

## 'As is, where is'

Mohagher Iqbal |15 February 2016

The Bangsamoro people shall be free and in order to be free, the Bangsamoro shall overcome injustice with justice, suffering with compassion, poverty with generosity, ill-will with good, prejudice with understanding, and death with life.

While the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), a crucial legislation towards the fulfilment of peace in our land, is not going to happen under the current administration, there should be no doubt about this -- the Bangsamoro will be established, insha Allah. Truth, justice, and goodness will always prevail. It is only be a matter of time. This is the trajectory of history. Our resolve, patience and determination to build the Bangsamoro is stronger and more passionate than ever. This failure to pass the BBL does not weaken us. It strengthens us.

We claim our right to self-determination, to build a better future for our children free from fear, hunger and ignorance, to live our lives to conform to our faith and principles. We claim this. The Bangsamoro is on the right side of history. Thus, we make this appeal:

To the Bangsamoro people, do not despair. Do not be disheartened. Be patient. We shall overcome. Console yourselves. The struggle for liberation is a long path. We need to prepare for a long and arduous journey. But it will be worth it. There is an end to our sacrifices and sufferings. Your MILF has struggled and negotiated for you. This is for you, for your children and your children's children.

To the political leaders in the Bangsamoro, let us unite under the banner of justice and freedom for the Bangsamoro people. For too many times in the past and which continues to be true in the present, the elite vested interests opposed to the Bangsamoro have used our disunity and political fragmentation as an effective weapon for the continuing oppression of our people. When will we wake up to see that they are using divide and conquer tactics against us? When will we wake up to see that until we transcend ourselves and offer it in the service of the larger and more important task of liberation, we shall never succeed to prevent the political, economic and socio-cultural extinction of the Bangsamoro people?

To the Filipino people, let us work together overcome the barriers to peace, justice and reconciliation. Let us end the war, the suffering, the tragedy and pain of our peoples, of the soldiers and our heroic fighters, of our mothers and sisters, of our children. Let us try to live quiet and peaceful lives. Let us not continue to live in fear of each other. Let us build a tomorrow for all our children. We know deep in your hearts that you desire the same things for your children. You are human. And we are human beings as well. Why can't we treat each other with dignity and compassion?

To our friends in the diplomatic corps and the international community, we thank you for your continued solidarity and support to the cause of peace and reconciliation. Your support, in many

ways, helped us forged the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), prevent a return to armed conflict and minimize the horrific impact of war.

To the Government of Malaysia, the Bangsamoro people looks on with deep gratitude and thanks to your excellent facilitation and mediation in the peace negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Bangsamoro People will never forget the esteem that you have bestowed on us. You are a big brother to us!

To President Benigno S. Aquino III and the Philippine Government negotiating panel, we thank you for negotiating with us in good faith and for pushing the negotiations closer to what is required to bring justice and reconciliation. We have learned our lessons. The problem is structural and systemic.

However, as a result of the failure of government, particularly Congress to pass the BBL, there is widespread frustration on the ground by our people and members of the MILF. They accused the government of resorting again to delaying tactic and just managing the conflict in Mindanao. .

In view of this, the MILF and government shall jointly find ways and means to address this dangerous situation and avoid actions that may increase the frustrations. We must provide them hope that there is chance for passage of CAB-compliant BBL whoever will be the next president. This must be in the form of firm and unequivocal commitment from government that it shall continue to comply with its obligations under the CAB, particularly on the passage of CAB-compliant BBL, which is a unilateral obligation of government. On the part of the MILF, we assure everyone including the international community that we will adhere to the CAB and comply with its obligations. And finally in order to preserve the gains of the peace process, government and MILF should journey together in faithfully implementing the CAB, guided by the principle of "as is, where is". In other words, the most immediate step is either the BBL will be refiled in Congress or a new basic law, faithful to the letter and spirit of the CAB, will be crafted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which will most likely have new faces as members. This is the only way forward.

Thank you and good morning to all!

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Opening Statement of Mohagher Iqbal During the Special Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on February 10-11, 2016.