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Peace be with you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to address this prestigious body.

I am Mucha Shim Quiling Arquiza coming from Sulu island of Mindanao, Southern Philippines. I represent the Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, a coalition of Bangsamoro civil society organizations and affiliate of the national coalition of education reform advocates or E-NET. Affirming that education is human rights, we advocate for accessible and quality education that is gender fair, promoting multiculturalism and is liberating. We envision an alternative learning system which is inspired by the people's culture, history and life-experiences, consistent with our indigenous tradition of education as a process of life-long learning. We promote community-based, development-oriented and holistic learning, and one that is especially concerned for the marginalized, excluded and vulnerable such as the ethnic, national, linguistic and religious minorities.

Mr Chairman, the Philippine experience in human rights work and peace building may often been lauded by government and non-government international observers as model of success stories. Yet despite of the mileage gained in human rights advocacy especially among the majority Filipino civil society, the minorities are notably lagging behind. By minority, we mean the marginalized, excluded and vulnerable segments of the Philippine society such as the indigenous Lumad and the Bangsamoro Muslims of Mindanao and Sulu.

This is allowed to happen, Mr Chairman, because minorities remain deprived and disenfranchised economically and are socially marginalized. Their capacities are undermined and their contributions are not recognised. This discriminatory attitude is perpetuated by Philippine state's insistence on a mainstreaming model and integrationist policy of development which succeeds only in assimilating the minorities into a monolithic and homogenous (majority-dominated) culture.

One such manifestation is the continuing non-enjoyment of the minorities of their basic social rights such as to education and, consequently, to development. While Philippine constitution believes as a matter of principle that education is a fundamental right, government's lacklustre performance to fulfil its obligations proves the opposite. For one, it is yet to show its political will to fulfil its obligations to international standards of development such as the Millennium Development Goal where it has committed, among others, to meet the primary objective for education as agreed in the Dakar Framework of Action, i.e. *to ensure that ALL children, youth and adults complete a good quality basic education by 2015 with emphasis to be given to disadvantaged children including the poorest working children, children in conflict and those with special needs.*

Mr Chairman, in order to prove its sincerity in meeting international commitment and objectives, the Philippine state must take it upon itself to continue to mobilise resources and enhance investment in basic education and in the promotion and support of the minorities' indigenous learning systems. Official Development Assistance (ODA) being an important component of public financing must be realigned so that at least 20% of the ODA is reserved for the social sector, particularly for education and health especially of minorities who comprise the majority poor, marginalized, excluded and vulnerable (MEVs). Further, corrective measures should be done to increase the availment of education sector and civil society. Funding windows for local communities and home-grown NGOs should be increased especially in endeavors where they have pioneered and proven their capability to implement. The engagement of foreign consultants as well as so-called experts who are not sensitive to minorities' culture must be restricted and must be resorted only when local expertise among the minorities themselves are not available.

We await for the Philippine state to show its sincerity, for example, by recognising and accrediting our indigenous learning systems such as those of the Mindanao Lumads and the Bangsamoro **madaris** system to its **full extent** as a public education system appropriate to our specific social and cultural needs and context. We challenge the government to encourage diverse and alternative learning systems to flourish by removing obstacles to our recognition and acceptance, especially abrogating arbitrary and derogatory classification of indigenous learning systems such as the Muslims' madaris as "sectarian" and "non-formal" thus, infantilising and rendering it inferior from the formal and mainstream education. We would rather be recognised at our own merit as not only the ALTERNATIVE but also the APPROPRIATE learning system at par with that of the mainstream. And because the state is obliged to make it possible for learners from alternative learning systems to excel and be comparable in competencies with those graduated from the mainstream schools, it must provide and give the ALS top priority in the national education budget. More importantly, the state should demonstrate its political will to implement important education laws such as the Education for All Philippine (EFA) Plan 2015 in full, and empower mechanisms such as the National Commission on Education for All (NCEFA) and its local expressions to effectively perform its mandates especially where civil society is recognised as equal partner of government in moving needed reforms in education.

Education being a proven effective strategy for building social capital, promoting multiculturalism and in eradicating any forms of racial discriminations and intolerance, the Philippine state must encourage inter-cultural exchange and dialogue among peoples and make education for peace and human rights as flagship components of its post-conflict humanitarian programmes in Mindanao and Sulu.

Mr Chairman, in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao alone, we have a big loan from the World Bank amounting to more than 30 Million US Dollars, this is a debt burden that even our grandchildren shall bear after we are gone. Regretfully, there is little money in the ARMM Social Fund (ASF), if at all, invested for education and in building the social capital. Another resource wastage is that of humanitarian aids that have been pouring in to Mindanao and Sulu purported to bring in lasting peace where a sizeable contribution is channelled through the UN Multidonor basket. We have sadly witnessed how a large portion of such funds have to be utilized for never-ending relief and rehabilitation of displaced communities because government offensives continue despite its signing a "cessation of hostilities" with insurgent groups. Also, the bigger part of investment went to projects aiming at de-mobilizing and "integrating" the insurgents but only trickles have actually resulted to

minority people's meaningful participation and empowerment through education. Now, as we await the outcome of the peace-talks between the GRP and the MILF, and fearfully aware of the Arroyo administration's obsession with counter-terrorism, we are watching with apprehension that humanitarian aids might again go to activities that further sow fear and aggravate divisions among our peoples. We therefore urge the appropriate UN commissions to monitor and put necessary pressure so that the Philippine State shall immediately desist from its exaggerated and excessive engagement in counter-terrorism campaigns and correct its wrong notion that combating terrorism is necessarily a strategy towards lasting peace. And maybe, more significantly, the UN bodies should encourage development actors to put in their contributions for the empowerment of the minority peoples' civil society so that it can do its role in educating the government that preventing terrorism can NOT be a development goal when the real enemy is illiteracy and poverty.

Short of the above, Mr Chairman, the Philippine government will continually be guilty of violating the Lumad and Bangsamoro people's rights as minorities, namely, their right to exercise their culture and preserve and perpetuate the same to the younger generation. It shall be violating the minorities' right to participate in designing their development and their right to non-discrimination.

Short of the above, the Philippine government shall be subverting the very essence and spirit of ALL the seven international covenants and related protocols that it has so dutifully signed and become party to.

In closing, we call on the relevant United Nations bodies such as the UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO and the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights to advocate our cause and pressure the Philippine government to fulfil its obligations and respect the minority peoples' right to a liberating education, right to participation in meaningful development and right to genuine self determination.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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