I. Overview of the Project

Sustaining Community Madrasa Project is an initiative of Al-Muhtasibeen Batch 2009, a group of young professionals from Ibn Siena Integrated School Foundation Alumni Relations, in cooperation with the Bureau of Madaris Education under the Department of Education in ARMM and the alumni youth leaders from Bangsamoro Young Leaders Program – Leadership Communities, a year-long leadership program of the Office of the Regional Governor – ARMM, Ayala Foundation and Eisenhower Fellows Association of the Philippines.

The project is designed to empower community Madrasahs (Islamic Schools) and promote awareness on their greatest role and significance in good values-formation to counter the ideology of violent extremism amongst youth in the Muslim Society in Southern Philippines.

II. Introduction and Background of how the Project was formulated

To give a short introduction on how the project was initiated, this is how it was. On May 23, 2017, a firefight broke out between Philippine Government and armed non-state actors in Marawi City, a city of 200,000 in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in Southern Philippines. The firefight quickly spread throughout the city, with militants taking over large areas including business establishments, religious structures and government buildings. Later that evening, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte announced that
he was placing the entire island of Mindanao under martial law and suspending the writ of habeas corpus.

The conflict lasted for five months, and resulted in the mass displacement of civilians, the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructures and the loss of civilian lives. Indeed, against the extremists group, the Philippine Government wins the battle but never the war.

The armed non-state actors, the militants were comprised of members of five or six different insurgent groups. Several of which had recently sworn allegiance to and reportedly received support from the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East.

These militant groups were composed majority of young people aged 18 to 35 years. Reports even proved that there were also younger than the mentioned age. These groups are also composed of young professionals who have finished higher educational attainments in Western education with less understanding on the true and genuine teachings of Islam, thereby, making these people vulnerable to foreign and radical ideology.

The estimated number of militants varied widely, with reports ranging from fewer than one hundred to more than one thousand. The battle was the most significant foray into Southeast Asia by Islamic State-linked groups.

Twenty two battalions of the Philippine Army, Air force and Navy were reportedly involved in the fighting which has been described as the Philippine military’s longest and bloodiest battle since World War II.

Within a month, the conflict displaced 360,000 people, including all the city’s residents along with many neighboring municipalities. The majority of these internally displaced persons have taken shelter with family and friends;
some have sought refuge at evacuations centers in the nearby provinces in Mindanao.

Access of the people to basic needs became so limited, and conditions became worst. Humanitarian workers and relief operations had a difficulty in providing assistance to about hundred thousands of people trapped on the other areas affected by the conflict.

After five long months of bloody war, the Government announced that Marawi City; our city had been liberated. Week after that, government then declared an end to fighting.

There are several studies, analysis and researches conducted by different civil society organizations, NGO’s, group of researchers, private and government agencies on what were the factors and reasons why this man-made calamity have not been prevented nor stopped at the earliest stage. What were the strings of conflict and immediate grievances of the people that had not been resolved and addressed that came out to be the cause of the causes. What were those simple yet crucial factors that if given attention, might hinder great calamities like what our place had suffer.

Our group is one of the several organizations who conducted studies and researches and wish to contribute greatly to prevent violent extremism and bring back lasting peace in our place. And one great solution that we had come up to is by bringing out the genuine teachings of Islam in a Muslim Society by way of Sustaining Community Madrasahs (Islamic Schools) and promoting awareness on their role and significance in good-values formation to counter violent and radical ideologies among the people in our society.
III. Rationale of the Project

Community Madrasa is one of the main reasons for the preservation of the moral and spiritual aspects of the Muslim youth. It has always been a mean by which they are educated of their important and transformative role in the society. This institution contributes, without a doubt, a great deal in their values and principle formation. Through it, the Ulama (scholars) of our people and other righteous individuals have been molded. They in turn become the most influential shapers of the society’s collective consciousness. Through them, the society is guided to a productive and constructive path. This is the reason why Madrasas cannot be ignored as the primal institution that can effectively combat radicalism and violent extremism. An ample amount of attention to their development will be the Muslim society’s greatest machinery for better change. But it is now very sad realities that these institutions are being relegated into shabby, haphazardly made buildings, with little or no support from the community they serve. At this point, many of them have already been closed, especially with the stalling of most of the communal activities due to the Marawi Siege. Some are struggling to survive with the help of the few people who understand the situation. Though, some have already been converted to the Madaris system under the subsidy of the government.

These conditions and situations can most likely be observed in the rural areas of our province, where most people are struggling for their living. Madrasa’s cannot expect much contribution from them for their financial needs. The government, on the other hand, doesn’t have an enough attention on them, unlike the other learning institutions who are receiving financial aid from it.

With the recent incident in Marawi City, the case of the Madrasa’s (Islamic Schools) has been further worsened. Some people, even our
politicians, associates this extremism with some selected Madrasa’s. But the truth is that the Madrasa together with the Masajid (Mosques) is the first institution to combat extremism with the true teachings of Islam. The early mentioned situations and conditions of the Madrasa’s were made by the extremists an opportunity to influence a few number of them. As responsible citizens and Muslims, it is then our duty to sustain and alleviate the status of the Madrasa’s, and to give no room for the extremists in influencing them.

IV. Programs and Activities

To empower and sustain community Madrasah in our region, below are some of the activities and initiatives we had conducted.

1. Providing one month to three month bonus honorarium to the teachers on the beginning of the school year, on the middle of the year, and on the end of the year.

2. Providing school supplies to the teachers such as class records, record books, ball pens, etc.

3. Presenting some school supplies such as notebooks, quiz pads, pencils, ball pens, erasers, and even bag packs, to the morits (students) at the first day of classes of the madrasa.

4. Providing the madrasa with the needed equipment, tools, or paraphernalia that will aid in the learning of the students and in the sustenance and maintenance of the madrasa, such as chalks, erasers, chairs, tables, paints, trashcans, brooms, and even repairs on doors and windows.

5. Organizing a half-day interactive program with the morits (students) of the madrasa on emphasizing their role in the society and in combatting with the widespread extremism ideas.
6. Organizing an interactive consultative meeting with the management and ustadz’s (Teachers) of the madrasa (School), the local leaders of the community where the madrasa (school) is located, the parents of the morits (students), and the nearby local masjid (mosque) – a meeting on sustaining the community madrasa, on emphasizing the role of madrasa in good values-formation to combat radicalism among youth, and on recent issues concerning madrasa.

7. Presenting gifts and cash incentives to the honor students at the end of the academic year.

8. Evaluation and filing of copies of lesson plans of the ustads (teachers) at the end of the academic year.

9. Inviting an education expert lecturer to the madrasa for upgrading and enhancing the teaching methods of the ustads (teachers) in sustaining the madrasa system. Part of which is providing basic knowledge on the modern technology and the modern world.

10. Inviting experts for lectures on farming and marketing basic principles and strategies for the livelihood enhancement of the community members for them to support the sustainability of the madrasa on the long run.
V. Documentations

On the photo are the working committee members buying schools supplies to be distributed to target Madrasah/Islamic Schools.
Below are photos taken during our preparation and packaging of school supplies.

The school supplies were donated by few individuals who are with us in our advocacy on preventing violent extremism. Some came from our own pockets.
Following photos were taken during our courtesy visit to the community leaders and the target madrasas (schools).
Here we took about (6) six hours hiking to reach out Madrasas in remote areas. From plains to mountains; passing by hanging bridges and rivers.

Some of these Madrasahs (schools) in remote areas were most likely to be targeted by the extremist groups.
In the picture, we can see how madrasahs (Islamic schools) are having lack of attention and support from any other agencies especially the government. These situations were taken by the extremists as opportunity to encourage and recruit the students to fight against the government and become extreme.
The following photos then were taken during our first visit and distribution of school supplies to our target Madrasahs (schools)
These photos were taken during our consultative meeting with the local leaders in the community where some of the targeted Madrasas are located. The activity was conducted to serve as orientation for our project as well as informing the community leaders on their significant role in sustaining the Madrasas that they have.
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These are the morits (pupils/students) in the madrasas lining up after the distribution of their school supplies.
The following photos were taken from different target Madrasa (schools) after providing them their basic needs in school and most importantly making them aware of their role and significance in building a peaceful community and keeping them away from foreign and radical ideologies.
This photo was taken during our talk with one of the community leaders explaining to her how we could work together in sustaining the project by defining their roles as the leaders of the community where some of our targets Madrasahs are situated.
Finally, this photo was taken during the making of our documentary interviews with the morits (pupils/students) of different target madrasahs. This was after our one year engagement with our selected madrasahs. The purpose was to document the overall impact of the project by sharing their stories and experiences after the project with them, how their perceptions towards radical ideologies have changed and how could they counter the said ideology and now recognizing their significant role in countering violent extremism in their respective communities. And yes! We made it. 15 Madrasahs became our beneficiaries for the academic year 2017 to 2018. Today, these selected madrasahs can continue and even develop the project better by the help of the community leaders and people living within that community.

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