

**DEMOCRACY IS THE NEXT PATH:
OUR TRANSFORMATION FROM AN ARMED REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION
TO A SOCIAL MOVEMENT**

Remarks delivered by MILF Panel Chair Mohagher Iqbal
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Brothers and sisters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), esteemed leaders, comrades in our long and arduous struggle, today we stand at a critical juncture in the history of our people. We gather not only to reflect on the battles we have fought, the sacrifices we have made, and the lives we lost for the freedom and dignity of our people but also to chart a new path forward—a path that honors the past and embraces the future.

Our struggle for self-determination, for justice, and for peace has taken many forms over the years. We have fought with arms in defense of our faith, our lands, our rights, and our people. We have negotiated across tables, making our case with conviction and integrity. We have stood in the face of overwhelming odds, never losing sight of our goal—a Bangsamoro that is free, dignified, and at peace.

Today, the nature of that struggle must change. We will transition from armed revolution to builders of a just and democratic society, we must recognize that our primary weapons are no longer arms, but ideas. Our battlefield is no longer in the marshlands but in the institutions of democracy, in Parliament, in the hearts of our people, and in the halls of governance. This transition will not be easy, and I understand the uncertainties that lie ahead, but I am here to tell you: **democracy is the next path of our struggle.**

The MILF and the revolutionary groups were all born out of necessity. We took up arms when no other options remained. Our people were oppressed, denied their basic rights, their land taken, their faith and culture disrespected, and their future darkened by injustice. The only language the world seemed to understand were force and threats of force, and we were forced to respond in that language. We made the world listen. Our resistance forced government to the negotiating table. It made them acknowledge that we cannot be ignored or belittled. It was

this very resistance that led to the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), and the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

But let us not forget that this victory was not handed to us on a silver platter, it was won through the bravery and sacrifice of thousands of our brothers and sisters, many of whom are no longer with us. They gave their lives so that we could live in a world where the Bangsamoro people could determine their own fate. Their blood has watered the soil of our revolution, and their spirits stand with us today as we take this next step. It was also won by our staying committed to the MILF program of Islamization, organizational strengthening, self-reliance and military build-up. But let me remind you: in this new path, democracy, not military build-up, is our tool to realize the goals we have always fought for: justice, equality, and freedom.

Democracy is the collective voice of the Bangsamoro people. It allows us to hold those in power accountable. It gives us the ability to participate in decisions that shape our future. But democracy does not work automatically. It requires active participation, vigilance, and a commitment to building institutions that serve the people. Our role now is to empower our communities, strengthen civil society, and ensure that the democratic process is inclusive and representative. Our journey as revolutionaries may have taken us through armed struggle, but our future will be determined by the democratic process.

Many of you might be wondering: What does this transition really mean? How do we, who have fought on the frontlines for so many years, shift our focus to building institutions and engaging in the democratic process? The answer lies in understanding that a social movement is as powerful as any revolutionary force—sometimes even more so. A social movement does not depend on the barrel of a gun, but on the **power of our story – the story of our resistance and struggle against tyranny.**

The MILF will lead this social movement by organizing our people, teaching them how to hold power holders accountable to the people, educating them about their rights, and empowering them to participate in governance. Our battlefields now are the fields of education, development, environment, and political participation. Our soldiers are no longer fighters but

teachers, community organizers, political party members, civil servants, and leaders in their own right.

Some of you may wonder if this transition means the end of the MILF. I say to you: **The MILF is not disappearing. We are transforming.** Our identity as armed revolutionary group will always be a part of our narrative, but we are now builders of peace, advocates of justice, and champions of democracy. Our movement will evolve into something broader and more inclusive, one that encompasses not only former combatants but also students, farmers, businesspeople, and civil society leaders. **Our strength lies in our unity and our ability to adapt to the challenges of each era.**

This is not the end of the struggle; this is the beginning of a new path. Our goals—to secure self-determination, justice, peace—remain the same. What is changing is the method by which we will achieve these goals. We are now winning with ballots, not bullets. We are winning with arguments and consensus. We are winning hearts, minds and hands.

Brothers and sisters, the path ahead is not going to be easy. There will be people and groups who will actively conspire to defeat us. There will be challenges and setbacks. But remember: our people have endured far worse, and we have come out stronger every time. Our transition to democracy is an extension of the struggle we have always fought. It is a fight for our future, for the generations yet to come.

I call upon each and every one of you to embrace this new path with the same vigor, heroism and determination you showed on the battlefield. We are now builders of a new Bangsamoro society. We will bring a new hope.

Let us march forward! Let us achieve with the strength of our unity and the power of our cause. Let us show the world that the Bangsamoro is not only capable of waging a revolution but also of building a peaceful, just, and democratic society. **Our struggle continues! Together, we will win the peace!**

Pagpalain, MILF. Pagpalain, Bangsamoro!