

Delivered during the 1ST BANGSAMORO WOMEN SUMMIT

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Isti'adhah

Basmalah

Hamdalah

Musa's du'a

Amma baad

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabaratuh.

Good morning and Happy Women's Month to all our participants. Before anything else, let me thank the Bangsamoro Women's Commission for organizing this Bangsamoro Women Summit despite the challenges we face today.

Even after a year of different degrees of lockdown, cases are still reaching record highs. Our lives are still being disrupted by the pandemic. So kahit socially distanced tayo ngayon, nakakatuwang makasama kayong lahat sa Summit na ito. Events like this give us a sense of hope and normalcy. But more than that, it is a very good reminder that there are so many of us who are working for the advancement of Bangsamoro women even as we also try to lead our own communities or do our own roles to help the region deal with COVID-19.

Women's Month was also a good reminder that women's issues should not be sidelined because of COVID. UN Women reminds us that women face distinct challenges in terms of their safety and well-being during the pandemic—like difficulties in accessing healthcare, gender-based violence, and worsening economic insecurity. Our work now should ensure that these issues are not being overlooked, keeping in mind that women's welfare—and an important part of that is increased women's participation—is part of the new normal we have to build in the Bangsamoro.

I'm also very happy to see that our session today links political participation and economic empowerment. For many of our allies, and maybe even for some advocates, the focus is often on just one or the other. But the thing is we do not have to choose. In many ways, this is a package deal; we cannot have just one but not the other.

If we want to push women's political empowerment, we need to push for their economic empowerment—because it's that economic empowerment that will allow women to break off the constraints of insecurity and take place in positions of leadership. We know that poverty and insecurity are big obstacles preventing women from leading and fully participating in politics. Paano nga naman ganap na

makikilahok ang kababaihan sa lipunan kung may mas malalaking problema pa silang hinaharap sa sariling tahanan?

At the same time, if we want to push for women's economic empowerment, we also have to push for their political empowerment—because that's how we ensure that we can put in place policies and systems that would level the playing field and allow women to thrive. Indeed, the more that women are present in the political arena, the more that their needs will be met and considered in decision-making.

That's why one of our key concerns during this transition period is to push for women's empowerment wherever we can. In the BTA, we're trying to lay down the groundwork for stronger women's political participation. That means making sure our ministries are advancing gender issues. That means setting up pathways where women can assert their rights and needs in the institutions we are setting up in the Bangsamoro government. That's also what we're looking at now as we work to strengthen women's participation in the electoral process through the Bangsamoro Electoral Code.

But as I have emphasized, this also means making sure our regional economy grows—growth that we will share instead of waiting to trickle down; growth that would lead to more comfortable, more prosperous, and more empowering lives for our fellow Bangsamoro, especially those in the margins.

One of the things we are doing here is advancing Islamic Finance, which is part of our work to establish a comprehensive halal ecosystem centered in the region. With the Ministry of Finance, and Budget and Management, we started the Islamic Finance in the Bangsamoro Program, which aims to advance Islamic Finance through advocacy and awareness raising and policy reform. That's still ongoing, and you can check out previous episodes in our Facebook page. But I mention this because the advocacy for women's leadership does not exist in a vacuum. There are so many overlapping and intersecting factors that shape it—among them the economic status and welfare of the women we are pushing to participate and lead.

This takes on even greater importance now as we try to recover from the pandemic. It's true whether it's in industries, in governance, or in society, whether it's the economic or the political kind: more than being the right thing to do, empowerment pays off. People have better lives, workers become more productive, and countries grow faster. In the context of the pandemic, empowerment means we recover stronger.

Today women account for only 13 out of 80 seats in Parliament. As in many other places around the world, so much more could be done to strengthen women's meaningful participation. I always say this, because sometimes that number surprises

me—given how vocal my fellow women MPs are, given how much they contribute to the work of Parliament from many different areas of expertise and from very diverse backgrounds. Which is not to say that we are content with that number; we should not be. Just imagine how much more we could do if we double that; if we triple that; and so on. Just imagine what the Bangsamoro region would look like.

My hope is for this summit to be a concrete step towards the region we envision—a homeland that is peaceful, prosperous, and truly equitable.

Again, Happy Women’s Month, and thank you.

ATTY. ANNA TARHATA BASMAN

Member of Parliament

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