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Philippine-MILF

PHILIPPINE-MILF NEGOTIATORS GO HOME WITHOUT INKING SECOND ACCORD

By: Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 20 (Bernama) -- The Third Formal Peace Talks between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ended here today and negotiators headed for home without signing any agreement on rehabilitation and development of the conflict areas in Mindanao.

The MILF Chief Negotiator Murad Ebrahim said today both sides were having disagreement over some aspects of the rehabilitation and development of conflict areas in Mindanao under the Tripoli Peace Agreement signed in March this year.

"Both sides need to go for consultation with their respective principles on the matter," he told Bernama on the last day of the six-day formal peace talks.

Murad said yesterday both sides had some disagreement over the interpretation on the management aspect of the development projects under the Tripoli Peace Agreement with regard to how to use the money that would be allocated for the conflict areas in Mindanao.

He said the Philippine Government insisted that projects funded by the government should be managed by the government while the MILF said they should manage them.

Murad said both sides met late last night and this morning to thrash out differences but they only managed to have some preliminary agreement on the need for further consultation with their respective principles on the matter.

"However, no date has been set for the next round of formal peace talks between the Philippine Government and MILF," he said.

The Philippine Government and MILF had been engaged in talks at the Mines Beach Resort, near here, since Monday to iron out technical aspects of the peace accord reached by the two sides early this year.

They managed to sign behind closed-doors on Thursday an agreement on a manual for ending hostilities in Mindanao, the troubled southern Philippine state.

The signing of the Malaysia-brokered peace agreement paved the way for the establishment of local monitoring teams, comprising non-governmental organisations as well as MILF and government officials to oversee the ceasefire.

Both sides signed a ceasefire accord in Malaysia two months ago witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Philippine President Gloria Arroyo to end the conflict which had killed more than 120,000 people.

Asked if the failure to reach an agreement on the rehabilitation and development of Mindanao is a setback to the peace talks, Murad said: "I don't think so."

"In fact, the signing on the manual on Thursday signals another progress in the peace talks although other aspects were not concluded in this discussion," he said.

Earlier, both sides expressed optimism that an agreement on the rehabilitation and development of the conflict areas in Mindanao and possible return of Muslim ancestral territorial rights could be reached by the last day of the peace talks.

The Philippine Government negotiators was led by Jesus G. Dureza while Murad, who is also Chief of Staff of MILF, headed MILF's negotiators.

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