



Republica de Filipinas  
Ciudad de Zamboanga

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**OFICINA DEL ALCALDE**

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**MENSAJE**

My warmest greetings and felicitations to the Silsilah Dialogue Movement and the United Nations Interfaith Harmony Partners – Zamboanga for the successful celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week this year.

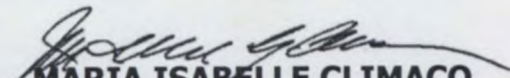
It is heartwarming to note, that the House Bill I initiated when I was still a member of the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress was signed into a law now known as Republic Act. No. 10525 "An Act declaring the first week of February of every year as "World Interfaith Harmony Week" in the entire country and mandating its observance by the different Government Agencies". That in itself is one of our legislative legacies to pursue peace and harmony and open avenues for dialogue among people of various faiths and cultural backgrounds.

The series of activities celebrating the World Interfaith Harmony Week renews our commitment for mutual understanding and respect and raises people's consciousness on the value peace and how it can lead to better lives, more stable families and tranquil communities. The WIHW with the support of the City Government and the newly created Zamboanga Interfaith Council will go a long way in ushering a culture of peace and dialogue in our City.

The City of Zamboanga had always been for peace – a just, meaningful, and lasting peace in Mindanao. Our beloved City had always been known and recognized as an ethnically heterogeneous but united community. Despite its ethnic diversity, we are truly blessed and inspired by its cultural harmony.

It is my hope that you will continue to work for peace and be further inspired in helping build back a better Zamboanga and a better Philippines.

*Enhorabuena y Vaya con Dios!*

  
**MARIA ISABELLE CLIMACO**  
City Mayor

*dudz@cmo*

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I am Dr. Milagros L. Fernandez, a member of the IFCL and presently the Chairperson of the Zamboanga City Council of Women (ZCCW) or known in short as the Local Council of Women (LCW). The council is a non-government entity and work in partnership with the Gender and Development Focal Point Committee of the City Government of Zamboanga City.

A just and lasting peace is what we in Zamboanga City have long desired. The absence of peace in any aspect of life affects greatly the Women Sector. This is one reason why I became a committed member of the Interfaith Council of Leaders (IFCL) organized by the Silsilah Dialogue Movement.

Through the IFCL, we Christians and Muslims worked together hand-in-hand and we successfully celebrated the World Inter-faith Harmony Week in Zamboanga City last February 1-7, 2015. Its success demonstrated unity in diversity in action.

I have seen that people of diverse culture and creed can work together for peace and development. Constant dialogue is one vehicle that promotes understanding and strengthens friendship among each other and removes whatever prejudices and biases we have for each other. The final outcome of any dialogue encounter will always be harmony of ideas and action.

It behooves therefore that we peace loving citizens should support whole heartedly the present on-going peace initiatives as long as it is in accordance with our existing laws and our constitution.

May our love of country and people's welfare prevail in our hearts.

God bless us all!



Republic of the Philippines  
Department of Education  
Region IX, Zamboanga Peninsula  
Division of Zamboanga City  
Ayala District



## LIMA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Sitio Lima, Baluno  
Zamboanga City

March 8, 2015

Greetings of Love and Peace

I am **Hadja Sarah L. Handang**, principal of Lima Elementary School, 23 kilometers in the hinterland, west of Zamboanga City, Philippines. The school has a population of 159 pupils, with 6 teachers, and the inhabitants of the community are 100% Christians.

The celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week has a significant role in my school governance. It is by the principle of "Love God and neighbour" that I started to lay the foundation of both my leadership style and the strong relationship of the school and the community.

Being the first Muslim school principal, of Lima Elementary School in this 100% Christian community, is not an easy job. With the various conflict in Mindanao, and the recent Zamboanga siege, people in this community was apprehensive of my presence, and that people in this community prompted that I may not be able to understand their culture, tradition and beliefs which might result to misunderstanding and mistrust between the school and community.

May being a member of The Interfaith Council of Leaders (IFCL) for many years, made it easy for me to win the heart of the people. My utmost respect and understanding to what the people in this community believe and the upholding of the school vision and mission in line with the of the Department of Education (Deped) policies, programs and projects, are my only guide to be able to do my job as a school principal.

The school have adapted programs and projects that developed the strong linkage of the school and the community. The Silsilah dialogue movement constructed a kindergarten classroom and concreted our pathway through the leadership of Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra. Thus the help of the Parish Priest of this community and the Christian religious leaders, regular Mass are conducted every first Thursday of the month, and the Catholic religion classes are being conducted every Tuesday at 10:30 to 11:30 am. These activities appealed the parents and little by little removed their apprehensions and prejudices in having a Muslim school principal in their community. But my real intension is to inculcate and develop in the young minds of the school children that the **love of God and neighbour** are the best tool to attain peace and harmony in the community. Thus understanding and respecting others beliefs, are the best strategies to remove the negative implications of people among different faith.

By gaining the trust and confidence to one other fade away in the successful transformation of the school, not only on the academic achievements, but also its physical facilities through the support of the stakeholders who truly believe and trust in my leadership and sincerity toward the betterment of not only the school children but the community as well.

Today 35 Christian couple enjoyed the holy sacrament of matrimony after I organized the Catholic Mass Wedding on October 23, 2014 in Lima Elementary school. These 35 couples are parents of our students who have stayed for a long time without legal marriage. These experiences truly touched the hearts of the many and really praised me for organizing such an activity, in spite of being a Muslim. My reason for conducting such an activity was to legitimize my students who do not even have any birth certificate, because their parents are not legally married. Thus the cooperation and support of various sector of the society contributed a lot in the success of this event. This was followed by the Mass registration of birth certificate of 159 students and children in the community for free. This is a realization of my target to zero out undocumented school children in our school.

Some people specially, those in the Muslim community would ask why I am helping the Christians? I said "They are people like us, children of God, and it is stated in our Islamic doctrines that respect to humanity and respecting each other regardless of beliefs are the teaching of Islam. Islam means peace, leaving to the teaching of Islam, peace and love to fellowmen are my inspiration to serve people even from different faith".

I hope the inspiration to love our fellowman regardless of faith will be passing on to our siblings and the generations to come. This is a legacy that will bring about peace and harmony to the whole world.

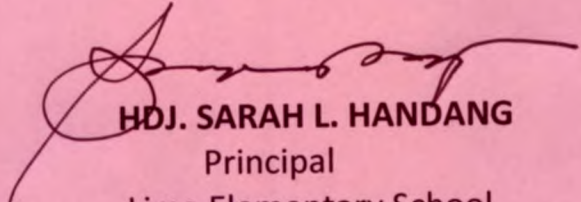
Silsilah Dialogue Movement and its partners conducted a Seminar orientation of Mothers In Dialogue, in Celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week, on February 2, 2015. This seminar was proposed and design by me, aiming to spread to each and every homes through the mothers, the idea and importance of dialogue in attaining not only peace in the family, the community and the neighbour but in the whole country as well. In my encounter to these mothers coming from the different Barangays of the city, was touching and memorable moment. Mothers are the heart of the family, and sharing the experience they have to journey toward peace and harmony in the family, is something that we must give attention as a society. I believed mothers are the most effective person to influence their children and the family in putting into action the principle of **love of God and neighbour**. Thus peace and harmony in the community will be attained, emanating from the families.

The successful conduct of that seminar orientation gave me hope that if only everyone do its own little way, to share toward the attainment of peace and harmony through lasting and meaningful dialogue, Mindanao is the most wonderful place to live in and this country will deter divisiveness and conflict and can stop war.

I enjoined everyone to work for peace and harmony among people, this is the only hope that we have to make this world a better place for our kin and siblings and for the generations to come. Thus the strength of the country is not measured by its armaments, but the kind of people it has. Give peace a chance. Don't dream of peace, work for it. It might be illusive right now, but if we join our hands together to attain peace and harmony, nothing is impossible.

Lastly, I would like to thank the organizer of the Celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week , for giving me the chance to do my part little as it is, to give peace a chance . As stated by King Abdullah of Jordan in his speech that "It is essential to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust specially among people of different faith." Love of God and neighbour / to love the Good and neighbour" must be the guiding principle of every man, every country, in this world to attain everlasting peace and harmony among people and nations. Let the love of God shines upon us, for it true and genuine love and understanding among people makes this world a better place for all of us.

Thank you and more power.



**HDJ. SARAH L. HANDANG**  
Principal  
Lima Elementary School



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## **TESTIMONIALS**

### **KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS :**

I, MOH. TAHA S. ARAKAMA, City Director, Department of the Interior and Local Government, City of Zamboanga, is implementing a program that has an outcome area on conflict free, safe, peaceful, environmentally and socially protective communities.

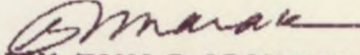
I am directly engaged with United Nation Interfaith Harmony partners Zamboanga (UNI-HP-Z) with Silsilah Dialogue Movement as the secretariat in pursuing peace and harmony in the city among people of different faith and culture.

I have undertaken a special gathering of barangay officials/leaders in the City of Zamboanga in collaboration with UNIHarmoney partners where we focused our discussions on Reconciliation and Healing Through Restorative Justice last February 3, 2015 at Astoria Hotel, this City.

I have also enjoined barangay leaders of selected barangays to attend tree planting activity and orientation seminar on mothers in dialogue: culture of dialogue, a path to peace on February 2, 2015 at the Auditorium, Harmony Village, Pitogo, Sinunuc, Zamboanga City.

I will continue to support the programs of UNIHarmoney partners that will redound to the attainment of peace and harmony in the city.

In testimony whereof, I hereunto set my hand this 6<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2015, City of Zamboanga, Philippines.

  
**MOH. TAHA S. ARAKAMA**  
Acting City Director

Peace and harmony are two familiar words that have only become meaningful in an extraordinary sort of way since I joined the Silsilah Dialogue Movement two years ago. Before that, peace was any moment or situation that was quiet, untroubled, and tranquil. And harmony meant a condition or situation where there was complete understanding or agreement.

My employment in the Silsilah Dialogue Movement taught me that true peace extended beyond the quiet and tranquility found by the body. That true peace was the untroubled status of the soul that found rest in God and continued to stay with Him, while at the same time inviting others, regardless of differences in culture and religion, to join in the same company.

Meanwhile, harmony was more than the forced agreement imposed upon friends, beyond the pretended understanding among people. True harmony is based on the personal desire to give each person the freedom and the liberty to be different while at the same time appreciating and accepting the difference.

My assignment as Director of Media in the Silsilah Dialogue Movement has given me unusual opportunities to witness true peace and true harmony through the various activities held during Interfaith Harmony Week which are all reflective of the two great commandments: First, the love of God. Second, the love of neighbor.

My position as Director of Media has also allowed me to witness the mass wedding of 35 Christian couples organized by a Muslim who felt no qualms in doing it regardless of criticism of difference in religion. The objective in doing it was a noble as a Muslim who could show respect for the Christian God, but at the same time continue to respect her own God.

The world has become, and continues to become more violent. More than ever before, man has to exert more effort to find and preserve peace and harmony among peoples of different cultures and religions. The hour is getting late. Unless we start now, future generations will never know what is the real love of God and love of neighbor.

*E. C. Espinosa*  
Erlinda C. Espinosa, Ed. D.  
Director of Media  
Silsilah Dialogue Movement



## TESTIMONIAL

Every year since the start of the World interfaith harmony week Celebration, the Silsilah dialogue Movement has always considered Zamboanga City medical Center as a Practicum area of **“Love in action”** for the Youth Volunteers. On this occasion, they express their sincere service and compassion to the sick in-patient of the hospital. True enough, the Youth volunteers who came were touched and had understood the real essence of love of God, Love of neighbor, as the patients are very appreciative of the visit and the food shared during the half day visit.

For this year, on February 3, 2015, the Service of the Youth were focused on the patients at the Pediatrics Ward and the mentally challenged patients at the Psychiatric Ward. The volunteers provided food to share and spent some time listening and fostering friendships to the patient and their care givers. This they did without considering one’s status in society or the religion or ethnicity of the patient. It is surprising to note that one psychiatric patient recognized the President of Silsilah Ms. Aminda E. Saño who was with the Youth that moment. These patients were recipient of Silsilah hospitality during the Siege in Zamboanga in September of 2013 when for lack of an institution to relocate them, Silsilah provided shelter at Harmony Village and food for the duration of the crisis. It was unfortunate that the hospital has to be closed during that fateful Zamboanga Siege which lasted for 25 days because it is located at ground zero.

At the end of their visit, Dr. Hermino Casto Jr, the Chair of the Psychiatry Dept. Explained to them that the patients are still human, non -violent and capable of receiving and giving love.

Celebrating Interfaith harmony Week with the poor and the sick is indeed a joyful and fulfilling journey towards achieving world peace.

Thank you very much to the people who made this activity worth remembering.

**VIOLETA C. MAGASO**

Chief Administrative officer

Hospital Operation and Patient Support Service

March 6, 2015