

**Framework Agreement On Bangsamoro Chance To Enjoy Peace - Najib  
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From R. Ravichandran**

MANILA, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro signed between the Philippine Government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) here Monday is a chance to ensure that the Bangsamoro people will enjoy the dividends of peace, which he said they rightly deserve.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the historic agreement at the Rizal Hall of the Malacanang Palace here, the Prime Minister said the agreement was also a chance to restore dignity to the people of the southern Philippines; who were deprived of their humanity by decades of violence.

Assuring the people of the Philippines that Malaysia would stand with them to make this agreement work, Najib in his 15-minute speech said Kuala Lumpur was ready to help as a partner for peace.

"It is my great hope that this agreement brings about a new time of moderation; where the practice of religion and the right to a peaceful existence are never again in conflict. Where people of different faiths live together, united by common values, under a common constitution.

"The agreement we have witnessed today marks the beginning of that era in the southern Philippines. I congratulate all those who have made this possible, and I look forward to the final agreement," said Najib, who later along with President Benigno Aquino III witnessed the historic ceremony which marked a significant milestone in the peace process in Mindanao.

The process was wrecked by almost four decades of war and conflict, resulting in the loss of some 150,000 lives.

The Framework Agreement is dubbed as the "mother agreement" that serves as a roadmap for the creation of the new Bangsamoro entity that will replace the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"The framework before us will bring to and end the violence which claimed so many lives, and cut short so many futures. It will protect the rights of the Bangsamoro people, and preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines.

It is the firm ground on which a lasting peace can be built," said Najib who's speech was received with thunderous applause from those attending the ceremony in the packed hall.

The signing ceremony at 3pm (local time) was preceded by the national anthem of the Philippines, a 'doa' (Muslim prayer) recital and a Christian prayer.

Earlier Najib and his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor were received by President Benigno Aquino III on arrival at the Malacanang Palace.

Later Najib was accorded an official welcoming ceremony at the Malacanang Palace Grounds. Accompanied by the president, Najib inspected the Presidential Honour Guards who conferred on the Prime Minister arrival honours.

Najib pointed out that in confronting their differences and finding common ground, both sides had given something.

"But the people of the southern Philippines have gained everything. In choosing peace over conflict, and stability over chaos, both sides have stated their belief not just in universal principles of democracy, justice and tolerance, but their application in the service of a greater good," he said.

Offering readiness to assist the Bangsamoro, Najib said Malaysia was willing to offer training and education, so that the children in Bangsamoro could aspire to a future that their parents could not.

"For decades, Malaysia has been home to those who sought refuge from this conflict. Thousands fled in search of safety. Generations have grown up on our shores, far from the land of their ancestors. It is our abiding hope that the agreement gives them a homeland again. For Mindanao, there can be no more lost generations," he said.

While saying that Malaysia was honoured to have played a part in today's historic agreement, the Prime Minister said Malaysia was also willing to help build institutions in Mindanao so that the society that grew in Bangsamoro is stronger than before.

Malaysia was also willing to help in land development, so that farmers in Bangsamoro who were formerly freedom fighters could reap the harvest of peace, he said.

In his speech, Najib also reminded that today's agreement was not an end point but a beginning, thus there was much still to be done.

He stressed that the framework agreement was a historic document, "but it does not solve all the problems".

"Rather, it sets the parameters in which a lasting peace may be found. I hope all sides continue to recognise their responsibilities in the coming months, as they work towards a final peace agreement," he said.

Najib, said that the document signed today was an expression of the trust that people had placed in this peace process.

"That trust is hard won; it must be protected and above all it must be honoured. Only those responsible for the conflict can prevent its return," he said.

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