

19 OCT 2001

Mindanao-Delay

PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND MILF PEACE TALKS DELAYED

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The third Formal Peace Talks between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) today was delayed by disagreement on the interpretation on the management of the development project under the Tripoli Peace Agreement, MILF Chief Negotiator Murad Ebrahim said.

He said the Philippine government and the MILF negotiators had different interpretations on how to use the money to be allocated for the rehabilitation and development of the conflict areas in Mindanao.

"GRP (Philippine government) insists that projects funded by the government should be managed by the government while MILF said it should be managed by them," he told Bernama after meeting Philippine government Chief Negotiator Jesus G. Dureza on the second day of the senior official level meeting between both sides.

Yesterday, the Philippine government and MILF signed behind closed doors an agreement on a manual for ending hostilities in Mindanao.

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.

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

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

Murad said both sides needed further consultations on the interpretation and decided to resume the talks late tonight to thrash out the disagreement before formal scheduled talks end tomorrow.

"We will continue tonight and try our best at the panel level before resuming at the technical committee level tomorrow," he said.

Asked if he was confident that the matter could be resolved and the agreement on the rehabilitation and development of conflict areas in Mindanao inked tomorrow, he said "we can at least reach some preliminary agreement".

However, Dureza denied there was any delay but said both sides still needed to resolve some basic issues on the matter before any agreement could be signed.

"There is no delay, in fact we are working very fast, both sides are really working hard," he said, adding that some technical committee members would continue to thrash out the differences tomorrow.

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

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