

Mayor Celso Lobregat is hopeful that the peace agreement between the government and the rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) will be finalized within the term of President Noynoy Aquino and most importantly that it will be within the framework of the Constitution.

Mayor Lobregat said this in reaction to reports that President Aquino met with MILF chair Al Hadj Murad Ibrahim in Tokyo, Japan August 4, to discuss possible approaches in moving the peace process forward.

“Hopefully the peace agreement will be completed within the term of President Noynoy,” the mayor said emphasizing that it was exactly 3 years ago when the Supreme Court, due to the clamor of the Mindanao people, struck down the peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF”.

Lobregat was one of local government officials in Mindanao who led in the fight against the MOA-AD-BJE which was later declared unconstitutional and contrary to law. The advocacy gave the mayor the opportunity to speak before the Supreme Court and to supplement the arguments of the lawyers concerning Zamboanga's stand on the said proposed agreement.

Unlike the proposed agreement 3 years ago, the chief executive hoped that the peace pact that will be forged by the Aquino administration and the MILF will be within the framework of the Constitution and reflective of the sentiments of the people of Zamboanga and other parts of Mindanao.

He reiterated that the majority of the people of Zamboanga will remain firm in its stand concerning the peace agreement. “We are yes for peace and want peace—a just, long and lasting peace but Zamboanga does not want to be part of any entity or group in whatever form or name”.

Mayor Lobregat called on the people to remain, as always, vigilant of the ongoing negotiations and to make sure that whatever will be forged will be in accordance with the law and the true sentiments of the majority in Zamboanga and Mindanao.

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) has published the photo and the news story about the Aquino-MILF meeting in Tokyo in its website yesterday. The story quoted government peace panel chair Marvic Leonen as saying that the “informal meeting which lasted for two hours was cordial but consisted of a frank and candid exchange of their views about the frames of continuing peace talks and some possible approaches that the parties can take to bring a peaceful settlement”.

The report also identified those who accompanied the president during the Tokyo meeting with the MILF official as OPAPP Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles, Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin, National Security Adviser Cesar Garcia, Budget and Management Secretary Florencia Abad, Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, Presidential Spokesperson Edwin Lacierda and GPH peace panel chair Marvic Leonen.

Celso hopes peace pact will finalize during Pnoy's term

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Murad was joined by members of the Central Committee, the MILF negotiating panel and some base commanders, according to the OPAPP report. — Sheila Covarrubias