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MNLF-Malaysia

MNLF ASKS FOR CONTINUED ASSISTANCE TO HELP FILIPINO MUSLIMS

By: Sulaiman Jaafar

MANILA, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- A joint founder of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Datu Haji Abul Khayr Alonto has asked Malaysia and other Islamic countries to help develop Southern Philippines following the formal signing of a peace agreement here yesterday.

He thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for Malaysia's continued support to the Muslims in Southern Philippines.

He said the peace accord, signed by MNLF chairman Nur Misuari and the Philippine government, had opened a new era for greater development and economy for the people in Southern Philippines.

Haji Abul Khayr together with Nur Misuari and Selamat Hashim, now leader of the splinter group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), founded the MNLF in 1971 to fight for the interest of Muslims in Southern Philippines.

"Muslims here are looking forward to investment from Muslim brothers in Malaysia and other countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference to help develop their area which has been neglected for so long," he said at a reception held in conjunction with the visit of Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad here last night.

Haji Abul Khayr, chairman of Continental Pacific Star Inc. which undertakes several joint venture projects with Terengganu-based Kemaman Terminal One Sdn Bhd in the Philippines, said Filipino Muslims had high respect for Malaysia and Dr Mahathir.

Apart from investment, he hoped Malaysia could offer help in the setting up an Islamic bank in Southern Philippines.

He said Southern Philippines had various natural resources which had yet to be tapped.

"The inflow of foreign investment could enhance development and provide jobs to the locals," he said.

Wan Mokhtar, in his speech, said Mindanao had vast potential for progress following the peace agreement, ending more than two decades of confrontation.

He said the Terengganu government, through its subsidiary companies, and the Malaysian private sector were willing to pave ways and help develop the region.

Terengganu's over 25 years experience in the plantation industry could help develop the Southern Philippines as the new growth centre for palm oil production.

He said two subsidiaries of Terengganu State Economic Development Corporation -- Kumpulan Ladang-ladang Terengganu and Gabungan Kuari Sdn Bhd -- were identifying areas for the purpose.

Wan Mokhtar, who is here for a two-day visit, also visited the Cavite province, south of here yesterday.

During the visit, he was presented a key to the province and made its honorary citizen by its governor Epimaco A.Velasco.

Cavite province is a major industrial and tourism area in Luzon, Terengganu's twin state. -- BERNAMA

SBJ NMO ABG