
Bismillahir rahmanir rahim.

Asalamu alaikum. May Peace be with you.

Unang una, nais ko pong magpasalamat kina Father Dawe at Ms. Joy at sa buong Coalition for Bicol Development (CBD) sa imbitasyon. Actually si Ms. Patricia Sarenas po sana ang andito ngayon, Chairperson ng CODE-NGO at ng MINCODE. She regrets not being able to join you today, as she has to attend to pressing concerns now with the Bangsamoro Peace Process at kung paano maisusulong ang pagpasa sa BBL, especially as she is part of the recently formed civil society Peace Council.

Kaya po ako ang nasa harap nyo ngayon...

Masaya po ako dahil first time in Bicol, pero medyo kinakabahan dahil first time ko ring magsalita bilang Keynote Speaker sa isang General Assembly. Kaya pagpasensyahan nyo po sana ako..

So today, baka medyo marami po akong masabi, pero sana maalala nyo kahit yung tatlong main points lamang na nais naming mga Mindanao peace advocates na maiparating:

1. Na may mga personal na kwento sa likod ng peace process - for both sides (GPH and MILF) and various cultural affiliations
2. We can only achieve our aspirations for peace and development WHEN there is strong participation from the people, from civil society; and
3. The Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination and the peace process is a National issue (hindi lang ng Mindanao).

So to start off, nais ko pong magpakilala bilang isang Bangsamoro:

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Ako si Bai, ipinanganak sa Cotabato City. When I was 7 years old, my parents decided to move to General Santos City. Mas tahimik, payapa and progressive kasi sa Gensan. Both my parents are Maguindanaon, and both were born in Maguindanao. Papa was born in a village named Tanguapo near the famed Municipality of Datu Piang. (Sikat po kasi ang datu piang sa balita dahil madalas nagse-station ang mga relief and media agencies pag may armed encounters. Although decades ago, ang Datu Piang ang sentro ng commerce and trade sa Maguindanao sultanate.) Si Mama naman ipinanganak sa Sapakan, a town near and very similar to Mamasapano. The image you saw of Mamasapano - the bridge - there are many bridges that look just like that in Sapakan, in Maguindanao, in ARMM and in some other areas in Mindanao. In his childhood, my father even had to remove his shoes and trousers to cross the river when going to and from school. My father, just like many other Bangsamoro, really had to struggle to be educated, to be healthy, to gain employment, and to be able to provide for the family. And I am very thankful to my parents for giving us an opportunity to experience a better life. However, not everyone in the Bangsamoro areas are able to do this.

Growing up, my brothers and I often spent our summer vacations in Maguindanao - to visit relatives and to remain rooted in our own culture. Kaya lumaki akong witness ng struggle ng mga kamag-anak at mga kaibigan - that most of them have guns and long arms, na karamihan sa kanila ay mga farmers and fishers that would usually not be able to see the harvest dahil kelangan umalis pag may armed encounters. Ang mga pinsan ko na nasa Maguindanao, pag nagsusuot ng malong/kumot sa gabi, dapat nakalabas ang mga paa para pag may putukan, mabilis makakatakbo. They would have to stay in evacuation centers or go to relatives in nearby towns. Worse, when they go back to their homes, they would find that their houses have been ransacked, their livestock and poultry are gone, their farms destroyed. They would have to start all over again. Minsan, they will not have any land to go back to because it has been occupied by military. At some point, my father and his siblings had to decide to abandon their property in Tanguapo because the military established a base in their land.

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If they insisted on taking back their property, it might have cost them their lives. And so for many years, ganito ang sitwasyon sa mga conflict-affected areas. Hundreds of thousands of people are affected and thousands of income are lost when there's conflict. Kaya kung meron man pong nananawagan ng kapayapaan, unang-una po dito would be the civilians who are most often Bangsamoro themselves. In fact, unang-una pang nananawagan ng kapayapaan ang mga Moro armed fighters. Of course, they will not give up their guns easily -unless their issues are addressed.

And you may ask: ano ba talaga ang issue they want to be addressed? Ano ang ipinaglalaman nila?.. Marami pong reasons, but to sum it up, it is basically **to enjoy their right to self determination - a basic human right recognized in international treaties -for a People with common history, culture, language and identity to be able to chart their own development path.** Basic rights like to be able to pray five times a day and for Friday to be a day without work because it is the day in the week for congregation - instead of Sunday - in Bangsamoro areas. And, other basic rights like mechanisms for governance and financial management that are culturally appropriate.

For decades, the Bangsamoro people are at the mercy of the Philippine government. Our forefathers tried asserting our rights through proper channels. Wag po sana kayong maniniwala na Bangsamoro ang nagsimula ng gulo. Sinubukan po ng naunang mga leaders namin na makipag-usap sa gobyerno, but the government never listened. Instead, government harassed and mocked the Bangsamoro people through military offenses and even with policies and programs. Kaya nabuo ang Moro Liberation Fronts - because we needed protection and we needed the Philippine government to listen to us.

Sa likod po ng bawat balita ng gulo sa Mindanao, at sa likod po ng bawat provision sa Bangsamoro Basic Law, ay may Kwento. Hindi po ako MNLF, at hindi rin po ako MILF. Bangsamoro po ako at nagpapasalamat ako na merong mga leaders na patuloy na nakikipag-usap sa gobyerno para mabigyan ng magandang buhay ang mga kapwa ko Bangsamoro.

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Pagkatapos po ng Mamasapano clash, nagdeclare ng Military Offensive against the BIFF. As a result, more than 125,000 people have been displaced in Maguindanao. 125,000 people, 125,000 lives. 125,000 personal stories ng pagtakbo in the middle of the night, pagpunta sa evacuation centers, at pagbalik sa bahay to start all over again. Next time you hear news about armed struggles, please think about the lives of these people. Although sana wala nang next time...

My second point: We can only achieve our aspirations for peace and development WHEN there is strong participation from the people, from civil society.

There were a lot of times in the peace talks that agreements cannot be reached and that both parties have exhausted all possible options, but are unable to reach a common path. There were also times when one party to the talk is almost on the verge of giving up and withdrawing from the peace table. Sometimes there are manifestations of mistrust and negotiations fatigue. Indeed, working for peace is never easy, probably most especially for peace negotiators who have to manage physical, emotional, psychological, mental and spiritual challenges that come with the duties and responsibilities of the post. But what keeps them going? What or who ensures that the peace process continue? What or who calls for accountability? Who provides creative ideas and facilitate consultations and grounding? The answer: the people and civil society.

In terms of governance, we all advocate that the people/constituency should be involved in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects. We make sure that government policies and programs redound to the benefit of the community. We make sure that we correct wrong practices and recommend reforms that need to be put in place.

Same goes true for the peace process. The people affected by the conflict should be listened to. The agreements must reflect the changes that they want to see. As much as possible, their voices should be amplified and that their rights should be protected. Just like our advocacies for governance, we call for the establishment of mechanisms for feedbacking. And of course, the whole process needs a lot of organizing and constituency building. And this is the role of us CSOs.

And this brings me to my third point: The Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination and the peace process is a National issue. Hindi lamang po ito issue ng Mindanao.

And this is where we need your help. We need the Filipino nation to support us in our quest for peace and development.

Nakakatuwa pong isipin na maraming pagkakapareho ang Bicol at Mindanao. Both are rich in natural resources. Mindanao provides 1/3 of food products in the country, that's why it's called the Philippines' food basket. It contributes almost 30% in GDP and majority of export products come from Mindanao. Unfortunately, we get very little in the national pie of revenues. **There is widespread poverty in the midst of abundance.** The poorest provinces come from Mindanao - and mostly from ARMM. Sa ARMM, only 3 out of 10 children are able to finish elementary and slimmer chances of graduating from high school. And very lean ang nakakapagtapos ng college. At hindi pa kasali sa equation ang quality ng education. Sana hindi ganito ang statistics dito sa Bicol.

Isa pang pagkakapareho natin ay of course, ang panawagan na sana mas malapit sa tao ang gobyerno. Na sana ang taxes na nakokolekta dito ay magagamit din dito. Sa Bicol din, I know may ready at sarili na kayong constitution. Kaya sana sabay tayong manawagan na ipasa ang BBL.

The BBL actually symbolizes the Filipino people's acceptance of the Bangsamoro people and of our shared history. More than the provisions on

exclusive, reserved and concurrent powers, **the BBL will be a national act that would signify recognition of the need to review government structures and policies based on history, culture and people's aspirations.** Some people say that the BBL is a stepping stone towards federalism. And many of us in this room support that. Although that is not the primary intention, it is a much-welcomed idea for most of us in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro and even here in Bicol and the Cordillera.

At this point, I would like to share with you some key points about the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) --simply to shed light and demystify this proposed law.

1. **The BBL is constitutional.** The creation of the Bangsamoro is provided for in the Philippine Constitution: "There shall be created autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras consisting of provinces, cities, municipalities, and geographical areas sharing common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, economic and social structures, and other relevant characteristics within the framework of this Constitution and the national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines" -Art.X Sec 15 of 1987 Constitution. Ang Bangsamoro political entity po ay hindi isang separate state at hindi po humihiwalay sa Pilipinas.

The creation of the Bangsamoro will follow a legislative process with the enactment of an organic act and its ratification in the core territory. Magkakaroon po ng plebiscite and democratic processes will be followed.

The Bangsamoro follows the Constitution's provision on legislative powers of an autonomous region while upholding national sovereignty of the Philippines. "Within the territorial jurisdiction and subject to provisions of this Constitution and national laws, the organic act of autonomous region shall provide for the legislative powers over: (a) administrative organization; (b) creation of sources of revenue; (c) ancestral domain and natural resources; (d) personal, family, and property relations; (e) regional urban and rural planning development; (f)

economic, social, and tourism development; (g) educational policies; (h) preservation and development of the cultural heritage; and (i) such other matters as may be authorized by law for the promotion of the general welfare of the people of the region." - Art. X, Sec. 20 of the 1987 Constitution

The ministerial form of government in the Bangsamoro is allowed under the Philippine Constitution. "The organic act shall define the basic structure of government for the region consisting of executive department and legislative assembly, both of which shall be elective and representative of the constituent political units." -Art. X Sec 15 of the 1987 Constitution.

The Bangsamoro is a secular government --not an Islamic state.

The Bangsamoro will respect the basic rights of all.

2. **Bangsamoro people are not necessarily Muslims.** BBL defines who the Bangsamoro is as "those who at the time of conquest and colonization were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands including Palawan and their descendants, whether of mixed or of full blood shall have the right to identify themselves as Bangsamoro by ascription or self-ascription. Spouses and descendants are classified as Bangsamoro".
3. **The BBL will not force indigenous people or anyone else to become Bangsamoro.** BBL: "freedom of choice of other IPs shall be respected".
4. **The BBL does not include all regions in Mindanao.** Mindanao has 6 administrative regions. BBL largely touches ARMM, Cotabato City which hosts the ARMM government but is currently administratively under Region 12. BBL's core territory includes: present ARMM, municipalities that voted for the inclusion in ARMM during 2001 plebiscite, Cotabato and Isabela City, and all other contiguous areas where there is resolution of the LGU or a petition of at least 10% of registered voters in the area asking for inclusion.

5. **The BBL will not be run by the MILF.** There will be a democratic process of election. Registered voters will elect representatives in the Bangsamoro Assembly. The BM Assembly elects Chief Minister. Chief Minister appoints Deputy CM and other ministers to form the Cabinet.

Other good provisions in the BBL that are not being talked about:

6. **The BBL mandates the development of comprehensive framework for sustainable development** through proper conservation, utilization and development of natural resources. It shall include measures to reduce vulnerability of women and marginalized groups to climate change. Art 13, sec 3 BBL
7. **The BBL provides for incentives for victims and communities adversely affected by mining and other activities that harness natural resources** (e.g. Payment of just compensation, relocation of affected people, rehabilitation of areas, etc). Art 13, sec 16.
8. **The BBL provides that 75% in all national taxes, fees and charges collected in the Bangsamoro will be given to the Bangsamoro Government.** Annual Block Grant of 4%. But this will be coursed through government line agencies' programs and projects. In other words, it is just to flag and ensure that development programs in the BM is funded. This is to address decades of backlog in provision of basic government services in the BM areas.

Many other noteworthy provisions are found in the BBL if only people find time to read it and not be swayed by politicians making noise in preparation for 2016 elections.

In conclusion, may I urge you again to support our calls for peace and development in Mindanao and for the passage of BBL that is true to the CAB? How?... **By spreading correct information about the BBL, by**

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sharing the right perspective and context of the peace process, and by asking your respective Representatives in Congress and your other partners and members to support the Bangsamoro people in this quest for peace and development in Mindanao.

And on a personal level and perhaps this is more important, may I ask you to stay committed to Peace?.. How?... **By practicing non violent communications, by giving instead of taking, by respecting rather than discriminating, and by accepting that we live in a multicultural society.**

When you choose Peace and particularly, when you choose to support the BBL - as individuals, as an organization, as a coalition - we Mindanaoans and Bangsamoro will forever be grateful.

Maraming salamat po and wassalam.

Raizsa Mae "Bai" M. Anayatin

MINCODE Executive Director

"CSOs Shared Responsibility in Achieving Peace and Development"

Coalition for Bicol Development (CBD) 16th General Assembly

April 18, 2015

Irosin, Sorsogon