

Work starts to define new Muslim region in Philippines

Mindanao (Philippines), UCAN News, 4 April 2013:



A transition body convened today to develop a “Basic Law” to guide the establishment of a new Muslim region in Mindanao. This move follows the signing of a peace deal between the government and Moro rebels last October.

Mohagher Iqbal, head of the 15-man transition body and a negotiator for the rebel Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) group, appealed for support in his

welcome remarks.

"Let me call on our partners from the government to work hand in hand with us in trusting an instrument that will embody the Bangsamoro ideals and aspirations and create new relations founded on the principles of parity of esteem and mutual respect," Iqbal said.

He also called on the international community to help the transition body, "so that the lessons we may learn here will also help others."

Teresita Deles, President Benigno Aquino's adviser on the peace process, said the creation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law would be "long and filled with challenges." But the government anticipates seeing the teamwork "as one collegial body which shall be able to craft inclusive frames and processes," she said. The group comprises representatives from the MILF, the government and various ethnic groups in Mindanao.

Upon completion, the Bangsamoro Basic Law will be submitted to Congress for passage under an expedited mechanism. Once the law is ratified through a plebiscite, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao will be abolished and the Bangsamoro region will be established.

[More information:

The term **Bangsamoro** refers to a people who are natives of the Sulu archipelago, parts of Mindanao, and parts of Palwan in the Philippines, and parts of Sabah in neighboring Malaysia at the time of conquest or colonization. It comes from the Malay word *bangsa*, meaning *nation* or *people*, and the Spanish word *moro*, from the Spanish word for Moor, the Reconquista-period term used for Muslims. It may also refer to the Moro people in general. These include the tribes who constitute the major tribes of the Moro people.

Bangsamoro has originally evolved from the Spanish colonialist as early as 1570 when they saw the Muslims in the Philippines practiced Islam much in the same way their arch enemies- Moors of Spain and called the local Muslims as **Moro**. Since around 1970 Moro activists, despite opposition from Islamists because of its origin from Spanish colonists, bravely employed its use in their organizations and writings.

The use of Bangsamoro, a combination of Moro and Nation (Bangsa) connoted the solidarity of the people as a nation. It rekindled the spirit to seek nationhood and statehood and struggle to establish an independent Islamic state in this area in which Sharia is enacted.

In January 1987, the MNLF accepted the Philippine government's offer of semi-autonomy of the regions in dispute, subsequently leading to the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The MILF, however, refused to accept this offer and continued their insurgency operations. A general cessation of hostilities between the government in Manila and the MILF was signed in July 1997 but this agreement was abolished in 2000 by the Philippine Army under the administration of Philippine President Joseph Estrada. In response, the MILF declared a jihad (strived and struggled) against the government, its citizens and supporters. Under President Gloria Arroyo, the government entered into a cease-fire agreement with the MILF and resumed peace talks. In 2010, President Aquino of the Republic of the Philippines resumed the 6th Peace talks between the MILF and the Philippine government.

On October 15, 2012, the historic GPH-MILF framework agreement was signed by chief negotiator for the GPH Marvic Leonen, MILF peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal, and Malaysian facilitator Tengku Dato' Ab Ghafar Tengku Mohamed with President Benigno Aquino III, Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia, Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Secretary-General Ekmeleddin of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in attendance at the Malacañan Palace in Manila, Philippines. This document outlines general agreements on major issues, including the extent of power, revenues and territory granted for a new Muslim autonomous region to be called Bangsamoro].