

Suggested Speech
for Minister Mohagher Iqbal
on the occasion of
BRAC Learners Graduation Ceremony
Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat | 02 April 2019

1. Greetings

Assalamu alaikum.

My compliments to:

- His Excellency Asad Alam Siam, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Philippines
- Francesca Lawe-Davies, First Secretary, Australian Embassy in the Philippines
- Sultan Kudarat Mayor Shameem Mastura
- Mr. Anowar Hossain, BRAC Regional Director for Asia
- Dr. Bai Alibai Aliuden, Al-Haja, schools division superintendent of Maguindanao 2
- Dr. Ebrahim Embing, Division Coordinator
- Khalima Embing-Yusof, school head of CDIS
- Barangay officials
- Learners, teachers, and parents who are here today...good afternoon.

2. Introduction

Maraming salamat sa pag-imbata ninyo sa akin. Thanks for inviting me here.

It's been quite a while since I joined a graduation ceremony. Surely, this brings back memories of my childhood.

Napakasarap ang pakiramdam di ba mga bata na ga-graduate na kayo? Indeed, graduation ceremonies are happy milestones. And I am sure your parents are proud of your achievements and your teachers, too.

Maswerte kayo ngayon na narito at tinatamasa ang bunga ng kapayapaan. Ito naman talaga ang misyon ng ating mahigit 50 taong pakikipaka, ang mabigyan ng marangal at mapayapang pamumuhay ang ating mga anak.

Let me translate this for our dear visitors. I told the children that they are fortunate for starting to reap the benefits of peace. This is the mission of our more than 50 years of armed struggle – to provide our children a decent and peaceful living conditions.

You know, I spent much of my youth in the armed struggle. Many of our community members here also experienced being a ‘bakwit’ – internally displaced persons we call them. And I know for a fact that it is not easy to live in the dire conditions brought by war.

Kaya mga bata, napaka-swerte ninyo ngayon na namumuhay kayo na payapa. Marami sa mga kabataan noon ang hindi nakapag-aral dahil sa giyera at pakikibaka. Marami sa mga anak ng ating mga kasamahan sa MILF ang hindi nakapag-aral dahil sa prinsipyo at pakikipaglaban noon.

But the sacrifices of our brother and sisters throughout the course of our armed struggle were not put to waste.

Today’s, graduation ceremony is a testament that the dawn of just and lasting peace as well as genuine progress is within reach.

3. Religion and education

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to point out that Islam – just like Christianity, puts premium on education. Islam is a way of life for Muslims. The Holy Qur'an tells us to seek knowledge. Even the first word of the Holy Qur'an tells us to "read."

Sabi ng Allah [SWT] sa Holy Qur'an: magbasa. Yan ang unang salita ng Holy Qur'an. Kaya tayong mga Muslim dapat marunong magbasa ng Qur'an. Kaya tayo pinapadala ng mga magulang natin sa madrasah upang matuto tayong magbasa dahil required sa ating relihiyon na magbasa. Inaasahan ko na ang mga batang Moro na nagtapos ngayon ay marunong magbasa ng Qur'an.

Sa mga kapatid naman natin na Kristiyano, ang sabi ng Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." It is a profound way of saying na kapag may takot ka sa Panginoon – alam mo kung ano ang mali at tama.

This is why it is important to be discerning. And to be discerning, we need to be educated. We need to seek knowledge.

For us Muslims, knowledge is a pre-requisite to living Islam as a way of life. And I believe this also the same with our Christian brothers and sisters. As a way of life, Christians are also taught to discern right from wrong.

I think you will agree with me when I say that we can only build a progressive and peaceful nation if we are able to inculcate in our children the teachings of our religion. Whatever our failures as a country or as a people, are reflections of how we raise our children, isn't it? And education has a big part to play in raising our children.

This is why it is very clear in the Bangsamoro Organic Law that the Bangsamoro Government will be establishing an educational system that is reflective of our aspirations as a people. In terms of education, we aspire to produce not only competent graduates, but also graduates with moral high ground.

This is why the Bangsamoro Organic law will not curtail its people's right to religion. It will even support the religions of its people. Because religion will strike the balance between seeking knowledge and making sure that knowledge is put into good use.

I have been reading about news reports on a legislative measure, making Good Moral and Right Conduct or GMRC as a separate subject. I think this bill, which will be filed by Senator JV Ejercito in the Senate, is important. We have been producing brilliant professionals, but to tell you honestly, many of them don't have the desired moral character and heart.

In the Bangsamoro, Moro children and youth will be afforded with madrasah education and Arabic studies. A contextualized curriculum will be developed for our Lumad and Christian children. This is in the hope that we will not only be producing technically competent and world-class professionals, but also professionals who have the heart for the people – for the Bangsamoro and for our nation.

4. Closing statements

The Bangsamoro Government is on the right track. We will be investing heavily in producing graduates that are not only experts in their fields, but also exhibit the tenets of our ways of life.

Mga bata, magpasalamat kayo sa inyong mga magulang at mga guro. Nawa'y ang lahat ng magagandang aral na inyong natutunan sa eskwela ay mananatili sa inyong puso at isipan. Hindi nagtatapos ang inyong pag-aaral sa graduation ninyo ngayon. Kaya pagbutihin ang inyong pag-aaral sa mga susunod pa na mga taon.

Palakpakan naman natin ang mga magulang ng mga bata. Alalahanin ninyo na ang edukasyon ng inyong mga anak ay hindi lamang nakasalalay sa paaralan at kanilang mga guro. Malaki ang papel na ginagampanan ng mga magulang sa paghubog nga talino at magandang asal ng mga bata.

Bigyan din natin ng pugay ang mga guro at ang paaralan ng mga bata. Alam ninyo, hindi po madali ang pagiging guro lalo na dito sa atin sa BARMM. Makakaasa po kayo na ang bagong pamunuan ng Bangsamoro Government ay may mas malaking puso para sa inyong mga guro. Alam namin ang lahat ng inyong hinagpis kaya makakasa kayo ng reporma sa edukasyon kung saan lahat ay makikinabang.

And to our partners in education, thank you so much for the unrelenting support.

To First Secretary Davies, kindly extend my gratitude to the Australian Government for your continued support to education in the BARMM. Thank you for training our teachers, building classrooms, and sending our professionals to Australia to study in recent years.

Thank you for helping the ministry at this very crucial time of the transition period through the Pathways Program. You have been kind to us, providing us experts advice in many aspects of our day-to-day operations. We will be doing

a lot of initiatives in the immediate and medium term. We will be needing more of your support.

Indeed, Australia has been our friend. This friendship will get even stronger in the coming years.

Thanks also to BRAC and the support of the Bangladesh embassy in the Philippines. We will be studying the BRAC model. We hope to learn from your experience so we could design appropriate alternative delivery modes for our school-less barangays. Thanks to BRAC for helping provide access to education to thousands of our children across the Bangsamoro.

Thank you.

Assalamu alaikum.

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