

Thursday's oath-taking at Malacañang by newly-elected officials of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the five ARMM provincial governors was a show of solidarity among leaders of a known hotbed of political factionalism, officials said.

Local peace activists and religious leaders interpret President Benigno Aquino III's induction of Mujiv Hataman, Haroun Al-Rashid Lucman, as ARMM governor and vice-governor, respectively, and the 24 members of Regional Legislative Assembly, as an introduction to the public on who Malacañang's "facets" for its peace efforts in the region are.

The ARMM, which covers Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, both in Central Mindanao, the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and the cities of Lamitan and Marawi, are known "common havens" of the rivals Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front.

Also inducted to office, along with the newly-elected ARMM officials were Govs. Esmael Mangudadatu of Maguindanao, Nurbert Sahali of Tawi-Tawi, Jum Akbar of Basilan, Mamintal Adiong, Jr. of Lanao del Sur, and Sakur Tan, Jr. of Sulu.

"That was something never witnessed before. That would show there could be stronger political solidarity now among senior leaders in the region and in the provinces," commented lawyer Makmod Mending, Jr., ARMM's local government secretary.

Mending said "cohesion" among political leaders in the autonomous region is good for President Aquino's Mindanao peace efforts..

Hataman, Lucman, and the five elected ARMM provincial governors, who all belong to the Liberal Party, promised voters during the campaign period the to help push the Mindanao peace process forward if elected.

Ustadz Esmael Ebrahim, commissioner in the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos, said

the mass taking of ARMM officials in Malacañang should also be regarded as a challenge for local sectors to support the peace agenda of their elected leaders, from the provinces up to the regional government.

“Peace-building is something that concerns everybody. Muslims ought to unite always, particularly in peace processes that are to benefit Muslims and non-Muslims alike,” Ebrahim said.

He said there is a teaching in Islam which espouses respect and support for elected political leaders.

Mending said ARMM residents can be assured of Hataman’s readiness to step down and vacate his post by 2015 if the transition, from the present autonomous regional government to a Bangsamoro entity the GPH and MILF panels are to jointly establish, will necessitate.

Meantime, Mending said the political solidarity among ARMM leaders will be useful in maintaining the fragile peace in potential flashpoint areas in the provinces covered by the 1997 Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities between the government and the rebel group.

“While local government units in the ARMM are not directly involved in the on-going talks between the Aquino Administration and the MILF, these LGUs have actively been helping monitor the government-MILF ceasefire accord,” Mending said.

Khadafy Mangudadatu, a re-elected member of the ARMM assembly, touted as the region’s “Little Congress,” said his first mission is to author a resolution reiterating the commitment of the regional law-making body to the efforts of President Aquino and the MILF to craft a final peace deal.

“No Moro leader, in proper frame of mind, will ever disregard the Mindanao peace process. We have to show that we are one, we are in one boat, together, as far as that endeavor is concerned,” said Mangudadatu, who, along with two other assemblymen, are to represent the second district of Maguindanao to the ARMM assembly.

Mangudatu is a younger sibling of the governor of Maguindanao, also known for his being supportive of the on-going peace talks between the government and the MILF.