

**MESSAGE OF DR. SAFFRULLAH M. DIPATUAN, BDA CHAIRMAN, DURING A PARTNER'S MEETING SPONSORED BY IC NET AT EL BAJADA HOTEL, DAVAO CITY ON 8 FEBRUARY 2016.**

Representatives from JICA, IC Net and its consultants, OPAPP, and LGU, representatives from BTC and JNC, ladies and gentlemen, Assalamo alaikom wa rahmatollahi wa barakatoho.

The CD-CAAM program is one of the most successful programs implemented by BDA in partnership with government represented by OPAPP & LGUs, JICA & IC Net, Academe and the community stakeholders.

Our Community Development Guidelines and Manuals for Vegetable Production & Marketing, Tilapia Fish Production, Processing and Marketing, and Road Construction and Rehabilitation are living testimonies to this successful endeavor.

Our journey towards the success of this program is full of difficulties and challenges. As we look back, we realize that these difficulties and challenges are what make our success more meaningful, rewarding, and fulfilling. As the saying goes: "Among the songs of birds, the saddest is the sweetest."

The biggest challenge in our current situation is within us. Our communities are not improving because people are inclined to blame others for their pitiful and deplorable condition. Our people tend to blame the national government, the local government, the traditional leaders, the professionals, the Ulama, the Mujahideen whether they are MNLF or MILF, the rich people, and others but they tend to forget to blame themselves. The condition of our people is vividly captured in this anonymous saying: "I have no shoes and I murmured, until I saw a man who has no feet."

Realizing this predicament, the Bangsamoro Development Agency, starting early during its formative years, came up with its Values Transformation Trainings to change the defeatist mindset of our community stakeholders and align it with the Qur'anic verse which states that "Verily Allah will not change the condition of the people unless they change what is in themselves." This means that as believers, we have to be proactive in changing our situation for the better.

Very significantly, we can see that the CD CAAM Program, as a community development model, strikes at the root of the problem. It now has the biggest potential to be replicated in other communities with high promising degree of success.

One very important learning in this program is the successful linking with our local government executives. Recall that the biggest challenge we encountered in pushing for the BBL is the opposition coming from our own local executives starting with our provincial governors, municipal mayors, and barangay chairmen. They are apprehensive that if the BBL is enacted and the BTA is established, the MILF will be entrenched in power and they will be sidelined or marginalized. But of course, this fear is baseless.

If we are only given the opportunity to showcase our approach to the development of our communities thru the CD CAAM model, their fear could have been eliminated.

We in BDA are already positioning ourselves on how to implement the learnings of the CD CAAM model in the context of the entire Bangsamoro area once the

Bangsamoro government is already in place, but unfortunately the BBL that could have led to the establishment of the BTA is now DEAD. The legislators in Philippine Congress murdered the BBL not by way of what they did but more by way of what they did not do. And it is very demoralizing to see that the executive branch of the government led by the President himself is helpless in rescuing the BBL from the unfair and dirty tactics of our lawmakers who used the tyranny of numbers and the lack of quorum to block the BBL.

The crucial issue here is no longer on the non-passage of the BBL but the implication of what happened. The non-passage of BBL means that Philippine Congress has just provided a strong and credible basis for the stand of radical groups in not engaging government in peace negotiations because it is just a waste of money, time and effort. After all, whatever is agreed in the negotiating table could be effectively shoot down by either the judiciary in the case of MOA-AD, and the congress in the case of BBL, no matter how long a time was invested and how much effort and money was spent.

Imagine some lawmakers like Senators Marcos & Santiago saying that the office of the President does not have the authority to represent the whole of government in the peace process? If this is so, then who has the authority to represent government? Is it the Chief Justice, the Senate President or the House Speaker? As far as I know, there is only one Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief in the country and that is the President. Can you imagine Sen. Escudero saying that they (in Congress) are cleaning up the mess done by the government peace panel giving the impression that the panel did a hell of a job.

As I reflect and attempt to dissect the sudden turn of events, I was able to identify a number of wish list. At this juncture, this could only amount to wishful thinking but nonetheless I hope you will allow me to share with you my wish list if only to appease my grieving heart. Please don't tell me not to feel agitated because of what happened because it will just make me furious. How can I not feel agitated when I fear that the unfortunate turn of events could bring us back to turbulent times when innocent bloods are continuously being shed, number of orphans and widows increasing, and communities continue to be destroyed? Let me cry, let me grieve at this moment so that I may be able to unburden my heart and one day I will, once again, be ready to face the challenges of tomorrow with a high spirit.

The BBL is an agreed formula that was a product of almost two decades of peace negotiation and both parties agree that it could address centuries old injustices. Now that it is dead, it only means that injustices to the Bangsamoro will continue. That is what our lawmakers have done.

Congressman Balindong, during his last valedictory address in congress, rightfully quoted a US President who said: "When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty." What Congressman Balindong missed to remind his colleagues, however, is that for as long as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) is not implemented, the Bangsamoro people will continue to assert their right to freedom and self-determination and the Philippine Government, on one hand, will continue to send the best of its young men to quell the assertion of the Bangsamoro, and the young and dedicated Bangsamoro Mujahideen, on the other hand, will continue to fight in defence of the rights of their people and homeland. So young Filipino and Bangsamoro men and women will continue to kill and die in bloody combat simply because the Philippine government squandered the chance of a lifetime to put an end to the Mindanao Conflict.

Let me go back to my wish list lest I wander and lose my focus:

1) **How I wish** that the President was able to summon his strong political will to push for the BBL. The political will of the President is tried and tested. It was seen in action during the impeachment of Chief Justice Corona that was unprecedented in contemporary Philippine political history and during the enactment of the controversial Reproductive Health Bill that was opposed by the popular and powerful Christian clergies. But against all odds, the President got what he wanted. So, how I wish the President was able to use the same strong political will when it comes to the BBL.

2) **How I wish** the President honoured his commitment of certifying the BBL as Urgent Administration Bill. It would have fast tracked its discussion in congress and made sure that all administration legislators pushed hard to pass it. It is disheartening to learn later that he did not, which gave a signal to the lawmakers that the government is not really serious about the passage of the bill.

3) **How I wish** the President did not allow OPLAN EXODUS to be implemented at a time when we are already on the verge of passing the law. The OPLAN identified the MILF as enemy force and deliberately disregarded established ceasefire mechanisms with the full knowledge of the President.

4) **How I wish** the President reigned on ARMM LGU officials to stop opposing the BBL. In a meeting with BTC members in Malacanang, one of the Commissioners asked the President what they intend to do with regards to ARMM local executives opposing the bill. The President assured the BTC commissioners that he will summon them in Malacanang and ask them not to oppose the bill.

The President, however, did not do this because later on the ARMM Local Executives came out with a Consolidated Position Paper against the BBL.

The CD-CAAM model is well aligned on BDA's focus on Quick Impact Projects (QIP's) to immediately deliver the dividends of peace to grassroots communities as identified in the Bangsamoro Development Plan. But in the absence of the BBL we are now at a crossroad with regards to how to move forward with our Plan, in general, and the CD-CAAM, in particular.

At this point, we are calling on our development partners like JICA to continue engaging us on the development track even as both parties are trying to figure out how to move forward in the political and diplomatic tracks because while it is true that the BBL is dead, the CAB is very much alive.

In passing, let me express my gratitude to everybody especially OPAPP, JICA, IC NET and LGUs for their part in making this collaborative effort a success. Thank you and wassalam.