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(L-R): UNDP Philippines-Peace and Stabilization Programme Team Lead Dr. Srinivas Kumar, Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin Abalos, Jr., National Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, Special Assistant to the President Antonio Ernesto Lagdameo, Jr, Basilan Governor Jim Hataman-Salliman, Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr, Bangsamoro Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim, and First Secretary of the Political Section of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines Retired Colonel Michio Suda had their hands up for a peace sign during the ceremonial opening of the ASPIRE Project, or the Assistance for Security, Peace, Integration, and Recovery for Advancing Human Security in BARMM, on Oct. 5, 2023 in Isabela City, Basilan. (Benyamen Cabuntalan/BIO)

## ASPIRE project launch: UNDP, Japan, Philippines, BARMM, join forces in promoting peace in Mindanao

By Norjana Malawi

COTABATO CITY — In a momentous event held in Basilan on Oct. 5, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the governments of Japan, Philippines, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) gathered to launch the ASPIRE project which aims to end the cycle of violence in the region and throughout Mindanao.

ASPIRE or the Assistance for Security, Peace, Integration, and Recovery for Advancing Human Security in BARMM to address sporadic conflicts caused by private small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in vulnerable communities of the region.

It will be implemented by UNDP-Philippines, with financial contribution worth USD 5-million from the Government of Japan, and was developed through consultations with key stakeholders, including the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity (OPAPRU), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Joint Normalization Committee (JNC).

Dr. Srinivas Kumar, head of Peace and Stabilization Programme of UNDP-PH, said that ASPIRE is a major step forward for the key stakeholders of the peace process in the BARMM to address the lingering issue and concern of the proliferation of the SALWs using

community approach.

“With this project is the commitment of UNDP to continue its overall support to peacebuilding initiatives in the BARMM, maximizing its technical resources and expertise as well as its global experience in peacebuilding including SALW management,” Kumar said.

On the other hand, OPAPRU Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr. said ASPIRE will work closely with the local government units and the security sector to facilitate the registration and stenciling of loose firearms in identified areas.

The end goal, Galvez said, is to reduce the proliferation of unregistered weapons in communities, which will consequently prevent situation of violence of conflict.

“Basilan was chosen as the pilot area for the roll out of the ASPIRE program because it was the top performing province in the implementation of the SAL-W program. The province, under the leadership of its hard-working Governor Jim Hataman Salliman, has demonstrated its capability to convince its residents to set aside their firearms or give them up in the name of peace,” Galvez mentioned.

In his remarks, BARMM Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim highlighted the critical role of SAL-W

management in post-conflict scenarios, disarmament, normalization, and transitional phases in Southern Philippines. He emphasized that ASPIRE is “not solely about disarmament but is a “profound empowerment initiative that enables individuals to rebuild their lives, actively contribute to society, and become catalysts for positive change”.

“The path to peace and progress is a gargantuan construct, but with the collaborative efforts and understanding of all parties involved, we can pave the way toward lasting peace,” Ebrahim said.

The Chief Minister also extended his deepest gratitude to the UNDP and the government of Japan for their unwavering commitment to social justice in the BARMM.

“I also express our appreciation to the Philippine government for their determination to sustain the dividends of the peace process and provide equal opportunities in the Bangsamoro,” he added.

The reduction and management of SALWs and disbanding of private armed groups (PAGs) are stipulated in the Annex on Normalization as integral parts of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) between the Government

of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF.

Given that transitional security is a paramount concern in the implementation of peace agreements, the decommissioning former combatants and the gradual reduction in the prevalence of unregistered firearms will play a central role during the transition period.

Present during the ASPIRE project's launching in Basilan were First Secretary of the Political Section of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, Retired Colonel Michio Suda; National Defense Secretary, Gilberto Teodoro; Interior and Local Government Secretary, Benjamin Abalos, Jr.; Special Assistant to the President, Antonio Ernesto Lagdameo, Jr.; Police Regional Office of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (PROBAR) Regional Director, PBGen Allan C. Nobleza; Western Mindanao Commander Major General Steve Crespillo; Basilan Governor Jim Hataman-Salliman; and various mayors in the province.

Also in attendance were Akmad Brahim, co-chair of the Joint Normalization Committee on the MILF side, and Ariel Hernandez, co-chair of the Joint Normalization Committee on the government side.

## BARMM's 1st air transportation summit pledges to elevate airline services

By Kasan Usop, Jr.

COTABATO CITY – Efficient air transportation and heightened safe operations were the primary goals of the 1st BARMM Air Transportation Service Summit, organized here by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications (MOTC) here on Oct. 10.

Anchored on the theme “Enriching BARMM's Future: Catalyzing Growth and Development through Enhanced Air Transportation Services”, the summit was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the ministry's Civil Aeronautics Board of the Bangsamoro (CABB) and Bangsamoro Airport Authority (CAA).

It provided a platform for open forum and discussions to stimulate the implementation of policies that promote a sustainable and safe environment in the air transportation sector.

In his welcoming remarks, MOTC Minister Atty. Paisalin Tago, also a Member of the Parliament, highlighted the vital role of air transportation in driving economic, social, and cultural development, saying, “airport is a frontline

development of economic and tourism activities”.

He further underscored the Government of the Day's plans and programs for air transportation to amplify the region's vast tourism potential and widening connectivity.

“While fostering safe air transportation, the BARMM Government is pursuing various air transport infrastructure projects, particularly in island provinces, to improve connectivity and create more economic opportunities with various stakeholders,” Tago said.

MOTC Director-I, Atty. Hanamir Emblawa, CPA presented the long-term vision and strategies for air transportation growth aiming to unlock cohesive development and prosperity and enhance the quality of life of the Bangsamoro.

Included in the topics discussed during the said presentation were the policies and regulations of air transportation in the region, joint efforts for safe and secure air travel, and strategic initiatives in sustaining a competitive market landscape and



mitigating monopolistic practices.

One of the participants Lali Odasan, admin generalist representing J&T Express of Cotabato City Branch, was grateful for the summit and described these practices as essential in addressing the significant challenges faced by the business sector in air transport.

“Through this summit, it will help the organization and business sectors to know the rules and regulations in air transportation that we must follow,” said Odasan.

“It also gives us new information about new trends, innovations, challenges, and opportunities within

the aviation and commerce industry,” Odasan added.

The summit brought together officials from regional government, leading airlines, airport authorities, service providers such as cargo forwarders, ticket sales agents, local communities, and concerned agencies for the prestigious event.

The momentous event aligns with BARMM Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim's 5th priority under his expanded 12-priority agenda, which aims to develop a system of reliable and resilient infrastructure for land, sea, and air transport to support economic growth in the BARMM.