

# Ex-Abu Sayyaf Group members visit Congress

**MANILA**—A total of 40 former members of the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) from Basilan toured the halls of the House of Representatives on Thursday as part of an ongoing reintegration program for former extremists who wish to live a normal life.

Deputy Speaker and Basilan Rep. Mujiv Hataman said the ex-ASG members are part of the latest batch of beneficiaries of the Advancing and Sustaining Good Governance and Community Action Toward Resilience and Empowerment (AS2G-CARE) launched in June this year and implemented by the Balay Mindanao Foundation Inc. (BMFI) in collaboration with local government officials in Basilan.

The House tour is part of the Basilan Farmers Exposure Program that aims to teach rebel-returnees farming techniques as a source of livelihood.

Hataman said after the tour, the former extremists are bound for Baguio, Benguet, Pangasinan, and Bulacan to study best practices for farming.

"Lahat sila ay ngayon lang makakarating ng Maynila o makakatatungtong sa mga lugar tulad ng Kongreso (This is the first time for them to reach Manila or go to other places like Congress). We are showing them an alternative way of life, na meron silang kina-bukasan kapag binigtawan nila ang kanilang mga armas (that they have a future if they lay down their arms). We give them a reason to give up a life of fighting and turn to farming," Hataman said.

"And it is good that they are exposed to a lot of places. They can start to dream, learn new things, and want their lives to be productive," he added.

The AS2G-CARE is a continuation of a program of the now-defunct Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) called Program Against Violent Extremism or PAVE that was initiated by Hataman during his term as regional governor.

It is a collaboration between BMFI and the Provincial Government of Basilan; Joint Task Force Basilan-Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); Nagdilaab Foundation Inc.; Office of Deputy Speaker Hataman; and the Office of the Presidential Assistant on the Peace Process (OPAPP), with the support of the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

"Many of these people have known poverty and violence all their lives because of a lack of support from government and limited access to social services and education. With the continuation of the PAVE program, they can now rebuild their lives, have families and be productive members of society once more," Hataman said. (PNA)

# SC disbars farmer cooperative's lawyer for indiscretions

**MANILA** -- The Supreme Court (SC) disbarred a lawyer for committing actions that display lack of good judgment, particularly involving money.

"He has been warned the first time; he has not made amends to undo the consequences of his indiscretions and greed this second time. He was punished with three years of suspension, but to no avail, as no sooner could he complete the service of the penalty than he is again before the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) and the Court reviewing his actuations," the SC en banc ruled in a 13-page per curiam decision promulgated on August 14 released Thursday.

Lawyer Elmer dela Rosa was found guilty of gross misconduct in violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility and ordered the Office of the Bar Confidant (OBC) to strike out his name from the Roll of Attorneys.

Before his latest run-in with the Court, dela Rosa, had been suspended from the practice of law for three years effective Sept. 26, 2016, for borrowing a substantial amount of money from his client-spouses.

This time, he is accused of anomalies in the handling of money of his client, a cooperative and its farmer-beneficiaries.

In 1997, Palanan CARP Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative hired dela Rosa in a civil case involving the annulment of a transfer certificate of title over a 111.4-hectare land situated in Barangay Lumbia, Cagayan de Oro City, in the cooperative's name.

In 2002, the cooperative executed a special power of attorney (SPA) authorizing dela Rosa to do certain acts but revoked the same in 2007.

Despite the revocation of the SPA, dela Rosa still brokered the sale of the property. Dela Rosa did not dispute that he processed the sale and paid the farmer-beneficiaries their respective shares in the purchase price.

The SC said dela Rosa acted with corrupt intent to flagrantly disregard established ethical rules, and his conduct amounts to grave misconduct.

The IBP-Board of Governors concluded that dela Rosa preferred to protect his own personal pecuniary interest over the interest of his client and its members, and recommended the extreme penalty of disbarment on him, which the SC adopted.

The SC further held that dela Rosa had proven himself disloyal to his client -- exploit-

# Joint congressional review of K-12 program eyed next year

**MANILA** -- The chairman of the Senate Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture on Thursday said he is mulling a joint congressional oversight review of the K to 12 program by January next year.

"The K-12 program is a massive historical educational reform we introduced to produce the quality of graduates that our country needs. While the program has gaps and challenges, we need to sustain it in a way that also addresses implementation issues to provide quality education and boost global competitiveness," Senator Sherwin Gatchalian said.

"We need to come up with strategic solutions because industries will suffer and decline without a workforce equipped with the competencies required of the 21st century and Industry 4.0 (a new phase in the industrial revolution)," Gatchalian added.

The senator also vowed that the budget proposal for the K-12 program would be thoroughly reviewed at the upper chamber, as one of its biggest hurdles is the inadequacy of equipment in schools.

In October, the House increased the proposed budget of the Department of Education (DepEd) for next year by PHP800 million -- from PHP550.89 billion, as submitted in the National Expenditure Program of the Department of Budget and Management, to PHP551.69 billion.

While PHP650 million will go to DepEd's maintenance and other operating expenses to boost the K to 12 program, the remaining PHP150 million will be used for the building of model daycare centers nationwide under the Early Childhood Care and Development Council.

Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano said the increase was for the provision of equipment, training for teachers, and other necessities to help realize K to 12's goal of high school graduates landing jobs without college degrees.

"As we work towards finalizing the 2020 budget, we will ensure that the program gets an allocation that responds to the needs of both students and teachers. We need to make parents and students feel that this program is helpful, not an added burden," Gatchalian said.

Cayetano earlier said the House of Representatives was in consensus about K to 12 not "living up to its promise, which is, after you finish senior high school, you don't have to go to college."

The DepEd has welcomed moves for a congressional review of the effectiveness of the K to 12 program, noting that "a dedicated review session will provide an appropriate venue to comprehensively discuss concerns about the program and plot out corresponding solutions."

"DepEd commits to coordinate and collaborate with the members of the Congress in strategizing the effective implementation of the program in adherence to Republic Act 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 for the benefit of the learners," the DepEd said.

The DepEd added it hopes the review would result in renewed commitment from lawmakers and other stakeholders for the program and its goal of "holistically-developed Filipino learners with 21st-century skills." (PNA)

# PH Army to buy land for quake victims' temporary shelters

**MANILA** -- The Philippine Army (PA) will acquire land where some temporary shelters, which will be used to house families rendered homeless by the series of earthquakes in Mindanao last month, will be constructed.

Funds for the measure amounting to PHP9,226,600 were from the portion of the November meal allowance donated by all Army troops.

PA chief, Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto formally handed the donation to 10th Infantry Division commander, Major General Jose Faustino, Jr. and Disaster Response Task Force head, Brig. Gen. Rodolfo Lavadia Jr. during short ceremonies at Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City Thursday.

The initiative aims to provide decent temporary housing to displaced individuals currently staying in schools/evacuation centers. "In these trying times, we are in solidarity with the people of Mindanao."

"The funds donated will be used to purchase a lot and build one hundred homes where the evacuees can transfer to so that the children can use the schools," Alberto said.

The money will be allotted to purchase an estimated 4.9 hectares of land and materials for the construction of "Kobe"-type houses.

Each house will cost around PHP50,000 and can accommodate seven persons.

On Tuesday, soldiers from the 534th Engineer Construction Battalion have already built a prototype of the temporary shelter.

The recent earthquake destroyed 60 percent of households in Makilala, North Cotabato.