

Message of Minister Mohagher Iqbal
Ministry of Basic, Higher, Technical Education
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Banquet for Scholars and Intellectuals hosted by the
Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Philippines

21 May 2019, Ibrahim Convention Hall,
EM Manor Hotel, Cotabato City

Asalaamu alaikum warakmatulahi taala wa barakatuh.

May Peace and Mercy and Blessings of Allah be Upon You.

The Honorable Ahod Balawag Ebrahim, BARMM Interim Chief Minister;

The Honorable Fares Bin Saad Al-Mutairi, Religious Attaché of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Philippines;

Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I want to express my gratitude to the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Philippines for their kind invitation to this impressive gathering. Though I would not necessarily consider myself an intellectual, it is my honor and it is an act of virtue to be in the company of learned and admirable people. Your commitment is an inspiration to the younger generation of Muslims. Education, after all, does not only focus on obtaining technical knowledge. It is also about spiritual and moral development and values formation, of which both the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah provide.

There is no doubt that the Philippines and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have robust and productive bilateral relations. Modern political and economic ties between our countries can be traced centuries ago when Arab traders and Muslim missionaries first visited these shores. We should also emphasize that Saudi Arabia is also a friend of the peace process between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, through its membership in the peace architecture (i.e., International Contact Group) and the observer status granted to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

After the successful conduct of plebiscite for the approval of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) last January 2019, the peace process is now in the transition phase beginning with the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. In addition to my role as Chairman of the MILF Peace Implementing Panel, I also have the privilege of serving

the BARMM as the Minister of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education. It is a “super ministry”; sixty percent (60%) of the employees of the BARMM are in the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, around 27,000 employees, including teachers, are in the ministry.

Investing in education is paramount for the BARMM. Education is discussed extensively in the BOL. Article IX, Section 16 of the BOL 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. The Bangsamoro Government shall institutionalize peace education in all levels of education.”

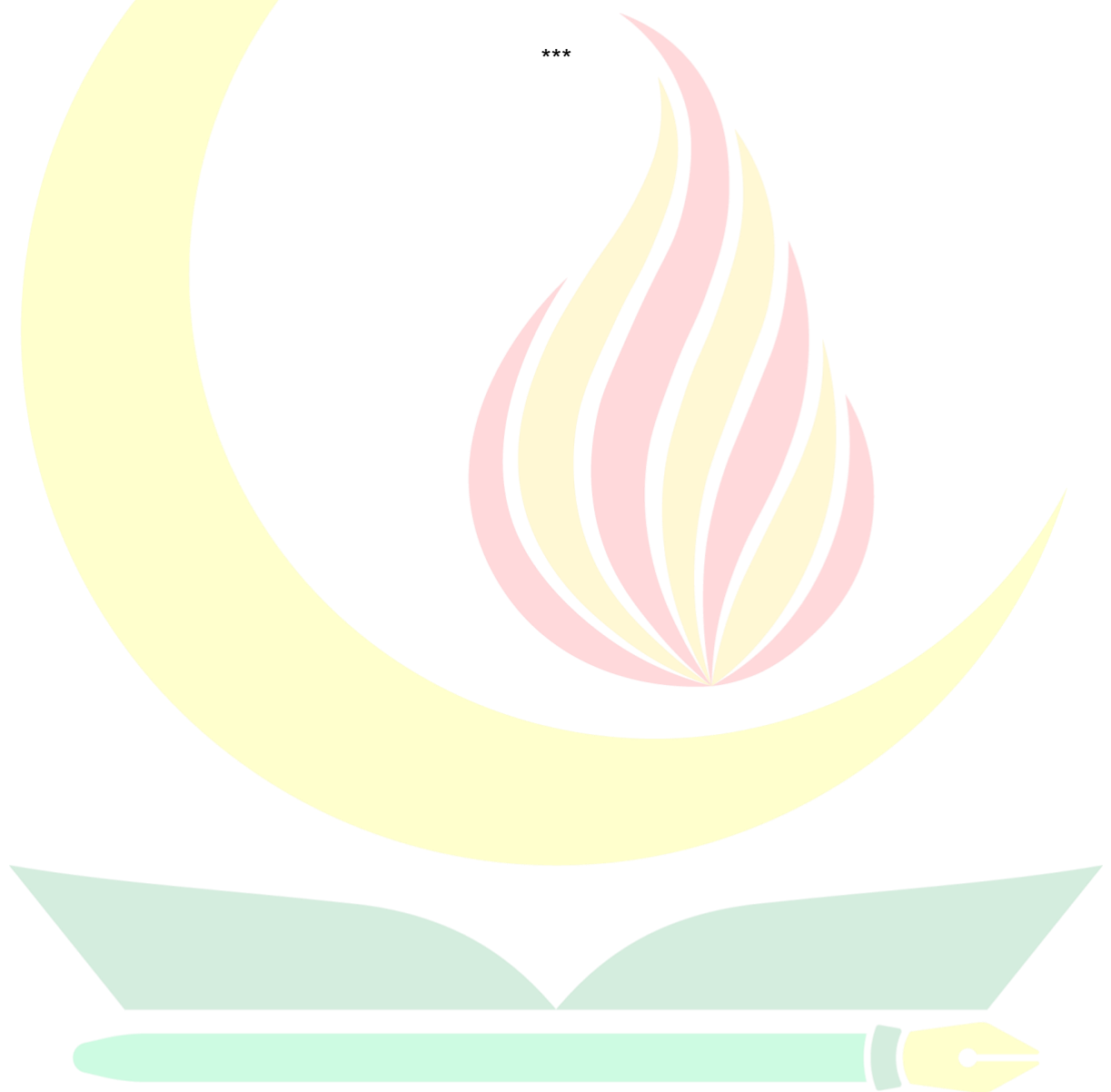
By improving the educational system in the Bangsamoro, we aim to produce (at least) one professional in every family in the BARMM. But it is easier said than done. Admittedly, the standard of education in the Bangsamoro is inferior than the benchmark found in Manila-based academic institutions. Our education sector is also facing serious resource gaps: (1) lacking or limited school facilities, especially in privately owned but registered schools; (2) insufficient training for our teachers; and (3) curriculum that is irrelevant for employability. Moreover, (4) there is a need to establish branch of Madinah or Riyadh Islamic University in the BARMM. Shia followers are growing in number in Mindanao. This is a dangerous development and we have to combat them right now.

While trade and economic investments are integral to the BARMM, we hope that education could be one of the priority areas of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Bangsamoro regional government. We envision that the educational system in the Bangsamoro to embody a high, quality standard with a broad, relevant, and inclusive curriculum that is accessible to all students and will guarantee equal opportunity to all graduates regardless of their chosen field. More importantly, this education should not only be balanced but it would also address the needs of man both in the temporal world and the day hereafter.

Speaking of trade, I want to take this opportunity to invite Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to start investing in the BARMM. The MILF is already leading the BARMM and generally speaking, there is peace in Mindanao.

Again, I would like to thank the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Philippines for their kind invitation to today's special event. We also look forward to cooperating on issues of mutual importance.

Sukran and a pleasant afternoon to all.



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