

**Delivered during the Fulbright Philippines Virtual Roadshow for the BARMM
on February 16, 2021**

Bismillahir Rahmaanir Rahim
Hamdalah
Salaam

Good afternoon to everyone who joined us for this event. First of all, let me thank our friends from Fulbright for making it a point to extend this program to our Bangsamoro youth. In particular, thank you to the Fulbright Alumni, the officials from the Philippine-American Educational Foundation, and my fellow workers in government for making sure this roadshow reaches the BARMM, and for giving your time to talk to all the Bangsamoro youth tuning in to this event across all our provinces. (Special mention to my good friend, a dear classmate from way, way back in college, Mr. Julio Amador, for thinking of the Bangsamoro as one of the focus areas for your roadshow.)

Now that we've heard more details and information about the Fulbright Programs, and now that you've had your questions answered by our friends from PAEF, I'd like to talk to you on a more personal note. I'd like to talk to you about the *why*.

Some of you may already know this—I was honored and privileged to be chosen for another scholarship program back in 2016, which allowed me to pursue my Masters degree in another country. While that is not THE Fulbright Program, I feel equally passionate for competitive scholarship programs such as this and see the benefit of having more of our youth in the Bangsamoro take advantage of similar opportunities.

I tell you this because that experience is a big reason why I strongly encourage you to not let chances like this pass. There is truly so much to gain in pursuing higher education — and we can say that the fruits even multiply especially when we get to do that in renowned learning institutions in new environments.

I can tell you that that opportunity really widened my horizons and enriched me as a professional, as a development worker, and even as a person. But more than that, I can say that it was that experience that equipped me and allowed me to better contribute now, in my own way, to this very crucial period in the history of the Bangsamoro. Just for example, the learnings and experiences I gathered from that opportunity have been so useful in the work that we are doing now to pioneer a program for Islamic Finance in the BARMM. So bear in mind that what you have here is the opportunity to grow, in both senses of the word—that is, in the sense of developing as individuals, and of developing something outside ourselves.

It was not always easy, and it will not be easy in your case as well. And I tell you this not to discourage you but to let you know that this will require you to push yourselves beyond your preconceived limits. You'll meet your fair share of challenges, like many of those who came before you. Starting from choosing the degree to pursue, the institution or university to join, and particularly to compete with all others in this highly sought-after program. And once, inshaaAllah, some of you are fortunate to get in, taking yourselves out of your comfort zones and literally crossing borders to new terrain, while taking on the rigours of an American education, is no joke. It will exact so much from you that you come out of the experience a new person.

But nothing is wasted as long as we do it for a higher purpose—and every step, every hardship, is just as crucial in helping us make bigger, more impactful, and more meaningful contributions to our region and our people.

Before I end, let me say that I'm so happy to see all of you here today, because this is exactly what the decades of struggle, the long and often meandering peace negotiations, and the painstaking transition have always been about. It has always been about bringing new and better opportunities to the next generation of Bangsamoro—opportunities to have better futures, to build stronger communities, to lead happier lives. Today these opportunities are yours for the taking—and I urge you all, especially our Bangsamoro college and graduate students, to grab them. Grab them and use them for us to have the things I just said – better futures, stronger communities, and happier lives. But above all, use this with one end in mind – to give back to our people.

We are all excited to see what new and brighter heights you will bring to the Bangsamoro.

I wish you all the best. Thank you very much.

ATTY. ANNA TARHATA BASMAN
Member of the Parliament, Bangsamoro