

# **Mindanao (Philippines): On the struggles of the Bangsamoro for the right to self-determination and the coming plebiscites regarding the Bangsamoro Organic Law**

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## **STATEMENT OF THE REBOLUSYONARYONG PARTIDO NG MANGGAGAWA - MINDANAO (RPM-M) ON THE JANUARY 21 AND FEBRUARY 6 BANGSAMORO PLEBISCITES**

January 1, 2019

In the next few days, two (2) sets of plebiscites will be held regarding the newly signed Bangsamoro Organic Law or BOL. Two sets of questions will also be asked on the voters; the first whether they approve the BOL and the second will be if they want to be included in the areas under the jurisdiction of the new autonomous political entity. The former will be addressed to the voters in the existing provinces and cities of the autonomous region and the latter will be for the voters outside the autonomous region and for those who have petitioned the Commission on Election or COMELEC to include themselves and their territories to the autonomous political entity.

These democratic exercises have been made integral part of the whole political process of peace negotiations which have lasted for almost twenty (20) years between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Under four (4) Philippine Presidents, three plebiscites (including the one coming) and several major documents have been signed between the two panels.

The above-mentioned plebiscites have been part of the highlights of the Bangsamoro Struggle for Right to Self-Determination as led by the MILF aspiring to attain enduring peace by establishing self-governance and fiscal autonomy.

The same political exercises (plebiscites) have been part of the implementations of the government of the Republic of the Philippines to mainstream the Moro Revolutionary Fronts within the political accommodation framework. The latest approved law on Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) or Republic Act 11054 has been consistent with the two previous laws – the Republic Act 6734 – Establishing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM - 1989) and the Republic Act 9054 or the Expansion and Strengthening of the ARMM – 2001. All the three laws have used the Constitution of the Philippines as framework within the integrity and territorial sovereignty of the Republic of the Philippines.

Based on the framework, the political process of the peace negotiations between the government and the MILF has used this one-sided process. Grossly in favor of the former.

Such unilateral basis for peaceful settlement of conflicts in the process of the Moro struggle for Self-Determination under the leadership of the MILF should be taken seriously. This could even be the main or substantial reason why the first two laws earlier created for self-governance have miserably

failed and had been considered political failures.

The above-mentioned framework has required the approval of the Philippine Congress in order to be legally considered valid. The Philippine government through its Congress has the final say regarding the peace process with the Moro Fronts.

The main reason of the struggles of the Bangsamoro for Right to Self-Determination against national oppression has been blurredly negated.

The whole essence of the struggle against national oppression is concretely expressed in peace process' engagement of the Moro Fronts to address the national oppression manifested in Moro basic problems currently caused by the neo-liberal framework and implemented by the representatives of both the dominant class of the majority and Moro elites.

Such exclusive and elitist political and economic framework can never produce inclusive results. Other peoples within the jurisdiction of the claimed territories will also be mainstreamed. The struggle for self-determination of the Bangsamoro people can be used to undermine the struggle for self-determination of other smaller nations/peoples like the Indigenous Peoples in the region.

Enduring peace and genuine sustainable development in the region can even become more elusive than ever. An imposed arrangement from above can never sow seeds of internal and free participation from below – from the peoples in the region.

The coming plebiscites will be held in a very undemocratic setting – under Martial Law. It is not circumstantial that Martial Law has been extended in Mindanao. This is not unrelated to the holding of the January 21 and February 6 plebiscites but more so in the holding of the May 13, 2019 mid-term elections in the country. This is still excluding the situation where the areas known to disagree with the questions on the plebiscites have been considered hotspots and are placed under Commission on Election (COMELEC) control. The results of the plebiscite and the actual implementation in the autonomous region will be mainly dependent on the popularity of the current leadership of the country. Just like in the past mainstream model of autonomy.

The timing of the plebiscites and the mid-term election have already shown ugly results. The traditional politicians from the Moro, Indigenous Peoples and Majority nationality elites have been using the plebiscites to campaign for the preservation of their interests in the region. The peoples who are the real subject for the self-determination and self-governance have been deprived for their basic right to know the merits or demerits of the questions posed in the plebiscites. Traditional politicians have been campaigning to support the BOL and the expansion of its territories if these will preserve or perpetuate their hold on to power. Those who campaign for the rejection of the BOL or its expansion of territories have been campaigning to protect their own political and economic interests. The results of the plebiscites can make or unmake their (trapos) political interests in the coming May 2019 midterm elections. The real problems and issues of the peoples have not been discussed and addressed during the campaign.

The leadership of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa – Mindanao (RPM-M) and its armed forces under the Revolutionary Peoples' Army (RPA) has called for democratic and objective/informative campaigns for both the merits and the demerits of the issues. It unites its entire leadership and calls the whole membership to assist in facilitating the democratic processes so that the people concerned can reach an informed decision to express their option with regards to the inclusiveness of the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro and other peoples. At the same time we will work against all forms of exclusivism and triumphalism just as we will strongly oppose all kinds of opportunisms in our midst.

In the name of the Central Committee and Executive Committee,

**Anzelmo R. Guerero**

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