

**Closing Remarks on the occasion of the 2007 Ateneo Awards**  
**Antonio F Moreno SJ**  
**09 December 2007**

Most Reverend Romulo Valles, Archbishop of Zamboanga, the Honorable Celso Lobregat, Mayor of Zamboanga City, the Honorable Maria Isabelle Climaco, First District Congresswoman, Atty Arsenio Gonzalez Jr, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Fr William H Kreutz SJ, former President of the Ateneo, our 2007 Ateneo awardees: Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc., represented by its president and founder Mr Charlito Manlupig and Ms Sylvia Okinlay-Paraguay, Chair of its Board, and Sisters of the Discalced Carmelite Order in Zamboanga represented by Sr Delia and Sr Gloria, Trustees of the Ateneo, members of the Ateneo and Jesuit communities, distinguished guests, alumni, ladies and gentlemen ug hilabina gayod ang 42 ka mga bisita nga gikan pa sa Misamis Oriental nga kauban sa Balay Mindanaw, buenas tardes y bienvenidos a todos, maayong hapon, Assalamu alaikum warah matulahi wabarakatu.

I thank you all for taking time off to be here for this occasion. I thank especially our bien amable Archbishop Romulo Valles for presiding over and preaching at the Mass we celebrated earlier. To our awardees, I thank especially Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc., and the Carmelite Sisters for graciously accepting the recognition and appreciation we have given them this afternoon. Awards like these make a statement about who we are, what we aspire, what values we hold dear, and what we set out to do. The Ateneo is committed to the promotion of faith that seeks to dialogue and peace that is founded on development in Western Mindanao and the island Provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

If there's anything that binds our Ateneo awardees this year it is their low-key profile and their work of development, whether it be personal or communitarian, spiritual or social, private or public,

for our people in Mindanao. Balay Mindanaw is not concerned of the publicity of its achievements more than its work through skillful peace negotiations, peace education, and community-based development work. Balay Mindanaw is not known to work for peace to earn *pogi* points from donors, government, private sector, and even from the people who partner with its labors. I am very pleased to let you know that a contingent of 42, mostly from Misamis Oriental. They traveled by bus all the way from Cagayan de Oro City last night to witness and celebrate the conferral of awards. They have been partners with Balay Mindanaw for years now. They, like Balay Mindanaw, do not seek the limelight. Balay Mindanaw has shown us that there can be no real peace unless people feel at home in their own land; there can be no lasting peace unless there is genuine development; there can be no true peace without justice and reconciliation. Its aspirations are simple: make Mindanao truly a home, a *balay* of citizens, not simply of denizens, - and this is a new name of peace.

The Carmelite Sisters likewise are not known to serve and get something in return. When Carmelite Saint Therese of Lisieux was on the threshold of death, the sisters thought about her obituary. Then as they were thinking about it, a sister remarked: "What shall we write about her, she is so simple." The life of the Carmelite Sisters here in Zamboanga is indeed so simple. They live a quiet life, almost in obscurity. When asked to make a write-up of their life here in view of these awards ceremonies, they cannot and would not write anything about themselves – their humble achievements and noble contributions to our people here. They offer prayers even if people are not aware of their prayers. The convent of the Carmelite Sisters for over 50 years now has been a haven of spiritual renewal and inspiration. They may have limited contact with the outside world but they are truly engaged in our Christian community through their prayers and life of witnessing to Gospel values. At times, I have the feeling that they are the first ones to know about the burning concerns in our place

here (even ahead of the Archbishop and Jesuits!). People seek counsel and prayers from the Carmelite Sisters.

In sum, the awards we have just given are tightly connected with each other. Genuine development involves peace and faith. One cannot promote genuine peace without taking on board the faiths of our people. In the same way, faith is empty in our context if there is no struggle for peace. So there you are, for peace and faith, we take a bow to Balay Mindanaw and to the Carmelite Sisters. You inspire the Ateneo community with your heroic lives lived simply and without fireworks and funfare. You empower us with your lives of faithful service carried out with least public attention. May God continue to bless you with good things and plenty.