

We can help develop Mindanao
New Straits Times
16 October 2012

HISTORIC DEAL: Malaysia can offer education to children and invest in land projects, says Najib

MANILA: MALAYSIA has offered to be a partner for peace in pushing for stability and prosperity in southern Philippines.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, at the signing of the Framework Agreement for the Bangsamoro between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), said the past decade had seen the strengthening of trust between Malaysia and the Philippines.

He said Kuala Lumpur looked forward to lending its hand in the development of the region.

Najib said Malaysia was willing to offer training and education so that the children of Bangsamoro could aspire to a future that their parents could not.

"We want to help build institutions so that the society that grows up in Bangsamoro is stronger than what went before.

"Malaysia is willing to invest in land development so that farmers, who were formerly freedom fighters, can reap the harvest of peace.

"So I give my assurance to all the people of the Philippines that we will stand with you to make this agreement work," he said to a resounding applause by the more than 1,000 invitees at Malacanang Palace, where the signing took place.

Najib, in his 15-minute speech, said it was his hope that the agreement would bring about a "new time of moderation" where the practice of religion and the right to a peaceful existence were never again in conflict and that the people were united by common values under a common constitution.

He said the signing of the framework agreement was a beginning, with much still to be done.

He said the accord was a chance to restore dignity to the people in southern Philippines.

"This is a chance to ensure that Bangsamoro people will enjoy the dividends of peace, which they rightly deserve, and for all sides to prove that peace and moderation are hallmarks of all religion, not the preserve of one."

He said Malaysia had been home to those who had sought refuge from the decades-long conflict in Mindanao, which had cost 150,000 lives.

Thousands, he said, had fled to Malaysia in search of safety, with generations growing up away from their homeland. "It is our abiding hope that the agreement gives them a homeland again.

"For Mindanao, there can be no more lost generations," he said before paying honour to those who had lost their lives without getting to witness yesterday's historic signing.

"The agreement does not solve all the problems. Rather, it sets the parameters in which lasting peace may be found. The document signed today is an expression of the trust that the people have placed in this process.

"That trust is hard won, it must be protected," he said, adding that the Philippine government and MILF, in reaching the agreement, had confronted their differences and found common ground, with both sides "giving something"

This, he said, had allowed Filipinos in general to "gain everything".

Copyright © 2012 The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad.

Source: <http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/we-can-help-develop-mindanao-1.157608>