

**MESSAGE OF**

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**on faSK forward! Forming & Accelerating SK Leaders Forward**

**Opening Message**

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First off, thank you to the Ateneo School of Government for initiating this important event and to our co-partner alongside the Bangsamoro Youth Commission, the Ateneo de Zamboanga University. Greetings to our distinguished guests from different academic institutions and civil society organizations, members of the development sector, and former and current government officials and public servants who will be taking the stage in the coming weeks. And of course to all our young leaders in attendance today: a pleasant morning to everyone.

I am humbled and privileged to speak before such a bright and talented group of Bangsamoro youth leaders. And before anything else, I would just like to ask all our attendees to take a few seconds to sit back and really take in everything that is in front of you. It is not every day that you are able to undergo a training program of this caliber and depth, with such outstanding resource persons and mentors. So right from the get-go, embrace and appreciate every opportunity that is given you to learn and grow.

Through the modules and courses in this program, you will become equipped with the tools to further understand what it means to have transparency and accountability in governance, the value of an inclusive and participatory democracy, how to build empowered and capable leaders. And beyond learning these through readings and lectures, more importantly, you will learn how to apply all these in real life with your own constituents and respective localities.

Especially coming from the Bangsamoro that is currently under transition and is committing to the peace process, we continue to face challenges and difficulties when it comes to leadership and governance. What I hope is that you also approach your communities carrying the unique histories, cultures, and struggles of the Bangsamoro. And that we keep in mind the plight of our people, of the vulnerable and marginalized, of those experiencing systemic oppressions, in all the work that we do for the public.

Moreover, I enjoin everyone to respect not only the inputs of our accomplished speakers, but to look inwards amongst your own ranks, as well. The value of initiatives such as this is for young people to come together and make connections. You are here because there is something special already within you that we want to bring out further.

You all already have vast wells of knowledge and experiences worthy of sharing and are already leaders and change-makers in your own right.

Listen to the stories of your fellow youth leaders. Inspire and uplift each other. Learn and discover what the new struggles of today's youth are and figure out how to address these in your own creative ways. Rest assured, we will be here to provide whatever support and encouragement we can.

Years from now, you young people in this very room may well be next in line to become the future leaders of the Bangsamoro, of the nation. It will be your actions that will make waves in the lives of your fellow citizens. It will be your voices that will ring loud and inspire more young leaders to carve their own space in this world.

And in your leadership, may you embody the spirit of democratic values and good governance, of genuine and long-lasting peace and development.

Thank you and good luck to all our participants!