

Moro women, second to none

As people celebrate Women's Month, *Moro Times* honors the struggle of Muslim women to right wrongs, fight poverty, injustice and discrimination, and find peace and development for their homeland.

Following are stories of outstanding Moro women who have broken the so-called glass ceiling in various fields.

Second to none, veiled or not, these Muslim women have gained the respect and following of their people proving that in Islam, men and women are equal not only in rights but also in shouldering responsibility to the *ummah*. They are mothers and daughters, peace advocate and *mujahideen*, educator and politician, *aleema* and labor leader, journalist and community worker. Most of all, they are exemplars of

the *Muslimah*, proof that Islam supports the leadership of women, not subjugate them.

Senadora: Champion of Filipino women's rights

Santanina "Nina" Rasul, the island girl, graduated *cum laude* in political science from the University of the Philippines. She was a favorite model of now National Artists Napoleon Abueva and Ireneo Miranda.

She returned to Sulu and became a public school teacher (1952 to 1957) where she taught among others, Nur Misuari, chairman of the Moro Na-

tional Liberation Front (MNLF).

While Rasul devoted herself to becoming a fulltime wife and mother, she spent her free time serving her community. Her husband, the late Amb. Abraham Rasul, also believed in public service. Disturbed by the high levels of illiteracy in the Muslim communities, she developed an effective literacy methodology in the 1960s, Magbassa Kita (Let Us Read). This has been implemented by the Department of Education as a national-literacy program. She founded the Magbassa Kita Foundation Inc., which has trained about 1,500 literacy teachers nationwide. In 1990, she was appointed Honorary Ambassador of UNESCO during the International Literacy year.

A liberal Muslim husband, Ambassador Rasul—or Abe, as he was fondly called—encouraged his wife to give in to the clamor of their community run for public office. She was elected *barrio* councilor at Moore Avenue, Jolo, Sulu (1960 to 1963). Later, she became the first Tausug woman elected provincial board member (1971 to 1976). She was appointed a Commissioner representing Muslim and other ethnic minorities in the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women from 1978 to 1987.

The first Muslim woman elected senator, the only Muslim elected senator for two terms (1987 and 1992), Rasul is unfortunately also the last Muslim senator. She authored eight laws as Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Civil Service and Government Recognition and the Committee on Women and Family Relations. She received the Women's Government and Non-government Organization Network Award for her comprehensive legislation for the promotion of women empowerment, specifically Republic Act 6949—making March 8 as National Women's Day; Republic Act 7192—Women in Development and Nation Building Act, which removed vestiges of discrimination against women, opened the doors of the Philippine Military Academy to women.

Rasul received The Golden Heart Presidential Award in 1998, "for her diligent efforts in reconciling conten-



■ Former Sen. Santanina Rasul, women's rights champion.



■ Bai Sandra Sinsuat Ampatuan Sema is not just the first lady of Cotabato City.

tious positions of both the government and the MNLF during the last phase of the peace negotiations in 1996, culminating in her active involvement in the formulation of the Final Peace Agreement, which ended hostilities between the two parties."

After leaving the Senate, she has focused her energies on organizing Muslim Women Peace Advocates, the education of Tausug youth and Magbassa Kita.

The Princess who settled vendettas

Princess Tarhata "Tata" Alonto-Lucman, 80, of Lanao del Sur, was

the first woman governor in Mindanao at a period of turmoil during the martial law years.

Lucman is better known as a settler of *rido* (the local term for clan conflict). *Time* magazine noted her peacemaking role for helping the release of kidnapped nuns in Marawi City in 1986. Literally standing between shooting clans, Lucman was able to settle the most bloody conflicts.

Born into royalty among the Ranaw's Pat a Pangamong Sultanates, Lucman as a girl looked up to other pioneering Moro ladies like Princess Tarhata Kiram and Dayang Dayang

Piandao of Sulu who were educated and widely traveled. Lucman was reared in the world of politics. She assisted her father, who was "no read, no write" in his travels to Manila. That experience became her training ground in the man's world. When then-President Ferdinand Marcos called *datus* and politicians to Malacañang to consult them on declaring martial law, Gov. Lucman's advisers and kin advised her against going to Manila and facing the fearsome, notorious Marcos. She went anyway.

Lucman, the only lady in the entourage, went with other politi- ➤ **WomenD2**

Women push for clean elections in ARMM

AS elections for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) draw near, women are taking the helm as election watchdogs to ensure free, fair and credible elections.

The proposed election date is August 11, 2008.

Known as a region that was at the center of controversies during the 2007 senatorial elections, the ARMM has become a swing vote that determined the fate of national elective positions. President Gloria Arroyo owes her victory to an unprecedented and overwhelming victory in Maguindanao province.

Lawyer Laisa Alamia of the Bangsamoro Lawyers Network emphasized the need for election watchdogs to be vigilant against any attempts to manipulate the elections, especially in the light of plans by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to implement an automated system of voting in the ARMM as mandated by Republic Act 9369.

Volunteers, many of who are women, have been trained to oversee the electoral process starting from the precinct level to the canvassing level. Volunteers have been tapped to serve in 1,500 barangay



■ Moro women, together with Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting, are working to ensure clean and honest elections in ARMM.

units (or villages) and 80 municipalities in ARMM.

"Women are less prone to pressure and influence from partisan interests," said Salic Ibrahim, chairman of the Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reforms Inc., an organization of 13 women coordinators and only nine men.

Agreement with PPCRV

Fourteen Muslim and ARMM-based civil society organizations, two media outfits, and the Parish Pastoral

Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), signed a memorandum of agreement which provides for the merging and sharing of resources to "establish a single network of volunteer monitors and watchers which shall take the lead in monitoring, watching and canvassing of votes in the 2008 ARMM elections."

This historic agreement is the product of a workshop among electoral reform partners last March 10, 2008 in Davao City—following similar efforts in the national elections of 2007.

Amb. Henrietta de Villa, the council's national chairman, hailed it as a continuation of interfaith collaborations toward electoral reforms. She said, "This is a good example of how we, as a nation, can move past our differences and focus on what we have in common: the interest of our country."

Among the signatories to the agreement are: Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation Inc.; Bangsamoro Lawyers Network; Basilan Women's Initiative Foundation Inc.; the Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reforms Inc.; Concerned Alliance of Professors and Students Inc.; Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society; Electoral Reform Advocates; Maranao People Development Center Inc.; Mindanao Cross; Muslim Women Peace Advocates—Sulu Council; Nagdilaab Foundation Inc.; Notre Dame Broadcasting Corp.; Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy; Sulu State College Master in Public Administration Alumni Association Inc.; Tulung Lupah Sug Inc.; and United Youth for Peace and Development Inc.

SAMIRA GUTOC AND GANDHI KUNJUO



■ A Syrian youth walks on Wednesday past Arab national flags installed all over the Syrian capital ahead of this week's Arab League summit in Damascus. Egypt and Saudi Arabia will send only low-level delegations, and Lebanon's Western-backed government will not participate in the weekend summit. AFP PHOTO

Heavyweights snub Syria's Arab summit

DAMASCUS: Syria hosts its first Arab summit this weekend and faces a boycott by heads of state from a number of regional heavyweights which blame Damascus for the political

crisis gripping Lebanon.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia will send only low-level delegations to the meeting in Damascus on Saturday ➤ **ArabD3**

Dutch government will not seek ban on anti-Islam film, says Foreign minister

BRUSSELS: Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen said Wednesday that the Dutch Cabinet has no plans to ask the courts to ban the controversial film *Fitna*, due to be released this month by right-wing lawmaker Geert Wilders, Dutch news service ANP reported.

"We looked at the possibilities and there are none," Verhagen was

quoted as saying.

His comments came after former Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek, now a government advisor, called on the cabinet to take the issue to court.

Dutch paper *De Volkskrant* published an interview Wednesday in which Van den Broek said Dutch people around the world could be-

come victims of violent actions by angry Muslims if the anti-Islam film was released.

"Let the judge decide what is the most important: freedom of expression or national interest," he was quoted as saying.

"It is unwise to wait until people have been killed before reviewing what can be done," he said.

Wilders, leader of an anti-immigration, anti-Islam party with nine seats in the 150-member Dutch parliament, plans to release his 15-minute film by the end of this month.

He has said his film will be provocative but will remain within legal boundaries.

It remains unclear when and where the film will be released after

US web-hosting company Network Solutions recently suspended the website where Wilders had intended to show the film.

No television broadcaster has as yet agreed to screen the film.

Although the film's exact content is not yet known, it has sparked protests in many Muslim countries and has been condemned as inciting

hatred toward Islam.

The Dutch government, worried about the consequences of the film, had tried in vain to persuade Wilders to abandon his plan.

The Netherlands' Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said the government cannot ban the film beforehand, but it can file a lawsuit after it is released. XINHUA

