, join us in moving this peace process forward. Let us seize this opportunity to motivate and mobilize collective action to get everyone to take responsibility to bring forth peace, justice, development and reconciliation through educating ourselves and supporting the GPH-MILF peace process.

Thank you and good afternoon!

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Heal the Past We Must, Painful and Slow the Process May Be

Mohagher Iqbal message read during the launching of the TJRC 2nd and 3rd reports on Land Dispossession and Listening Process in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao on February 22, 2017.

For an occasion such as this one, which was similarly held just two days ago in Makati, it is almost tempting to simply reiterate what have been said already. But on second thoughts, I consider it a disservice and injustice to the organizers and guests if I do so. Although I must admit that I need to repeat some fundamental points that our audience today needs to know.

Foremost, we truly appreciate and welcome the statement of GPH peace implementing panel Chairwoman Irene Santiago that the government of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte will organize the National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission on the Bangsamoro or NTJRCB, a major recommendation made in the 125-page Report of the TJRC which was turned over to the GPH and MILF Panels in February 2016 in Malaysia. It is indeed a bold step on the part of Government.

The announcement was made during the launching of these two Reports in Makati City the other day. Anyway, my peace partner from government, Madame Irene Santiago, is with us this morning and she can bear me out in this regard.

The NTJRCB, as described in the said Report, shall oversee and support the operations of four Sub-Commissions, ensure the implementation of the "dealing with the past" framework, and promote healing and reconciliation.

In line with practice, we hope that the MILF will be given the chance to look at the draft of the proposed executive order that would create the NTJRCB. This will give meaning and substance to the partnership of government and MILF in their joint quest for the resolution of the conflict in Mindanao.

Bearing in mind that the implementation of signed agreements must always be done bilaterally, and should not be unilateral to any of the parties, the participation of the MILF in the establishment of the NTJRCB is in keeping with the ideals of inclusivity, transparency and justice. Over that, it is what has been agreed by both parties in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB).

Also, it is the position of the MILF that the attempt in the past to lodge the proposed functions of the NTJRCB to the different agencies of the government is not the proper way to do it. As for the rest of the recommendations made in the Report of the TJRC, it is our request to the GPH Peace Implementing Panel that special focus discussions be held so that such other recommendations can be examined thoroughly and that appropriate decisions or actions can be adopted.

At this juncture, I would like to stress again my point made during the Makati Launch the other day for the creation of a five-person Technical Group, with Madame Mo Bleeker as Chairperson, and with two members each from the GPH and MILF, to study ways for the implementation of all the recommendations. This awaits the go signal of the parties to proceed.

Certainly, there would be other numerous decisions and actions that would be demanded of the parties as we deal with and heal the past. No wonder that transitional justice and reconciliation is put in the Annex on Normalization, the latter being a process that will surely take a time longer than the political process, although deep inside my heart I hope the components under normalization would not take a period longer than what we have already spent in the negotiations.

These two succeeding "Land and Listening Process Reports" would enrich the TJRC report. But the MILF peace implementing panel receives these documents with a heavy heart because, for all the hopes that they promise, these documents are still sad reminders of the human rights abuses our people went through, of the dispossession of their lands, which oftentimes is their only possession in this world, of legitimate grievances still clamoring for redress, and injustices that have spanned our known history as a people.

Heal the past we must, painful and slow the process may be, but this is its way and not in any other way. For three months in the 16th century, Ferdinand Magellan, who discovered the Philippines for the Europeans, and his men never saw any land, but he kept telling them, "sail, sail, sail" – and finally on March 16, 1521 they landed in Cebu in central Philippines today.

I am personally glad that the TJRC, under the able leadership of Mo Bleeker, always hold public presentations in Metro Manila and Mindanao. Policymakers, influential individuals and groups attended those public presentations. I would consider it already a success if the ideas of transitional justice and reconciliation have already occupied a place in their hearts and minds.

On a final note, allow me then to congratulate the TJRC officials and personnel for these achievements. Your works, and ours all the more, are far from over. But these are already wonderful things to start with as we pursue transitional justice and reconciliation.

Thank you.

Insights and Lessons Learned from 19 Years of Negotiations

Presentation in Siem Reap, Cambodia titled "Insights and Lessons Learned from 19 years of negotiations" on March 14, 2017

What are your lessons learned from 19 years of negotiations?

First, generally, a revolutionary organization does not initiate the negotiation process; wait and strengthen yourself and negotiate when it is right or ripe to do so. You can only get in the negotiating table what you can defend in the battlefield.

Second, once you have decided to negotiate (with the government), don't take it for granted. Prepare, prepare, and prepare is the only rule to adopt. Negotiation is part of the war and expects anything to happen including the betrayal of the first order.

Third, know what you want and know how to get it. This is just a revalidation of lessons learned by all successful negotiators. In our case, right at the beginning, we know what we wanted, i.e., "Solving the Bangsamoro Question/Problem." But how to get it entails a lot of planning, sacrifices, and hardships. It was our perseverance that made us succeed. Allow me to discuss further:

1. Know what you want: It's surprising how often people say that they want something but can't communicate what it is they want, usually because they haven't thought about it thoroughly. The first step then is to make sure you understand what it is you want and that you can define it in positive, clear, and detailed terms.

2. Banish fear and negativity: Even when you're not aware of its presence, a deep-seated fear of failure or rejection can undermine you. When this lurking monster finally shows up, it can make you insecure, which threatens your

confidence and can make you step backward instead of forward. Remember that the most significant risk of all is not trying. Look your fear in the eye and go for it anyway.

3. Understand whom you're asking: It's easy to get so caught up in what you want that you forget from whom you're asking itfrom. People have varying and deeply held emotions, values, experiences, and viewpoints. They're prone to their own biases and perceptions--and, of course, so are we. Keep in mind that you are dealing with another human being, and communication built on trust, understanding, and respect will most likely lead to an outcome that makes both of you happy.

4. Make sure you know what's being offered: The best way to do this is to listen and ask questions. Pay attention to what's not being said. Stay focused and take notes if you need to. A clear understanding will help you know if you're on the road to a good outcome or being side-tracked with distractions.

5. Start with small wins: In a more long-term situation, start by asking for little things. Make it easy for those you're negotiating with to develop the habit of saying yes to you.

6. Finally, bear in mind that your resolution to succeed is more important than anything else: If your first strategy doesn't work, try a different approach. Be flexible but determined until you get what you want. Those who fail are often the ones who don't realize how close they are, so they give up.

Fourth, a peace negotiator has to control or manage his/her emotions. A person prone to pique has little space in negotiation. Negotiation is like engaging in war. You are up to all kinds of pressures and even dangers. In battle, a combatant can die anytime unlike in a negotiation where no one dies. But when a negotiator agrees to sign something inimical to his group, he would be blamed bitterly for the consequences since he did not only compromise himself but the group he represents and also the people at large.

One time, a member of a foreign delegation trying to learn from the MILF experience in negotiation asked me about the secret of our success in talks with the government that led to the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). I cannot think of any direct answer to the question except by saying: "*We manage to control our emotions, persevere in the course of the long and hard negotiations, we stay consistent to all signed agreements of the parties, and we are willing to stake everything in defense of what we hold as morally right*."

Fifth, negotiating, as a problem-solving exercise, is not only having to compromise to move the peace process and succeed. It is more than that. Negotiation is taking and giving or giving and getting.

However, the basic principles that a liberation movement, or any similar group, stands for must be upheld at all times. You can compromise on methods and approaches, but not on principles that are considered non-negotiable. For instance, the right to self-determination is a universally recognized right of people and therefore must be protected at all cost. However, there are a few exceptions, such as Quebec in Canada, Scotland in the United Kingdom or during the decolonization period where you cannot negotiate for outright independence.

Sixth, the trust, and confidence of your principal say in my case, the MILF Central Committee, has to be ensured at all times. Of all the agencies of the MILF, I think it is the peace panel that has consistently never drifted away from the mandate given to it because we are dealing with the "enemy." The MILF Central Committee must first clear all major decisions; and I cannot recall any instance that we were reprimanded or warned. Of course, this is not to say that we, including myself, have not committed lapses. As chair of the MILF peace panel for 14 years, I have never thought that I did a perfect job. It is just that we always find time to criticize ourselves and review our path with our principals to avoid making hasty or unjustifiable decisions.

Seventh, a perfect balance between confidentiality and transparency has to be instituted throughout the peace process. The parties in negotiation have to agree when to be secretive and when to be transparent. Confidentiality is an essential factor in ensuring the success of the exercise. Providing secrecy is the reason that the government and MILF have resorted to various modes of engagement, from direct face-to-face discussion to back-channeling, proximity talks, and not talking at all, etc. On the other hand, transparency is not precisely the twin of confidentiality; it occupies a place at the forefront. Peace-makers must undertake regular consultations with all sectors of society especially those who are directly affected. The people have the right to know the discussion in the peace talks.

Eight, trust and confidence are very important in negotiation, but it is not a precondition before starting it. Our experience tells us that it is challenging to easily trust those representing the government, which has caused the miseries, sufferings, and hardships of the Bangsamoro people. But no negotiation will ever succeed if the parties were unable to attain a reasonable level of trust and confidence at certain stages of the

negotiation process. One has to understand that it is the government that makes laws and policies and not individuals especially those members of peace panels.

Be that as it may, vigilance is always a ready weapon at the disposal of a negotiator. Your counterpart in the negotiations may be a good person, but the agenda that he/she pushes forward is indeed not the kind that you want. Each party starts from a position where they try to pursue or possibly work out a compromise assertively. As much as possible, each party wants the flow of the engagement in its favor, which is natural and accepted as such. We cannot say that the parties are engaged in trickery, which most negotiations are. It is not always the case, but this is the inherent nature of all talks.

Ninth, sometimes it is more difficult to negotiate with your peers than your counterpart in government. The difficulty becomes progressively greater if the bone of controversy is over tactical aspects of the engagements.

Tenth, nothing is agreed until the parties decide it and this is the standard rule of negotiation. But in our case, enduring so many bad experiences in the past with so many agreements violated, we added a long dash and then put the words: "and signed." To add more, those agreements in principle or gentlemen's agreement are not binding at all; they cannot be effectively asserted. The best safeguard is to write everything down and sign them.

Eleventh, we need experts in the negotiation, which a peace panel can engage as consultants. But don't allow them to hijack the process. Their role is mainly to provide options and technical support, but not to decide for the organization. Some can be rigid and therefore, virtually one-sided in outlook and orientations. If given a chance, they would tend to hijack the whole process. But I am not saying that they are ill-motivated. They can be as pristine in their thoughts as anyone involved in any struggle throughout their entire lives. It is the manner that they want it to happen which is questionable. Anyone, including experts, can say, suggest, or propose ideas, but official decisions, especially strategic, are made by the political leadership of the MILF, or by the peace panel, and not by individuals.

Twelfth, real negotiation starts when the other party says no to a proposal. It is like a truck driver hitting a roadblock or a dead end; he has to find different ways to reach the same destination.

Thirteenth, be soft on people but be hard on issues. Always be willing to walk away, if necessary.

Fourteenth, our experience tells us that most of the hard issues are decided outside of the negotiating table usually via back-channeling and with the help of third-party facilitation, etc.

Fifteenth, it is not much on the physical or material wealth that the weaker party should draw its strength; it is more on the faithful adherence to truth and principles and the determination and willingness to suffer for it when necessary. However, the moment the moral ascendancy and the material strength are combined, they present a formidable force.

Sixteenth, most often the stronger party violates agreements. The weaker party should not only watch for any sign of it but has to prepare for any eventuality.

Seventeenth, don't give anything away without getting something in return. Unilateral concessions are self-defeating. Whenever you give something away, get something in return. Always tie a string: "I'll do this if you do that." Otherwise, you are inviting the other negotiator to ask you for additional concessions. When you give something away without requiring them to reciprocate, they will feel entitled to your concession, and won't be satisfied until you give up even more. But if they have to earn your concession, they will derive a higher sense of satisfaction than if they got it for nothing.

Eighteenth, impasses, no show-ups, proximity talks, outright rejection of offers, postponements, etc. are normal in negotiations. Never be surprised by them and prepare for them.

Nineteenth, good negotiators, are not only born but also made; meaning, while he/she has a natural talent, but he has to be trained. To complete the process, he/she should also be involved in negotiations.

Twentieth, always seek the participation of the international community. The involvement of the international community does not only strengthen the mechanisms of the peace process but also gives it more legitimacy. But extreme caution is needed because the government is always sensitive on the participation of other states in what is perceived to be a domestic issue.

However, experience tells us that international non-government organizations rather than states are more assertive in pushing the peace process forward. The reason for this is because they do not operate within the restrictions of international diplomacy. But concerning delivery, states have higher capacity and impact.

Other Related Questions from the Participants:

- What do you consider to be the main successes of the peace process?

The most defining achievements of the GPH-MILF peace negotiation are the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and it four Annexes and the Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters. Together with all other previous agreements, this agreement and its Annexes were lumped together in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The FAB and CAB contained the formula to solve the Bangsamoro Question in Mindanao, which is right to self-determination by instituting genuine self-governance for our people.

- What were the principal obstacles and challenges and how were they overcome?

The main obstacle on the part of the government was the refusal to share power and resources with the Moros in Mindanao. They also have difficulty in shifting their objectives in the negotiation from counter-insurgency approach to real problem-solving exercise. On the side of the MILF, the ever-present challenge is how to keep the trust in government and keep the process moving. Like the government, the hawkish elements in the MILF sometimes have the upper hand in the discourse whenever government fails to deliver its commitment. They were overcome after long and protracted negotiations extending up to 17 years. The process is still ongoing to this day.

Other (possible) specific questions to cover:

- When and why/how did you and MILF experience a certain level of trust towards the government?

Trust is hard to build but easy to lose. Trust is a mental state of reliance on the integrity of a person. When you trust someone, you believe that he or she is going to do what you expect.

Trust with government started during the time of President Benigno Aquino III whose father and mother were close to the Moros in Mindanao. This sentiment was reinforced by the Murad-Aquino meeting in Tokyo, Japan in 2011. Against the advice of his closest advisers, he went out of his way to travel to Tokyo, Japan to meet the MILF leaders there. Also, commitments of the parties were mutually implemented by them. However, it suffered a severe snag when the tragic incident in Mamasapano

took place on January 25, 2015, which mainly caused the non-passage of the BBL in Congress.

- How did the peace process manage to reach a peace agreement? What was vital for its survival and success?

It was a long, harsh, and laborious process before we signed the peace agreement. It was the mutually hurting stalemate that sent both parties to prefer talking peace than prolonging the war, which proved very bloody on both sides.

Except for President Joseph Estrada, every new president adopted the primacy of the peace process as their policy. The MILF also espoused the view that it is more civilized and practical to resolve the conflict in Mindanao through peaceful negotiations.

Both parties never disengaged in the peace process.

- How is the relationship among the parties post-agreement? What are the challenges faced to implement a peace agreement?

Generally, the relationship is one of partnership, but irritants continue to exist because the tendency of the parties especially government to interpret any part of an agreement to suit its convenience.

The challenges are many and great; for instance, the passage of the BBL is still not sure. The MNLF and other sectors like the indigenous peoples are also exerting efforts to bring forth their respective agenda, which at times are at odds with the GPH-MILF agreements.

- What are the current challenges in the peace process?

(1) After the unfortunate incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on 25 January 2015 that claimed the lives of 44 special police commandos, 17 MILF combatants, and five civilians, the lawmakers, who initially supported the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), began to question the peace process and the MILF's sincerity. Many of those lawmakers are still members of the present 17th Congress. (2) The shift to federalism by the Duterte administration overshadows the priority and prominence given to the BBL.

- How has the approach or positions of MILF changed over the years?

Currently, there are no more rigorous negotiations after we signed the FAB and CAB. We are in the implementation phases of three tracks: 1) Security-related issues; 2) Normalization process, and 3) Passing the BBL into law.

- What is your experiences and perspectives of inclusion in peace processes? E.g., the role of women.

Inclusivity is indispensable in the whole process, but sectoral interests cannot be overstressed at the expense of the general interests of the people. Some lobby groups focus on one subject, say issues of women and indigenous peoples, forgetting the more significant problem.

Why the MILF Engage in a Peace Process?

Delivered during a Forum for Bangsamoro Youth on Islam and Radicalism on March 28 to 31, 2017 held in Davao City.

Quranic Injunction: And if they incline to peace, then you (also) incline to it and put (your) trust in Allah. Indeed, He (is) All-Hearer, All-Knower. (Chapter Al-Anfal, Verse 61)

MILF Invited to Talk: President Fidel Ramos invited the MILF to conduct a separate peace negotiation with the government in November 1996. Ramos' former Executive Secretary Ruben Torres was sent to contact the MILF. Nevertheless, the MILF did not ask for negotiation and we waited for 20 long years before we decided to talk.

The imposition of war: If the Moros had the choice, they would prefer peace over war. A study of the conflict in Mindanao would reveal that it is imposed on the Moros and they only defended themselves. The government had created all the triggers of this war, such as the following:

1. Massive land grabbing
2. Planting of settlers in Mindanao
3. Organization of vigilantes such as the ILAGA

4. The mass killing of Moros
5. Declaration of Martial Law

Mutually Hurting Stalemate: The mutually hurting stalemate forces both parties to talk instead of prolonging the war. The MILF cannot defeat the government in conventional warfare while the MILF can always resort to full guerrilla warfare to stay in the course of the struggle.

It was costly. From 1970 to October 8, 2015, the war had claimed 150,000 lives, 50% rebels, 30% government troops, and 20% civilians, according to government data. Moreover, about P640 billion ($13.9 million) was the total economic loss sustained by Mindanao due to the conflict.

Salamat Hashim's Advice: The late Chair Salamat Hashim said that the most civilized and practical way to solve the Bangsamoro problem is through a negotiated political settlement. We are not seeking the overthrow of the government nor the replacement of its system and those running it. Furthermore, our concept of the right to self-determination is either independence or grant of meaningful autonomy. Strictly speaking, even the process of granting independence can be the subject of negotiation such as in Quebec, Canada, and Scotland in the United Kingdom.

F**laws in GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement:** The GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of 1996 had several inherent defects or deficiencies that would require rectification. First, the MNLF and Chairman Nur Misuari abandoned and foreclosed the right of the Bangsamoro people to self-determination, and second, the totality clause states that if there is a conflict in the interpretation of the Agreement, it is to be resolved in the light of the Philippine Constitution and existing laws.

Legitimacy and Recognition: Negotiation gives more legitimacy and recognition to the MILF especially with the participation of the international community in the peace process. Through signed agreements such as the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), as well as other similar agreements, we were able to preserve the gains of our struggle.

Right to Defend Intact: Negotiation does not mean we surrender our right to defend ourselves; if we are attacked we fight back. Until all agreements of the parties are implemented, our weapons are still in our hands.

Breathing Space: Negotiation gives us space and opportunity to organize and strengthen the MILF in all spheres. However, the MILF military can only conduct retraining or retooling in deference to the peace process and the ceasefire.

GPH Non-Compliance: Deliberate failure of the government to comply with its obligations gives not the only legitimacy to the MILF and negative impact on government. Surprisingly, it also results in improved safeguards for the peace process.

The revival of the Armed Struggle: When government reverts to systematic oppression and repression of the Bangsamoro people, the right to return to the use of arms becomes incumbent upon the MILF. We will not hesitate to repel aggression by use of force if necessary.

Renewed Hope for the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL)

Speech delivered during the BBL Signing Ceremony on 16 June 2017 at A-Venue Hotel, Makati City

Mr. Chairman, fellow Commissioners, please allow me to read my prepared speech rather than speaking extemporaneously. You know, I am going to include this speech in the compilation of my previous speeches, not for personal glory nor personal aggrandizement – but with the hope that this compilation, which will be published soon, will allow our generations and the next generations to learn from what we have done during our time.

Now, with all sincerity and humility --- and without the slightest reservations --- I am signing the new BBL after my speech.

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning to one and all.

It is indeed an honor to be standing here before the Honorable Chairman of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and my fellow Commissioners and be part of this momentous event: the signing of the new Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) under the leadership of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. More than three years ago – April 20, 2014 to be exact – the BTC then also produced a BBL that embodied the spirit of the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Despite our best efforts, the BBL

did not pass the 16th Congress of the Philippines. The reasons for which are varied. But the ultimate reason is that Allah did not decree that it would pass. Nevertheless, four years of hard work were not in vain as every lesson learned, every problem solved and every relationship gained will help us move the peace process forward.

While today's event is part of the greater journey towards the fulfillment of the Bangsamoro people's aspiration for self-determination and lasting peace in Mindanao, it is also a personal and emotional one, especially for those who have been in the struggle for more than 40 years and who, like me, had the insurmountable task of negotiating with government for a good eleven years until the CAB was signed on March 27, 2014. The journey for me is virtually blood, sweat and tears; and mind you my dear colleagues, the hardest part of this negotiation and perhaps in all other negotiations for that matter is when you are negotiating with your own peers or comrades in the organization. To say "no" to an offer of the other party in a negotiation, say the enemy (in open and close quotation marks) is very easy but to reject an idea from a comrade is much more difficult. But if these difficulties and tribulations germane to negotiations would bring peace, harmony, and progress in Mindanao, then it is a journey worth taking and risking.

As we submit the BBL to the Office of the President, I would like to call upon everybody – whether Muslims, Christians, and the indigenous peoples – to work together so that the elusive peace in Mindanao is achieved through the BBL.

Let us also be reminded that our engagement with government is not over after this signing and submission one of the BBL. Experience tells us that the real hard work still lies ahead. It is only the strength of our prayers to the Almighty for succor and our trust to the commitment of the President to deliver the BBL that energize us and soothe our spirit to surge ahead without fear and doubt that we are doing the right thing.

At this juncture, allow me to emphasize the passing of the BBL into law is not only for the benefit of the Bangsamoro but redound to the whole of this country as well. It surely is a national interest of this country; not to over-stress that it is also a menu for unity and solidarity. More importantly, this will greatly help arrest the growing radicalization especially of the youths in Mindanao.

To continue, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the BTC Chairman, to my esteemed colleagues in the Commission, and to our hardworking and dependable executive director and secretariat. Let us continue this journey together with one spirit, one purpose, and one commitment and we must make the BBL the legacy of all of us.

Finally, if I have hurt the feeling of anyone in the course of our grueling sessions, please forgive me!

Thank you again and good morning!

MILF and the Marawi Crisis: Its Implications to the Moro Aspiration

Speech delivered during a forum in Siem Reap, Cambodia on July 31, 2017

Where is Marawi City?

Marawi City was formerly the municipality of Dansalan. The municipality of Dansalan was established under the Moro Province in 1907 during the American regime in the Philippines. In 1940, Dansalan became a chartered city but was not inaugurated until 1950. In 1956, Dansalan City was renamed Marawi City through a congressional act. In 1980, it was officially renamed the Islamic City of Marawi, with a 90 percent Muslim population.

As Lanao del Sur's capital city, Marawi serves as the province's commercial, educational, cultural, religious, and political center. The population of Marawi City, as of 2015 census, is 200,000 and predominantly Muslim.

Maranao is the most widely spoken dialect, understood by Muslims and Christians alike. Since Arabic studies were widely taught among the city's students, a high number of the population can read, write and speak Arabic. Many schools still use English as the medium of instruction.

The current crisis: how it started?

On May 23, 2017, Philippine Government launched an offensive to capture Isnilon Hapilon, leader of the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf faction, after receiving reports that Hapilon was in Marawi City.

The Hapilon-led Abu Sayyaf group (ASG) allied itself with the Maute group, which are both claiming to have links to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

A deadly firefight erupted when Hapilon's forces opened fire on the combined Army and police teams and called for reinforcements from the Maute group.

Maute group militants attacked Camp Ranao and occupied several buildings in the city, including Marawi City Hall, Mindanao State University, a hospital and the city jail. They also held the main street and set fire to Saint Mary's Church, Ninoy Aquino School and Dansalan College, which is run by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).

The group also attacked the Marawi Cathedral, taking a priest and several churchgoers hostage. Their primary objective was to raise an ISIS flag at the Lanao del Sur Provincial Capitol and declare a wilayat or provincial ISIS territory in Lanao del Sur.

On May 26, 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines stated that some of the terrorists are foreigners who have been in the country for quite some time, offering support to the Maute group in Marawi.

According to data culled by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of July 20, there are more than 466,000 individuals displaced by the crisis.

In summary, the crisis has various dimensions: international connection with ISIS, extremist interpretation of Islam, local politics in Marawi City and Lanao del Sur, the proliferation of drugs, pyramid scam in 2012 by Coco Rasuman, external forces' interests.

How the Maute group originated?

The Maute Group is named after its founders, brothers Omar and Abdullah Maute, sons of Engr. Cayamora Maute, an inactive member of the MILF. The Mautes criticized the MILF leadership and eventually broke away from the organization. They considered the MILF as a non-Islamic conformist organization and is engaged in endless if not senseless negotiations. They formed their group called Daulah Islamiyah Ranao or the Islamic state of Ranao. Then they pledged allegiance to the terrorist group, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in April 2015. The group, though, has not yet been classified as an ISIS member but are tagged as sympathizers.

"The Maute brothers, Abdullah, and Omarkhayam Romato (known simply as Omar) went from petty, small-time criminals to full-fledged militant activity when they created Khalifa Islamiah Mindanao in 2012. The Maute Group then pledged allegiance to the Islamic State," noted the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium.

Earlier reports claim that the Maute Group has around 100 members. The group was responsible for several acts of terror in 2016, including the bombing in Davao City leaving at least 14 dead and at least 68 others injured, most of them obtained massive shrapnel wounds. There was also a confrontation between the armed forces and the Maute group in November 2016 when the latter occupied parts of Butig town in Lanao Del Sur.

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte declared Martial Law

On May 23, while still in Russia, President Rodrigo Duterte announced martial law and suspended the writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao. Proclamation 216 further notes that the Maute militants started flying the flag of the Islamic State in several areas, "thereby openly attempting to remove from the allegiance to the Philippine Government this part of Mindanao." Proclaiming martial law is within the powers of the President: Article 7, Section 18 of the 1987 Constitution granting the president the power to declare martial law in cases of "invasion or rebellion when the public safety requires it" for a maximum of 60 days.

President Duterte previously announced that he is considering military rule throughout the country, declaring that the Islamic State is here and may gain footholds in Luzon and Visayas. It is no secret that President Duterte has weighed the idea of martial law since August of last year and has mentioned it publicly at least 35 times in his presidency. Reasons he cited included illegal drugs, crime, and terrorism. Nevertheless, the challenge to the President and the rest of government would be can he achieve his mission as President "to make life comfortable for all" without resorting to some extra-legal measures?

MILF Response:

The MILF immediately called an emergency meeting to discuss the situation including the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao. The MILF also ordered all its members especially those bearing arms to observe maximum tolerance and prevent unnecessary movements. Furthermore, the MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim released a statement on May 24.

For further clarification, the MILF sought a meeting with President Duterte, which took place on May 29 in Davao City. The agenda include the martial law declaration, impact on the peace process, especially on the ceasefire, joint peace mechanisms, the effort to craft and pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).'

MILF offered humanitarian intervention in Marawi crisis through the MILF Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities. Both sides approved the resulting joint peace corridor.

Implications for Moro aspiration

Before answering the main topic, allow me to make a quick comparison between the Mamasapano incident that happened on January 25, 2015, and the Marawi Crisis. Unfortunately, after the Mamasapano incident, the passage of the BBL was affected by negative public opinion while the MILF was demonized and accused of harboring terrorists. On the other hand, the Marawi siege has not, at the moment, severely affected the MILF and BBL. However, some quarters were reviving the Mamasapano ghost, including the filing of case versus former President Benigno Aquino III, President Duterte's predecessor.

As illustrated in Marawi, some groups whose approach is violence and to sow terror. There is a clear indication that the young people are vulnerable for recruitment by these groups. The MILF and peace advocates believe that there is the need to pass the BBL is getting stronger support even from among legislators. This need is caused by the current radicalization of the youth, the widespread frustrations among the people as a result of lack of actual success in the peace process, and the lack of recognition and real representation of the Moros in government and decision-making process.

While we remain optimistic, it is too early to call the timely submission of the BBL to the President a resounding success. Spoilers have not yet awakened thoroughly.

A great balancing act for MILF:

Nevertheless, the MILF is engaged in peace process with the government. In fact, they are already partners, as they have signed the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) which contained the political formula for the settlement of the Moro Question, or the right to self-determination.

Also, MILF and government have an existing ceasefire and are cooperating on anti-kidnapping, anti-criminality, and anti-drug trafficking through mutually agreed mechanisms and protocols. They share a universal dislike for "terrorism," violent extreme radicalism and extremism.

On the other hand, the MILF has no quarrel with Maute group and Abu Sayyaf that justifies fighting them actively. Muslims in Mindanao would never accept the MILF fighting the Maute group and Abu Sayyaf group, except in defense of the MILF, civilians, and areas controlled or influenced by the MILF. At present, the MILF does not have the legal authority to fight enemies of the state.

To justify this defensive action, the MILF has supported the recent Shariah ruling or "fatwa" made by Bangsamoro Dal Al-Ifta (a government body) against violent extremism in Mindanao, signed by Bangsamoro Mufti, Sheikh Abuhuraira Abdulrahman Udasan on June 25.

Based on the ruling, the Bangsamoro Dar Al-Ifta sees the need to "fight violent extremism on the land and promotion of division among Muslims, as compliance with the injunction of the Quran and the Prophetic Tradition (Al-Hadith).

As mentioned earlier, what the MILF does is to cooperate with the government in all those activities that are covered by terms of reference (TOR) under the auspices of the peace process architecture. The MILF will not assume any role or take on any responsibility not covered in the relevant TORs.

We Have Accomplished A Lot Under His Guidance

Testimonial Message during the Launch of "Beyond the Peace Table: Reflections on the GPH-MILF Peace Process" by Tengku Abdul Ghafar in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat. Maguindanao, 19 August 2017

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

I deemed it a great privilege to be given the opportunity to speak in today's event. We are here to launch a book that will be now a part of the rich narrative of the peace process between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. As you all may know, maintaining a peace process is no easy feat. There are great difficulties and trepidations in both the negotiation and implementation phases that must be overcome by the conflict parties. As we stay on the path to peace and face the challenges head on, we also gain valuable lessons that could only help move the process forward and prevent it from collapsing. At the end of the day, these lessons, insights and any morsel of wisdom from the GPH-MILF peace process must be documented and shared to the future generations of the Bangsamoro and Filipino nation. After all, achieving peace and justice in Mindanao is not only for the benefit of the Bangsamoro, but for the whole Philippines as well.

I therefore cannot emphasize enough the importance of the reflections found in this book as expressed by the late Dato' Tengku Abdul Ghafar Bin Tengku Mohammed, our facilitator from 2011 until his death on September 16, 2016. Contained here, for the benefit of peace scholars and the general public interested to learn about peace making and third-party facilitation, are first-hand insights from someone who has served the Bangsamoro peace process and who was knowledgeable on the plight of the Bangsamoro people, as well as a full grasp of how government like the Philippines properly situates itself in settling a centuries-old problem like the one in Mindanao. As the facilitator, Dato Tengku had the exceptional role of providing an efficient, cordial and secure space for both the peace negotiating panels of the government and the MILF to responsively discuss the most contentious issues and also agree on principles that served as the backbone of the peace process. His experience as a career diplomat and senior government official, plus strength of character, made Dato Tengku qualified to take on such a role. Indeed we have accomplished a lot under his guidance.

While we are here to commemorate Dato Tengku's remarkable contribution to the peace process, we are also here to reminisce fond memories of him – highlighting his generosity, warmth and sense of humor. Contained in this book are personal anecdotes of our relaxed interactions with him that occurred on the side of the peace process. In my case for instance, the time he bought me a pair of shoes, which I am using today in this occasion, and the memorable Durian Party – you have to read the book to know how that came about. I believe these moments were his way of breaking the ice as they say and making people comfortable notwithstanding the weightiness of the peace negotiations. Despite belonging to the highest level of Malay nobility, Dato Tengku was an exceptionally humble man. Arrogance, which is one of the most dangerous inner diseases of the heart, seemed none of his traits.

We cannot deny Dato Tengku's legacy. In fact, we are here today to affirm that legacy. The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro were the culmination of the 17 long years of negotiations and we are truly grateful to Dato Tengku for the wisdom he generously shared and unwavering support he exemplified until the end. However, signing a peace agreement is only half of the journey towards achieving the Bangsamoro's right to self-determination. The other half, which to me is more crucial and is the fulfillment of our struggle, is the implementation of these agreements on the ground. But it's sad to note that at the moment, these efforts are marred by diverse views and proposals that are not in harmony with the letter and spirit set forth in the signed agreements. I hope that we are not heading towards another situation where we have to deal with the non-implementation of an agreement.

As we are gathered here today, we are indeed honored to be joined by the current Malaysian facilitator, Dato Kamarudin Bin Mustafa, former OPAPP Secretary Teresita "Ging" Deles, my former counterpart from government, Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, the acting chair of GPH peace implementing panel, Undersecretary Nabil Tan, and the family of the late Malaysian facilitator.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Emma Leslie and her team for giving me the chance to share my story on Dato Tengku. I would also like to congratulate the publishers of this book for a job well done – a simple yet fitting way to commemorate Dato Tengku's positive impact to the peace process. Dato Tengku, may Allah bless you and allow you to enter His paradise! Thank you and have a pleasant day.

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A Legacy That Will Remain Forever In Our Hearts

Mohagher Iqbal's Testimonial Message during the Second Launch of "Beyond the Peace Table: Reflections on the GPH-MILF Peace Process" by Tengku Abdul Ghafar in the Lower House of Congress, Quezon City, August 22, 2017

Good Afternoon to one and all.

My highest courtesy to House Speaker of the House Pantaleon Alvarez, Congresswoman Ruby Sahali, and other honorable members of Congress, esteemed members of the international community, friends and partners of the peace process and honored guests!

I am not a big believer of premonitions, but perhaps it was pure happenstance when on August 13th of last year, during the launching of the GPH and MILF peace implementing panels in Kuala Lumpur, I sensed a certain calmness and bliss in Dato Tengku Ab'Ghafar bin Tengku Mohamed (May God have mercy on his soul). On that day, Dato Tengku was obviously happy and relieved that the peace process he was facilitating between the GPH and MILF got back on track. He was straightforward and candid, as he always was, in his opening statement. He told the parties that all he wanted, as far as facilitation was concerned, was to proceed quickly. He wanted nothing more than for the GPH-MILF Peace Process to succeed.

That day of August 13th being the first time for Dato Tengku to facilitate talks involving a fresh peace team under the new administration, it was an opportune time for him to clarify the issue on the involvement of the Government of Malaysia and his mode of facilitation. He then urged the parties to stick to the virtues of sincerity and good faith in dealing with each other.

It set the mood and tone for the parties to level off with each other that day; and I could say that we looked forward to seeing Dato Tengku again if we needed to. We ended that session with enthusiastic conversations, hearty photos, and a rejuvenated spirit to move on forward.

However, unexpectedly and yet certain to happen as it is part of natural life and human experience, we heard of the demise of Dato Tengku on September 16, 2016. We could only utter these words instantly, "From God we come from and unto Him we shall return". It took some time for the initial shock to wear off, and for the sadness to

subside. It was truly a big loss to the peace process, and his memories and contributions will never be forgotten. Dato Tengku was a man of many fine qualities. He was good both in person and as facilitator, although his footprints are more remarkable in the second.

Dato Tengku had been involved in the peace process as early as 2001, when the Government of Malaysia was called to facilitate upon the official invitation of then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. He played a very important role in the signing of the GPH-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace in 2001, which is considered the "mother of all the agreements" of the parties.

During Dato Tengku's watch as facilitator in 2011, the peace process was at one of its most difficult phases. Nobody knew what lay ahead. The ghost of the botched Memorandum Agreement of Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was still haunting everyone, especially those involved in the peace process. Notwithstanding this difficulty and low spirit especially on the MILF side, a breakthrough happened after both parties persevered in many trying moments. We signed the most important agreements in the 17-year negotiations namely, the Ten Decision Points on Principles on April 12, 2012, Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) on October 15, 2012, and all its Four Annexes and Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters and Zones of Cooperation, and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014.

The clinching of these agreements especially the FAB and CAB completed the real and hard bargaining or negotiation of the parties. The political solution to the Bangsamoro Question of Problem, which is the sole agenda of the parties since 1997 when they officially started their negotiations, is now contained in the FAB and CAB. What remains to be done is to enact a legislation in order to be able to translate the FAB and CAB, which are political documents, into a legal document, which is now called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). Allow me to reiterate that the delivery of this law is the sole responsibility of government.

The part that I will cherish most about Dato Tengku was his unequivocal commitment towards peace and justice, particularly in the context of the Bangsamoro peace process. His legacy will remain forever in our hearts.

Today, we feel grateful to have the immense opportunity to honor Dato Tengku's tremendous engagement towards justice and peace through this book entitled "Beyond Peace Tables: Reflections on GPH-MILF Peace Process." Ultimately, the lessons and experiences of Dato Tengku as immortalized in this book will teach us that the journey

towards achieving genuine and lasting peace within the context of the Bangsamoro peace process may be overwhelming, but far from impossible.

These are lessons and experiences that even I, as a long-time negotiator in the GPH-MILF peace process, have painstakingly gone through and continue to learn from. Extraordinary experiences can sometimes harden the heart and can lead to extraordinary sensitivities, but it can also renew and invigorate one's will to overcome all new challenges.

I know in my heart that Dato Tengku was hopeful to see through the conclusion of the peace process, as he followed closely within his lifetime the progress of the two-track implementation of the agreement of the GPH and the MILF contained in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. The first track is the passage of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which is a unilateral responsibility of the GPH. The second track is a bilateral implementation of all the aspects of the normalization process by both the GPH and MILF and with the participation of the international community.

This is why I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to our esteemed legislators who are present today to look at the Bangsamoro problem as a political and not a purely legal issue. In one engagement with some of the Philippine Constitution luminaries, it is said that the Constitution is a political document, so the interpretation is not strictly legal but political. Many if not most of the provisions in the expanded Bangsamoro Transition Commission's submitted BBL are actually in the CAB, which is an agreement signed between the GPH and the MILF. It is not the BTC that decided for those provisions to be there.

The bottom line is, as Congress go through this legislative process concerning the proposed BBL of the BTC, we ask that our honorable legislators go by what will achieve justice, and what will achieve the purpose of justice. This means having to work around the flexibilities of the law.

A lot of learned and respected personalities have worked hard for the GPH-MILF peace process to reach this point. Seventeen years of arduous peace talks and various peace building efforts in conflict-affected communities would be pointless if we could not bring ourselves to deliver sustainable peace and development to the future generation of this country. For the sake of just and lasting peace and development, we urge our honorable legislators to pass the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law submitted by the BTC, as it is the

one reflective of the true aspirations of the Bangsamoro people. Any other proposed bill, lesser than R.A. 9054 that created the present Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) or equal or similar to it, is a betrayal of the agreements of the parties, and more seriously, it will only prolong the sufferings and agonies of the people.

Thank you and good afternoon.

How the Bangsamoro Government would ensure the rights of PWDs and provide necessary services to address their needs

Delivered during the forum on the role and involvement of persons with disabilities in the Philippine Peace Process, September 6, 2017 in Manila, Philippines.

It is to be admitted here that involvement of people with disabilities (PWD) in the GPH-MILF peace process is limited, if not rare, and not long time ago. As chief peace negotiator of the MILF for 14 years or so, not one from the group has been involved in the peace process directly. The reason for this is that peace-making is not only sitting across the negotiating table or being stationary but it entails a lot of traveling and other rigorous activities.

On the contrary, alongside, children, women, and aging people, they are down there in the conflict zones and are suffering more compared to more ordinary people because of their disabilities.

It is also a fact that efforts to mainstream issues about PWDs are relatively recent in the fields and from there, the problems have progressively penetrated the peacebuilding agenda.

These efforts have been recently qualified by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as an "emerging issue." They benefit from increased attention, with the progressive development of new thinking to incorporate disability provisions in every program.

A significant shift in perspective took place over the years where an approach motivated by charity was replaced by one based on the rights of the persons with disabilities. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2002),

using the human rights perspective means "viewing people with disabilities as subjects rather than objects." From being problems, people with disabilities are seen as holders of rights. Importantly, it means locating issues outside the disabled person and addressing the manner in which various economic and social processes accommodate the difference of disability - or not, as the case may be. By using the human rights perspective, the non-discrimination principle has been strengthened.

The shift to the human rights perspective has been authoritatively endorsed at the level of the UN over the past two decades. The authoritative document to this end agreed upon as the binding, comprehensively supported the standard for disability rights, is the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. According to this document, The rules have been monitored by a United Nations Special Rapporteur and have been instrumental to the process of raising consciousness about the human rights of persons with disabilities and in stimulating positive change throughout the world. The shift to the human rights perspective is also reflected in the fact that national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe have begun to take an active interest in disability issues. More recently, the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted in December 2006 and entered into application in May 2008) have constituted a further step.

Disabled peoples organizations have been framing grievance and injustice into the language of rights for a long time. They stress the fact that isolated crimes need to benefit from a collective approach. For instance, members of the collaborative project Disability Awareness in Action view themselves also as human rights organization. A similar process of self-transformation is underway within traditional human rights NGOs, which are increasingly approaching disability as a mainstream human rights issue.

The truth is that the MILF, as well the government, has recognized the necessary roles to be played by or rights to be enjoyed by people with disabilities as early as October 12, 2012. By any standard norm, this is a late realization. Nevertheless, the timing is still relevant given the fact that the search for a just, lasting, and genuine peace in Mindanao is a continuing process.

This realization is contained in an official document. A provision on Basic Rights in the GPH-MILF Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) states that all the inhabitants of the proposed Bangsamoro political entity shall enjoy, among others, protection from non-discrimination in social and full opportunity to economic activity and the public service, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender, and ethnicity.

ARTICLE IX, BASIC RIGHTS, BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW (BBL)

Section 1*. Basic Rights in the Bangsamoro. – In addition to the basic rights already enjoyed by the citizens residing in the Bangsamoro, the Bangsamoro Government shall guarantee, among others, the right to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in social and economic activity and the public service, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender, and ethnicity;*

Section 21*. Support for Persons with Special Needs, Senior Citizens, and Disadvantaged Groups. – The Bangsamoro Government shall establish a special agency and support facilities for persons with special needs, and other disadvantaged persons for their rehabilitation, and livelihood or skills training to encourage their productive integration into mainstream society. The Bangsamoro Government shall coordinate all existing governmental and nongovernmental agencies concerned with the rehabilitation and education of these persons.*

The Bangsamoro Government shall ensure the welfare of senior citizens by continuing to provide rights, benefits, and privileges they presently enjoy.

According to many pieces of research conducted by both private and public entities, the following are advantages of involving PWDs in peacebuilding:

1. The inclusion of PWDs in resolving conflict and peacebuilding initiatives will make a significant contribution to the resolution of the conflict in communities as well as creating an environment that is sustainable for peace.

2. When community leaders and NGOs representing PWDs are included in civil society's efforts on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, field practitioners will ensure the inclusion of all affected populations, thus contributing to the full implementation of critical peacebuilding initiatives.

3. There is a strong incentive for PWD leaders/NGOs to support civil society's efforts to ensure the provision of security and peace because civil conflicts disproportionately impact PWDs due to the lack of access to basic needs and the risk of increasing their numbers from combat and civilian casualties.

4. Including PWD leaders/NGOs in the civil society, peacebuilding process increases the effectiveness and innovation of peacebuilding initiatives because they bring necessary experiences and expertise that are useful to the implementation of essential peacebuilding efforts.

5. Understanding the fundamental commonality of the experience of PWDs has potential to be a dominant and successful unifying theme for peacebuilding initiatives across conflict divides.

6. A peacebuilding initiative that includes PWDs and implemented across conflict divides can be successful when actions by NGOs and civil society actors are not politically tolerated.

Recommendations:

1. Encourage a change in view toward PWDs from the charity/medical approach to the global, human rights-based and all-inclusive model of PWDs as equal participants in the peace process.

2. Include PWDs in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. This step will create both opportunities for the individual to be part of his or her community. In turn, the whole community shall enjoy the benefit of full inclusion in the conflict resolution process as well as a shared responsibility between community members with and without disabilities.

3. Ensure or encourage both public and private sectors, as well as international agencies/institutions including the UN, to initiate more programs and commit more resources towards strengthening the involvement of PWDs in peacebuilding, and to collaborate with government, as well as the Moro fronts especially the MILF.

Peace and Justice in Mindanao Is For The Whole Philippine Nation, Not Just the Bangsamoro

Mohagher Iqbal Message read during the "Week of Peace Celebration" in Sarangani on November 30, 2017

Good Morning to one and all.

I deem it a great privilege to be invited to this year's Sarangani Week of Peace, with the theme "Sustaining the Gains of Peace." I would, therefore, like to thank the honourable Governor Steve Chiongbian Solon for his kind invitation and also hosting an important event. I would also want to pay my highest respect to our guest of honour, Secretary Jesus Dureza, a friend of long standing since 1997, as well as to the other distinguished personalities who also grace this occasion today.

To all of you, again, a pleasant "good morning"!

Cognizant of this event's theme, allow me to reiterate that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is consistently and unquestionably committed to achieving genuine and lasting peace in Mindanao. In 1997, the MILF decided to enter negotiations with the government to find a sustainable solution to the long-standing armed conflict in this region that already claimed the lives of more than 150,000 since 1970. While peacemaking has its challenges, the MILF believes that negotiations was – and still is -- the most practical and civilised way of resolving the armed conflict in Mindanao. And we have not only travelled so far in this endeavour but had already invested so heavily on this. For the MILF --- and I am sure the government also – the only viable way ahead of us is to pursue the way of peace and NEVER WAVER. The peace negotiations would eventually be part of a more comprehensive peace process wherein ceasefire mechanisms were operationalised, protocols and agreements leading up to the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro were signed, and development projects were implemented in conflict-affected communities as part of the peace dividends even at its first stage.

The peace process is not only for the MILF and the government. We are committed to reaching out to various groups and organisations – across political, religious, cultural and socio-economic lines – as well as to like-minded individuals who have a clear and principled agenda towards peace, justice and prosperity in Mindanao. This is the reason why I am here with you today --- standing in front of you --- in this historic gathering.

Last 27 November, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) with the active support of the MILF and MNLF chaired by Yusoph Jikiri endeavoured to achieve that by hosting a Bangsamoro Assembly. I am happy to share that the event was a resounding success, with no less than President Rodrigo Duterte as the guest of honour, with members of his cabinet, our counterparts in the peace process, local government officials and legislators, traditional leaders as well as our domestic and international partners. The event was more momentous when a million of our brothers and sisters, coming from various parts of Mindanao, joined us to celebrate the milestones of the peace process as well as express support for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). The BBL drafted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission is now officially filed in the House of Representatives as House Bill 6475. As a sign of the Senate's interest to participate in this vital discussion, Senate President Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III filed a version of the BBL as Senate Bill 1608. (*Sir, this is to clarify that Koko's version is not the same as the BTC's)

During the Bangsamoro Assembly, the President reiterated the significance of addressing the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro people. At this juncture, allow me to share the view of experts on what is the historical injustice, which already assumed a place in every speech of the President whenever the topic is Mindanao and the Moros.

Historical injustice, according to the Britannica Encyclopedia, is the past moral wrong committed by previously living people that have a lasting impact on the well-being of currently living people.

History is replete with episodes of genocide, slavery, torture, forced conversions, and mass expulsions of peoples. For political, economic, religious, or ethnic reasons, states often abused or allowed the abuse of specific minorities or foreign populations. These events remain alive in memory and sometimes resurge as the foundation of modern conflicts.

I will cite just three of the many instances of historical injustices done to the Moros and indigenous peoples in Mindanao. These pertain to land laws made by the government in Manila.

- In 1913, the Philippine Commission passed Acts 2254 and 2280, creating agricultural colonies. Under these Acts, a non-Moro settler was awarded 16 hectares against the 8 hectares for Moros.

- In 1919, the Public Land Act No. 2874 gave non-Moro settler the chance to apply and own 24 hectares of land in Mindanao while a Moro can only hope for 10 hectares.

- In 1936, President Manuel L. Quezon signed Commonwealth Act No. 141 declaring all Moro landholdings as public lands; and in this law, a Moro is only allowed to apply for four hectares; migrants up to 24 hectares; and corporation, which was wholly owned by non-Moros, 1024 hectares.

During the assembly, President Duterte shared his intention to call for a special congressional session to deliberate on the basic law and ensure of its acceptability to all sectors in the Bangsamoro. Once approved by Congress, the BBL would create a conducive environment for peace in Mindanao. If you recall, an earlier iteration of the BBL did not pass the 16th Congress. Nevertheless, four (4) years of hard work were not in vain as every lesson learned, every problem solved, and every relationship gained will help us move the peace process forward. We still believe in the collective wisdom of Congress, led by Senate President Koko Pimentel and House Speaker Alvarez who are both from Mindanao, in passing legislation based on the signed peace agreements without curtailing into the plenary power of Congress over legislation.

In closing, allow me to emphasise that peace and justice in Mindanao are not only for the benefit of the Bangsamoro but the whole Philippine nation as well. Through the establishment of public institutions that are guided by principles of good governance and responsive to Bangsamoro's needs, the BBL would usher in development and progress in Mindanao as well as help effectively obstruct the rise of violent radicalism in the region by addressing historical injustices. I am confident that the majority of the Filipino people would prefer to stay the course in pursuing a peaceful solution to the Bangsamoro question, which the BBL aims to do by entrenching the CAB in the Philippine system.

I again would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Governor Solon, to Sarangani's local chief executives and all of you present today. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, let us continue this journey together for the sake of peace in this country.

Maraming Salamat po!

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Chapter 9:
Speeches from 2018

"As we have said time and again, this peace process is for everyone. The MILF may have been in the proverbial "driver's seat" especially during the negotiation phase, but we carry with us the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the Bangsamoro, as well all other inhabitants of the region. And we value friendships and partnerships with other peoples of this diverse region and we intend to respect the rights of our brothers and sisters from various non-Moro indigenous groups and our Christian neighbors."

- **Mohagher Iqbal**
Message during the Presentation on Republic Act No. 11054, or the "Organic Law on the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao" on 08 August 2018

Opposition and Armed Group Perspectives on Humanitarian Negotiations with Aid Organisations

Presentation during the ICRC Regional Conference "Humanitarian Access and Negotiation in Asia" held at Hotel Borobodur, Jakarta, on 8-9 March 2018[1]

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, headed by the Chair of the MILF Central Committee Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim, I would like to express my gratitude to the International Committee on the Red Cross for inviting the MILF to this important conference.

I am Mohagher Iqbal, currently the Chair of the MILF Peace Implementing Panel, a position I have held since 2003. While the work is challenging, I consider it an honor to represent the MILF in the peace process with the Philippine Government; essential highlights of which were the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) on 15 October 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro (CAB) last 27 March 2014. The peace process is now in the implementation stage, which means parties are no longer involved in hard negotiations and are currently working to realize the critical components of the agreed peace settlement. We are starting with the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, the legal instrument that would create an autonomous Bangsamoro government – part of our people's struggle for the right to self-determination.

I hope will be able to provide the pertinent information as well as insights relevant to this panel. I would also like to apologise in advance if I am not able to keep with the time, but I will be happy to answer your questions in the open forum.

MILF and observance of IHL principles

At present, the MILF remains a revolutionary organization. Nevertheless, we abide with the principles of international humanitarian law and other pertinent declarations on the observance and respect for human rights. For instance, members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the armed wing of the MILF, are required to follow Article 34 of the BIAF Code of Conduct, which provides the guidance on the rules of

[1] Humanitarian Access – generally defined as the humanitarian actors' ability to reach populations affected by a crisis, as well as an affected population's ability to access humanitarian assistance and services (OCHA).

engagement, including the humane and respectful treatment to captured enemies and prisoners of war, and the protection of civilians and non-combatants. All of these are in line with Islam and IHL.

Peace process mechanisms to facilitate Humanitarian Access

We understand that the observance of IHL can help create an environment where peace efforts can thrive. Therefore, under the auspices of the peace process, the MILF agreed to include IHL principles in the course of the peace negotiations, in the agreements and protocols we have signed with the government, and essential joint mechanisms operationalised in conflict-affected communities. We believe these would help facilitate humanitarian access to vulnerable groups during times of crisis.

On 22 June 2001, the MILF and government signed the Tripoli Agreement on Peace. This document laid down the agenda of the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF between 2001 to 2009, focusing on three elements or aspects: 1) Security, 2) Humanitarian and Rehabilitation and 3) Ancestral Domain. The Humanitarian and Rehabilitation aspect addressed the issue of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and communities affected by the conflict. Furthermore, Humanitarian and Rehabilitation aspect allowed relief operations for the evacuees as well as the implementation of rehabilitation and development projects in these communities, which is led by the MILF through a designated entity, the Bangsamoro Development Agency. On 7 May 2002, the government and the MILF signed the Implementing Guidelines on the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development aspects as a supplementary agreement.

The Tripoli Agreement on Peace also improved the ceasefire mechanism observed by the government and the MILF, organised after the parties signed the General Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in 1997. For example, we invited international and local monitors to ensure that both the government and the MILF are rigorously enforcing the ceasefire mechanism's operational and administrative guidelines. We also added the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) to address a large number of civilians and internally displaced peoples still affected by earlier hostilities between the government and MILF forces.

On 24 January 2014, the MILF and government signed the Annex on Normalization, one of four supplemental documents of the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). Normalization focuses on putting MILF weapons beyond use, providing sustainable livelihood to vulnerable groups and communities, and promoting

human security and human rights in the Bangsamoro region where people are free from fear of violence, and long-held traditions and rights are respected and honoured. Under Normalization, the MILF and government are working to establish transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms to address the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, correct historical injustices and address human rights violations committed in the past.

I am sure all of you have heard of the unfortunate incident in the Islamic city of Marawi in Lanao Del Sur last year, where local armed extremist groups attempted to establish an ISIS wilayah in Mindanao. The MILF strongly condemned the violence in Marawi perpetrated by groups whose only aim is to sow terror. The government responded by imposing martial law in Mindanao and on 29 May 2017, the MILF met with the President to discuss the situation in Marawi and seek assurance that martial law will not have any negative impact on the peace process.

It was in this meeting that the MILF offered humanitarian intervention in Marawi crisis through the necessary peace mechanisms, such as the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities. The result was the establishment of a peace corridor, which has two objectives: (1) a safe and secure corridor for women, children, and other vulnerable groups that remained trapped in the Marawi, and (2) a reliable space for humanitarian assistance to pass through affected municipalities in Lanao Del Sur. We renamed the corridor as Joint Coordinating, Monitoring and Assistance Centers (JCMAC) and it is composed of representatives from government, the MILF, international community and Ulama, and it is under the supervision of the MILF and government peace panels. When the fighting in Marawi ended on 23 October 2017, the government and the MILF peace panels agreed to retain this initiative, and we plan to turn it into an early warning, early response mechanism that will complement government's rehabilitation and reconstruction program in Marawi. We are still finalising the terms of references.

Working with Humanitarian Actors

The MILF has a clear policy in dealing with humanitarian actors. We understand that such groups are not directly involved in peace processes, which can be a highly political endeavour. Nevertheless, the MILF can work with them because of our shared observance of IHL principles and genuine desire to help alleviate the condition of the Bangsamoro people, especially those affected by the conflict. We also would like to emphasise that humanitarian actors in the past have also assisted the MILF by sharing their technical expertise on IHL and human rights.

For instance, the MILF has been actively engaging the ICRC since the early 1980s. The ICRC was generous to provide our combatants training on IHL as well as host seminars attended by our Islamic scholars to identify the connections between IHL and Islamic Law. The ICRC facilitated the publication of the Article 34 of the BIAF Code of Conduct I mentioned earlier, which was translated in different languages and then distributed among our BIAF members.

The MILF also signed the Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action with Geneva Call in 2000, a protocol banning the use of landmines and other types of improvised explosive devices (IED) that cannot distinguish civilians from legitimate targets. The MILF/BIAF incorporated its obligations under this protocol into its internal regulations (General Order no 3) and trained more than a thousand MILF/BIAF commanders and fighters on the provisions of the Deed of Commitment banning AP mines.

The MILF/BIAF agreed to work with Geneva Call on the prohibition of sexual violence and the protection of women. Sixteen women and one man, as well as members of Moro community civil society organisations based in areas that may become part of the Bangsamoro political region, participated in a workshop on gender issues organised jointly with UnYPhil-Women, a local NGO. The MILF also signed with the United Nations Children's Fund an action plan on the gradual release of young people associated with the BIAF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Women's Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB). The action plan, which was first signed in 2009 and extended in 2013, exemplified the MILF's commitment to ban the recruitment of child soldiers.

Insights on Humanitarian Access

As I said, we welcome humanitarian actors and organisations, especially those working for the benefit of the Bangsamoro people. But we are sensitive to any intervention that could be misconstrued as counterinsurgency especially when done one-sidedly in conflict-affect areas or near MILF camps. I would like to share my insights on this matter.

First, it is crucial that humanitarian actors coordinate with the MILF, primarily through the ceasefire mechanisms. Humanitarian activities must be appropriately coordinated with the MILF so that we can give them advice when travelling in our area of operations. We don't want a repeat of an incident that happened in January 1990 in Buldon, Maguindanao when ICRC foreign staff Walter Bergweger and his driver were

killed. We advised him not to pass the road due to complex security problems. His death saddened us because we view ICRC as our partner in peace.

Second, humanitarian actors must remain impartial. We understand that humanitarian organisations are not neutral on essential issues, for instance, they have a stance against human rights or IHL violations. Nevertheless, we expect that they are impartial and opt to exercise independence when identifying aid and project beneficiaries. Any humanitarian organisation should be wary of their projects were used by politicians or people with self-serving interests.

Third, humanitarian interventions must be informed of local sensitives. Sometimes in a crisis, humanitarian actors are required to deal with anxious and dejected communities. While their needs must be met at the soonest possible time, any good intention should not be compromised by the lack of understanding of the existing cultural, political, social sensitivities. To avoid any incidents of misunderstanding and confusion, recipients themselves should be part of the early stages of planning a humanitarian response.

Fourth, humanitarian interventions must be sustainable, even if it is smaller compared to those implemented by the government or donor agencies. We recognise that humanitarian projects are conducted to fill gaps left by government especially in emergency situations, but such interventions should also promote ownership or empower the recipients to make them resilient to future challenges.

And fifth, transparency of the humanitarian interventions. If I can be frank, non-state armed groups do not trust easily. Should there be lack of clarity on the part of the humanitarian actors and the purpose of their projects and interventions, they can be accused of collecting intelligence or working on behalf of the government. Other than coordinating with different stakeholders, humanitarian actors should clearly state their purpose and what their projects hope to accomplish and be willing to give feedback when requested.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the MILF welcomes any support provided by humanitarian actors for the Bangsamoro people whether in emergency situations or long-term rehabilitation process. Because our peace process with the government is already at the implementation stage, after 17 years of negotiations, we have agreed on critical issues relating to IHL and have established mechanisms on the ground that could facilitate humanitarian access to

vulnerable populations. Before launching any humanitarian response, actors must work, coordinate and remain transparent with the necessary peace mechanisms and actors on the ground so that the interventions would be for the benefit of its beneficiaries and not cause further harm.

"Now is the time for action."

Speech delivered during the 4th Year Anniversary of the Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on 27 March 2018[2]

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

I consider it a great privilege to welcome all of you to this auspicious event – a celebration of a significant milestone in the peace process between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Therefore, allow me to recognize all the dependable partners, respected personalities and ardent peace advocates who have worked tirelessly to keep the GPH-MILF peace process on track. Furthermore, the MILF leadership always welcome the words of support from President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and our esteemed counterparts in the Philippine government.

Nevertheless, at this point in the process, assurances to implement the CAB must be put into action. Seventeen years of arduous peace talks, as well as various peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected communities all over the Bangsamoro, would be pointless if we could not bring ourselves to implement the commitments stipulated in the CAB and from earlier signed peace agreements. Our priority should be the necessary steps to be taken to deliver sustainable peace and development to the future generation of the Bangsamoro homeland and the rest of the Philippines.

We begin of course with the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which will realise the aspirations stated in the CAB. Moreover, the BBL shall lay the foundations for the vital political, economic and social institutions, which in turn would facilitate the needed reforms in the Bangsamoro region. It is not a regular bill as it contains the solution to the Bangsamoro Problem or Question. For the sake of peace, justice and sustainable

[2] Read by Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga on behalf of Chairman Iqbal

development, I implore the honourable legislators to pass the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law submitted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, as it is the one reflective of the genuine aspirations of the Bangsamoro people. I have made this appeal many times before, but it is worth repeating.

It is true that the MILF, as the crusader of the Bangsamoro's struggle for self-determination, has been at the forefront of this endeavor. But allow me to reiterate that the CAB, the BBL and the comprehensive peace process are not solely for the benefit of the MILF and its leadership. The peace process is about addressing the historical injustices suffered by Bangsamoro communities, the significant concerns and respecting the rights of our brothers and sisters from various non-Moro indigenous groups and for peace of mind of our Christian neighbours. Moreover, what the CAB and the peace process hopes to achieve will contribute to the prosperity and resilience of Mindanao. For instance, job opportunities for the youth and education for our children, infrastructure to jumpstart local industries and income to home-grown businesses, the establishment of a merit-based and representative form of government, and the delivery of primary and essential services to communities, especially conflict-affected and impoverished areas.

There is also another issue that demands attention – the complicated security situation in the region due to the presence of local terrorist groups. Unfortunately, the delays in the peace process and the frustrations borne from it provided an opportunity for these spoilers and we witnessed their destructive capabilities in Marawi City last year. It is imperative that we as peace actors prove to the Bangsamoro people that the most logical and justifiable approach to address their grievances is the full implementation of the CAB and not violence. By placing primacy on the peace process, the relevance of these terrorist groups will decline and so will their agenda.

After today's festivities, I hope that we move forward and push for the approval of the BBL; its non-passage would render the CAB inadequate. Now is the time for action, and I can assure everyone present today that the MILF is more determined to assert the full implementation of the CAB and the fulfilment of our struggle for self-determination.

Thank you very much and a pleasant day again.

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The Bangsamoro Government and Federalism

Speech delivered at ARMM Complex, Cotabato City, on April 26, 2018

Maybe we need to have review first relevant literature, so we can fully grasp my subject matter.

What is Federalism?

Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent political units.

Federalism is a system of government in which two levels of government control the same territory. Generally, an overarching central/national government is responsible for the federal governance, governing the issues that affect the entire country, while the smaller subdivisions, states, and cities, regulate the affairs of local concern. Both the national government and the smaller political branches have the power to make laws and both have a certain level of autonomy from each other.

Federalism is a political system through which two or more governments have shared authority over the same geographical area. Governing most democratic countries in the world are by a federal system, including Canada, the U.S., Australia, India, and Argentina. Even the EU has a federal system, although one of the very few examples where the members of the "upper houses" in the federation are not appointed or elected but are delegates of the respective governments.

How Do Federal Systems Work?

The exact structure of the various Federal Systems varies greatly. Some federations have a central government that regulates the whole country, while others give more power to the different states or provinces. In some federations, there are clear divisions in the law-making powers of the various entities, while in other federations the powers overlap. Federal systems are often governed by a Congress, with a President or a Parliament with a Prime Minister.

The Features of federalism:

1. There are two or more levels of government. Different tiers of government govern the same citizens, but each layer has its jurisdiction in specific matters of legislation, taxation, and administration.

2. Specified in the constitution are the jurisdictions of the respective levels or tiers of government.

3. One level of government cannot unilaterally change the fundamental provisions of the constitution. Such changes require the consent of both the levels of government.

4. Courts have the power to interpret the constitution and the powers of different levels of government.

5. Sources of revenue for each level of government are explicitly specified to ensure its financial autonomy.

6. The federal system thus has dual objectives: to safeguard and promote unity within the country, while at the same time accommodate regional diversity.

What is Unitary System of Government?

A unitary system of government, or unitary state, is a sovereign state governed as a single entity. The central government is supreme, and the administrative divisions exercise only powers that the central government has delegated to them. Subdivisional units are created and abolished, and their powers may be broadened and narrowed by the central government. The United Kingdom, for example, is a unitary state, as its constituent countries — England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland — have no power to challenge the constitutionality of acts of Parliament.

Unitary states contrast with federal countries, such as the United States where power is shared between the federal government and the individual states. More than 150 countries are unitary states, including France, China, and Japan, compared to only about 26 federal states which include, however, the most advanced ones like the US, Germany, Canada, Russia, Switzerland, and Australia.

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has expressed that his administration will make the BBL as the template of federalism in the country.

Which should come first, BBL or federalism? The MILF position is the BBL first and then federalism. The only question is the sequencing. There is nothing to lose on the part of the Bangsamoro if federalism is pursued, especially if they (or MILF) take part in the process.

Why should the BBL be pursued first? The following are the reasons:

1. The passage of the BBL is a commitment or obligation of government as provided for in signed agreements such as the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB);

2. As stated above, it is a commitment of President Duterte during the election campaign and repeatedly asserted to this day. The President must make true this promise;

3. Passing the BBL is easier because the 1987 Constitution has already provided in Article 10 for the creation of autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera than tinkering with the Constitution which is very unitary; and

4. Any change of the national status quo where control of powers and resources is the exclusive domain and monopoly of the powerful and wealthy elites will be very difficult to undertake. We expect stiff opposition from most of them.

Some features of federalism in BBL:

1. There are two levels or tiers of government in the proposed law, the Central Government and the Bangsamoro, which have jurisdiction in matters of legislation, taxation, and administration;

2. Powers of government are delineated into three categories: reserve or national, concurrent or shared, and exclusive for the Bangsamoro Government.

3. Amendments and revisions of the Basic Law shall be endorsed by the Bangsamoro Parliament to Congress for prior hearings and due enactment into law; and

4. Sources of revenue for the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government are specified in the BBL to ensure its financial autonomy.

5. National defense is lodged with the central government while responsibility for public order and safety is concurrent or shared. (Note: If full federal takes place, usually policing is lodged with the region or state).

In case the effort to shift to federalism succeeds and the federal-parliamentary is adopted, rather than the presidential-federal, the following is already in place in the BBL:

1. The Bangsamoro government is ministerial or parliamentarycharacter, as practiced in many if not most federal states;
2. Change of government can happen not only during an election but also when a vote of no confidence removes the government of the day;
3. The legislative and executive authorities in the Bangsamoro are fused together, as such that the chief minister, two deputy ministers, and most members of the cabinet are members of parliament; and
4. Administrative or policy matters are resolved through non-adversarial manner through the inter-governmental relations (IGR) mechanisms. If the issue cannot be settled at all levels of the IGR mechanisms, the same shall be elevated to the President through the Chief Minister.

Are BBL and federalism contradictory to each other? The answer is No. On the contrary, they can mutually strengthen each other; they are not mutually exclusive.

What happens if the BBL is enacted and the shift to federalism also succeeds? If that happens, the BBL will be more entrenched and strengthened while federalism can easily convert the Bangsamoro region into one federal state. The BBL will be its fundamental law, while federal states; for example, Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, the Cordilleras, and Metro Manila will still have to draft and adopt their respective basic laws.

What happens if the BBL is enacted into law while federalism does not occur? The asymmetrical relation between the Bangsamoro Government and the Central Government under a unitary system will continue to exist?

Thank you very much! Sukran!

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Statement of Support by Chairman Mohagher Iqbal

Delivered at the launching of "Cohesion, Advocacy, Resilience, and Expansive Engagement (CARE) for Peace in the Philippines" Program of the Asia Foundation at Camp Salipada K. Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao on May 8, 2018.

Ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant afternoon to all of you.

It is my honor to be part of today's significant event – the launching of The Asia Foundation's program, generously supported by the Australian Government and aptly named "Cohesion, Advocacy, Resilience, and Expansive Engagement for Peace in the Philippines," or CARE for short. At this crucial stage in the peace process, some CARE is appreciated and to be supported. After all, a peace process is more than just the signing and implementing of political agreements; it is about protecting the well-being of individuals and communities.

The primary purpose of this program, which is "to support strong mechanisms to avert the escalation of violence and to resolve conflict," is judicious. The ghost of the tragic incident in Mamasapano in Maguindanao on January 25, 2015, still haunts us to this day. We abhorred that episode in the peace process and resolved that it should never happen again. Severe lessons from that incident should help us to move forward.

Meanwhile, exacerbating Mindanao's current peace and security situation are groups that use heedless violence as a means to an end. Furthermore, violent extremism does not happen in a vacuum; its instigators have taken advantage of weak government institutions, deep socio-economic imbalances in conflict-affected areas, and the historical grievances and injustices that have troubled this region for decades. It is therefore admirable that this endeavor seeks to engage the Philippine National Police, an important stakeholder in the Bangsamoro peace process.

To reiterate, we are not starting from scratch when engaging with the PNP. As far as the peace process is concerned, there are existing instruments and modalities at the community-level where input from the police is crucial. In fact, they play direct roles in these mechanisms. I am referring to the arrangements relating to the cessation of hostilities, anti-kidnapping, and anti-drug trafficking. Furthermore, the police will also have a crucial role in the Normalization phase, particularly in the decommissioning of MILF arms and forces, the disbandment of private armed groups and the operations of the Joint Peace and Security Teams.

I understand that part of the CARE program is the provision of accurate information and raise awareness among police personnel on the GPH-MILF peace process and the Bangsamoro Basic Law. Therefore, allow me this opportunity to address the misconception that the BBL aims to create a separate police force, independent from the Philippine National Police; this is not the case. The police force stipulated in the BBL remains under the auspices of the PNP and the National Police Commission. Nevertheless, the police force would also recognize the authority of the Bangsamoro government and informed of the cultural and social nuances in various Bangsamoro communities it is mandated to serve. More importantly, the BBL hopes to enable political and policing reforms in the Bangsamoro.

Criminality, peace and order and other traditional security issues can affect any post-conflict environment. Peace processes are highly political, mainly when it also aims to establish new governmental institutions that will change the status quo and address the underlying causes of the armed conflict in Mindanao. As the peace process moves forward, communities shall increasingly rely on the police and other security forces as impartial actors that will ensure the safety and security of all citizens, uphold the rule of law and human rights, promote transparency and accountability, and contribute to advancement and resilience of communities. We hope the PNP is up to the challenge.

I applaud both the Asia Foundation and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, both long-time time partners in the peace process, for this endeavor. Any initiative that will help Mindanao achieve enduring peace and justice and sustainable development are most welcome. The MILF Peace Implementing Panel and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission are more than willing to engage in constructive dialogue and provide background information on the peace process mechanisms and the BBL. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, let us continue working together for the sake of peace in the Philippines. Rest assured of our unwavering commitment to peace!

Thank you very much and good afternoon to all.

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Opening message of Mohagher Iqbal during Forum on the Proposed BBL's Prospect for Inclusive and Lasting Peace in the Bangsamoro at NDU Gymnasium, Cotabato City on June 18, 2018.

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuhu!
Peace and blessings be upon us all!
Good morning.

First and foremost, allow me to thank the GPH Peace Implementing Panel for hosting this peace forum, entitled **Discussion on the Proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law: Prospects for Inclusive and Lasting Peace in the Bangsamoro**, in partnership with the MILF Peace Implementing Panel and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission. This morning is all about building on the momentum for peace in Mindanao, through a proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law that we envision to be fair, responsive, and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people.

This momentum for peace is given a new direction with the approval on the third and final reading of the proposed BBL via the House Bill based on HB 6475 in the Lower House, and Senate Bill 1717 in the Upper House.

I must say, we have all eagerly awaited this outcome ever since the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 2014. Since then, our leaders from the Executive Department and the Legislative Department have set numerous timelines for the movement of the proposed BBL, and to say that we have repeatedly been disappointed in the lack of such progress during the past years is an understatement.

Speaking as the Chairman of the MILF Peace Implementing Panel, I learned how to manage my expectations than by looking back to all the long hours of negotiations, numerous stalemates, significant walkouts and fruitful compromises we had experienced in the negotiating table to move forward. As a former chair of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and as member thereof today, I held on to balanced optimism knowing fully well that the proposed BBL we submitted is a product of our collective efforts, consultations, and references to all signed agreements between the Government of the Philippines and Moro groups.

So, to my mind, the recent developments in both Houses of Congress moving on to the Bicameral Conference Committee have been a testament of how heightened understanding, collaboration, political will, and genuine concern for the need for peace can spin the legislative wheels into action.

For this, I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support and hard work of notable legislators whom we consider as our allies for peace, unity, and progress: Sen. Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri, former Senate President Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, Senator Sonny Angara, and Senator Riza Hontiveros, House Speaker Pantaleon "Bebot" Alvarez, House Majority Floor Leader Rodolfo Fariñas, Deputy Speaker Bai Sandra Sema, Congresswoman Ruby Sahali, and Congressman Pedro Acharon, Jr., among others.

At this juncture, I do not want to impress upon you any ambivalence on my part. I admit that current versions of the BBL in Congress were less to be desired. I have always pushed for a legislative measure that remains true and faithful to the terms agreed by the parties in all signed agreements. I cannot overemphasize that the new Bangsamoro Political Entity should never be less than the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

After all, it has repeatedly been stated that the cause of conflict in Mindanao is INJUSTICE; more particularly, the historical injustice committed against the Bangsamoro people of Mindanao, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The conflict in this region can be categorized as political in origin; hence, the Bangsamoro Question requires a political solution, that is, the restoration, regaining and recognition of the Moro identity, homeland, and right to self-governance.

In the simplest terms, the Bicameral Conference Committee must come up with an improved and energized version of the bill that will vigorously promote and seek justice for the Bangsamoro people. Let this not be a mere exercise of legislative power for the sake of doing so. Let these sessions of the Bicameral Conference Committee be essential avenues for more in-depth and dignified dialogues, sincere problem-solving, and profound justice.

While the fate of the final Bangsamoro Basic Law is now apparently out of the BTC's or the Joint Panels' control, I would like to believe that what we say on the outside could potentially turn ripples to waves. We have the responsibility to tackle disconcerting issues and air out our concerns on the BBL. When equity and justice are at stake, we must take on a pro-active role, even if this means playing hardball or taking controversial stands, because what we say matter. What we say should matter.

Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge is enormous: to persuade legislative leaders to put in paramount consideration the genuine peace and development in our region as they determine the fate of the proposed BBL. The BBL's passage is the best route to justice, and the best chance to prevent the causes of endless conflicts at their source.

With this, I encourage everyone in this forum to embrace the challenge. Thank you very much and may we all have a pleasant and productive forum.

Engaging political parties and the electoral process in the Philippines: An MILF Experience

Speech delivered at Sihanoukville, Cambodia on June 23, 2018

MILF Policy Guidelines on Elections:

The MILF has adopted a policy of "no participation" in an election. This guideline is to ensure that the Islamic revolutionary line of the organization is pursued and intact. It is also a way to maintain the support of every sector of Moro society while we are facing the government and the military. As a consequence, not one politician, even the harshest ones, becomes our open enemy.

Following are the Policy Guidelines:

1. No MILF officials from municipal to central committee is allowed to run in an election;
2. No MILF official is authorized to go with politicians during a campaign;
3. No MILF official is entitled to solicit campaign fund from politicians or political parties;
4. No MILF official is allowed to lend his/her vehicles to politicians for use in a campaign; and
5. No MILF official is authorized to speak during campaign rallies.

The MILF leadership suspended several MILF officials, mostly low-rank, who violated these rules. After serving their suspension, the MILF leadership reinstated them. However, those who ran in an election won and assumed their posts were divested of their positions in the MILF. Therefore, they became ordinary members of the MILF.

IPP: First Political Party

In 1987, the MILF started to find ways to effect change and reforms in the political landscapes especially in Mindanao where the Moros have a considerable presence. Then, as it is today, politics are in the hands of politicians, usually belonging to family dynasties. Often, the three Gs -- gold, goons, and guns -- determine the result of elections, well ahead of the voting day.

To be able to realize this objective, the MILF organized the Islamic Party of the Philippines (IPP) in the same year. To ensure control of the party, as well as its direction, policies, and activities, core leaders of the MILF (using pseudo-legal names) serve as members of the party's board of directors. Similarly, legal personalities sympathetic to the MILF occupied executive positions who ran the party in its day-to-day affairs.

Following its registration with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), the IPP fielded its candidates. The IPP also sought alliances with national and dominant political parties such as the Laban Ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP, or Fight of Democratic Filipinos), Liberal Party, Nacionalista Party, PDP-Laban Party, Kilusang Bagong Lipunan Party, United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO) and several others.

The IPP managed to win few seats in the municipalities but not in the province or regional levels. It had to work with LDP, which was associated with the late President Corazon Aquino, to win. During the elections in 1990, the IPP's candidate, Lawyer Zacaria Candao, won the governorship of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The IPP also supported the candidacy of a Christian candidate for congressman in Sultan Kudarat province, in the person of Estanislao Valdez, who won handily against another Christian candidate.

In 2001, the IPP faced with almost insurmountable odds, ranging from lack of funds to lack of winnable candidates. Those vying to control politics were personalities who used offensive tactics to win elections, such as unprincipled "horse-trading," massive cheating, vote-buying, politics-related killings, and many others. With no choice left, the IPP was virtually abandoned.

In these years of engagement, we learned valuable, albeit mostly negative, lessons or conclusions:

1. A political party like the IPP, which is backed by an ideologically-based organization like the MILF, cannot compete with political parties which only had one motive: to win an election by any available means;

2. A political party, even it has widespread support, has no chance of defeating political parties that resort to the use of the three Gs. The broad support is often not converted into votes. Cheating started right at the precinct level, then to municipal, provincial, and upward. A cash-strapped political party cannot afford to hire many poll watchers, as well as good lawyers;

3. People will not move unless provided with logistics. Unlike running a revolutionary struggle, nay jihad, where people perform their task without expecting any pay, but in an election it is different. People are not as responsive or cooperative. The popular belief is that an election has nothing to do with rewards in the day hereafter that they earnestly seek in a jihadic struggle;

4. A weak political party, partnering with a dominant political party, will eventually be absorbed by the latter, and its distinct personality and platform will vanish in the process; and

5. Those who sought to run under the party were merely lame-duck candidates, not seasoned politicians, to avail of its machinery.

UBJP: Second Political Party

Conflicts, no matter how harsh, cannot go on forever. Sometime in the future, a compromise or political solution has to be worked out. In the case of the Bangsamoro peace process, it is the creation of a legitimate autonomous government that grants the Bangsamoro people's legal right to choose their leaders democratically via fair and honest elections.

Fully aware of this vital principle, juxtaposed with the nature of elections and political party systems in the country, both the Philippine government and the MILF included safeguards in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014, and in the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), now being discussed in Philippine Congress. In fact, on May 30, both

Houses passed their respective versions of the bill, which will be the subject of deliberation during the bicameral conference on July 9-13 to come up with a consolidated bill.

To minimize or prevent massive cheating and other election-related irregularities, the FAB, CAB, and BBL provided that political parties that participate in elections in the Bangsamoro shall be principled. Also, an office under the COMELEC shall be mandated to conduct the election following an election code suited to a parliamentary system of government.

In preparation, the MILF organized a political party named "United Bangsamoro Justice Party" or UBJP in 2014, but it was officially registered in the COMELEC in May 2015.

We also conducted training, seminars, fora, as well send party members to Turkey, Germany, and Malaysia to learn from their experiences, especially on party-building techniques.

Some basic information on the party:

1. The UBJP is not an ordinary political party; in a sense, it is a social movement. It provides services to the people more during a non-election period;
2. All members of the MILF, political or military, are automatic members of the UBJP. Non-MILF members including Christians, indigenous tribes, and reverts to Islam are encouraged to become members;
3. The UBJP actively interact with grassroots communities, civil society organizations, women's organization, as well as youth groups. A common platform for good governance and a clean election is the battle cry;
4. Sustained education on the basic principles and platform underlying the party, e.g., need for unity, justice, and the pursuit of Bangsamoro identity; and
5. Raising of funds is one of the priorities of UBJP. Without strong logistical support, a political party has little chance of winning seats in Parliament.

My advice:

1. Once the group in Patani has made their decision, then proceed. Courage conquers all.
2. But don't be adventurous, prepare for it. Establishing a political party is like constructing a concrete edifice; it needs to withstand the elements, in this case, pressure from your political rivals.
3. Hard lessons are learned not by people telling you such things but by experiencing for yourselves the harsh realities of politics. Politics is traitorous. We have yet to find politicians who are straightforward and mean what they say.
4. To withstand the rough and tumble of politics, you must have a core group that discusses challenges and solutions in full length.
5. Furthermore, create internal systems and procedures, so you don't quarrel and conflict resolution mechanisms in case of misunderstandings.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL): A Hard-Earned Piece

A Paper read during the Forum on Understanding the Bangsamoro Organic Law at the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City on August 4, 2018

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), originally called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), has been a hard-earned piece of legislation. Until the last minute, no one could ever tell it would ever pass at all. Debates had been so tough that every single part of it including what appeared to be inconsequential matters delayed the deliberations or sessions. Sometimes, emotions ran high. It was only our collective will to overcome all obstacles that kept us on track.

Depending on who is the beholder, the appreciation of the BOL ranges from 50% or below to as high as 85 to 90%. If the beholder, say, one with a rigid mind – not excluding negativist – the rating is usually lower, but if it is made through the optic lens of political, the rating is usually high. This is especially true with a revolutionary or a "striver", nay a mujahid, who accepts the nature of a struggle as life-time or generational. One can only achieve certain success at a certain point in the protracted struggle. The exception is if one wins a total military victory.

The BOL is not a perfect law or something what the MILF and our people had ideally hoped for and worked so much to achieve it. But we have only two options: rejection or acceptance! All indications point to acceptance, without prejudice that all provisions of the CAB not captured in BOL must also be complied with by government.

What are good points in the BOL?

Powers of the Bangsamoro Government numbers 55. In addition, the general welfare clause enables the Bangsamoro Parliament to enact laws for the general welfare of the people. The only limit is that it would not be in direct contravention with national laws.

The parliamentary system of government in the Bangsamoro is highly laudable. This suits the customs and tradition of the Bangsamoro people through the institution of sultanate: group leadership through the cabinet, allows more elbow rooms for consultation, less politics, because the chief minister and two deputy chief ministers are not elected region-wide, and very inclusive, because all sectors of society are represented in the parliament.

On the Shariah justice system: Most of the proposals on the Justice system in Bangsamoro especially on Shariah were adopted in the BOL. The only major concern is that it requires Shariah judge, like any judge in any regular court, to be member of the Philippine Bar. They must also be member of the Shariah Bar.

However, in long-term appreciation, this will be good for the Bangsamoro people and their government. This will enable us to come up with a very competent Shariah justice system in the region.

On fiscal matters: Virtually most of what the Bangsamoro people asked for, which are possible in an autonomous arrangement, are granted: 75-25 shares in taxes and revenue collections from the exploration, exploitation, and utilization of non-metallic and metallic resources are given to the Bangsamoro. For fossil fuels such as gas, oil, uranium, and coal, the sharing of revenues is 50-50. The block grant of 5% of the total internal revenue and custom collections nation-wide, which is more or less 70 to 80 billion annually, and which is automatically appropriated and released, is a tremendous gain and boost to the Bangsamoro economy and development. In addition, there is also the Special Development Fund in the amount of 50 billion for ten years.

To me, it is in fiscal matters that showcases that indeed the Bangsamoro has been self-governing entity.

It also essentially captures what President Rodrigo Roa Duterte had told MILF leaders, at least on two occasions the latest being on May 11 in Malacañang Palace, that natural resources in the Bangsamoro region belong to them.

In other aspects of BOL especially on the exercise of powers, there is a colatilla, or a precondition: "Subject to the Constitution and national laws". There is no problem about mention of the Constitution, because that is given, but national laws are numerous and changing. For non-lawyer like me, it is problematic to subject laws enacted by Bangsamoro Parliament to all national laws, which are not static.

There are other good provisions of the BOL that made me view it as 85% good. But I am only allotted 20 minutes, and therefore, there is no enough time to discuss them here.

Now what are the issues that are not addressed or lacking in the BOL?

First, the Preamble. There are principles that were deleted from the original formulation in the BBL, such as parity of esteem, principle of subsidiarity, and principle of asymmetrical relationship. Instead of the Bangsamoro people and other inhabitants speaking, as expression of ownership, the Filipino people are the ones who spoke. Moreover, the fear factor of Moros seceding from this country, not exempting members of Congress became the permanent feature in many provisions of the BOL especially this Preamble, like colatilla: "Within the framework of the Constitution and national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines."

Second, the list of Basic Rights to be enjoyed by citizens of the Bangsamoro is deleted, saying those were already in the Constitution. I don't think this is so much of demerit. Listed or not, those rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and are to be enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Bangsamoro.

Third, there is no more delineation of powers such as reserved, concurrent, and exclusive, but only powers, subject to Article X and Section 20 and this Organic Act, to be legislated on by the Bangsamoro Government are enumerated.

Fourth, policing in the BOL did not carry all the provisions provided for in R.A. No. 9054 that established the ARMM. The issue of policing is very important because it has direct link with decommissioning of MILF weapons and combatants. Once the Bangsamoro Police is operationalized, the will decommission 35% of its weapons and combatants.

Fifth, the plebiscite and appreciation of votes during the ratification of BOL. In BBL, both first and second, appreciation of votes, in the case of six municipalities in Lanao Del Norte is by municipality, and the 39 barangays in North Cotabato is by barangay. But the BOL provides reckoning by double majority, meaning, the yes votes must win in the municipality or barangay, as the case maybe, and the mother unit has to allow such inclusion in the Bangsamoro.

At this juncture, let me state here my personal conviction that it is men more than law that determines the failure or success of any important human endeavour. The imperfections in the BOL may be paid for or balanced by sustained constructive engagements with government and their agencies, including private institutions, as well as the international communities. Maybe in the future, more devolution of powers will follow. More importantly, the Bangsamoro Transition Committee (BTC), which I chaired before and a member thereof today still has another mandate, which is to propose a list of amendments to the Constitution. Hopefully, this will further improve the quality of the BOL.

Finally, while all swans are white, but sometimes in a rare occurrence, the Black Swan strikes. For now, the shift to federalism is almost a foregone conclusion. But who can say it will not happen at all? When we started our struggle in 1972, we never imagined we reached this far. Similarly, when we started the peace negotiations in 1997, we did not know we will ever achieve what we are now celebrating. It is perseverance that spells the difference even in hard conflict.

Thank you very much for lending me your ears, and once again, good afternoon to all!

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Honoring The Martyrs and The Friends of the Bangsamoro

Statement of Mohagher Iqbal, during the Presentation on Republic Act No. 11054, or the "Organic Law on the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao" on 08 August 2018, Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Complex, ARMM ORG Compound, Cotabato City

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh!

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Please allow me to recognize our good friends and esteemed personalities present here today: (Names to follow).

The recent event in Malacañang on August 6, 2018 and now the presentation of the BOL to the public and multi-stakeholders in Cotabato City and elsewhere in Mindanao are significant and historic. These are part of our continuing and collective efforts to make sure that the BOL will be fully understood and appreciated by our people, so that on plebiscite day, most probably either in November or December, the yes votes will prevail and the proposed law gets ratified.

However, let me be very candid. I have mixed emotions, despite the celebratory mood all around us. Of course, I am in high spirits because with the passage of the BOL, another crucial milestone has been reached in our journey for peace, justice and development in the Bangsamoro and the rest of Mindanao. Nevertheless, I also mourn for the martyrs who have selflessly offered their lives and blood for the realization of our right to self-determination. Let us therefore honor them, foremost of whom was the late MILF Chairman Sheikh Salamat Hashim, and countless others who were not able to witness this momentous event. Were they alive today, they would be with us – and certainly, the scripts would change.

I also take this opportunity to mention and offer prayers to my colleagues in the MILF peace negotiating panel who died in the course of our long and hard negotiation from January 1997 namely, MILF Vice Chairman Abdulazis Mimbantas, Atty. Lanang Ali, Atty. Musib Buat, Datu Antonio Kinoc, Omar Hassan of Davao, and Napis Bidin of Tawi Tawi. Likewise, I pay homage to our counterparts from government who also passed away in the line of duty in the search for the elusive peace in Mindanao. I can name only two now: Lt. Gen. Fortunato Abat and Maj. Gen. Orlando Soriano, who both served as chairs of the government peace panel.

Indeed, without their sacrifices our historic struggle and peace process would have not reached this far. We build on their achievements and successes – and learned from their failures -- to reach this point. May their souls rest in peace and May Allah grants them His Paradise!

While we remember the memory of those who made sacrifices for the struggle, we also celebrate those who have worked tirelessly to keep the peace process on track. I again humbly acknowledged these men and women, known and unknown, who either advocated publicly for peace or quietly worked behind the scenes. Of course we have our peace partners who continue to assist both GPH and MILF; civil society groups and various non-governmental organizations, the members of the diplomatic corps and international organizations, our international peace mechanism partners, such as the International Monitoring Team and the International Contact Group. I also expressed my highest appreciation and sincerest gratitude to the Government of Malaysia for facilitating the GPH-MILF peace negotiations since 2001, for without their able facilitation, I don't think we would ever be here this morning. In particular, I am thanking Datu Kamaruddin bin Mustapha, the current Malaysian facilitator and/or special advisor, who is with us this morning.

To our young generations: We have not remiss in our responsibility. Truth is that we have secured for you and our people the Framework of the Bangsamoro (FAB) and Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). These are not ordinary agreements; they were virtually cast in stone, as far as we are concerned. Therefore, we urge you to value these agreements and keep on asserting that all the remaining unimplemented provisions shall be given to us, sooner or later. It is government obligation to deliver them.

Moving forward, I call on the Bangsamoro people regardless of tribe and political affiliations to be united in this quest for sustainable peace and development. I understand there are many questions, especially now we enter the transition phase. Allow me to allay your fears and assure you that while we intend to address the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro and implement the obligations stipulated in the signed peace agreements, we will not create new conflicts in the process.

As we have said time and again, this peace process is for everyone. The MILF may have been in the proverbial "driver's seat" especially during the negotiation phase, but we carry with us the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the Bangsamoro, as well all other inhabitants of the region. And we value friendships and partnerships with other peoples of this diverse region and we intend to respect the rights of our brothers and sisters from various non-Moro indigenous groups and our Christian neighbors. For this next phase, we will wholeheartedly work with the current ARMM government to chart the next course.

When the MILF embarked on this journey towards peace, which we knew could be perilous, our intention was for all of us including the next generation to have a comfortable and peace loving environment. The BOL may not be a perfect law for us but at least we can have something to start with. Without our unity and our collective support we cannot reach our final aspiration of charting our political future.

Finally, the passage of the BOL would not been made possible without the men and women who pushed it vigorously through turbulent waters of legislation. Without saying, the role of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in making this possible occupies the premier spot; without his support and appeal to members of Congress to pass the BOL, I don't think we would have it today. Moreover, the roles of champions in the House and Senate are hereby acknowledged. In the House, we have former Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, Majority Floor Leader Rodolfo Farinas, Deputy Speaker Bai Sandra Sema, Congresswoman Ruby Sahali, Congressman Pedro Acharon Jr., Congressman Wilter "Sharky" Palma, Congresswoman Anihilda Sancopan, and several others. I also acknowledged the role of the new Speaker, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, no matter how momentary it had been. She caused the ratification of BOL immediately upon her assumption as the new speaker. In the Senate, I acknowledged the indispensable contributions of all the senators; they all worked together to have it passed in the Senate. But special mention must go to former Senate President Koko Pimentel, current Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto, Senators Risa Hontiveros, Sonny Angara, Win Gatchalian, Richard Gordon, and Joel Villanueva. But the most passionate and consistent of all was my friend, Senate Majority Floor Leader Miguel Zubiri. My wholehearted salute to you, sir!

Again, thank you and a pleasant morning to all!

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What Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) Can Contribute To Good Governance

Opening Remarks of MILF PIP Chair Mohagher Iqbal Forum on the BOL with Liga ng mga Barangay sa Pilipinas SMX Convention Center, Pasay City, Metro Manila on August 26, 2018.

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Before anything else, please allow me to acknowledge our esteemed guests, honorable local officials and good friends attending today's momentous event.

It is a privilege to be speaking to you today, and I would like to extend my gratitude to the organizers for this event. Perhaps most of you were present in the previous Liga ng mga Barangay sa Pilipinas Convention on April 23, 2018, also held here at SMX Convention Center. I spoke before the league's Mindanao Chapter about the historical background and the founding principles of the Bangsamoro's struggle for self-determination here in the Philippines as well as updates on the peace process. The Bangsamoro Basic Law then was still being deliberated in Philippine Congress, and I am pleased to say much has changed in the last four months.

As you know, last August 6, 2018, President Rodrigo Duterte presented the signed Bangsamoro Organic Law, also known as Republic Act 11054, to Moro Islamic Liberation Front Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim in a modest yet historic gathering held in Malacañang Palace. Representatives from the MILF, the national government, Congress, diplomatic corps, civil society organizations and other reliable partners of the peace process graced the event and had since then expressed support for the BOL. We then replicated this affair in a ceremony held at the Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Complex, in the ARMM Compound, Cotabato City last August 8 wherein we presented the BOL to the ARMM and the attendees.

With the passage of the BOL, both the Philippine government and the MILF reached another crucial milestone in the peace process. Nevertheless, the journey has not been easy, and we had lost many brave and honorable mujahideen in the early years of the peace negotiations when resentment, cynicism, and mistrust were widespread between the GPH and the MILF. However, after seventeen years of peace talks and almost four years of striving to have the basic law approved, the government and the MILF have managed

to control the escalation of violence in conflict-affected areas, discuss contentious issues logically and agree on solutions to move the peace process forward. In other words, the GPH and the MILF worked together towards a common goal: peace, justice, and development in the Bangsamoro and the rest of Mindanao.

Perhaps relevant to today's event is area of good governance and how the BOL can contribute to that. We envision that the BOL shall lay the foundation for the vital political, economic and social institutions, which in turn would facilitate the needed reforms in the Bangsamoro region, especially the delivery of essential services to our people. For instance, job opportunities for the youth and education for our children, infrastructure to jumpstart local industries and income to home-grown businesses, the establishment of a merit-based and representative form of government, and the delivery of primary and essential services to communities, especially conflict-affected and impoverished areas.

Given the scale of the work ahead of us, the post-BOL scenario is not without its challenges and possible impediments. We are now in the "transition phase," meaning the BOL will be subjected to a plebiscite for its ratification and subsequently, the creation of an interim government that will preside over the Bangsamoro region until the election of a new Bangsamoro Parliament. All of these are stipulated in the signed BOL and based on the commitments found in the negotiated peace settlement: the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro of 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro of 2014. I understand in the program that we have resource persons who will be discussing the BOL in detail, later on, particularly provisions relevant to the barangay. However, allow me to describe the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, or BTA briefly.

The BTA shall serve as the interim government during the transition phase, composing of 80 members to be appointed by the President. Because its establishment is anchored on the peace process, the BTA is MILF-led but without prejudice to the participation of the Moro National Liberation Front in its membership. Elected officials of the ARMM are automatically members of the BTA and shall also be open to representatives coming from Non-Moro indigenous communities, youth, women, Christian communities, traditional leaders, and other relevant sectors. The BTA will be dissolved immediately after the election of a new Bangsamoro autonomous government.

I anticipate that there are still many questions on the transition phase and how it will affect the local government units in the Bangsamoro region. While my speech is relatively short, I am confident that this is not the last time we will have the chance to interact. It is only the beginning, and I shall look forward to more conversations and dialogues with

you on the BOL's implementation as well as addressing any misconceptions about the transition phase and the peace process as a whole.

I also take this chance to assure you that while the BOL intends to address the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro and implement the commitments stated in the FAB and CAB, we will not create new grievances in the process. When the MILF embarked on what began as a perilous undertaking more than 40 years ago, we intended that inhabitants of the Bangsamoro region, especially the next generation, to have a comfortable and peace-loving environment. Moreover, after the signing of the exit agreement, the MILF hopes to continue contributing to the prosperity and resilience of Mindanao as a social movement.

The MILF, through the BTC and various peace mechanisms on the ground, is more than willing to work with multiple stakeholders for the transition phase, including the current ARMM leadership whose commitment to peace is commendable. The BOL may not be a perfect law, but at least we have something we can work with and improve later on. Without our unity and our collective support, we cannot reach our final aspiration of charting our political future and pursue our economic, cultural and social development. Regardless of one's tribe, religion, and political affiliation, all inhabitants of the Bangsamoro should be united in this goal.

Finally, let me stress here -- and I am sure everybody is fully aware of this – that BOL is an apolitical issue. It is beyond petty politics, which serves only the selfish interests of individuals or groups. It is about peace; it is about stopping the fratricidal war that engulfed Mindanao for almost five decades that cost the lives of 150,000 soldiers, MILF, MNLF, and civilians.

The BOL has to be ratified, because without its ratification, it means there is no law, and therefore, if there is no law, the necessary implication is that war situation will return to Mindanao.

DO WE WANT THIS TO RETURN AND HAPPEN? THINK OF IT!

WITHOUT BEING OFFENSIVE OR ARBITRARY, I THINK THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION IS TO RATIFY THE BOL.

And the roles of barangay captains – all of you who are gathered here today -- in this regard is crucial. You are not only supporting the law that President Rodrigo Roa Duterte had "fathered", borrowing his term, and had committed to deliver, but you also contribute solidly to the establishment of peace in our midst, which is the best legacy that we can pass on to the generations who come after us.

Thank you very much, and I hope you will have a productive and informative day.

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It is true that the MILF, as the crusader of the Bangsamoro's struggle for self-determination, has been at the forefront of this endeavor. But allow me to reiterate that the CAB, the BBL and the comprehensive peace process are not solely for the benefit of the MILF and its leadership. The peace process is about addressing the historical injustices suffered by Bangsamoro communities, the significant concerns and respecting the rights of our brothers and sisters from various non-Moro indigenous groups and for peace of mind of our Christian neighbours. Moreover, what the CAB and the peace process hopes to achieve will contribute to the prosperity and resilience of Mindanao. For instance, job opportunities for the youth and education for our children, infrastructure to jumpstart local industries and income to home-grown businesses, the establishment of a merit-based and representative form of government, and the delivery of primary and essential services to communities, especially conflict-affected and impoverished areas.

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Speech delivered at the 4th Year Anniversary of the Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on 27 March 2018

Milestones of the GPH-MILF Peace Process[3]

1996	The peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) began
7 January 1997	The Technical Committees conducted their first meeting.
18 July 1997	The Parties signed the Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities.
12 September 1997	The Parties signed the Implementing Administrative Guidelines of the GRP-MILF Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities, and the joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) was created.
14 November 1997	The parties signed the Implementing Operational Guidelines of the GRP-MILF Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities.
6 February 1998	The Parties executed the Joint GRP-MILF Agreement to Sustain the Quest for Peace.
27 August 1998	The General Framework of Agreement of Intent between the GRP and the MILF was signed.
25 October 1999	Peace talks formally opened in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, with a set deadline for conclusion on June 2000.
21 March 2000	President Estrada declared an "all-out war" policy against the MILF, causing the latter to withdraw from the peace table
2001	The Parties resumed the peace negotiations and conducted exploratory talks in Malaysia, marking its diplomatic stage.
24 March 2001	The Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of Peace Talks between the GRP and MILF was signed.
22 June 2001	The Parties signed the Agreement on Peace between the GRP and the MILF in Tripoli, Libya. It is also known as the Tripoli Agreement of 2001

[3] ***Sources:***
- http://www.congress.gov.ph/press/details.php?pressid=10700
- https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1011517/bicam-approves-bangsamoro-organic-law#ixzz5SogtzLwu
- Mindanao: The Long Journey To Peace And Prosperity
- https://peace.gov.ph/timeline/peace-process-milf/

7 August 2001	The Implementing Guidelines of the Security Aspect of the Tripoli Agreement was signed by the Parties
6 May 2002	The Parties signed the Joint Communique for the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), which seeks to interdict and isolate lawless elements
7 May 2002	The Parties signed the Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation, and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001.
11 February 2003	A military campaign was launched at the MILF Central Command Headquarters in Buliok Complex, Maguindanao.
13 July 2003	Upon the death of MILF Chair and Founder Hashim Salamat, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim succeeded him as the MILF Chair and Mohagher Iqbal became Chair of the MILF Peace Panel.
8 September 2004	The Parties signed the Terms of Reference of the International Monitoring Team (IMT).
27 July 2008	The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was initialed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
4 August 2008	The Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) blocking the scheduled signing of the MOA-AD the day after.
14 October 2008	The Supreme Court declared MOA-AD unconstitutional.
15 September 2009	The Parties signed the Framework Agreement on the Formation of the International Contact Group (ICG).
27 October 2009	The Parties agreed to create the Civilian Protection Component of the IMT.
3 June 2010	The Parties signed the Declaration of Continuity for Peace Negotiation.
9 February 2011	The 20th Formal Exploratory Talks was conducted, marking the formal resumption of peace talks, in which the MILF Panel submitted a revised draft of the Comprehensive Compact.
4 August 2011	President Benigno S. Aquino III met with MILF Chair Murad Ebrahim in Tokyo, Japan, to express the sincerity of GPH and to fast-track the peace negotiations.

22 August 2011	The GPH Panel submitted its "3-for-1" proposal to the MILF Panel.
24 April 2012	The GPH-MILF Decision Points on Principles as of April 2012 was signed
8–11 August 2012	During the 30th Formal Exploratory Talks, Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were created.
2–7 October 2012	The Parties forged the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) during the 31st Formal Exploratory Talks.
15 October 2012	Both GPH and MILF Peace Panel Chairs signed the FAB at the Malacañan Palace.
12–17 November 2012	During the 33rd Formal Exploratory Talks, the TWG on Normalization was convened for the first time.
7 December 2012	UP Professor Miriam Coronel Ferrer took her oath as the new GPH Peace Panel Chair, replacing UP College of Law Dean Marvic Leonen who was appointed Associate Justice in the Supreme Court.
17 December 2012	President Aquino issued Executive Order 120 creating the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which will draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law.
21–25 January 2013	Terms of Reference of the Third Party Monitoring Team TPMT) was signed during the 35th Formal Exploratory Talks. The TPMT will review, assess, evaluate, and monitor the implementation of the FAB and its annexes.
11 February 2013	President Aquino and MILF Chair Murad Ebrahim launched the Sajahatra Bangsamoro program at the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI) in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.
25–27 February 2013	During the 36th Formal Exploratory Talks, the Parties signed the Annex on Transitional Arrangements and Modalities, which details the road map towards the creation of the Bangsamoro. Also in this round, the Parties signed the Terms of Reference for the Independent Commission on Policing (ICP), which was prepared by the TWG on Normalization.

9–11 April 2013	The Terms of Reference for Sajahatra Bangsamoro was signed by the Parties during the 37th Formal Exploratory Talks.
3 April 2013	On this day, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission was ceremonially opened at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Ortigas, and was formally convened for the first time.
23 April 2013	The Parties signed the Guidelines for Mutual Understanding for Ceasefire-Related Functions during the 13 May 2013 National and Local Elections
29 April 2013	The Facility for Advisory Support to Transition Capacities (FASTRAC) was launched at the MILF headquarters in Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, facilitated by representatives of World Bank (WB), United Nations (UN), and MILF Chair Murad Ebrahim.
8–13 July 2013	The 38th Formal Exploratory Talks resulted in the signing of the Annex on Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing. Members of the TPMT were also convened for the first time.
10–20 September 2013	The Independent Commission on Policing (ICP) was convened for the first time during the 40th Formal Exploratory Talks.
22–25 January 2014	The Annex on Normalization and the Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters and Zones of Joint Cooperation were signed by the Parties at the close of the 43rd Formal Exploratory Talks. These are the final documents to be included in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB).
4–8 December 2013	During the 42nd Formal Exploratory Talks, the Parties signed the Annex on Power Sharing.
22 March 2014	The Parties signed the Terms of Reference for the Joint Normalization Committee (JNC), the Independent Decommissioning Body (IDB), and the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC).
27 March 2014	The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was signed by the GPH and MILF Peace Panel Chairs at Malacañan Palace

April 22, 2014	Draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) was submitted by the BTC to the Office of the President
October 4, 2014	Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was formally launched in Cotabato City.
November 5, 2014	Bangsamoro Development Plan (BDP) was launched in Davao City.
November 23, 2014	The terms of Reference for Coordination Team for the Transition (CT4T) to Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) was signed in Kuala Lumpur during the GPH-MILF peace panel meeting.
March 17, 2017	The GPH-MILF Implementing Panels were created to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the CAB.
November 7, 2016	President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Executive Order No. 08: Expansion of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC). The expands the members of BTC from 15 to 21 to make the process inclusive other interest groups including representatives from Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The expanded BTC was composed of 11 representatives from the MILF and 10 government representatives.
May 30, 2018	The House of Representatives approved on third and final reading House Bill 6475 or the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law by an overwhelming vote of 227 in favor of the measure, 11 against and 2 abstentions
May 31, 2018	All 21 senators voted to pass Senate Bill No. 1717 also known as the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro. This was senate's version of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).
July 13, 2018	28-member bicameral conference committee approved on the reconciled version of HB 6475 and SB 1717. The proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) was renamed the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).
July 27, 2018	President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Republic Act Number 11054 also known as the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

(R-L) Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chief Negotiator Mohagher Iqbal (R); Malaysian government facilitator Othman Abdul Razak; and Former Chief Philippine government negotiator Rodolfo Garcia after a joint press conference in Kuala Lumpur, 15 November 2007. Photo credit: STR/AFP/Getty Images

Delegation from the Philippine government (GPH), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and members of the International Contact Group (ICG) at the GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in December 7, 2011

Signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)

Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB)

Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB)

43rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks

The GPH Delegation for the 33rd round of Formal Exploratory Talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front composed of the gov't peace panel and the members of the Technical Working Groups for (1) power-sharing, (2) wealth-sharing, and (3) normalizaiton

Members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) under Aquino Administration

The GPH-MILF peace panels, members of the secretariat, and members of the International Contact Group (ICG)

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GPH – MILF Peace Implementing Panels

Signing of the Revised Implementing Guidelines on the Joint Communiqué of 6 May 2002; Guidelines for the Operationalization of the Bangsamoro Normalization Trust Fund (BNTF); the Terms of Reference of the GPH-MILF Joint Communications Committee; and certification extending the mandate of the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) by GPH Implementing Panel Chair Nabil A. Tan and MILF Implementing Panel Chair Mohagher Iqbal on December 14, 2017

Signing of the Executive Order (EO) No. 8 that expands the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC)

Members of the expanded Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC)

Senate hearing on the Bangsamoro Basic Law

Submission of the BTC draft Bangsamoro Basic Law to President Rodrigo Duterte

Presentation of the legislated Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) to the Bangsamoro Constituency

Presentation of the legislated Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) to the Bangsamoro Constituency

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NEGOTIATING PEACE An Insider's Perspective on the Bangsamoros' Struggle for Self-Determination