



MESSAGE AT THE DONORS FORUM
Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, MILF Chairman
11 October 2018, Park Inn Hotel, Davao City

BISMILLAH RAHMANIR RAHEEM

Secretary Jess Dureza, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
UN Resident Coordinator Ola Almgren
Excellencies of the diplomatic corps
Esteemed Development Partners
Colleagues from the MILF
Friends, ladies and gentlemen

Assalmu Alaykum Warahmatuulahi Wabarakutu!

Good Morning!

I feel a deep sense of satisfaction today to be able to converse with you on a range of issues of mutual interest to us, brief you on the progress of our effort towards establishing the Bangsamoro Government, and hopefully map out areas of cooperation and collaboration between us in the forthcoming Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

I shall be as candid as possible in outlining where exactly we are at in our implementation of the CAB, dissect the challenges we confront, present our priorities in the Bangsamoro, and invite your attention into areas where we can interface as we bring together our resources to address many of the challenges we will confront in the transition to the Bangsamoro.

We are very much aware of the big challenges ahead of us especially in the transition.

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The establishment of the Bangsamoro political entity requires the enactment of the Organic Law. This law is not an ordinary legislation as it is a product of the negotiations between us and the government for more than forty years. But beyond this, the Constitution also requires this law to be ratified by the people in a plebiscite unlike ordinary legislation. While we acknowledge the work of Congress in passing this law and of the President's approval of the law, one final hurdle remains, and that is the plebiscite. This plebiscite will make or unmake our decades of negotiations as the result will determine the establishment of the Bangsamoro Government.

We are revolutionaries trained in warfare and with nil experience in elections and electoral processes, that is admitted and so, much of the burden of ensuring the law is ratified and our peace agreement implemented, now lies with the Philippine Government, our partners in the process. We have struggled and sacrificed in the legislative process. We expect also our counterparts in the government to struggle and deliver on the plebiscite even as we contribute our fair share in convincing our people that the Organic Law is for the benefit of all and not just of the MILF. We remain optimistic in the face of challenges.

As we prepare for the transition into the Bangsamoro Government, it is best to keep in mind that the Bangsamoro still lags behind the rest of the country in many human development indices. Poverty incidence remains highest in the region which is more than triple than that of the national average; we are at the poor bottom of literacy rate. Ours is 86.1 % compared to other regions where 90% is their lowest and that is SOKSARGEN. The national average is at 96.5%. Only 32 percent of our population have access to safe water. Our inflation rate of 8.1% for August of this year surpasses the national figure of 6.4% making our population spend 60 percent of their earnings much on food and cut-off on other urgent needs such as health and education. Our people still struggle to access clean water and electricity. Despite having Lake Lanao being the source of around 68 percent of the hydro electric supply for the whole island of Mindanao, our electricity supply is unreliable and expensive compared to major Mindanao cities and selected Asian countries. Our life expectancy rate is at 59 for male and 61 for female. The second leading cause of death for male adult is gunshot wounds leaving behind them orphans and widows.

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This is the snapshot of the region that we will inherit.

These statistics are appalling and it is extremely painful to look at these numbers. It is almost paradoxical that we wallow in poverty amidst an abundance in natural resources.

In the past few months, I have, on several occasions and in different fora, discussed many of the challenges we currently face as we transition into the Bangsamoro. For today's purpose and for the sake of brevity, I will just draw a broad outline of these challenges. There are two major transitions involved and both are critical in ensuring the success of the Bangsamoro.

The first is the transition of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front from a revolutionary organization into governance. The second is the transition from the ARMM to the Bangsamoro.

The transition from rebellion to governance should involve careful and deliberate steps as the risks are enormous. While we have commenced this transition by organizing a political party called the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) and laid the ground work to shift the struggle from an armed revolutionary struggle to one of peaceful and democratic struggle, we are ever conscious of the huge challenges that we are about to confront. Principal among the many challenges we will face is the need to ensure a responsive and timely program for around 30,000 to 40,000* of our combatants who will undergo the decommissioning process. Aside from this, there are also irregular members who need to be transformed into productive members of the population.

These combatants and their communities must truly be transformed. The first recipient of the true dividends of peace must be these individuals and their communities.

The second transition, which is from ARMM to the Bangsamoro involves a deeper understanding of the intricacies of governance and public administration and more importantly of leadership. At the outset, let me confess that as rebels, we are neophytes in this and we will need to learn a lot of new skills to be able to effectively manage this transition.

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The first challenge that we will need to hurdle is how to ensure a successful administrative transition. The phasing out of ARMM bureaucracy and the installation of the new Bangsamoro civil service must be perfectly synchronized to avoid disruption in service delivery. A plan will have to be formalized immediately to ensure that the effectively performing civil servants are made available; new arrivals are fully capacitated; and those who are separated get appropriate severance. This transition plan, and the new civil service code, will have to take into account the fact the ARMM is ensured of a budget only up to December of 2019. If the Phase Out Plan extends up to 2022, there is a need to coordinate with DBM to ensure the agencies that will be phased out beyond 2019 will be provided a budget at least for the salaries**.

The second challenge that must be hurdled is financing the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. We cannot successfully kick start a government that will make a marked difference in the lives of our people if there is no infusion of new money into the region. There must be serious effort to ensure that the BTA receives the Block Grant and Special Development Fund provided for by law. We cannot just inherit the regular programmed resources of the current ARMM for this leaves us without flexibility to respond to emerging and new priorities. Here, we will need the assistance of our good friend Sec Jess Dureza to make this point clear to our partners in government especially the President. A further step into this will be the complementation of our effort from our development partners to achieve a perfect complementation in our efforts and avoid duplicity.

Far more important than these technical preparations of course is the ability to provide an inspiring leadership with a well articulated vision for the Bangsamoro. This vision should reflect and articulate the aspirations of our people and should be broad enough to cover everyone and yet so close to each of us that we can identify with it. This vision should galvanize everyone to rally behind a cause far larger than ourselves and inspire the youth to contribute their share in nation building.

Corollary to this, we intend to be the leaders of the Bangsamoro and not just of our organization or party. We shall serve the interest of our people and not the interest of our clan or tribe. We intend to govern the Bangsamoro and not

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just a part of its territory. Together, we shall achieve what our people truly deserve.

Let me now quickly outline the priorities in the BTA. These priorities are by no means exhaustive and we will continue to evolve this as we engage more partners and stakeholders in the hope that we can respond to the actual needs of our people in an appropriate and timely manner.

1. Enactment of legislations mandated under the Organic Law. There are at least five priority legislations such as the Electoral Code, Civil Service Code, Administrative Code and other legislations that needs to be enacted during the BTA.

2. Review and integration of different plans such as the Bangsamoro Development Plan, The Regional Development Plan of ARMM, the Camp Transformation Plan and other plans. These plans must be reviewed to ensure that we build upon the earlier works that have been done over the years while being conscious of the need to update and make them responsive to current needs.

3. Careful study and design of the appropriate bureaucracy for the Bangsamoro Government to ensure that we achieve the right balance between the size of the bureaucracy and the services that needs to be delivered as well as the appropriate skills required of people in the bureaucracy.

4. Immediate programs that will respond to the pressing social and economic challenges in the Bangsamoro such as poverty, education, health, access to clean water and electricity, job opportunity, agricultural productivity, and access to capital market. This must be complemented with responsive strategic infrastructure in the region such as ports, road network, flood control, and logistics and communication facilities.

5. Special programs for transitioning combatants and their families apart from regular programs of the government like 4Ps, Philhealth, among others to ensure that these programs are tailored-fit to their needs so that they will become productive members of the society.

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6. Rehabilitation and reconstruction of Marawi. Marawi must be quickly rehabilitated and reconstructed as every delay is an opportunity for violent extremism to use it for propaganda and recruitment. Besides, immediate rehabilitation of Marawi is both the right and just thing to do.

7. Developing policy environment on transparency, accountability, and prudent fiscal policy as well as improvement on revenue generation.

8. Energy development and power generation improvement to support the development of industries that will generate jobs and other opportunities.

9. Enhancing security by maximizing the utilization of available legitimate forces on the ground and leveraging on the network of the MILF in the Bangsamoro communities by deploying such joint forces such as the agreed JPSTs or Joint Peace & Security Teams.

10. Ensuring a productive partnership between the Bangsamoro Government and development partners as well as the national government to ensure complementation of programs to maximize results.

This does not mean that we will be introducing new system of cooperation as we have already established some mechanics of cooperation but maybe just to improve or maybe to make it more effective in the present challenges we are facing.

Today, I am grateful for the support and cooperation shown by our development partners. Actually I did not expect as much attendance as this, and I am very thankful to the UN Resident Coordinator Ola Almagren for initiating this and the national government in the conduct of this forum. I am personally grateful to Mr. Ola and Mr. Titon Mitra, UNDP Country Director, who helped in conceiving this occasion and for promptly responding to my request and for generously hosting this forum. I hope to continue this kind of engagement and to ensure that this forum continues to be a venue for productive exchanges amongst us and the donor community. Towards this end, I am proposing to the UN Resident Coordinator to continue to host and make this a regular forum for our continuing engagement. A permanent Secretariat may be jointly organized from the donors and the MILF structures allowing the gradual integration of some of our people so that a transfer of

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technology may allow us to continue this forum when the BTA is established. I am grateful to the support of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, who immediately responded positively after extending him an invitation. I look forward to this continuing partnership. We have been partners for decades in the peace process. And finally we may see the fruition of our dream for a peaceful Bangsamoro and a peaceful and developed country in the future Inshaa Allah.

Thank you very much and good morning to everyone. Wassalamu alaykum.

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