

UN official meets with MILF brass on child soldiers

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The new resident coordinator of the United Nations met with top brass of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern Philippines to discuss the MILF's recent commitment not to tap children in armed conflict.

According to the MILF, the meeting took place in Sultan Kudarat town in Maguindanao province.

"Badcock's visitation with the MILF, particularly focused on the formal engagement of the United Nations Children Educational Funds (Unicef) with MILF on the issue of child soldiers in armed conflict, was the first ever since her assumption to the post as the highest official of the UN in the Philippines who has the direct supervision over all UN agencies in the country," the MILF said in its website (www.luwaran.net).

MILF vice chairman for political affairs Ghadzali Jaafar led the MILF in what he called a "historic meeting with the UN high officials in the Philippines."

With Jaafar was Eid Kabalu, chief of Civil-Military Relations Department of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF).

Kabalu is head of the five-member MILF team that deals with the Unicef in the formulation and implementation the landmark "Action Plan Between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the United Nations in the Philippines Regarding the Issue of Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in the Armed Conflict in Mindanao."

The Agreement for the Action Plan was signed last July 29.

Signing for the MILF was Sammy Al Mansoor, chief of staff of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces; and Vanessa Tobin as Unicef representative.

"This forging of Action Plan following United Nations system was an offshoot of the meeting between Madame Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the MILF Central Committee in December last year," the MILF said.

Badcock, a co-signatory, was not present at the signing ceremony held at the office of Vice Chairman Jaafar.

During the meeting with the MILF brass, she commended the MILF for the good job being achieved on the Action Plan.

"She noted with elation the updates on the status of the action plan by the MILF team particularly the finalization of the Agreements' Terms of Reference (ToR) and the issuance of MILF supplemental order for the participation of people on the ground for the better realization of the multidimensional programs for the children in armed conflict in Mindanao," the MILF said.

The meeting also took up the hundreds of thousands of villagers displaced by fighting and the latest development on the government and MILF's peace efforts.

Jaafar stressed the need for government to show sincerity, and the need to come up with a comprehensive solution.

"Badcock regarded with deep appreciation the cordiality and candidness of the meeting, even as she gave assurances of the continuing support of the UN agencies in the Philippines through development and humanitarian programs," the MILF said.

With her during the dialogue was Matthew Serventy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Mishael Argonza, national program officer of the UN World Food Program. -

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