A MONTHLY NEWS SECTION OF | The Manila Times | EVERY LAST FRIDAY

■ Bai Sandra Sinsuat

March 28, 2008



Moro women, second to none

S 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

ports 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-

Muslim communities, she developed an effective literacy methodthe Muslimah, proof that Islam supology 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 ethics minorities in the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women from 1978 to 1987.

tional Liberation Front (MNLF)

While Rasul devoted herself to

becoming a fulltime wife and mother, she spent her free time serv-

ing her community. Her husband,

the late Amb. Abraham Rasul, also believed in public service. Disturbed

by the high levels of illiteracy in the

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— Nomen 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-



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 Pangampong 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.

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

She went anyway.



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.; Con cerned 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 KUNIJO



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

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 become 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

has been condemned as inciting

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

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 XINHUA it is released.

Moro women, second to none

cal kingpins-Tamano, Dimaporo, and Pendatun.

When Marcos asked the delegates what they thought of his proposal for martial law, Lucman stood up among the datus who could not oppose the forthcoming militarization of the South. She said sarcastically, "Even as I am an ordinary woman, I have to raise my hand. Thank you for inviting this group. As governor, I should be here to answer your call for a meeting with Muslims. What I can say with all the datus here is that they are unitedly agreed to support you in the announcement for reform. Thank you, God bless you and the Filipino people.'

The feisty Lucman was removed from governorship by Marcos but was later reinstated by President Corazon Aquino.

Her maverick attitude also defined her personal choices. Lucman also didn't want to marry someone whom she did not choose. She was repeatedly engaged by her family to men from reputable and respected Maranao families, but she kept breaking off wedding plans.

She eventually married her mentor, Sultan Al-Rashid Lucman, founder of the Bangsamoro Liberation Organization. The couple went on exile during martial law.

Princess and educator

Her *jihad* was simple—education for all. A Maguindanawan princess pursuing free education for her provincemates, Bai Matabay Namli Plang of Kabacan founded Mindanao Institute of Technology and the University of Southern Mindanao in 1951. That school has become one of the country's top schools for agricultural education.

In the 1940s, Plang was able to get enough capital support from politicians to acquire from the Americans the 1,024 hectares of former rubber plantation in the town of Kabacan, Cotabato province. Mindanao Institute of Technology became a university in 1978.

Plang was one of the children of Moro royalty educated in the United States as a governmentsponsored student. She returned home and was married off to another political scion, Salipada Pendatun, who later became congressman and was instrumental in creating the Children's Educational



Bai Matabay Namli Plang

Foundation Village, now called the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology.

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It is a testament to her vision and passion that today, the University of Southern Mindanao has three campuses with more than 10,000 students. The university is also in the top 10 among more than 120 stateowned universities and colleges that earned Level 4, the highest accreditation status awarded to institutions that excel in a broad area of academic discipline and enjoy prestige and authority comparable to that of international universities.

More than 20 years after her death in 1984, the two schools she founded and nurtured are centers of excellence where students from poor families are given the hope and opportunity to improve their lives by way of education. Such was the legacy of Plang, the pioneering and one of the most successful the Magindanawn tribe has produced.

Woman president

One of the country's Ten Outstanding Women in the Nation's Service (TOWNS) is the first woman president of the Mindanao State University Nurhaylah "Emily" Marohombsar. Lions International described her as "erudite, bemedalled and exemplary among the crop of



Nurhaylah "Emily" Marohombsar

Muslim women."

Gracing the cover of Woman's Magazine, this attractive woman from Ganassi, Lanao del Sur, was hounded by talent scouts to join showbiz. Laughing it off, she returned to her province after graduating from Philippine Women's University and taught at Mindanao State.

She started as a professor in English. She rose up the ranks to become university president.

As president, Marohombsar perevered to make Mindanao State one of the top schools of the country, producing leaders in business and engineering. She also opened the doors of the university to linkages abroad in the United States and the BIMP-EAGA region. BIMP-EAGA refers to the East Asean Growth Area, a grouping that includes Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

After Mindanao State University, she continued to serve her country as the lone woman member of the government panel for the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). She was later appointed by President Gloria Arroyo to be a member of the Constitutional Commission, created by the government to study the Charter change.

For her achievements, she was conferred the Asean Gintong Ina Award, Sultan Kudarat Award for Most Outstanding Muslim Educator, Bangsamoro Woman of Distinction, Outstanding Alumni by the East-West Alumni, and other awards.

Politician

Faysah Maniri Racman-Pimping Dumarpa is a three-term representative of the first district of Lanao del Sur. Born in Marawi City, Dumarpa is married to Commissioner Salic Dumarpa.

While more famous for the unfortunate incident at the House of Representatives cafeteria, where she allegedly slapped a waitress for serving her pork, Rep. Dumarpa has a fine legislative record. She currently chairs the Committee on Social Services and is vice-chairman of the Committee on Muslim Affairs.

In the current Congress, she has sponsored bills focusing on the establishment of a Moro Cultural Heritage Center, the expansion of the Shari'ah Court System in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the prohibition of religious and racial profiling improvement of her district.

against indigenous cultural communities and other local bills for the Faysah, who graduated with a master's degree in Anthropology at the Centro Escolar University,

started her public-service career



Faysah Maniri Racman-Pimping Dumarpa

teaching at the Pangarungan Islamic College, where she also finished her bachelor's in education. She then held the post of ARMM undersecretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development before getting elected to the Regional Legislative Assembly in 1993.

Quiet force behind ulama

Aleema Khadijah Imam Mutilan, widow of the late Dr. Mahid Mutilan of the Ulama League of the Philippines, was the strongest supporter of the influential Muslim religious leader. Not much is known about the Aleema Mutilan, since she has deliberately kept a low profile in Marawi.

She graduated from Al Azhar Unveristy of Cairo and later helped institutionalize women's participation in the ulama organization of Lanao. The ulama (Muslim religious scholars and leaders) are considered most influential in Muslim society. She organized the Nisa Ul-Islam, a group of aleema or women graduates of Islamic theology. The group was vital in pushing for the Islamization of communities as it started holding Islamic seminars in public places, involving more professionals, who were schooled in Western education.

She also supervised the political participation of women in a movement in a Marawi-based Islamic political party that catapulted Mahid Mutilan to mayorship for two terms and later the governorship of Lanao del Sur, wresting power from the traditional political elites.

Mutilan's major accomplishment is institutionalizing the madaris (Islamic schooling) system not only in ARMM but also in other areas. She helped lobby for government support for the Islamic schools, especially in providing salaries for madaris teachers.

After the untimely death of Dr. Mutilan, she was perceived as a quiet force keeping her Islamic party together to pursue the vision of her late husband. During the First National Ulama Summit in January, the 25 aleema participants from Mindanao turned to her for leadership as she guided their discussions toward how they can help peace and development in conflicttorn homeland.

Mutilan was conferred a royal title, "Baialabi ko pata pangampong ko Ranaw," in recognition of her efforts to help her people.

Intellectual and mujahideen

Absent in the story-telling about the March 1968 Jabidah Massacre are the women behind the resulting Moro rebel fronts that were organized. It was but fitting that the marker placed by Mindanao groups that commemorated the event in Corregidor on March 18 was written by a woman.

Djalia Hataman of Basilan wrote, "This controversial incident sparked the Bangsamoro struggle for national self-determination which cause is sanctified by hundreds and thousands of lives of Moro men, women and children ... This marker serves as a remembrance and a beacon for us living to continue the struggle for justice that their deaths would not be lost in vain."

One such woman became the pillar and strength of the Moro National Liberation Front as she founded the Bangsamoro Women Committee, a support arm of the MNLF. Eleonora Rowaida Tan-Misuari or Roi to her comrades joined the armed movement as a woman-member of the Central Committee of the MNLF. Roi, who witnessed the inhumane impact of war, adamantly believed in the Bangsamoro movement as a catalyst in achieving social development for the Bangsamoro people, although she was open to diplomatic approaches that could help build institutional change. She believed in laying the groundwork for social justice by reforming the Moro cultural institutions and rectifying historical and political inequities.

Roi has always been an organizer, a force behind Chairman Misuari. Behind his fiery and charismatic presence that galvanized thousands to believe in a Bangsamoro nation in the '80s was this low-key intellectual, is a woman with a bachelor's in political science and master's in Asian studies who drafted and typed Misuari's speeches.

Two months after the historic signing of the Final Peace Agreement on September 2, Roi organized the Bangsamoro Women Foundation for Peace and Development, Inc. Roi believed that empowering Moro women was necessary to help them cope with from the trauma of war. The foundation has become the umbrella organization of Bangsamoro women who have dedicated their lives to improving the welfare of the widows, orphans, homeless, and displaced.

Muslim democrat

In 2007, Amina Rasul received the Muslim Democrat of the Year Award from the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, a Washington-based think tank. The Muslim Democrat of the Year award is given by center to one outstanding advocate for democracy in the Muslim world, particulary those individuals who overcome hardships or challenges in his or her efforts to promote democracy. The award, with a distinguished list of recipients, including former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, recognizes Rasul's life-long advocacy for democracy and peace in Muslim Mindanao.

She has been a commissioner with the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, a board director of the Philippine National Oil Corp. and of the Development Bank of the Philippines. She is the first Muslim woman member of the Cabinet, appointed by former President Fidel Ramos as presidential advisor on youth affairs. Appointed concurrently as the first chairman of the National Youth Commission, she was responsible for organizing the new agency and for the formulation and implementation of the Philippine Medium-Term Youth Development Plan. That plan was acknowledged by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as one of the best practices in the preparation of youth development plans.

Vietnam had invited her to help them establish their own youth development program. She managed the growth of the Youth Commission as an institution from an unknown agency with a budget of P18 million to a highly regarded national policy-oriented body with a budget of P140 million.

Rasul has the distinction of speaking for the Group of 77 during the United Nations' 10th anniversary of the International Youth Year in 1995. As presidential advisor on youth affairs, she focused attention on the plight of vulnerable and disadvantaged youth, including those in areas of conflict, foreign-occupied or alien-dominated territories, refugee and displaced youth, indigenous youth and those with disabilities were of particular concern to the international community.

Passionate about giving the Moros an effective voice in mainstream society, Rasul organized the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) in 2002 together with former Human Rights Commissioner Nasser Marohomsalic and the late Abraham Iribani, former MNLF spokesman.

Concerned about the false and negative image projected about Muslims in the media, she initiated the Moro Times, the first supplement devoted to Muslim and Mindanao issues published by The Manila Times.

Rasul continues to muster foreign and local support for Mindanao concerns, such as human rights, Islamic law, Islamic education, empowering the ulama and Muslim women. She has written and edited several books on the Muslim situation in the Philippines and is a columnist for The Times.

Champion for Muslim women's rights Marie Claire magazine named civil

society advocate Yasmin Busran-Lao as among the top 25 "Women of



Yasmin Busran-Lao

Substance" for her pioneering work in promoting Muslim women's rights. The US Embassy in Manila has conferred on Lao the Ninoy Aquino Public Service Award for her indefatigable work in advancing the rights of marginalized groups.

She founded Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation Inc. in Marawi City that was inspired by a Qur'anic (verse 58) Al-Mujadilah, which either means "The Women who pleads" or "The Women who Seeketh [justice]." The foundation's main advocacy is seeking social justice and working on issues related to women's rights, good governance and peace building.

The foundation has produced pioneering publications such as the Primer on Code of Muslim Personal Laws and the CEDAW primer in four Moro dialects.

Lao is also the second nominee of the Abanse Pinay party-list group.

Labor leader and humanitarian

Bai Fatima Palileo Sinsuat is the remarkable daughter of the late strongman Datu Blah Sinsuat. Not content to be a pampered Maguindanao princess, she helped her father organize labor.

In 1986, all dockworkers in the Cotabato City port were members of the Progressive Labor Union, which she headed. Union members reported that the princess gave money to families with emergencies and bailed out laborers from jail.

She was mayor of Upi, Maguindanao, from 1980 to 1986 before her appointment as head of the ARMM Board of Investments. She was appointed a member of the University of the Philippines Board of Regents by former President Joseph Estrada and served for

A pillar of the Red Cross in Maguindanao for the last 30 years, Sinsuat is the first Muslim woman elected to the national board of the Philippine National Red Cross. She was chosen by the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency as one of the country's six outstanding volunteers in 2003.

Sinsuat, now 67, was lauded for her blood donation advocacy programs at the awarding ceremony last December 10, 2003 at Malacañang, the official residence of the Philippine President.

The communicator

Moro Times managing editor, Samira Gutoc, believes in the power of media to promote a positive image of the Moro. This 33-year-old has founded publications such as Suara Kabataan, the Mindanao State University Law Gazette and Arellano Law and Policy Review. She is also one of the pioneering writers www.bangsamoro.com, a Philippine web awardee. Samira's writings have been published nationally (Newsbreak magazine, the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism) and inter-



Samira Gutoc

nationally.

As a youth leader, she was the first woman to become president of the UP Muslim Students Association, the Muslim Youth and Students Alliance and executive vicepresident of the First National Youth Parliament. She is one of the founding convenors of the Young Moro Professionals Network, which aims to bridge the information divide between the mainstream and the minorities. When she was just 26, Samira was

recognized as the first Muslim woman to receive The Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) 2001 by the Jaycees International for Youth in Socio-Cultural Development. Awarded the Chevening Fellowship, she studied at the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies.

Moro student activist "To see the Moros succeed and ex-

cel in various fields, to prove that we too can excel and to see the Moro brethren live out of poverty and conflict." So proclaimed Shahana "Shan" Abdulwahid, a Sama from Zamboanga City. She is the first Muslim-Filipino to hold the presidency of the University of the Philippines Student Council.

Abdulwahid, who is currently taking up her master's in Islamic studies at UP, is a devout Muslimah (Muslim woman). Islam is the basis of everything she does.

"Whatever I do is based on the principles of Islam, and I am upholding Islamic teachings,' Abdulwahid said during in an interview with Moro Times.

She still wears her hijab or head covering. Those who know her describe her as "humble and quiet," sympathetic to the masses, a "radical" and "intelligent."

She is the second child of Court



of Appeals Associate Justice Hakim Abdulwahid and Naida Edding

The young woman graduated cum laude from UP in 2006 and was a recipient of the Prince Salman Scholarship Grant. In 2005, she was cited as one of the 50 Young Achievers. Abdulwahid also received the President Macapagal-Arroyo Leadership Award in 2001.

Anti-war poster girl

Articulate and adamant, Amirah Ali "Mek-Mek" Lidasan is often interviewed while mobilizing demonstrations. She continues the activism she displayed as a leader of the stu-



Amirah Ali "Mek-Mek" Lidasan

dent movement in Manila.

At age 33, she was elected the first Muslim woman president of the National Union of Students of the Philippines, after her stint as president of the University of the Philippines Mass Communications Student Council

A native of Parang, Maguindanao, Lidasan belongs to the Iranon Muslim ethno-linguistic group. Her family is one of the most influential families in Maguindanao province. She, however, grew up in Manila where she took up her elementary to college education.

Even as a child, Lidasan would hold discussions with the mujahideen (women fighters) whenever she went to Maguindanao for vacation. This exposure helped her understand their lives and the essence of what the Moros are fighting for.

She later co-founded the Moro Christian People's Alliance, working for the welfare of the minorities. Entering politics, she became the national vice-chairman of the Suara Bangsamoro party-list group. She has been traveling here and abroad to gain media mileage of the human rights violations in Sulu, Basilan and central Mindanao. In March 2007, she was part of a Philippine human rights delegation that toured North America and Europe, drawing international attention to the human rights crisis in the Philippines.

Defender of the boat people Mucha Shim Arquiza of Sulu advo-

cates for the rights of the Bajaus and Sama, two of the more marginalized Moro groups based in Zamboanga, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. The Moro beggars seen in Metro Manila are mostly Bajau escaping the harsh life in Mindanao. She organized a Zamboanga City-

based foundation called Lumah Ma Dilaut (House in the Sea) with the slogan, "Lost Language, Banished People," to give Bajaus access basic services and livelihood programs.

Arquiza, who also dabbles in writing poetry and literary essays,



■ Mucha Shim Arquiza

promotes the arts of the Sama and Bajaus. "In promoting indigenous knowledge systems and practices and in modeling appropriate and empowering education program for reviving the spiritual and cultural energies of Sama ethnic communities is nonetheless a self-fulfillment for its mostly Muslim staff as their own personal jihad and a contribution to a favorable da'wah environment," she said.

She holds the distinction of being the lone Moro woman to address the 10th Session of the Working Group on Minorities organized by the United Nations Office of the High Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in March 2004.

She was former secretary-general of the Asian Muslim Action Network, an Asia-wide network of Muslims working for human rights, peace and social justice through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. She is also executive director and senior researcher for an all-woman, mostly Moroland (an indigenous community in the Philippines) research collective. The aim of the organization (HAGS Inc.) is to work toward indigenous women's empowerment.

Protector of the lake

Omera Dianalan-Lucman, 59, was the first Muslim woman to be appointed undersecretary. Serving the Department of Social Welfare and Development from 2001 to 2004, she oversaw the delivery of services to the Mindanao region. Prior to her Social Welfare department, she was a board member of the Cooperative Development Authority in 1993.

As an administrator representing Mindanao, she caused the formulation of responsive policies supporting sustainable development of cooperatives

She earned her Bachelor of Science in administration from the Philippine Women's University and a master's in business management from the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute.

After her government stint, she led the formation of the Philippine Muslim Women Council, a national federation of Muslim women. Mobilizing local and international support, Omera Dianalan-Lucman has committed herself to the protection of Lake Lanao, which she believes should be named a World Heritage Site as it is one of the oldest lakes in the world.

First Muslim woman ambassador

Ma. Corazon Yap-Bahjin was born to a small and frugal family in Jolo. Her links to the Tausug came from her grandmothers and her late husband, Datu Samsuddin Bahjin of Patikul, Sulu.

She graduated cum laude from the University of Santo Tomas in 1967, majoring in English and theology. The latter never fails to raise eyebrows whenever people learn that Bahjin is a Muslim.

"Senator Enrile was surprised when I told him so," she said. In 1974 Bahjin obtained her Master of Arts from the University of the Philippines.

Before embarking on a diplomatic career, Bahjin was an educator. She taught at the Holy Trinity College in Palawan (1967), at the Centro Escolar University (1972), then at Palawan State University, where she eventually became an assistant professor.

Amb. Bahjin rose from the ranks. She started out as acting director of the Cultural Division of the Office of Islamic Affairs (now the Office on Muslim Affairs) in 1982. She had her first assignment abroad as vice consul in Jeddah in 1986. She went back to Manila in 1998 to become a director of the Office of Middle East and African Affairs. In 1990, she served as second secretary and consul in Amman, Jordan. In 1991 she was moved to Cairo, where a year later she became the chargé d'Affaires.

Bahjin also served in Bangkok and Beijing. She became the first Muslim



■ Ma. Corazon Yap-Bahjin

woman to be appointed ambassador in 2007 and later Foreign Affairs undersecretary.

At the center of her public service is her faith. Bahjin always keeps a Qur'an in her office. Every morning before she begins her routine, she turns to Sura Yasin and reads to calm her mind and for guidance.

Not just a first lady

Bai Sandra Sinsuat Ampatuan Sema is the first lady of Cotabato City, married to its mayor, Muslimen Sema. It is a position that she takes seriously.

As city tourism head of Cotabato and regional tourism chairman of Region 12, she has presided over projects intended to preserve Muslim traditions. At the same time, she sought to change the image of her city by initiating projects like the Shariff Kabunsuan Festival, which was included as one of the country's tourist destinations listed on the Department of Tourism calendar of festivals.

Sema values her traditions as a Muslim woman and passionately believes that the young should be taught the same. This same principle guided her stint as ARMM Education Secretary, appointed by then Gov. Misuari.

She pushed for the integration of the teaching of the Arabic language in ARMM schools. Sema, a leader among the MNLF women, was later appointed by President Arroyo to be the first Muslim Department of Education undersecretary because of her expertise in developing madrasah education.

Mother of war victims

Baicon Cayongcat-Macaraya began working with victims of the war after giving up her law studies in Marawi City during the all-our-war in nearby Baloi, Butig, and other parts of central Mindanao in 2000.

At age 36, she now serves as a Philippine officer of the World Food Program of the United Nations helping thousands access basic services.

Her public profile began early in college, when she became the first woman to be elected student regent of the Mindanao State University System. She later founded a non-government organization, the Bangsamoro Youth Ranao Center for Peace and Development, which oversaw the daily needs of thousands of evacuees staying in schools.

Her organization tied up with Tabang Mindanao and pioneered the Integration Return and Rehabilitation Program to help displaced families get back on their feet. Later, her group handled the reconstruction of about 500 houses, six mosques and five schools destroyed by fighting in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

For her community work, local datus conferred on Macaraya the title, "Bai Labi



■ Baicon Cayongcat-Macaraya

Ko Shakba," in ceremonies held at Ditsaan Ramain, Lanao del Sur.

She helped organize innovative campaigns, such as the Mothers for Peace Campaign, and hosted the Peaceteach, a tele-conference for young people organized by the United Nations Children's Fund and its allied partners. She is also a model of Modess' "Aim High Pinay" campaign.

Muslimah dean of Islamic studies

Dr. Carmen Abubakar has served the academe most of her life, believing that teaching is a profession that fulfills her because it allows her to nurture young minds.

She said she knows that the core of the Bangsamoro problem is rooted in the need for knowledge. She is the only Muslim woman to be appointed dean in the prestigious University of the Philippines, heading the UP Institute of Islamic Studies for three terms.

Born in Jolo, Abubakar finished her bachelor's in education at the Notre Dame of Jolo College. She started teaching at her alma mater, before going to UP Diliman to finish an master's. She then taught English at the high school department of UP Baguio before heading back to Diliman to earn a doctorate in Philippine studies.

Abubakar said the educational situation in Muslim communities is "very poor," as shown even in the low levels of literacy in the ARMM. She said this implies that the number of people who make enlightened and informed decisions is also very low.

Stressing education as the fuel for development, Abubakar said education has to be made more accessible to people in rural areas, and government must be address this.

"Quality education is impossible to attain, if there is an absence of infrastructural support," she said.

A sought-after lecturer on Islamic law here and abroad, Abubakar co-wrote the book The Convention on the Rights of the Child and Islamic Law, Convergences and Divergences: The Philippine Case, 2005, published by the UNICEF.

Voice of courage

Maguindanao's Noraida Adang Abdullah Karim delivered the keynote address in New York City for receiving the "Voices of Courage" award in 2007. The award is given annually by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children to individuals or organizations from around the world that have shown commitment to and leadership in promoting the well-being of displaced women and children.

Karim, an internally displaced person herself, is also the coordinator of the Food Assistance Project for conflict-affected communities in Maguindanao, a project in partnership with the World Food Program. She played a leading role in the Literacy, Livelihood, and Food Sufficiency Project for women and male youth that was field-tested for the World



Noraida Adang Abdullah Karim

Bank. She also headed the "Arms are for Hugging" project that initiated the rebuilding of an elementary school in Inug-ug, Maguindanao, in 2002.

She was born in Cotabato City and spent most of her formative years in Datu Piang in Maguindanao. Her childhood and youth were marked by poverty, repeated displacement because of armed conflict in Mindanao and by a determined desire to survive.

Karim spent years assisting other displaced Muslims in Metro Manila, organizing to meet basic needs, and advocating for peace negotiations in Mindanao. The Peace Agreement of 1996 set the stage for her return to Mindanao. She became involved with local civil society organizations concerned with human rights; advocated for the relief of displaced persons, and initiated livelihood projects for poor women. She returned to school in her native Cotabato City and obtained a social work degree from De La Vida College in 1999.

Here comes the judge

Nurkarhati Salapuddin Sahibbil was one of the thousands of devout young Muslim girls educated in the Catholic Notre Dame of Jolo. Graduating magna cum laude, she never thought she would be thrust into a controversial position.

She was happy to be a wife and mother of six, working with the Jolo Shariah Court as clerk of court from 1985 to 1993 to help support the

But Sahibbil has always been strong-willed and a fighter for rights and justice. Not content to merely document cases and decisions, she took the Shariah bar exam in 1991 and passed.

She then applied to be a Shariah court judge. This created a controversy. Many Muslim men in the Office of Muslim Affairs objected to a woman being appointed judge. But she is a formidable advocate who does not give up easily. Sahibbil is known to be the matriarch of her clan whose quiet word is followed. Against all odds, she was appointed in 1994 and became the first Muslim judge of the Shariah court system.

Sahibbil is looking forward to the implementation of the Shariah system in all-Muslim communities, as promised in the 1996 peace agreement between government and the MNLF. She laments the lack of access of most Muslims to an Islamic court and their lack of knowledge of their rights and obligations.



■ Nurkarhati Salapuddin Sahibbil

ARAB FROM D1

Heavyweights snub Syria's Arab summit

and Sunday, while diplomatic sources said Jordan and Morocco will also be represented by lower-

The snubs underscore the anger with Syria over the protracted political crisis in Lebanon that has left the country without a president since November amid accusations Damascus has blocked efforts to elect a successor.

Foreign ministers from the 22-member Arab League were to meet in Damascus on Thursday to prepare for the summit, with heads of state or their representatives expected to arrive today.

Lebanon said Tuesday it would refuse to take part because of what it termed Syria's negative role in Beirut's protracted crisis while Egypt and Saudi Arabia said they blamed Damascus for obstructing

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said Lebanon has "lost a golden opportunity to discuss the crisis and strengthen the Arab initiative for solution."

Syria, which held sway in Lebanese affairs for decades before it was forced to withdraw its troops from the country in 2005, is accused of blocking the election of a successor to former President Emile Lahoud.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which back the government of pro-Western Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, already announced their leaders will boycott

Egypt will be represented by State Minister for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Mufid Shehab, while oil powerhouse Saudi Arabia, a major supporter of the Lebanese government, is sending Arab League Ambassador Ahmad Oattan.

Iran, also accused by the West of meddling in Lebanon's affairs, is sending Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to the summit. Tehran denies the claims and says it is making efforts to boost fragile relations with neighbors.

The United States, which also backs Siniora, last week called for Arab countries to reflect before deciding to participate in the summit and also accused Damascus of paralyzing Lebanese politics.

London-based pan-Arab newspaper Ashara al-Awsat on Wednesday quoted Syrian Vice-President Faruq al-Shara as saying that "countries that do not attend the summit will regret it," without elaborating.

Lebanon is in the midst of a standoff between the government and the Hezbollah-led opposition after pro-Syrian Lahoud stepped down at the end of his mandate on November 23.

The Lebanese crisis, the worst since the end of the country's 1975 to 1990 civil war, is widely seen as an extension of the conflict pitting the United States and its regional allies against Syria and Iran.

On Monday, a 17th session of parliament to elect a successor to Lahoud was postponed. A new session

has been set for April 22. Analysts predicted a weak turnout and few results

by the end of the summit. "No one expects much from this summit," Mohammed Saved Said, editor in chief of Egyptian daily Al-Badeel, told Agence France-Presse. He added he anticipated little more than a broad

unity or some such." Egypt's state-owned daily Al-Ahram said in an editorial Sunday that the Lebanese crisis seems to have polarized member states.

final statement calling for "Lebanon's national

"This summit will be one that confirms Arab differences instead of being a summit of Arab unity in these times."



Republic of the Philippines Department of Transportation and Communications AIR TRANSPORTATION OFFICE MIA Rd., Pasay City, Metro Manila 1300



Minimum Required

March 25, 2008

The Air Transportation Office (ATO) invites all prospective bidders to apply for Eligibility and subsequently bid for the following

Approved

		Budget	Bid Security				
1.	Repair of ILS Localizer and Glide Slope	P3,569,875.00		08-025-03			
	(RWY06) at Manila International Airport,						
	MIA Pasay City(Direct Contracting)		Shall be in accordance with				
2	Procurement of NAV/COMM and DME	P1,692,327.00	the provision of Section 27,	08-026-03			
	Transponder Test Sets Flight Test Section-		IRR-A of R.A. 9184				
	ASD, ATO Hangar, Andrews Ave., Pasay City						
3	. Repair of Glide Path and DME RWY 23	P1,422,870.00		08-027-03			
	Approach of Davao International Airport,						
	Sasa, Davao City						
The BAC activities are as follows:							

Issuance of Eligibility Statement Forms BAC Secretariat, G/F ATO Main Building, MIA Road, Pasay City, during office hours from 28 March-14 April 2008, Upon receipt of Letter of Intent and payment of P1,500.00 per item. non-refundable Pre-Bid Conference 15 April 2008, 2:00 P.M Receipt and Opening of Eligibility and Bid Documents Not later than 2:00 PM, 28 April 2008

Eliqibility Documents and Bid Proposals submitted after the deadline shall not be accepted. Bids will be opened in the presence of the Bidders representatives who choose to attend at the aforementioned address. Aside from the other requirements, the value of prospective bidder largest single contract compeleted within the last three (3) years similar

to the project to be bid must be at least fifty percent (50%). Bidding will be conducted through open competitive and all other particulras relative to Eligibility, Bid Evaluation, Award of Contract and Performance Bond shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations-Part A (IRR-A).

The ATO reserves the right to reject bids and or all bids, to waive defects or formality therein and to accept bids considered responsive and most advantageous to the Government.

(SGD.) WILFREDO S. BORJA

MT - Mar. 28, 2008



Republika ng Pilipinas KAGAWARAN NG PAGAWAIN AT LANSANGANG PAMBAYAN

Mountain Province District Engineering Office

Bontoc, Mountain Province

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The MOUNTAIN PROVINCE DISTRICT ENGINEERING OFFICE, BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, through its Bids & Awards Committee (BAC), invites contractors registered with and classified by the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) to apply for eligibility and if found eligible, to bid for the hereunder contract:

Name of Contract	Location	Project I.D. Number	Brief Description	Approved Budget of the Contract (ABC)	Duration
1. Improvement /	Paracelis,	08PI0015	Road Improvement &	P19,300,000.00	125 CD
Construction of	Mt. Prov.		Road Concreteing		
Bananao Access Road					
2. Rehabilitation /	Tadian,	08PI0016	Road Widening,	P19,270,000.00	138 CD
Improvement	Mt. Prov.		Concreting and		
of Mt. Province-llocos			Road Improvement		
Sur via Tue Road			_		

Prospective bidders should possess a valid PCAB License applicable to the contract, have completed a similar contract with a value of at least 50% of the ABC, and have key personnel and equipment (Listed in the Eligibility Forms) available for the prosecution of the contract. The MPDEO- BAC will use non-discretionary pass/fail criteria in the Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids. The MPDEO- BAC TWG will conduct postqualification of the lowest calculated bid.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bid Conference, Evaluation of Bids, Post- Qualification and Award of contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

The Schedule of MPDEO- BAC activities are as follows:

MPDEO BAC Activities	Dates
1. Deadline of receipt from prospective bidders of Letters of Intent	April 04,2008
(LOI including Application for Eligibility)	
2. Pre-Bid Conference	April 08,2008
3. Issuance of Bid Documents	April 11, 2008
4. Receipt & Opening of Bids	April 24, 2008

The MPDEO-BAC will issue to prospective bidders Eligibility Forms at DPWH-MPDEO, Bontoc, Mountain Province, upon their submission of LOI, and upon their payment of non-refundable amount of Two Hundred Pesos (Php200.00) to the DPWH-MPDEO Cashier. Prospective bidders shall submit the Eligibility Requirements to the BAC-TWG Central Office. They may also obtain the results of the Eligibility Check by the BAC-TWG Central Office.

The MPDEO-BAC will issue Bidding Documents only to bidders declared by the BAC-TWG Central office to be eligible for the bidding upon payment of a non-refundable amount of Five Thousand Pesos (Php 5,000.00) to the DPWH-MPDEO Cashier.

The DPWH-MPDEO assumes no responsibility whatsoever to compensate or indemnify bidders for any expenses incurred in the preparation of their bids and reserves the right to reject any and all bids, to declare a failure of bidding, or not to award the contract for the reasons stipulated in section 41 of the IRR-A of RA 9184.

> (SGD.) REX K. OYA-OY **BAC Chairman**

Approved: (SGD.) LEONARDO C. LEYALEY **District Engineer**

MT - Mar. 24 & 28, 2008