

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace negotiating panels held the 2nd Round of Formal Peace Talks on March 1-2, 2000, at the Estosan Garden Hotel, Cotabato City.

Inspirational messages from Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado, Maguindanao Governor Zacaria Candao, and Mayor Muslimin Sema of Cotabato City highlighted the Opening Ceremony. Secretary Mercado challenged the GRP and the MILF Peace Panels to make compromises and find common areas of agreement so that a peaceful settlement may be reached. Gov. Candao and Mayor Sema reiterated their high hopes and full support to the peace negotiations.

GRP Panel Chairman Lt. Gen. Edgardo E. Batenga AFP (Ret.), and Acting MILF Panel Chairman/ Chairperson, Committee on Information Mohagher Iqbal, representing MILF Panel Chair Alèetzi Abdulaziz Mimbantas, delivered opening statements for both sides, reiterating their sincerity and commitment to the peace talks.

During this meeting, both the QRT/IFFC and the CCCH presented their respective reports on the incidents in Carmen, Cotabato and Shariff Aguak, Datu Piang and Talayan, all in Maguindanao. The CCCH of the GRP and the MILF likewise presented their respective reports on the status of the implementation of the GRP-MILF Agreements on September 2, 1999 and January 12, 2000.

The GRP and MILF Peace Panels agreed to cluster the nine (9) Agenda Items presented by the MILF for discussion in the Formal Peace Talks into six (6) aggrupations, namely:

1. Ancestral Domain / Agrarian Related Issues
2. Destruction of Properties and Victims of War / Displaced and Landless Bangsamoro
3. Human Rights Issues
4. Social and Cultural Discrimination / Corruption of the Mind and Moral Fibre
5. Economic Inequities and Widespread Poverty
6. Exploitation of Natural Resources

The Technical Committees of both Panels were directed to discuss the following for submission to the Peace Panels:

1. GRP proposal on the modification/refinement of headings for the clustered Agenda Items
2. Proposed organization and specific tasks of the Technical Working Groups which will discuss the Agenda Items;
3. MILF Draft on Immunity and Security Guarantees, and GRP counter-proposal; and,

4. MILF Draft on the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws.

Both Panels agreed to meet again next week, with the following schedule:

21st GRP-MILF Technical Committee Meeting on March 6-7, 2000 at Esposan Garden Hotel, Cotabato City; and,
3rd Round of the GRP and MILF Formal Peace Talks on March 8-9, 2000 at the same venue.

Done this 2nd day of March, 2000 at Cotabato City.

For the GRP Peace Panel:

For the MILF Peace Panel:


LT. GEN. EDGARDO E. BATENCA AFP (RET.)
Chairman


BRO. MOHAGHER IQBAL
Acting Chairman

WITNESSES:


EDIR ALMA R. EVANGELISTA
Chairperson, GRP Technical Committee


SHEIKH MONER BAJUNAID
Chairman, MILF Technical Committee