

Welcome Remarks of MILF Peace Panel Chair Mohagher Iqbal

Mohagher Iqba | 28 March 2016

Commemoration of the First Anniversary of the Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) 28 March 2016, Monday @ Notre Dame University, Cotabato City

COURTESIES

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 as well 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, information dissemination of all sorts, 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 those high hopes were dimmed or shut-out, we have a flurry of frustrations, of anger, of doubt, and of 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 germ of truth to this opinion. We are all agreed that without the BBL, the CAB will never be fully implemented. While some aspects of CAB can be started, yet 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; or to pursue further the peace process, the BBL especially; or 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 in 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!