

SPEECH OF MINISTER MOHAGHER IQBAL
Minister of Basic, Higher and Technical Education

**Launch of World Bank Study – “Unlocking the Potential of the Bangsamoro
People through the Alternative Learning System”**

1:00 PM, November 19, 2019

Al Nor Convention Center, Cotabato City

Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

It is my privilege to welcome all of you to this afternoon's activity, which shall discuss an important area of our work in the Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education – the development of the alternative learning system (ALS) for the Bangsamoro.

My appointment as the Minister of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education was due to extraordinary circumstances. Of course, I am speaking of the armed struggle in the Bangsamoro since 1972 and the peace process that began in the late 1990s to address long-standing issues that fueled the conflict in Mindanao. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), in fact, was a product of the negotiated peace settlement between the Philippine Government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

It is within this political landscape that we are implementing the commitments stated in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro 2014, and we have started with the transition from ARMM to BARMM. Education is one of the priority areas of the Bangsamoro Autonomous government. The BARMM, as stipulated in the Bangsamoro Organic Law or Republic Act 11054, will pursue a “complete and integrated system of quality education” in the Bangsamoro.

Ergo, the Education Ministry shall establish an educational system that exemplifies a high standard with a balanced, comprehensive, and inclusive academic program supported by a clear strategic framework and robust infrastructure, including better school facilities and competent teachers and education managers. In terms of learning and development, we will ensure that no Bangsamoro child – regardless of age, ethnicity, religion – will be left behind.

At present, the Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education is working to address a myriad of problems affecting our educational system. High dropout rates of our learners, lack of access to education services (especially in the remote areas of the Bangsamoro), weak to nonexistent school facilities, ineffective teacher management processes are just a few of the issues that we need to resolve in this transition period.

Given the magnitude of challenges faced by the Ministry, also exacerbated by the negative impact of the armed conflict, we must maximize all available resources and pursue solutions that are strategic and comprehensive. Moreover, our collective efforts should be guided by the principle of Moral Governance as espoused by no less than the Chief Minister himself.

I understand the Alternative Learning System is one modality we can use in the Bangsamoro for the benefit of our children and young people. As the name suggests, the ALS serves as a practical option to the existing formal instruction. ALS is especially beneficial for learners who, due to difficult circumstances, will need to avail of functional literacy skills outside of formal schooling.

Of course, we cannot implement just any alternative learning system in the Bangsamoro. The ALS should be based on the existing socio-economic and cultural realities in the BARMM. And I hope this study by the World Bank will provide the Education Ministry the recommendations towards creating a viable alternative learning system in the Bangsamoro. We are grateful for your efforts and look forward to the study's findings, which shall contribute to our efforts. For instance, the Ministry is currently implementing the Abot Kaalaman sa Pamilyang Bangsamoro (AKAP) program, which aims to bring education services closer to Bangsamoro communities.

ALS is part of the implementation design of the AKAP Program, which also serves as a mechanism for policy engagement and convergence of programs with education stakeholders, including local government and civil society organizations. The Education Pathways for Peace in Mindanao PMO and the Australian Government are supporting the Ministry in this endeavor.

I want to take this opportunity to share with you that we are in the process of drafting the Bangsamoro Education Code, which is one of the priority bills in the BOL. Generally, the Education Code shall govern the education system in the Bangsamoro and set the strategic direction for the implementation of a balanced, accessible, and high standard educational

structure. It shall underline the mandate, responsibilities, and relationship of the BARMM, local government, the private sector, and all stakeholders to develop accessible and quality education in the Bangsamoro.

Before I conclude my opening message, I want to assure all of you that change is coming in the BARMM, *Insha' Allah*. The bulk of the improvements are yet to be felt, but it began with the resolute commitment to pursue Moral Governance in the Bangsamoro. The Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education has already introduced crucial reforms, and these were exhibited through:

1. The hiring of teachers,
2. The creation of monitoring and evaluation teams,
3. The bidding process for the construction of classrooms,
4. Reshuffling of school division superintendents,
5. Increasing the salaries of contractual employees; and
6. Pursuing expedient partnerships with various local and international actors.

With your support, we shall build on our gains so far and successfully realize the Education Ministry's mandate and marching orders from the Chief Minister.

I want to thank the World Bank for the support to the Education Ministry and also to the Bangsamoro peace process. I am also grateful to all of you who took the time to participate in this significant event. Despite the challenges, we should remain optimistic and continue to serve the children and people of the Bangsamoro with vigor and commitment. Thank you very much, and good afternoon to all!



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