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Press Release

EU AMBASSADOR UNVEILS PEACE MURALS AND REITERATES EU'S COMMITMENT TO THE PEACE PROCESS

To support the month of Peace launched by President Aquino on 14 September, EU Ambassador Guy Ledoux will unveil peace murals and billboards at Cotabato City Airport on 25 September. The murals and billboards are based on paintings of the children of Maguindanao who participated in a competition organised by the International Monitoring Team in cooperation with the Department of Education of ARMM.

Ambassador Ledoux said that he was encouraged by the announcement last week of the Philippine Government Peace Panel Marvic Leonen that the Government was very close to concluding the Peace talks. The EU has announced in July a new grant of Php 462 million to support the peace process.

The programme will finance the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development component of the IMT which the EU leads. This will also cover support to local and international non-governmental organisations comprising the civilian protection component.

Further, the grant will provide funding for an International NGO which is a member of the International Contact Group and support a series of confidence-building measures and other initiatives in the areas of women's rights, governance and security.

One of these new initiatives includes the joint clearing by the Parties of the unexploded remnants of war. Landmines and other improvised explosive devices are

suspected to contaminate roughly 20% of the territory of 21 municipalities in 4 provinces of central Mindanao which thus remain unused by the communities unable to return and earn their livelihood.

The total of 20 peace murals and billboards disseminated in central Mindanao are replicating drawings by children from Talayan and Datu Piang who won in a peace painting contest entitled "Dreaming of Peace in my Barangay". The initiative aimed at broadening the support base for the peace process through the inclusion of the voices of children and young people who are often caught in the crossfire.

"Children have a stake in the peace process. Despite their young age, they are able to share their views on peace as they are the most vulnerable and often the most heavily affected by armed conflict" Ambassador Ledoux said.

Mr Ledoux thanked the children adding that "in this critical period and all along the path towards peace, your drawings will serve the central purpose of reminding us how, why, and for whom one is striving to achieve that goal".

"In the context of the month for peace, let us all give resonance to children's artistic expression and aspirations by also declaring "I am for peace", he said.

The works of the children are also featured in the peace calendars distributed to Congress members and Local Government Units in areas affected by the ongoing conflict in Mindanao.