

Advocates open to new 'peace tracks' in Mindanao

Contributed by Rick R. Flores/MindaNews contributor
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ILIGAN CITY (MindaNews/04 December) -- In the quest for peace, Mindanawons should not lose sight of its context, especially among the Bangsamoro people, a professor-cum-peace advocate told participants Monday during a peace forum attended by various sectors here.

Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga said addressing the root problems of historical injustices brought upon the Muslims in Mindanao is key to achieving peace and that government should look into the 'valid grievances' of the Bangsamoro people.

"The Bangsamoro have valid grievances which are historically drawn such as social, political, and economic injustices," Lingga said.

A workable political solution to the problem is necessary which he described as a new political thinking and reinvention of the way the government is approaching peace in Mindanao.

"Political creativeness will help the Bangsamoro achieve their right to self-determination because a democratic society is not bankrupt of addressing the solutions to our problems," Lingga said.

Referendum

Lingga, also the executive director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies based in Cotabato City, stressed the need for a referendum for the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE).

The BJE will have the ARMM as its core area plus Moro-dominated villages in the contiguous areas.

Lingga said the idea of a referendum started 10 years ago and has slowly gained acceptance among the Bangsamoro to address their political demands. Lingga revealed that former chair of the GRP-MILF peace panel Silvestre Afable sent an official letter to the MILF expressing the government's openness to a referendum.

"Although he did not specifically say when the referendum will be held, the fact that they recognize our effort is already an achievement," Lingga said.

The proposed referendum, which will be held after a transition period of several years, will provide the chance to Bangsamoro people and other constituents to determine if they are willing to be part of the proposed Bangsamoro homeland or not.

Community participation

A "new track" was also discussed during the gathering yesterday with the theme Forum on Mindanao Options for Peace: The Peace Processes and Referendum.

Charlito Manlupig, president of Balay Mindanaw, an NGO based in Cagayan de Oro City, said community participation is being encouraged in the peace negotiations between the government and the Rebulosyonaryong Partido ng mga Manggagawa sa Mindanaw (RPMM).

Since it started five years ago, both panels have signed three major documents, the third of which was providing a concrete mechanism to community participation in the peace talks.

"The basic rule of the talks is to provide for local consultations so in this way, people who are there in the areas, have the right to air their views and sentiments because in the end the peace agreement is for them and not for the parties involved," Manlupig told about a hundred participants at Elena Tower, this city.

"I was invited to share this unique way of involving in the peace process and I was surprised that this is the first time in the Philippines and first time in the world," he said.

Manlupig said this framework veers away from the old, traditional, and conventional way the peace talks are being done. He said there are challenges of instituting the peace talks between the government and the RPMM, but through the participation of the barangays the facilitation of the talks had become easy.

Lumad peace process

Timuay Alim Bandara, a Teduray-Lambangian of Maguindanao, expressed concern about the agreement reached by the

government and the MILF which dealt on ancestral domain and territory.

"Lumad leaders in (Southwestern) Mindanao and ARMM would want to know the details of the agreement, its contents, and its coverage," Bandara said.

He said it is important that Lumads know the contents of the agreement.

Bandara said the proposed agreement on ancestral domain should provide equal treatment of the people living within the territory defined by the Bangsamoro.

During the forum, a new track for the Lumad was proposed by Lingga as a way of addressing their grievances.

"I suggest that the government opens a new track of negotiation with the Lumad if they feel that their agenda was not reflected in the ancestral domain of the MILF," Lingga said. (Rick R. Flores/MindaNews)