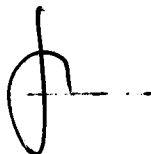


SENATE

Senate Bill No. 2915

RECEIVED



Introduced by Senator Juan Miguel F. Zubiri

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR THE INCLUSION OF THE PROVINCE OF SULU IN THE
BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO AS
PROVIDED FOR IN REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11054 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS
THE "BANGSAMORO ORGANIC LAW", SETTING THE PLEBISCITE FOR
THIS PURPOSE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Following the signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on 26 July 2018, which consequently abolished the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and created in its place the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), a plebiscite was held in all political units affected by the new law's enactment. One of the areas affected is the Province of Sulu, a political unit that has been part of the ARMM since the autonomous region's inception in 1989.

In the plebiscite to ratify the BOL held on 21 January 2019, the Province of Sulu rejected the measure, with only 137,630 voting "yes" and 163,526 voting "no." The result of this exercise became the basis of the decision promulgated by the Supreme Court (SC) on 9 September 2024, which states: "In considering the ARMM as one geographical area, the Bangsamoro Organic Law transgressed the Constitution and disregarded the autonomy of each constituent unit of what used to comprise the ARMM."

The SC decision has affected not only the people of the province, but the whole of BARMM as well. It has called into question the seven allocated seats in the Bangsamoro Parliament, which will be having its first election on 12 May 2025. It has also affected the delivery of government services, with its abrupt transfer from the regional government to the national government.

Six years after the law's enactment, the BARMM is reaping the benefits of the peace and order now being enjoyed by the area. It has become one of the fastest growing regions in the country, seeing remarkable economic growth particularly in agriculture. According to the PSA report released in August 2024, the region posted a 23.5-percent poverty incidence in 2023, a huge improvement from the 52.6-percent poverty incidence it posted in 2018.

This bill seeks to provide for the inclusion of the Province of Sulu in the BARMM, setting the plebiscite for this purpose and allowing its constituents to once again vote on Sulu's inclusion, now guided by the positive experiences that they have enjoyed over the past six years under the Bangsamoro Government. With this, we hope to honor the constitutional provision allowing for the creation of autonomous regions that share common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, and pave the way for a plebiscite that would reflect the sentiments and aspirations of an overwhelming majority of the constituents of the Province of Sulu.

In view of the foregoing, the approval of this bill is earnestly sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JUAN MIGUEL F. ZUBIRI

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BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO AS PROVIDED
FOR IN REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11054 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE
"BANGSAMORO ORGANIC LAW", SETTING THE PLEBISCITE FOR THIS
PURPOSE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Composition. – Pursuant to Section 2, Article III of Republic Act No. 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) shall, subject to the conduct of a plebiscite, be composed of the enumerated constituent units, including the Province of Sulu.

SEC. 2. Plebiscite. – Within 120 days from the effectivity of this Act, a plebiscite shall be conducted in the Province of Sulu to ratify its inclusion in the BARMM.

Sec. 3. Plebiscite Question. – The question to be asked of the voters in the plebiscite shall be determined by the Commission on Elections.

Sec. 4. Qualified Voters. – All registered voters in the Province of Sulu shall be qualified to participate in the plebiscite. The Commission on Elections may conduct a Special Voters Registration for this purpose as it may deem necessary.

SEC. 5. Appropriations. – The amount necessary for the conduct of the plebiscite shall be sourced from the budget of the Commission on Elections.

Sec. 6. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect 15 days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,