

SPEECH OF MINISTER MOHAGHER IQBAL
Minister of Basic Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE)

**Session 3: “Reforms in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
towards Good Governance”**

44th Annual National Conference,
Personnel Officers Association of the Philippines, Inc. (POAP)
3:30 to 5:00 PM, December 4, 2019, Hotel Rembrandt, Quezon City

Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

Good afternoon to all of you present here today! I want to thank the Personnel Officers Association of the Philippines, Inc. and its Executive Officers led by former USEC Loreta G. Ayson for their kind invitation to this event. I consider it a privilege to attend gatherings on behalf of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) wherein I have the opportunity to convey a message of friendship and expound the priorities of the Bangsamoro government.

I was requested by the organizers to discuss **“Reforms in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region towards Good Governance.”** I should start by providing the context of why a new autonomous government was created and why leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are now part of it.

Extraordinary circumstances led to the creation of the BARMM. It required the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), or Republic Act No. 11054. In turn, the BOL is the legal entrenchment of 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).

The FAB and the CAB were the negotiated peace agreements signed by the Philippine Government and the MILF after 17 years of arduous and challenging peace negotiations. The peace talks are part of the comprehensive peace process between the GPH and the MILF that aims to address the long-standing issues and injustices that fueled armed struggle in Mindanao in the late 1960s. The GPH and the MILF 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 Congress for six (6) years.

The body that was tasked to draft the BOL, previously known as the Bangsamoro Basic Law or BBL, was the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC). The BTC was created by an Executive Order signed by both Presidents Benigno Simeon Aquino III and Rodrigo Roa Duterte. I was part of both BTCs, first as its Chairman from 2013 to 2016, and then as a member from 2016 to 2018. It was in the BTC when I first began my government service.

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. Article V of the BOL outlines these responsibilities.

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 articulated in the BARMM Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim's 12-Point Priority Agenda. Moreover, we are now in this transition phase of laying the foundation for a robust, efficient, and morally upright regional government that genuinely represents the Bangsamoro people and readily protects their well-being and future. Parallel to this endeavor of setting up a new governance structure, we are busy responding to the everyday concerns of our people and trying to mitigate the negative impact of the armed conflict.

No doubt, the intricacies of the bureaucracy are complicated even for the most experienced executive or government official. The complexity of running a government is aggravated when certain officials use their position of authority for illegitimate private gain. Corruption undermines good governance by subverting formal and legal processes. It erodes the institutional capacity of government to deliver services if lawful procedures are violated, resources are siphoned off, and public offices are bought and sold. Unfortunately, chronic corrupt practices have plagued the Bangsamoro region.

Corruption, in any form, is unacceptable to the MILF-led BARMM. We will have wasted fifty years of our struggle for peace, justice, and the right to self-determination if such disgraceful practices become prevalent. Furthermore, we would be betraying the trust and

confidence of the Bangsamoro people. 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 public goods and services.

While I cannot speak for the BARMM as a whole regarding reforms towards good governance, I can cite my office, the Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education. The Education Ministry is the largest agency in the BARMM, where more than 60 percent of the employees report here: teachers and education managers, school nurses, and other non-teaching personnel. Commensurate to the size of the organization is the gamut of its problems and difficulties. High dropout rates of our learners, lack of access to education services, especially in the remote areas of the Bangsamoro, and inadequate teacher management processes are just a few of the issues that the Ministry needs to address.

When I first assumed the position of Education Minister, the Chief Minister’s first directive was to “bury the ghosts” of the then DepED-ARMM, including the “wandering spirits” in the payroll system. In this regard, we had to address the inconsistencies in our payroll system. With assistance from our international partners (Education Pathways for Peace Program and the Australian Government), we are conducting a human resource verification process to deal with this problem once and for all.

In addition to dealing with “ghost employees,” we have introduced crucial reforms in the Ministry promoting good governance practices in the last nine (9) months. These were exhibited through:

1. The observation of appropriate working hours;
2. The reiteration of no collection of fees and other incentives from teacher applicants;
3. The setting up of a data management system to promote evidence-based planning and decision-making;
4. The review of existing education programs, such as the school-based feeding program;
5. The creation of proper procedures in the hiring of teachers through the Regional Human Resource Merit Promotional and Selection Board;
6. The establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System, or MEMO System, for transparency and accountability.

7. Undergoing the proper bidding process for the construction of classrooms;
8. The reshuffling of school division superintendents, the first time in 20 years;
9. Our improved performance in the *2019 Palarong Pambansa*; and
10. Improving the salaries and employment status of MBHTE personnel.
 - I have promoted 97 provisional teachers from the division of Sulu to regular employees, which became official last May 3, 2019.
 - We increased the basic pay of contractual employees from P 7,500.00 to 11,500.00 in the lowest ladder.

The Education Ministry is just starting to introduce the necessary reforms that would ensure efficient service delivery even to the most remote and vulnerable communities of our region. Included of course are our children and young people.

Despite our accomplishments, we are at the early stages of the transition from ARMM to BARMM. I would, therefore, like to share the significant challenges facing the BARMM related to good governance.

1. **Since the BARMM is MILF-led, we need to deliver and prove that we are also competent administrators or managers.** Transforming MILF leaders into instant technocrats or bureaucrats will take time. The management styles would have to evolve in the process of learning the ways around bureaucratic governance without losing their tried and tested leadership styles. Furthermore, we need to develop the next generation leaders whose hearts and commitments are for the people and will continue the struggle for RSD.
2. **Ensure the implementation of the BOL and all priority programs of the BARMM:** education, social services, health, and the economic upliftment of the Bangsamoro people. These interventions would have a tremendous and immediate impact on the lives of our people.
3. **Undoing almost 30 years of practices under the ARMM that would harm the BARMM's authority or legitimacy as an autonomous government and its ability to uplift the lives of its constituents.** We in the BARMM have to ensure that the priorities of our constituents are also our priorities. As BARMM officials, we have to continually ask ourselves: how far are we in addressing the basic needs of our people? Indeed, we cannot afford to be detached from the Bangsamoro people.

4. **The BARMM needs to clarify that it is not a regular local government unit, nor it is under the authority of any cabinet-level office of the national government.** As per the BOL, we have appropriate mechanisms that will facilitate discussions and decision-making between the national government and the BARMM on critical policy areas and governance issues. Article VI of the BOL covers the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) instruments necessary to resolve the problems between the BARMM and the national government. At the moment, both the BARMM and GPH's representatives to the IGR body have been appointed. We are trying to organize its first meeting so we can formally engage on matters that fall within the ambit of the mechanism.
5. **Parallel to the implementation of the BARMM priority programs is the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and nation-building of the Bangsamoro.** This would include the implementation of all commitments mentioned in the signed peace agreements, such as Normalization, i.e., the healing process through transitional justice and reconciliation, should even start immediately. Healing is an integral part of transformation and peacebuilding.
6. **Purposefully engage and manage all stakeholders in the Bangsamoro, including those who have vested interests in the BARMM.** It is essential to be aware of all key players in the landscape where the Bangsamoro government operates and comprehend their connections, interests, and perceptions. There are situations where it is necessary to accommodate individual personalities for political reasons. The challenge is how to make them work for the benefit of the Bangsamoro region.
7. **Strategic communications to communicate our achievements so far and also manage spoilers.** Spoilers are changing the narrative of the Bangsamoro struggle and questioning the legitimacy of the MILF as the leading entity in the BARMM. They are also engaged in "influence-peddling" by organizing forums, studies, or researches, which altogether are aimed at changing the necessary course of events. However, we are not interested in petty or tit-for-tat politics, especially on social media. The BARMM would instead resort to appropriate and innovative means, such as strategic communications, to manage spoilers.

Despite the challenges, I want to assure all of you that meaningful 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. I should report that the Bangsamoro Transition Authority recently approved the Bangsamoro Appropriations Act, which is the BARMM's budget for 2020. The highest budget belongs to the Ministry of Basic Higher and Technical Education, amounting to around PHP 19 Billion. With this budget, plus our existing partnerships with different peace and development partners, the Education Ministry is in a better position to ensure that no Bangsamoro child will be left behind in terms of learning and development.

With a budget in place, I am confident that the year 2020 will be a milestone year for us in the BARMM. The tasks seem impossible, but fifty years of the Bangsamoro struggle provides us the needed inspiration to move forward. While many of us in the BARMM are new to government service, we are determined to carry out our mandate to serve the Bangsamoro people and fulfill the directives of the Chief Minister.

I hope my presentation was informative and fitting for this session. I am grateful to the POAP, Inc., for their kind invitation to this important gathering. I look forward to future events to discuss topics of mutual interest and exchange invaluable ideas.

Asalaamu Alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh. Thank you again very much and good afternoon!



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