

## Statement of CBCP Plenary Assembly Adopting the Mindanao Catholic Bishops on the BBL and the Peace Process

*“Guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1:79)*

### **Our Common Stand**

Questions and varying opinions about the peace process and the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) abound at all levels of Mindanao society.

As religious and moral teachers we, Catholic bishops of Mindanao, stand on common moral ground on the issues.

We do not intend to endorse or not to endorse any draft BBL being discussed by the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives. But we intend to envision a BBL that is based on and guided by social moral principles.

We note that:

(1) Christianity and Islam are religions of peace; (2) The vast majority of Muslim, Christian, and Indigenous People communities in Mindanao aspire for peace; and (3) All-out war is not the answer to the Mindanao situation.

Ever since colonial times, Muslim leaders have expressed three major grievances: the reduction of their ancestral territory, the erosion of their cultural identity, and the loss of self-determination in the development of their communities.

At the basis of the deep fundamental Bangsamoro aspiration to self-determination in an autonomous region is the moral principle of social justice. Social justice implies the other moral principles of just peace and inter-religious harmony.

This is the moral framework from which we view the peace process and the draft BBL.

### **A Social Climate of Mutual Mistrust, Bias and Prejudice**

The present social context is one of mutual biases and prejudices, of mutual charges of injustice. Such social climate demands moral consideration.

For the Christian disciple, the fundamental wake-up call to conscience would be: Would Jesus approve our biases and prejudices that create unpeace?

Bias and prejudice are part and parcel of the deep mistrust between Christians and Muslims, two peoples coming from the same Abrahamic faith.

It is this climate of mistrust that the horrible human tragedy at Mamasapano, Maguindanao, has resurrected. It has placed the peace process and the proposed BBL in limbo. But we believe that the Mamasapano disaster must not be equated with the BBL.

### **A BBL We Do Not Want**

Everyone wants peace, everyone wants some kind of BBL.

On our part, viewing the issues from a moral angle, we do not want a BBL that does not effectively address the root causes of social injustice.

We do not want a BBL that does not achieve the centuries-old Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination.

We do not want a BBL that makes the proposed Bangsamoro area of self-determination less autonomous than the ARMM it is meant to replace.

We do not want a BBL that discriminates by not effectively protecting and promoting the rights of minorities, indigenous or not.

We do not want a BBL that will foster ethnic, religious, political, and economic discrimination.

**A BBL We Want** Like everyone else we, Bishops, want a just and lasting peace.

For this reason, we want a Bangsamoro Basic Law that is rooted in social justice and promotes social justice.

We want a BBL that effectively addresses the injustices suffered by the Bangsamoro as well as the injustices suffered by indigenous peoples and various religious minorities within the proposed Bangsamoro area.

We want a BBL that concretely achieves the self-determination of the Bangsamoro in an identified area that remains part and parcel of the territorial integrity and under the national sovereignty of the Philippine Republic.

We want a BBL that promotes harmonious relationships between peoples of various ethnic groups and of different faiths.

We want a BBL that effectively protects universal human rights, particularly

the rights of IPs already enshrined in law, and the rights of Christian minorities who fear harassment and further marginalization.

We want a BBL that responds concretely to the concerns, hopes and aspirations of all stakeholders, of various Bangsamoro groups, and of non-Moro citizens within the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

We want a BBL whose provisions are clearly Constitutional, without betraying the intent and spirit of peace agreements.

That is the BBL we envision on the basis of social moral principles of social justice, harmony and peace. It is a vision that goes beyond the proposals now being discussed in our legislature.

### **The Constitutional Issue**

On both sides of the constitutional issue are legal experts and constitutional luminaries. One group defends the constitutionality of BBL provisions and their root-documents, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The other group rejects them as unconstitutional.

In the light of these divergent expert opinions we note the scrutiny of the BBL by Ad Hoc Legislative Committees.

We pray that the Ad Hoc Committees seriously and fairly consider these contrary expert opinions so as not to imperil the requirements of social justice for the Bangsamoro.

The suggestion of many experts, we believe, is wise — that such issues be left to the Supreme Court for judicial review. If left out through substantive revisions, the Supreme Court can no longer re-insert them.

### **The Need for Trust in Waging Peace**

Through many years of intense, and often adversarial debates, the relationship between our government peace panel and the MILF peace panel has evolved from suspicion and hostility to mutual trust and understanding.

There was a labor of partnership and they have produced, they believe, an agreement that, though imperfect, is a pathway to a just and lasting peace.

Let us then transcend the negative emotions of human tragedy and continue on the road to peace by way of dialogue, based on mutual trust, openness, and respect.

## **Conclusion**

We reiterate the fundamental intention of this statement. It does not intend to be either for or against the various drafts of the BBL being discussed in our Legislature. It simply presents social and moral principles and envisions, in general terms, a BBL that flows from the same principles.

The moral imperative to lasting peace is this: Christians, Muslims, Lumads and members of other faiths have to begin trusting in one another.

Continuing mistrust is the road to continuing violence and unrest in Mindanao. Trust is a moral pre-requisite for justice, harmony and peace.

Mary is eminently honored in both the Qur'an and the Christian Bible as the Virgin Mother of Jesus, whom we Christians call "Our Peace." To the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Peace, we commend all our striving for a just and lasting peace.

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