

**Delivered during the Role of Women in Multi-level Governance Transition Event**  
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*Hamdala*  
*Salaam*

Thank you to the Bangsamoro Women Commission and the Forum of Federations, our organizers, as well as my fellow resource speakers for what I foresee will be an enriching sharing and discussion on the role of women in multi-level governance transition. It is my honor to share with you some insights and experiences we have gained as we work from negotiations to peace agreement implementation in the Bangsamoro peace process. It is no secret that in my past life, I had the distinct privilege of being part of the peace negotiations as a member of the legal team of the Government Panel that engaged in peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

One of the hallmarks of the Bangsamoro peace process—especially in the past decade or so, which saw the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro or CAB—is the sustained participation of women.

When peace talks were restarted in 2010 with the MILF after the MOA-AD debacle in 2008, the government had one woman in its initial three-member panel—Prof. Miriam Coronel Ferrer, an academic. As it expanded, another woman—then Usec. Yasmin Busran Lao—was appointed to the five-person panel. In 2012, Prof. Coronel Ferrer was appointed chair of the panel—the very first female chair in the history of the peace process, not only in the Philippines but all over the globe. At that time, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process was headed by a woman, Teresita Quintos Deles, who was also the first woman to head the agency.

With women leading at the top of the peace process, it is perhaps no surprise that the government technical working groups that later negotiated key components of the peace process—like the annexes on Wealth-Sharing, Transitional Arrangements and Modalities, and Normalization were also all chaired by women; in the end, three out of four working groups on the Annexes were headed by women. My predecessor in the legal team was also a woman; so was the head of the panel secretariat. Almost 70% of the government panel secretariat were women, as were 60% of our legal team. And while the MILF panel was all-male at the start, it was eventually joined by a woman panel member in the person of now Minister Raissa Jajurie, as well as advisers, consultants, and other technical personnel. The first batch of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, had four women out of fifteen members, while the second batch involved five women out of its twenty-one members.

All these, of course, do not even include the women in civil society groups which actively accompanied the peace process and lobbied for gender inclusion in the peace agreement, as well as in international groups and bodies that played key roles in its success. It goes without

saying, there were also numerous women working hard in communities on the ground, who pushed both parties to commit to the peace talks.

With the peace agreement signed and a Bangsamoro autonomous region in place, the focus now is on the work of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority; building on the momentum and the work done by women in past years, today women continue to remain engaged as the peace negotiations turned into peace agreement implementation.

In the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, women MPs from different backgrounds and carrying diverse expertise are enriching discussions on policies and legislation and heading critical committees. Female Cabinet members and officials in the Bangsamoro Government are playing vital roles in decision-making in the BARMM. As I've said before, while our number is a useful metric, this is not just about counting women—it's about ensuring that we count; and the impact women have been able to make in Bangsamoro governance is so far undeniable.

From looking back at the evolution from negotiations to peace agreement implementation—and the role women have played throughout the whole process—allow me to share three important lessons that I've learned which can apply not only for peace processes, but also for the work ahead of us in the Bangsamoro as we endeavor to complete this transition period.

The first is that women's participation is important, because it enriches the fruit of any endeavor. Not only was the work for peace sustained by the participation of women at all levels; this arguably made the results better. Women brought diverse perspectives and approaches to a usually male-dominated arena; doing so made for healthier and more robust discussions. The results are clear, for instance, in the quality of the CAB and the gains it has already made. Provisions on meaningful women's participation, special programs for vulnerable sectors like the orphans and widows, particular interventions for women combatants, and many other aspects of the peace deal owe their existence not only to the presence of women in the table but also the willingness of their male counterparts to listen and take heed of their input.

In the BTA, the active participation of women – both in the Government of the Day, in the executive, and the Parliament, in the legislative – made for policies and laws that are more gender conscious and inclusive.

Second: involvement of women opens the door for more women. Our experience has proven that women's participation at any level only results in the entry of more women into the process. With women more than proving their capability at different aspects of the peace talks, the whole process became more receptive and saw how indispensable our contributions were. Examples of mechanisms in the peace process that are populated or even led by women have already been given. In the transitional government, we only have to look at the female Ministers, MPs, and other ranking officials in the Bangsamoro to see the team of able women they've also brought into the bureaucracy. And this number, not surprisingly, will only multiply exponentially. Demonstrating that woman can and should be in the picture paves the way for

more of our younger generation to also consider entering the field, in this case, of public service.

Finally, ensuring women's participation is an active struggle in itself. It is not going to be guaranteed; it will not be automatically baked into systems and structures. In short: women's participation will not be handed to us on a silver platter. And even if it is a fact today, that does not mean it will be so forever. It could change; it could weaken; it could be sidelined. We cannot take it for granted—women's participation is hard-fought, and as we celebrate the inroads we have accomplished, we are called to constantly assert it whenever and wherever decisions are being made. There is no sitting on our laurels for us women if we are to keep on improving upon our status quo.

And as we forge on and look at women in the transitional government, we must also remember that peace agreement implementation is not only about the BARMM. We must not forget the women in our communities that are the intended beneficiaries of the socio-economic aspect of the CAB, the women combatants who are part of the normalization process, the women survivors of the atrocities of the decades-long war who are the main players in our quest for transitional justice, and many others who are part and parcel of the peace we are trying to build in the Bangsamoro and beyond.

We must keep in mind that their participation makes the process and its results better. Their inclusion and involvement are greatly aided when women themselves are part of the decision- and policy-making. Getting women in opens the doors for more and stronger participation. But even as we succeed, we bear in mind that we must always remain active and vigilant in asserting and claiming our space.

Thank you very much.

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