

The Bangsamoro opportunity: Swiss-led Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) has publicly launched its report

The TJRC report, which was launched in two consecutive events held in Cotabato on 15 March 2016 and on the following day in Makati City, presents an assessment and formulates recommendations based on the Commission's analysis. The TJRC chose to listen, to convene and to act together in order to understand the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people.

At the public launch of the report of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), Ms. M^o Bleeker, Special Envoy for Dealing with the Past and Prevention of Atrocities of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Chair of the TJRC said that "there is nothing 'new' in the report – nothing that you, as an informed person, would not be in a position to know already". The value of the report lies in the fact that it summarizes and records part of the Philippine history that has been neglected for too long.

Within the framework of its civilian peace-building and human-rights commitments, Switzerland has been active in the field of dealing with the past for many years. It is involved in efforts to revisit specific past events and circumstances in a delicate and skillful manner to bring about reconciliation in post-conflict societies. We are convinced that efforts to deal with the past, rehabilitate victims and fight impunity are crucial to rebuilding war-torn societies and ensuring lasting peace.

Switzerland is honored that both peace panels – the Government of the Philippines and the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front* (MILF) – have chosen our country as a trusted partner for this important endeavor.

The chair of the TJRC mentioned in her message to the public that "when the TJRC began its work it was told about the 'Bangsamoro problem'. As we were advancing, the TJRC discovered the 'Bangsamoro opportunity'." It is on this positive note that the Embassy of Switzerland in Manila continues to support the dissemination and implementation of the recommendations as formulated by the TJRC.

The Commission found that the complexity of grievances and injustices of the Moro and indigenous peoples are the consequences of three mutually reinforcing phenomena: violence, impunity and neglect. As an independent commission, it concluded that the root cause of the conflict lies in the forceful imposition of a monolithic Filipino identity and Philippine State on multiple ethnic groups in Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago, who see themselves as pre-existing nations and nation-states.

The Commission submitted more than 90 recommendations to the peace panels. First and foremost, it recommends the creation of an independent National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission on the Bangsamoro (NTJRCB), which is mandated to listen to the victims of the conflict, to investigate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and to engage in the struggle against impunity.

Switzerland is hopeful that the new Philippine Government will take the important decision to implement key recommendations of the report and that such a national body will be established in due time. The International Community in Manila, and among its members the Embassy of Switzerland, will remain engaged in this important endeavor.

"This is the historic opportunity of the Bangsamoro, this is the historical opportunity for the Philippines" states M^o Bleeker. We are proud to be part of the International Community who is supporting the peace process in Mindanao.

The full report can be accessed here (http://tjrc.ph/skin/vii_tjrc/pdfs/report.pdf)