

Speech of Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, MILF chairman, for 2nd Anniversary Commemoration of CAB Signing

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Bismillahir Rahmaanir Raheem. Alhamdulillah. Wassalaatu Wassalaamu Ala Rasulillah. Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatoh

To His Excellency Tengku Dato' Ab Ghafar Tengku Mohamed, OPAPP Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles, GPH Peace Panel Chair Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, MILF Peace Panel Chair Brother Mohagher Iqbal, our reliable members of the different normalization mechanisms of the peace process both from GPH and MILF, members of the International Contact Group, Third Party Monitoring Team, Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Committee, Joint Normalization Committee, International Monitoring Team, the international donor communities, today's awardees, to my Bangsamoro brothers and sisters, and fellow peace advocates, warm greetings to you all.

It cannot be more obvious: Peace has been elusive to this part of the country. Much hope to finally grasp this ever-elusive prize of peace was strung around the anticipated passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. But the elation that greeted the submission of the draft in 2014 soon evaporated when both Houses of Congress failed to submit what could have been the historic piece of legislation to end the more than four (4) decades of war and conflict in the Southern Philippines.

This recent development on the fate of the peace process would easily discourage any optimist. But let me tell you, a hurried but flawed outcome would have been counterproductive and could have added to the cycle of distrust between the parties. To simplify, anything below the existing status quo is objectionable to the MILF.

Turning our backs on the peace process would be a mistake. After all, we have the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro intact, and which is over and above the Bangsamoro Basic Law. This silver lining among the dark clouds is the legitimacy of the CAB and its binding effect to the GPH and the MILF that forged the mutually acceptable agreement two (2) years ago. It will take patience, steadfastness and leadership on both sides to reach the ultimate goal of achieving just and lasting peace. And even if the roadmap was not met, the signed CAB would at least ensure that commitments are kept and compliance is demandable. Such strong words: commitment and compliance.

It is worth reiterating that the CAB sets up a new relationship between the Central Government and the Bangsamoro Government that would involve fulfilling the many legal obligations each party has assumed to put an end to conflict. To name a few, the Central Government agreed to relinquish some governmental powers to the Bangsamoro Government, and to share in the revenues generated within the region. The MILF, on the other hand, agreed to terms of decommissioning where combatants would turn over weapons and enjoy various developmental and capacity-building programs as part of the normalization process.

The decision on the part of the MILF to agree to a symbolic decommissioning in June 2015 was a gesture of good faith to give real and lasting peace a chance. For the record, we did not rise up in arms if the continued nonchalance to our causes had not provoked us to agitate for a remedy. But we remain committed to strengthen the ceasefire mechanisms, through our able and competent MILF representatives in the various peace process infrastructures, such as, the Joint Normalization Committee, the CCCH, AHJAG, Joint Peace and Security Committee, Joint Peace and Security Team, Task Force on Decommissioned Combatants and their Communities, and Joint Task Force on Camps Transformation, to name a few.

What comes next after this is both a challenge and an opportunity to all stakeholders since these crucial times shall ultimately decide the genuine willingness of the parties, more so the government, to put an end to conflict in the region. We know that the government has a critical role in bringing peace, and we want to reach that optimal point where we do not need to question the commitment of the government to improve security, peace and services to our people.

No one can be certain of the policies or priorities of the next administration. This is why, more than ever, we need to assert the CAB and its implementation, which ensures the most reasonable framework for a sustainable basis for peace, stability and development. It would be the height of injustice to rob the Bangsamoro once more of its rights asserted in the CAB. It would likewise be the height of humiliation for the government to sidetrack the process especially with numerous sets of eyes carefully observing and scrutinizing the implementation of the internationally-acclaimed agreement.

We should focus on post-agreement implementation. Acknowledging that the CAB lives on and binds the parties is a good start to guide the incoming administration. Whoever wins the elections must honor the CAB and place it among the top of his or her agenda to ensure that everyone's obligations are fulfilled. He or she must recognize that while the risk of failure is high, so are the costs of failure. Not only would a resumption of hostilities jeopardize the gains of the peace process, it would also undermine longer-term political and economic reforms for the country.

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 CAB. The gains of the peace process especially the FAB and CAB should be preserved.

Allow me then, at this point, to commend the various personalities and entities that helped fashion the political dialogue of the peace process that led to the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro: First, the Government of the Philippines through the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and the GPH Peace Negotiating Panel. The MILF Leadership and the MILF Peace Negotiating Panel. This includes all of those who have been part of the negotiations throughout its more than 17 years and even prior thereto.

Our most special thanks go out to His Excellency Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak; His Excellency Dr. Mahathir Mohammad under whose term of office as Prime Minister the peace negotiations were done in Malaysia; His Excellency Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu,

Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Malaysian Facilitator, His Excellency Tengku Dato' Ab Ghafar Tengku Mohamed, and Secretariat.

We also will never forget the tireless efforts and support of all the State and Non-State actors that compose the International Contact Group (ICG), the Government of the United Kingdom, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and its international NGO components, Conciliation Resources, Mohammadiyah, The Asia Foundation, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT), the International Monitoring Team (or the IMT), and its Civilian Protection Component, Malaysia, Brunei, Libya, Japan, Norway, Indonesia, and the European Union, the Non-Violent Peace Force, Mindanao Peoples Caucus, Mindanao Human Rights Action Center, and Muslim Organization of Government Officials and Professionals, and to the numerous world organizations and countries that have signified strong support to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro such as the United Nations, the European Union, United States of America, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We likewise extend our deep appreciation to the organizers of this CAB 2nd Anniversary Commemoration, which seeks not only to remember but most importantly, to honor, acknowledge and recognize that the CAB is active and alive.

Finally, to our Bangsamoro brothers and sisters, let this occasion be a reason to stand up and stand strong for peace. We have not come this far to allow the CAB to be put to waste. Let cool heads and good tempers ultimately prevail. Remember that the greatest interest of the Bangsamoro is our primordial concern. We need to solidify as a people and strengthen our resolve more than ever, for a united Bangsamoro struggle. The struggle does not and may never end, but every step closer to peace is already progress. We must realize that we have never been more ready for peace. Stand up for peace! Long live the CAB!

Thank you everyone, and may we have a pleasant rest of the afternoon. Wassalaam.

Delivered at Notre dame University Gymnasium on March 28, 2016.