

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

**BARMM Educational System: Plans and Direction<sup>1</sup>**

35<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Council of Teachers +1 Convention

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***Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.***

I want to acknowledge all esteemed Education leaders and professionals present in this significant event, particularly to the Brunei Malay Teachers Association and the Philippine Public-School Teachers Association. I also want to thank Hji Anton Bin Ahad, Dr. Kahar Macasayon, Dir. Somerado Pandapatan, and Atty. Nasser Marohomsalic for inviting me to this excellent event. I consider it a privilege to speak on behalf of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and share our priority areas for the Bangsamoro.

My appointment as the Minister of Basic, Higher and Technical Education is borne out of 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. It is also because of the peace process between the Philippine Government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that I found myself serving as the Minister of Basic Higher and Technical Education in this transition phase of establishing the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

For those not be familiar with the GPH-MILF peace process, I should give some background information. The ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), or Republic Act 11054, and the subsequent founding of the BARMM are stipulated in the negotiated peace settlement signed by the GPH and the MILF. I am referring to the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), the four Annexes on Transitional Arrangements and Modalities, Wealth-Sharing, Power-Sharing, and Normalization, and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). We cannot merely implement the CAB and FAB, which are political documents, without a legal instrument. That is why the BOL was drafted, which contains the critical provisions of the peace agreements, and lobbied actively for its approval in Philippine

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<sup>1</sup> Updated version of Minister Iqbal's speech delivered in the 35<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Council of Teachers + 1 Convention in Brunei.

Congress. We figuratively sweated blood before Philippine Congress passed it into law in July 2018 – almost six (6) years of hard, tedious, nerve-wracking legislative process.

The BOL embodies the aspiration of the Bangsamoro people for their right to self-determination, or the right to chart their own political, economic, socio-cultural future and express our distinct culture and traditions. With the BARMM in place, we hope to make that aspiration for self-determination a reality. To avoid any confusion, I want to reiterate that the BARMM is a significant part of the Republic of the Philippines and it is stated clearly in the BOL. However, the BARMM has a list of powers it can exercise autonomously from the central government. One of which is the administration over the educational system in the Bangsamoro, hence my appointment as Education Minister.

Admittedly, I've only been Education Minister for six (6) months. But I am determined to carry out my mandate to serve the Bangsamoro people and fulfill the directives of my principal, the BARMM Chief Minister Ahod B. Ebrahim. At present, the BARMM's focus is the implementation of priority programs on education, social services, health, and the economic upliftment of the Bangsamoro people, all indicated in the Chief Minister's 12-Point Priority Agenda. No doubt the intricacies of the bureaucracy are complicated even for the most experienced executive. Moreover, poor governance can lead to complications that can affect the well-being of our people in the long run. Hence, the BARMM observes the principle of "Moral Governance" as espoused by the Chief Minister. In a nutshell, it is about employing ethical values in governance wherein the obligation of every official or leader is to effectively and efficiently implement lawful programs for the general welfare of the people. I think our adherence to moral governance revitalizes hope in the ability of the BARMM government to deliver essential services.

Education is paramount for the BARMM, not only because it is a fundamental right of all peoples in the Bangsamoro, but it has significance in Islam. As Muslims, we believe that every act is a form of worship, and seeking knowledge is no different. The first word revealed to Prophet Mohammad (SAW) as appeared in the Quran is: "Iqra," which means "read" – which is knowledge. Education addresses both the temporal and spiritual needs of a person. And the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) said two things about intelligence and learning: (1) "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave"; and (2) "Seek knowledge even up to the point of going to China." Knowledge is also a cycle: we learn to improve ourselves; we implement or apply what we learn in our lives, and then we teach others.

Education is discussed extensively in the BOL. Article IX, Section 16 states that: “It shall be a top priority of the Bangsamoro Government to establish, maintain, and support a complete and integrated system of quality education, which shall be a subsystem of the national education system. The Bangsamoro Government shall develop an educational framework relevant and responsive to the needs, ideals, and aspirations of the Bangsamoro people. For this purpose, the Bangsamoro Government shall conform to the minimum standards set by the National Government.”

In addition to public schools and academic institutions, private schools, including sectarian and nonsectarian establishments shall be supervised by the Bangsamoro government. However, I should emphasize that the Bangsamoro regional educational system shall not discriminate against the sectarian educational institutions in any manner or form, and they are free to propagate their religious beliefs. Moreover, any college, school or university existing in the BARMM as of the effectivity of the BOL and other schools to be established after that, shall be governed by their respective charters.

Under the BOL, the BARMM shall endeavor to improve or strengthen the (a) vocational, technical, non-formal, and special education; (b) *Madaris* educational system, including Islamic and Arabic Studies; (c) physical education and sports development; and (d) science, research, inventions, technology education. Moreover, we shall institutionalize peace education in all levels as well as the creation of a tribal university system in the BARMM to address the higher education needs of the non-Moro indigenous peoples. Moreover, the ministry is responsible for drafting and submitting the Bangsamoro Education Code, which is one of the priority bills stipulated in the BARMM.

The MBHTE is the largest agency in the BARMM, where around 60 percent of the employees report here, including teachers, school nurses, and other non-teaching personnel. Commensurate to the size of the organization is the gamut of its problems and difficulties. Unfortunately, we do have serious resource gaps, and our educational system is unsatisfactory compared to the standard in Metro Manila. Nevertheless, we in the BARMM shall build on the gains of the peace process and institute relevant programs and reforms that would have an immediate impact on the lives of our people. The fifty years of the Bangsamoro struggle provides us the needed inspiration to move forward and fulfill our respective mandates. So allow me to enumerate the general direction or priority areas of the Education Ministry.

1. **Approval and implementation of an inclusive and relevant Bangsamoro Education Code.** The code shall govern the education system in the Bangsamoro and set the strategic direction for the implementation of a balanced educational structure and standard in the Bangsamoro.
2. **Prioritizing our children and young people.** In the MBHTE, our rallying cry is “no child in the Bangsamoro left behind.” We, therefore, have to improve the educational system in the Bangsamoro and look into policies, programs, and activities to enhance the performance of every child, from the accessibility of essential school facilities and materials to the quality of their teachers. Moreover, we aim to have **1 million children** enrolled in the BARMM.
3. **Accessible education for all.** We envision that the educational system in the Bangsamoro shall embody a quality standard with a broad, relevant, and inclusive curriculum. Education in the Bangsamoro should be accessible to all students – Moro, Christian or IP or in Bahasa Malay, “Orang Asli” – and will guarantee equal opportunity to all graduates regardless of their chosen field. Moreover, we will be employing appropriate teaching and learning methods based on existing context as well as customary traditions, such as those practiced by the IP communities.
4. **One professional per family.** We aim to produce (at least) one professional in every family in the BARMM. It will not matter if our young professionals will graduate from a traditional academic institution or a technical-vocational training center. What is essential these establishments offer a curriculum that is relevant for employability – and save us from Hellfire, in the day hereafter.
5. **Quality teachers and education managers.** To help our students, we need excellent teachers and school administrators. The Bangsamoro teachers and school officials should be well trained, competent, and adequately compensated. It would be in the best interest of the Ministry that appropriate policy and institutional reforms are in place for better teacher recruitment, deployment, and performance management. Hence, we recently organized the Regional Human Resource Merit Promotional and Selection Board to oversee the screening process. We shall endeavor to develop an effective professional development program for our teachers.

6. **School as a safe space for learning and development.** In addition to competent teachers and administrators, our schools should be secure and have the appropriate facilities to encourage learning. Any academic or technical institution should serve as space where bright ideas are born, nurtured, and realized. It should be a place for innovation where every student shall have the opportunity to develop his or her interests and decide a career path that would be beneficial also to the Bangsamoro.
7. **The welfare of students with disabilities.** Furthermore, we should create safe and inclusive school environments for students with disabilities and additional needs. A comprehensive program for them would include developing the knowledge and skills of school staff and giving schools clearer guidance and specialist support to better respond to the needs of students with disabilities.
8. **Comprehensive health and nutrition program in schools.** We hope our young people and future generations would be the vanguards of tomorrow. Hence, we need to guarantee that they are not only well-educated but in good health. Education and health will help our children and youth to take on the challenges of leading the Bangsamoro nation in the future. A healthy body produces a healthy and sound mind, which is critical for future leaders in their decision-making process and nation-building.
9. **Encourage parents to invest in education.** The MBHTE hopes to encourage the parents to invest in education and respond to their children's intellectual needs. We have to make them understand that without training, their children are robbed of a potentially bright future.
10. **Working with BARMM ministries and local community leaders.** The MBHTE shall work closely with other BARMM ministries for programs of mutual interests. Moreover, the regional office shall work with community leaders and local government units in the implementation of relevant educational programs and other frontline services at the community level.
11. **Good governance practices.** Mindful of the need to improve the Bangsamoro educational system, we must introduce reforms within the regional government. For instance, one of our priorities is the improvement of the Ministry's internal processing systems to promote good governance practices and transparency and



accountability. In the MBHTE, we will not tolerate any exercise that could trigger poor governance and corruption. In connection to this, we have plans of establishing a robust and functioning monitoring and evaluation system to record and assess the progress of education programs and projects implemented in communities.

**12. Learning good practices from international experience.** We need to learn from the best education practices among ASEAN countries and peoples especially the Malay world – Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. We look to you for inspiration especially in the field of Islamic education.

To say that the Ministry has an impossible task ahead is an understatement. But despite these challenges, we remain optimistic. A famous saying goes, "Sometimes when things are falling apart, they may be falling into place." Slowly but surely, we in the BARMM shall build on the gains of the peace process and institute relevant programs and reforms that would have an immediate impact on the lives of our people. The fifty years of the Bangsamoro struggle provides us the needed inspiration to move forward.

I hope my speech proved to be inspiring and informative, as well. I am grateful to the organizers, Brunei Malay Teachers Association, and the Philippine Public-School Teachers Association, for their kind invitation to this important gathering. I look forward to future events to discuss topics of mutual interest and exchange invaluable ideas.

Finally, let me take this rare opportunity to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Government and the people of Brunei Darussalam for their continued support to the peace process in Mindanao by way of sending your military contingent to the International Monitoring Team (IMT) which oversees the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the MILF and the GPH. The ceasefire observed by the GPH and MILF is one of the reasons why the peace negotiations was successful. Furthermore, in view of the prevailing peace in the Bangsamoro, I appeal to our brothers and sisters in Brunei to consider investing in business in our region. This will greatly help your Bangsamoro brothers and sisters after almost 50 years of hard conflict.

WABILLAHU TAUFIQ WAL HIDAYAH. Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh. Thank you again very much!

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