What is next in the Bangsamoro?

The peace process, which began in 1997 between the Philippines' government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), has passed a new phase with the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement in 2014. Both parties worked to protect the peace process from this date until the ratification of the law. On July 27, 2018, the Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte approved the Bangsamoro Organic Law and steps have been taken for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The Bangsamoro Organic Law paves the way for the establishment of an autonomous region for the Bangsamoro where the country's Muslim majority live in southern Philippines. The newly established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region includes the already existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) such as the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao Sur, Sulu, Tawi Tawi, Basilan and the cities of Marawi and Lamitan. This will also include Cotabato City, Lamitan City, six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 villages in North Cotabato. The population of the areas will vote for the incoming plebiscite (referendum). Muslims constitute 91% of those living in the region. According to the agreement, the plebiscite must be made within 90 days after the signing of the law. The people who would vote for the plebiscite have completed their registration. Approximately 1,9 million people will vote in the plebiscite scheduled on January 21, 2019. Should the Yes vote win, the Bangsamoro transition government will be established to govern the MILF. The transition government will work for building the governmental structure until the next election which be held in 2022.

Why Yes?

MILF leader Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim said the new law was expected to eradicate extremist movements in the region and to give a voice and a fairer chance for the Muslim youth to live a better life.

When the autonomous region is established, the Muslim population will have an authority that they belong to. But the creation of the administration will be the most difficult phase of the process. The Bangsamoro region has been the lowest invested area and one of the poorest regions in the Philippines due to years of conflict. In addition, the region needs investment in fields such as education, health and infrastructure. For this reason, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region needs skilful, competent, dedicated, committed, and experienced human resources to help govern the region.

Now, Bangsamoro people need to transfer their achievements on the battlefield to the political field. MILF's 40,000-strong armed force will gradually step down or join the police forces. Six MILF camps have been reorganized to ensure the fighters' transition to normal life.

Turkey and Malaysia have been the most supportive countries during the peace process between the Philippines government and the Bangsamoro. While the Malaysian government was mediating the peace process, a member of Turkey's IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation took part in the Independent Monitoring Committee. In addition, with scholarships provided by these two countries, Bangsamoro students were able to take their education abroad.

The Difference Between ARMM and BARMM

What is the difference between the existing ARMM and the newly established BARMM, and why did the new autonomous region need to be established?

The ARMM region was identified in 1989 as a result of on-going talks between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Philippines government. However, the MNLF objected to the decree about the autonomous region by plebiscite and announced that they would not recognize the result. Following the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, MNLF leader Nur Misuari became the governor of the autonomous region. However, this region and the rights granted to the people of Bangsamoro did not solve the problems that they had before. It is believed that ARMM was a failed experiment due to

corruption and mismanagement.

The autonomous region and the form of government set out in the new law were re-established by taking into account the complaints and requests of Muslims in the region; as well as highlighting the need to address the historical injustices suffered by the Bangsamoro. The government will come with a parliamentary system instead of a unitary system.

Voters will elect 80 parliament members representing different parties, regions, and sectors including the indigenous people. Then Members of the Parliament will elect a Prime Minister and two Deputy Prime Ministers. The Prime Minister will also appoint its cabinet members.

Sharia court will be authorized in cases involving Muslims in the region. But people of different faiths in the region will not be tried according to the Sharia laws.

Unlike the ARMM region, the BARMM region will automatically receive their budget through the block grant without waiting for the senate approval. Moreover, the share of the region's income such as natural resources and tax revenues will increase from 70% to 75%. Also, the fighters will be able to participate in the police force according to the age, weight, and education set out by the BOL.

The national government will maintain its authority over constitutional and national issues such as foreign affairs and defence. The Bangsamoro government will have special authority in some areas including budgeting, justice management, agriculture, traditional laws, generating revenue sources, disaster risk reduction, economic zones, ancestral domain, grants and donations, human rights, public affairs, social services, tourism and trade and industry.

The agreement has shift Bangsamoro’s struggle from that of armed into a political one. Now, after prolonged negotiations, a stronger autonomous government has been created for them. If this model of regional government successfully governs its people and region, this means the region would be able to make productions and use their natural and human resources for the better good. In the end, it would only result in the peace and economic growth in the whole Mindanao Island in particular, and in the Philippines as a whole.