

UP Halal Forum

**Harmonizing Roles, Addressing Challenges,
and Moving Towards a Common Direction**

25 June 2024 | 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

**Room 302, Virata Hall, UP Institute of Small-Scale Industries bldg.,
E. Jacinto St., UP Diliman, Quezon City**



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

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"Group photo of the organizers and attendees of the Halal Forum, held on June 25, 2024"

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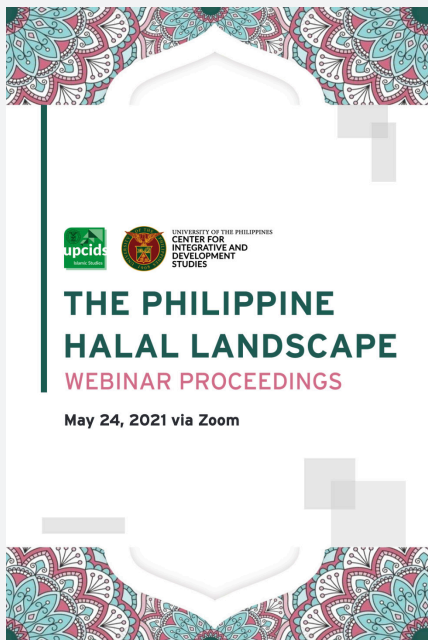
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ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

Nashwina A. Rasul

These proceedings document the “UP Halal Forum: Harmonizing Roles, Addressing Challenges, and Moving Towards a Common Direction” held on 25 June 2024 at the Virata Hall, UP Institute of Small-Scale Industries bldg., E. Jacinto St., UP Diliman, Quezon City. The forum served as a key platform for various stakeholders in the Halal industry to share their initiatives and address challenges, fostering collaboration for the advancement of Halal in the Philippines.

The forum included participation from a range of key government agencies:

- 1.** Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
 - Mr. Dimnatang M. Radia
- 2.** National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)
 - Ms. Rahima M. Solaiman
- 3.** Department of Agriculture (DA)
 - Ms. Soghra Mahbouby Pirdehy
- 4.** Department of Science and Technology (DOST)
 - Dr. Anthony C. Sales
- 5.** Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)
 - Ms. Bernadette S. Audije

The strong representation from these bodies underscores the multi-faceted approach required to address the needs of the Halal sector.

In addition, several UP-affiliated units were present:

1. UP Diliman
 - Atty. Edgardo Carlo L. Vistan II
2. UP CIDS-Islamic Studies Program
 - Asst. Prof. Darwin J. Absari
3. UP Institute of Islamic Studies
 - Prof. Julkipli M. Wadi
4. UP College of Home Economics
 - Prof. Maria Patricia V. Azanza
5. UP Manila Institute of Herbal Medicine
 - Dr. Cecilia Maramba-Lazarte

Their involvement highlights UP's comprehensive approach in supporting the halal industry through academic contributions. The event also saw active participation from the private sector, with organizations such as the Philippine Ulama Congress Organization Inc., represented by Mr. Abdurazaq B. Madale.

This endeavor was organized by the Islamic Studies Program of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, in collaboration with the UP Institute of Islamic Studies.

OPENING REMARKS

The opening remarks were delivered by the dean of the UP Institute of Islamic Studies, Prof. Julkipli M. Wadi. Atty. Edgardo Carlo L. Vistan II, Chancellor of UP Diliman and Sec. Alfredo E. Pascual of the Department of Trade of Industry gave welcome messages to participants present in the forum. Chancellor Vistan's message expressed his hope for continued and sustainable collaborations in halal-related research, discussions, and strategic planning. He looked forward to future activities and engagements led by the Institute of Islamic Studies and CIDS and encouraged further participation from all sectors in the development of the halal industry. Meanwhile, Secretary Pascual's message noted that the forum's theme—"Harmonizing Roles, Addressing

Challenges, and Moving Towards a Common Direction”—highlights the urgent need for collaboration among various stakeholders to tackle the challenges facing the halal industry. He further emphasized that by working together, the country could foster a resilient halal ecosystem that drives both economic prosperity and cultural harmony.



■ Group photo of the organizers and attendees of the Halal Forum, held on June 25, 2024.

Opening Remarks

Prof. Julkipli M. Wadi

Dean, UP Institute of Islamic Studies



- Prof. Julkipli Wadi delivering the opening remarks at the Halal Forum on June 25, 2024.

Professor Julkipli M. Wadi began his address by warmly greeting the attendees, including Chancellor Vistan, the faculty members of the University of the Philippines, officials and staff from various government agencies, as well as advocates and champions of halal. He noted a currently growing interest in three interconnected areas of Islamic Studies: Shari'ah, Islamic Finance, and Halal. These fields have not only gained traction for their social and economic benefits but have also deepened the understanding of their foundational and spiritual aspects.

Professor Wadi then elaborated on the two primary domains within Islamic thought that these areas encompass. The first, *Muammalat*, pertains to social, economic, and political transactions, while the second, *Ibadat*, focuses on religious and divine practices that strengthen the faith of believers. These two domains, he explained, are interwoven within the larger concept of *Deen*—a term often translated as “religion” but also refers to a comprehensive system of life in the Islamic context. He emphasized that the term *Deen* offers a holistic framework for understanding the faith by encapsulating both the socio-economic and spiritual dimensions of Islam.

Wadi also reflected on recent legislative strides in the Philippines and highlighted significant legal advancements that have supported the development of halal and Islamic finance in the country. Among these, he mentioned the passage of P.D. 1083 or the Code of Muslim Personal Law, the Halal Trade Industry Law, and the Bangsamoro Organic Law. He further noted the enactment of the Islamic Banking Law, the establishment of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, and more recently, a circular issued by the Insurance Commission allowing insurance companies, such as Pru-Life UK, to offer Takaful services. These developments, Prof. Wadi noted, signal an increasing recognition of *Muammalat* in the Philippines, thus fostering a promising environment for the growth of halal and Islamic finance.

He further emphasized the importance of continuous collaboration and dialogue to address the challenges faced in the halal industry. He pointed out that the Philippines had already initiated significant conversations on the topic, such as the first Halal Webinar held during the pandemic in 2021. Although the initial forum lacked representation from government agencies, it set the stage for future engagements. Prof. Wadi also shared the positive outcomes of the University's multi-sectoral collaboration on Hajj, particularly with the recent successful Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He highlighted the involvement of the Office of the Executive Secretary, Lucas Bersamin, and the sharing of their proceedings with both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

On the matter of Shari'ah law, he mentioned his discussions with Justice Dimaampao and Justice Leonen of the Supreme Court, where he was briefed on plans for a Shari'ah review and the establishment of a Shari'ah bar. He praised the Supreme Court's efforts to promote legal pluralism in the

Philippines for its potential to foster the development of legal hybridity and inter-analysis between Islamic law and Philippine law.

The proceedings then moved to preview the forum's schedule, which was organized into three sessions. The first session featured presentations of halal-related research conducted by various UP units, national agencies, and NGOs. The second session took the form of a roundtable discussion, with participants engaging in dialogue aimed at identifying key challenges and exploring ways to address them in pursuit of a unified goal. The final session was dedicated to synthesis and reflection, led by Atty. Mehol Sadain—an expert in Shari'ah and Philippine law, former Secretary of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, and current consultant to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Drawing on his deep knowledge of the Tri-Justice System, Atty. Sadain offered guidance and insights toward developing a cohesive framework for advancing the halal program.

Prof. Wadi concluded his remarks by announcing an upcoming seminar on Thursday featuring two Indonesian scholars who would discuss the themes of Islam and organization and reform in Indonesia, exploring its parallels and contexts in the Philippines. He invited attendees to register their names with the secretariat if they were interested in attending. With that, he expressed his gratitude to all participants and wished them a productive and engaging forum.

Presentations

Roles, Programs, and Challenges

UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies-Islamic Studies Program and UP Institute of Islamic Studies

Asst. Prof. Darwin J. Absari

Convenor, UP CIDS-Islamic Studies Program
Faculty, UP Institute of Islamic Studies

Assistant Professor Darwin J. Absari, who serves both as the Convenor of the UP CIDS-Islamic Studies Program and College Secretary of the UP Institute of Islamic Studies, began his lecture by highlighting his dual role, stating that while his focus in this presentation would lean more towards the CIDS Islamic Studies Program, he also represented the Institute of Islamic Studies. He humorously described his current position as “mestizo,” bridging responsibilities between the two institutions.

Asst. Prof. Absari shared a poignant childhood memory to illustrate the foundational Islamic concepts of halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden). He recounted how his grandfather, who lived with them for a few months, prepared simple meals with only salt and lemongrass, eschewing any artificial additives like monosodium glutamate. This practice, rooted in Islamic spirituality, emphasized the importance of consuming only what is lawful and pure. He explained that excessive consumption of haram could render a Muslim's prayers unacceptable, underscoring the gravity of dietary choices within the faith.

Drawing from traditional Islamic wisdom, Asst. Prof. Absari elaborated on the interconnectedness of food, income, and spirituality. He cited the belief

that a person's moral and spiritual disposition is influenced by the purity of their sustenance, which is why Muslims must ensure not only the halal nature of their food but also the lawful nature of the income used to procure it. For instance, taking more than what is rightfully one's share, even as little as one-sixth beyond one's due, is considered haram. This principle reflects a deeply ingrained ethical framework that values fairness, integrity, and purification—the last being central to Islamic faith, as purification is considered half of faith.

Asst. Prof. Absari humorously recounted his personal challenges as a Muslim navigating dietary practices in Metro Manila. Initially avoiding fast-food chains due to his grandfather's influence, he later adapted to the local food culture. He shared an anecdote involving a Mufti from BARMM, who, when asked about the permissibility of eating fast food, advised invoking “Bismillah” (in the name of God) to render the meal permissible, emphasizing the practical challenges Muslims face in urban settings.

Turning to the broader context of halal certification and advocacy, Asst. Prof. Absari traced the evolution of these efforts in the Philippines. As the Muslim population in Metro Manila grew, the need for halal certification became apparent, eventually leading to the establishment of certifying bodies. Asst. Prof. Absari expressed gratitude for the government's increasing involvement in promoting and supporting halal initiatives.

Under the auspices of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS), Asst. Prof. Absari highlighted recent academic contributions, including two policy papers: “The Legal and Institutional Ecosystem of Halal in the Philippines” by Atty. Mehol Sadain and “Operationalizing Halal Food and Beverages for Philippine Tourism” by Assoc. Prof. Nefertari Al-Raschid-Arsad. These works reflect the center's commitment to understanding and enhancing the halal landscape in the Philippines.

Looking forward, Asst. Prof. Absari articulated a vision for comprehensive research that transcends the narrow focus on food production. He emphasized the need to explore traditional knowledge systems and the operationalization of halal in Muslim societies. For instance, traditional Moro practices emphasized the concept of haq (rights or entitlements), which dictates that before selling harvested produce, a portion must be allocated to those who

contributed to its production. Any failure to fulfill this obligation renders the remainder haram. This principle extends to modern contexts, such as ensuring that wages are earned ethically and without neglecting one's duties.

Asst. Prof. Absari acknowledged the challenges of advocating for halal, particularly in education and public perception. He cited an anecdote from his travels in China, where halal-certified restaurants attracted both Muslims and non-Muslims due to the perception of cleanliness and quality. However, he also recounted hearing misguided statements from religious groups cautioning against halal food due to unfounded fears of conversion. These experiences underscore the need for better education and advocacy to convey the true essence of halal as a bridge between religious and cultural communities.

Asst. Prof. Absari closed his lecture by highlighting the transformative potential of halal advocacy, not only in fostering economic growth but also in addressing corruption and bridging religious divides. He called for collective action among various stakeholders, emphasizing that while the UP Institute of Islamic Studies and CIDS may lack financial resources, their strength lies in research and intellectual contributions. Expressing gratitude to government agencies and participants, he reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the halal movement in the Philippines for the benefit of Muslims and the nation as a whole.



■ Asst. Prof. Darwin Absari during his presentation at the Halal Forum on June 25, 2024

Competency Building on Halal-HACCP and Its Prerequisite Programs for Personnel of Food Service and Manufacturing Industries

Prof. Maria Patricia V. Azanza

Professor Emeritus, UP College of Home Economics

Professor Maria Patricia V. Azanza, Professor Emeritus at the UP College of Home Economics, delivered an insightful presentation reflecting her involvement in the 2019 Southeast Asian (SEA) Games. She began by recounting her secondment at the Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI) under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), where she collaborated with Dr. Anthony Sales on the DOST Halal Program. One of their significant undertakings involved addressing concerns over halal food preparation for the 2019 SEA Games, particularly in response to queries from Southeast Asian Muslim countries about the Philippines' capability to manage halal food requirements.

Prof. Azanza described the task as daunting but ultimately rewarding. Despite initial skepticism, the team successfully ensured that halal food standards were met during the SEA Games. This experience laid the groundwork for the Terminal Report presented by Professor Azanza, which detailed the challenges and accomplishments of the project titled “Competency Building on Halal-HACCP and its Prerequisite Programs for Personnel of Food Service and Manufacturing Industries,” conducted under the DOST Halal Science and Technology Program.

In her presentation, Prof. Azanza underscored the value of integrating Halal principles with the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) framework. This integration not only upholds rigorous food safety standards but also ensures compliance with Islamic dietary requirements. She highlighted how industries are adopting this framework as a prerequisite for compliance, with national agencies like the Department of Trade and Industry

(DTI) and the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) acknowledging the necessity of halal certification for commercial food products.

Prof. Azanza also outlined the project's objectives and scope, which involved collaboration among key institutions, including the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Home Economics, several DOST Regional Offices, and the Philippine SEA Games Organizational Committee (PHISGOC). With an allocated budget of approximately PHP 4 million, the project aimed to enhance the competencies of personnel in the food service and manufacturing sectors in the implementation of Halal-HACCP standards, both during the SEA Games and for future endeavors.

To achieve these objectives, the project implemented a comprehensive approach that included Training of Trainers (TOT), Training of Industry (TOI) personnel, and on-site monitoring of food production and preparation. Prof. Azanza shared that internationally and locally recognized halal experts, including Professor Dr. Rafek Salih, conducted the TOT sessions. These sessions culminated in competency assessments, which showed significant improvements among participants, with post-assessment ratings rising from 9.7 percent to 68 percent.

The project also developed locally tailored training modules covering topics such as halal awareness, food safety assurance plans, and critical points in halal compliance. These modules were used to train industry personnel, including those from PHISGOC and various catering and manufacturing companies. Certified trainers subsequently conducted inspections at accommodation and game sites, ensuring compliance with Halal-HACCP standards. The findings and best practices were consolidated into a copyrighted manuscript titled "Best Practice Approach to Halal-HACCP Food Safety Compliance in a Sports Event."

While there were difficulties, such as the recruitment of halal experts, time constraints, and logistical issues in accessing game and accommodation sites, the project still successfully delivered its objectives, leaving a legacy of resources and certified personnel to guide future halal compliance efforts.

In her concluding remarks, Prof. Azanza expressed hope that the project's outputs, including the training materials and best practice frameworks,

would be utilized in future sports events and shared with ASEAN neighbors. She emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders and the potential of Halal-HACCP systems to promote food safety, inclusivity, and cultural understanding.

Prof. Azanza closed her presentation by acknowledging Dr. Sales's leadership and the DOST's support, affirming that the initiative had not only met its goals but also paved the way for sustainable halal advocacy in the Philippines. The audience responded with applause, underscoring the significance of the project's accomplishments and its impact on promoting halal practices at a national and regional level.

UP Manila Institute of Herbal Medicine

Dr. Cecilia Maramba-Lazarte

Director, UP Manila Institute of Herbal Medicine

Dr. Cecilia Maramba-Lazarte, Director of the UP Manila Institute of Herbal Medicine and Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the role of the Institute of Herbal Medicine in the development of Philippine herbal medicines and its alignment with the halal movement. Expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the discussion, Dr. Lazarte humbly identified as a continuous student of the halal movement. She highlighted the shared responsibilities and mutual stakeholder relationships between her institute and the halal community.

Dr. Lazarte began by providing an overview of the Institute's significant contributions. Among these is the validation of Lagundi as a treatment for cough and asthma. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute conducted research in quarantine centers to validate Lagundi's efficacy in treating mild COVID-19 cases. Importantly, the pharmaceutical companies licensed to produce these herbal medicines are halal-certified, showcasing the alignment of their practices with halal standards.

The Institute has also developed other herbal medicines, including Ulasimang Bato tablets for gout and Sambong for kidney health. Further innovations include Acapulco lotion for fungal infections and Ampalaya tablets for hypoglycemia, alongside Yerba Buena for pain relief and Tsaang Gubat for gastrointestinal issues. These products, while not yet widely available in the market, reflect the Institute's commitment to scientific validation and development.

Dr. Lazarte explained the Institute's unique development pathway, which integrates traditional knowledge from healers with rigorous scientific validation. This collaborative approach extends to engaging with traditional healers from Muslim communities, whose contributions to herbal medicine

practices enrich the research landscape. The Institute's multidisciplinary structure includes an Agricultural Unit, Pre-Clinical Research Unit, Formulation Unit, and Clinical Trial Unit. These units collectively oversee the cultivation, research, formulation, and clinical trials of herbal medicines, ensuring their safety, efficacy, and quality. Once these medicines are validated, they are patented and licensed to Philippine pharmaceutical companies for FDA registration and distribution.

Advocating for halal medicines, Dr. Lazarte stressed the importance of expanding the concept of halal beyond food and beverages to include the medicines consumed by individuals. To promote accessibility and proper use, the Institute has produced educational materials, such as *The Guidebook for Proper Use of Medicinal Plants*, now in its seventh edition. This guidebook provides practical advice on growing and utilizing medicinal plants, empowering communities, particularly in geographically isolated areas, to harness herbal remedies safely.

Dr. Lazarte emphasized the affordability and synergistic benefits of herbal medicines compared to synthetic alternatives. She cited examples such as Artemisinin, derived from *Artemisia annua*, a medication used to treat malaria, which demonstrated enhanced efficacy in its crude extract form due to the synergistic action of multiple compounds. Similarly, she detailed how Sambong and Lagundi exhibit multi-targeted therapeutic effects, addressing conditions like kidney stones and asthma, respectively, with fewer side effects.

Despite these achievements, Dr. Lazarte acknowledged that the Philippines lags behind neighboring countries in integrating herbal medicines into mainstream healthcare. For instance, Thailand's national formulary includes 97 herbal medicines, whereas the Philippines has only 3: Lagundi, Sambong, and Tsaang Gubat. To address this disparity, the Institute has proposed the Philippine Herbal Medicine Development Plan to fast-track the integration of herbal medicines into universal healthcare. This plan highlights the potential for herbal medicines to improve public health affordably while providing high-value crops for farmers and stimulating local economies.

The development plan, supported by agencies like the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Board of Investments (BOI), involved extensive consultations with stakeholders, including representatives from the halal

community. The resulting manifesto envisions Philippine herbal medicine as an integral component of universal healthcare, responsive to cultural needs, and contributing to nation-building. Key themes include knowledge-building, regulation, mainstreaming, research and development, and industry-building. Dr. Lazarte underscored the importance of including halal standards within these frameworks, ensuring inclusivity and alignment with international practices.

Dr. Lazarte concluded her presentation by affirming the Institute's commitment to collaboration with stakeholders, particularly the halal community. She invited their active participation in shaping the future of Philippine herbal medicines, emphasizing shared goals of inclusivity, transparency, and cultural sensitivity. She expressed optimism that the Philippine Herbal Medicine Development Plan would become a reality, benefiting communities nationwide and reinforcing the country's position in global herbal medicine advocacy.

Halal Promotion, Development, and Accreditation Program

Ms. Rahima M. Solaiman

Halal Focal Person/Acting Chief, NCMF-BMEA Halal Division

Ms. Rahima M. Solaiman began her presentation by outlining the various programs, projects, and activities of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), specifically those falling under the Bureau of Muslim Economic Affairs (BMEA), which houses the Halal Division. She emphasized the importance of the NCMF's mandate, particularly in the socio-economic sphere, and clarified that the Halal Division plays a key role in promoting and developing the halal industry in the Philippines. Ms. Solaiman explained that the BMEA consists of three main divisions: the Training Skills Division, the Small Business Division, and the Cooperative Division. These divisions, she noted, are interconnected, with their respective programs aligning closely with the halal initiatives of the NCMF.

Further, she discussed the legislative framework that underpins the halal program in the Philippines, highlighting the enactment of Republic Act No. 10817 in 2016, which established the Halal Export Law and the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Act. During this period, ambiguities arised within the NCMF regarding the continued responsibility for promoting, developing, and accrediting halal entities. To remedy this, NCMF officials sought legal clarification from its Bureau of Legal Affairs. The Bureau ultimately confirmed that the commission's mandate under Republic Act No. 9997, particularly promoting and accrediting halal certification bodies, remains intact, especially in relation to the domestic halal industry. This clarification allowed the NCMF to continue its efforts in halal accreditation and regulation.

To solidify these initiatives, the NCMF requested a Commission En Banc Resolution that would formally create the Halal Division within the BMEA. This division, with 12 plantilla positions, was recently approved, and Ms.

Solaiman expressed hope that the positions would be implemented by the end of the year. She acknowledged the need for more personnel to run the halal programs effectively, noting that current staff were drawn from various BMEA divisions. As the Acting Chief of the Halal Division, she mentioned that her role in the Cooperative Division also entailed being the designated focal person for halal matters. She further highlighted ongoing discussions with Secretary Amenah Pangandaman of the Department of Budget and Management, with the potential for approval of funding for halal-related initiatives in 2025.

Ms. Solaiman highlighted the NCMF's fruitful collaborations with other government agencies, including the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in relation to the Halal Verification Laboratory. She also reflected on her personal involvement in the halal programs, tracing their development from the previous administration under former Secretary Mehol Sadain. Ms. Solaiman also acknowledged the former secretary by expressing gratitude for his strong leadership that ensured the continuity of the halal programs despite the challenges faced by the NCMF. The halal roadmap, initially drafted by the previous administration, continues to shape the current direction of the halal industry in the Philippines, with an emphasis on inclusivity and expanding halal beyond Muslim communities to cater to the growing demand among non-Muslims as well.

Ms. Solaiman shared that the NCMF has made significant progress in refining its halal accreditation processes, including the development of comprehensive training modules. These modules, in collaboration with academic and industry experts, are set to be launched soon. She also detailed the Halal Assurance System, a critical component of the certification process, which requires companies to appoint a Halal Assurance Officer to oversee halal practices within their operations. The NCMF has taken steps to train personnel in international halal certification standards, including sending staff abroad for training in Malaysia and other regions.

Among the notable initiatives is the development of a Halal Agro-Industrial Hub in partnership with Cavite State University. Located in Bulacan, the hub is intended to serve as a comprehensive facility for the production, processing, and distribution of halal-certified products. Ms. Solaiman outlined the objectives of this project, including job creation, increased accessibility to halal products, and tapping into the global halal market. She mentioned that the

project's current status involves coordinating with local government officials in San Miguel, Bulacan, to ensure its swift implementation. This project, along with others such as the Zambo Ecozone in Mindanao, represents NCMF's commitment to establishing strategic halal centers across the Philippines.

Ms. Solaiman also highlighted the NCMF's ongoing international partnerships with GISD Holdings of Malaysia and Brunei's Royal Culinary to further enhance the local halal industry's production capacity, expand its business opportunities, and improve its industry standards. . She noted that while the Philippines faces challenges in halal production, such as the lack of certified halal slaughterhouses and feeds, these partnerships are essential for improving the country's halal industry standards. Furthermore, Ms. Solaiman noted that the NCMF is also working on expanding Islamic finance, with a pilot project involving a local bank to establish an Islamic finance window.

Concluding her presentation, Ms. Solaiman emphasized that while the NCMF faces several challenges, particularly in funding, the commission remains committed to promoting and developing the halal industry. With strong leadership, strategic partnerships, and a clear roadmap, the NCMF continues to work towards elevating the halal sector, not only for the benefit of Filipino Muslims but also for the broader population interested in halal practices.

Updates on Regional Halal Industry Development and Capacity Building

Mr. Dimnatang M. Radia

Program Manager, DTI Halal Industry Regional Development and Capacity Building

Mr. Dimnatang M. Radia, Program Manager of the DTI Halal Industry Regional Development and Capacity Building, began his address by expressing a heartfelt and unifying message for the advancement of the halal industry. He extended his gratitude to his former classmate, Prof. Julkipli Wadi, Dean of the UP Institute of Islamic Studies, for hosting the activity, along with the support of Asst. Prof. Darwin Absari. Mr. Radia also acknowledged the presence of esteemed guests, including representatives from the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), the Halal Food Industry Development Program under the Department of Agriculture. He also noted the valuable presentation by Prof. Maria Patricia Azanza from the UP College of Home Economics.

Mr. Radia emphasized that halal is an ecosystem, and highlighted the timely and significant nature of the discussions, given the growing importance of the global halal market, valued at USD 7.7 trillion. He mentioned the national call made by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos following his visit to Malaysia, which focused on strengthening three key areas: the halal industry, Islamic finance, and food security. In response, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has established a Halal Task Force, and Mr. Radia noted that the event's theme, "Harmonizing Roles, Addressing Challenges, Moving Towards a Common Direction," was highly relevant and timely.

Reflecting on his work from 2023, Mr. Radia discussed his efforts to design a program aimed at achieving global halal excellence, with a focus on upscaling and reskilling halal capacity. He outlined the three key components of halal capacity building: research, training modules, and practical training programs. Mr. Radia emphasized the need to address current challenges within the halal sector, such as the need for consolidation, as halal is not

only a religious practice but also an expansive industry that requires systemic integration.

He also highlighted the necessity for collaboration across sectors and institutions. Drawing from the presentation by Ms. Rahima Solaiman, Mr. Radia shared his personal experience with former NCMF Secretary Guiling Mamondiong, noting the challenges faced in establishing a halal hub despite extensive efforts. He stressed the importance of collaboration between government agencies, private sectors, and international partners to overcome these challenges.

Mr. Radia further discussed the issue of halal industry export, specifically addressing the concerns raised by Republic Act No. 10817 or the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Act. While the law supports the growth of halal exports, Mr. Radia questioned the sufficiency of the local supply to meet export demands. He called for an academic approach to the halal industry's development, proposing a system that integrates data sharing, a crucial factor for the sector's future growth. He also referred to his 2023 policy foresight paper titled, "How is the Halal Industry in the Philippines Twenty Years From Now?" He explained that policy foresight is not about predicting the future but providing policymakers with options to make informed decisions.

Additionally, Mr. Radia underscored the importance of four pillars in the halal industry's strategic development: regional halal industry development, strengthened capacity building, facilitation of Islamic investments, and improved export development and promotion. He emphasized that capacity building is the most critical component, and praised the timeliness of previous presentations in addressing this issue. He also mentioned that discussions are ongoing with various agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture (DA), regarding halal-related topics such as organic agriculture, halal pharmaceuticals, and halal medicine.

Moving forward, Mr. Radia stressed the importance of creating a comprehensive matrix of ongoing research, training programs, and curricula being undertaken by institutions like the University of the Philippines, DTI, DOST, and NCMF. This would provide a clearer direction for stakeholders interested in entering the halal industry. He also highlighted the need for

a globally competitive workforce in the halal sector and by referring to a Quranic verse, emphasized that halal is a universal concept, benefiting not only Muslims but all of humanity.

He further discussed the potential for halal products and services to enhance the Philippines' reputation as a halal-friendly nation, positioning it as a key player in Southeast Asia and beyond. He cited the example of Thailand, where despite a Muslim minority, the country has become a major producer of halal products.

On the topic of halal-friendly development, Mr. Radia also mentioned the Philippine Trade Training Center, which is part of the DTI's efforts to promote industry development and support capacity-building programs. He highlighted the role of the Small Business Corporation in providing loans with minimal interest rates, aimed at supporting small businesses in the halal sector.

He concluded his remarks by referring to the importance of collaborations with international partners such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Mr. Radia cited the Amanah Ikhtiar model in Malaysia as an example of how government support, combined with training and capacity building, can help halal industry entrepreneurs become competent and successful. He suggested that a similar approach could be adopted in the Philippines to strengthen the halal industry's infrastructure.

In the broader context, Mr. Radia also spoke about the potential for Islamic finance in the Philippines, citing the establishment of Shari'ah-compliant banking windows by international financial institutions like Maybank and Amanah Bank. He expressed hope that more banks would open similar services to cater to the growing halal market. He concluded by reiterating the importance of collaboration and complementary efforts between the government, private sector, and international partners in realizing the full potential of the halal industry in the Philippines.

Finally, Mr. Radia called for a more comprehensive approach to developing the halal industry, urging all stakeholders to contribute to a common vision for the sector's growth. He emphasized that this was a golden opportunity for the country to tap into the global halal economy, fostering both domestic growth and international competitiveness.

Department of Agriculture - Halal Food Industry Development Program: Roles, Programs, and Challenges

Ms. Soghra Mahbouby Pirdehy

Representative, DA Halal Food Industry Development Program

Ms. Soghra Mahbouby Pirdehy, representing the Department of Agriculture (DA) Halal Food Industry Development Program, began her presentation by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to speak and acknowledging the challenging nature of her new role. She candidly admitted that she had limited information to share due to her recent appointment but noted that the presentations preceding hers had been highly informative and valuable. She expressed her agreement with the earlier presentations, stating that they offered significant insights into the halal industry. She emphasized the importance of a unified and inclusive approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities within the halal sector, encompassing food, services, and other related industries. This collaborative perspective, she stated, was essential for advancing the industry and ensuring its sustainability.

In her remarks, Ms. Pirdehy underlined the significance of the halal industry to both local and international markets. She highlighted the Philippines' large Muslim population of approximately 12 million citizens as a key demographic that must be considered when developing the halal sector. While she acknowledged the importance of meeting international demand for halal exports, she stressed that local consumption and domestic needs should not be overlooked. This dual focus, she argued, would ensure that the country not only meets global market standards but also supports the well-being of its own Muslim community.

Ms. Pirdehy elaborated on the mandates of the DA under Republic Act No. 10817, which aims to improve the Philippines' export capabilities in the halal industry. The act is intended to strengthen the country's position in the global halal market, particularly in food production, by ensuring compliance with

international standards. However, she acknowledged the significant gaps in the implementation of these mandates, including infrastructure deficits and the absence of sufficient facilities for halal animal production and slaughter. These challenges, she noted, have hindered progress, and she called for greater efforts to address these issues.

One of the key challenges identified by Ms. Pirdehy was the country's dependency on imported raw materials for halal food production, which undermines the industry's potential for self-sufficiency. She argued that the Philippines must strive to reduce this dependency by strengthening local production capabilities, particularly in the meat sector. The establishment of multiplier farms and other initiatives aimed at improving the availability of halal-compliant animals, such as chickens, goats, and cattle, was highlighted as a critical step in this direction.

Ms. Pirdehy also emphasized the need for a unified approach to halal certification across government agencies. She pointed out that differing interpretations and standards among certifying bodies could lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies, ultimately hindering the industry's growth. To address this, she called for the establishment of common guidelines that all agencies could follow, ensuring alignment and collaboration in promoting halal practices. This unified approach, she argued, would not only streamline processes but also enhance the credibility of the Philippines' halal certification system in international markets.

In discussing the Department of Agriculture's ongoing efforts, Ms. Pirdehy highlighted several key initiatives. These included capacity-building programs to raise awareness and educate stakeholders about halal practices, as well as the dissemination of informational materials and support for production services. She explained that the DA was working to establish a comprehensive database of halal-certified establishments and products, which would provide valuable insights into the industry's current state and areas for improvement. This database, she noted, would be updated regularly to ensure its relevance and accuracy.

Additionally, Ms. Pirdehy introduced the concept of a "halal participatory guarantee system" (PGS), modeled after the organic certification system. This initiative aims to support small-scale farmers and producers who may

lack access to formal halal certification bodies. By providing an alternative certification pathway, the PGS would help these producers meet halal standards and participate more actively in the market. She described this system as a collaborative effort to replicate best practices from other industries and regions.

Ms. Pirdehy also addressed the issue of infrastructure, particularly the need for modern slaughterhouses and other facilities to support halal animal production. She explained that the DA was focusing on improving these facilities to ensure that the entire halal production chain, from animal upbringing to final processing, meets international standards. She stated that this comprehensive approach was essential for building consumer confidence and expanding the country's export capabilities.

The local and international promotion of halal products and services was another area of focus in Ms. Pirdehy's presentation. She emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns and trade expos to showcase the Philippines' halal offerings and attract international buyers. She also discussed the DA's efforts to collaborate with other government agencies, such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), to align strategies and promote the country's halal sector more effectively.

Concluding her presentation, Ms. Pirdehy reiterated the importance of aligning the Philippines' halal standards with other ASEAN countries and key international markets. She highlighted the need for continuous research and development to address emerging challenges and improve the industry's competitiveness. She also expressed optimism about the future, emphasizing the DA's commitment to working with all stakeholders to achieve the shared goal of a thriving halal industry.

Department of Science and Technology: Programs and Projects on Halal

Dr. Anthony C. Sales

DOST Halal Program Leader and Regional Director, DOST-XI

Dr. Anthony C. Sales, DOST Halal Program Leader and Regional Director of DOST-XI, began his presentation by expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to share his insights and experiences in implementing the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Halal Science and Technology (S&T) Program. He reminisced about his time as a student of Professor Emeritus Maria Patricia Azanza, his thesis adviser in his Bachelor of Science in Food Technology program, and noted his joy in reconnecting with colleagues and friends in the halal ecosystem. Dr. Sales emphasized the significance of the halal initiatives undertaken by DOST, grounding his presentation in the legal basis provided by Republic Act No. 10817, which mandates the inclusion of halal-related strategies in the programs of government agencies, including DOST.

Dr. Sales elaborated on the timeline and milestones of said legislation enacted in 2016 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), which were signed in 2017. The DOST subsequently issued an administrative order to define its role in supporting the law's implementation. The law identifies DOST as a member of the Halal Export Development and Promotion Board and mandates its involvement in research and development (R&D), training, and education to strengthen the halal industry. Dr. Sales highlighted that halal products and services have been designated as a priority sector in DOST programs, including the Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP).

Dr. Sales explained that under Section 8 of Republic Act No. 10817, the DOST is tasked with assisting facilities and institutions in halal research, training, and education through grants and aid programs. Section 9 mandates DOST to collaborate with State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to support R&D efforts, impart scientific and

technical knowledge, and conduct laboratory analyses for halal standards. Dr. Sales highlighted DOST's commitment to providing S&T assistance, conducting R&D to improve industry competitiveness, and verifying the authenticity of halal products.

Dr. Sales described the establishment of the DOST Halal Program Committee, chaired by the Undersecretary for Regional Operations, with members representing various DOST institutions and the academic sector. This committee plays a critical role in ensuring the integration of academic expertise into the program, including offering halal scholarships and funding R&D projects. The Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI) has been instrumental in advancing research on food and non-food halal products, while three DOST councils provide funding and policy development for halal initiatives.

The presentation emphasized the importance of verifying the authenticity of halal-certified products. Dr. Sales revealed that some certified products contained haram components, prompting DOST to collaborate with the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) for rigorous halal verification. To support this effort, four ISO-accredited halal verification laboratories were established in CALABARZON, Davao, Cotabato City, and Koronadal. These laboratories conduct various tests, including porcine DNA detection and alcohol content analysis, ensuring compliance with international halal standards.

Dr. Sales also highlighted the role of DOST's SETUP program in providing financial and technical support to halal enterprises. This includes innovation funds for equipment procurement, training, and consultancy services to improve productivity and product quality, particularly for export markets. He shared success stories, such as a halal beef producer in Davao utilizing DOST funding to enhance production capabilities.

The presentation also covered the DOST's human resource development initiatives, including certificate courses in halal science offered at select universities, training programs for halal auditors, and modules for tourism and manufacturing establishments. Dr. Sales underscored the importance of expanding these programs to generate a larger pool of halal experts and support the industry's growth.

Research and development were a central focus, with projects targeting food products such as bakery items, regional delicacies, and export commodities like banana products and cacao. Dr. Sales highlighted a blockchain-based traceability system for halal cacao products developed in collaboration with Universiti Teknologi Petronas in Malaysia, which allows consumers to access detailed product information through QR codes. He noted the potential for this system to be adapted to other halal commodities.

In concluding his presentation, Dr. Sales discussed the challenges and opportunities in implementing the DOST Halal S&T Program. Challenges include transferring technologies generated through research to stakeholders, limited resources for commercializing these technologies, and a lack of providers in key areas such as halal tourism and logistics. However, opportunities abound, with funding available through grants and aid programs and partnerships with international counterparts willing to collaborate on training and capacity-building initiatives.

Finally, Dr. Sales emphasized that halal is not only for Muslims, but for everyone, reflecting the inclusive nature of the industry. He closed his presentation by inviting continued collaboration to further the development of the halal sector, ensuring its sustainability and global competitiveness.

TESDA's Initiatives and Programs on Halal

Ms. Bernadette S. Audije

Chief, TESDA Qualifications and Standards Office-Competency Standards Development Division

Ms. Bernadette S. Audije, Chief of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Qualifications and Standards Office-Competency Standards Development Division, presented the agency's initiatives and programs for the development of the halal industry. Speaking on behalf of TESDA Secretary Suharto T. Mangudadatu, Ms. Audije highlighted the agency's mandate under Republic Act No. 7796, which emphasizes providing relevant, efficient, accessible, and high-quality technical education and skills development to support Filipino middle-level manpower and contribute to national development goals. She elaborated on TESDA's 10-point agenda, which includes a focus on halal programs, aiming to align technical education with the skills requirements of the halal industry and position the Philippines to tap into the global halal business market.

Ms. Audije recounted the significant milestones in TESDA's efforts to support the halal industry. On July 31, 2023, TESDA organized a consultation forum at the TESDA Women's Center in Taguig City to discuss the development of a halal labor market information and prioritization process. The forum involved government and private stakeholders and focused on identifying essential skills in halal farming, slaughtering, processing, and certification standards. Follow-up consultations were held in August and September 2023, during which the results of surveys and stakeholder inputs were consolidated and validated. Among the participating agencies were the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Malaysian Embassy, and various halal certifying bodies.

The consultations revealed several challenges within the halal industry, such as the scarcity of raw materials, inflation, and a lack of skilled and experienced employees. Other issues identified were the absence of unified standards among halal certification bodies, the need for streamlined guidelines on

halal slaughtering practices, and limited statistical data on halal imports and exports. Respondents also highlighted the importance of ensuring that trainers, assessors, and trainees involved in halal-related programs are practicing Muslims, given the religious aspects of halal compliance.

TESDA developed a set of recommendations to address these challenges based on the consultations. The agency prioritized the creation of competency standards for critical roles such as halal slaughterer, halal butcher, halal checker, halal supervisor, and halal meat processor. TESDA also identified the need for competency standards in halal feed formulation and halal-related animal handling practices. Recognizing the broader scope of halal as a lifestyle rather than solely food-related, TESDA emphasized the importance of involving practicing Muslims as trainers, assessors, and trainees in halal-related programs.

To support these initiatives, TESDA developed micro-competency standards on halal awareness, which are accessible through its online platform, e-TESDA. This training program, expected to be available to the public by the third quarter of 2024, aims to raise awareness of halal practices among various stakeholders. Additionally, TESDA conducted a functional analysis in April 2024 to map the skills and functions required in the halal industry, in alignment with the Philippine Qualifications Framework. This analysis formed the basis for the subsequent development of competency standards for the five prioritized occupations.

In May 2024, TESDA held a five-day workshop to finalize the competency standards for these roles, with input from industry experts, government agencies, and private sector stakeholders. The workshop included representatives from the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Science and Technology, and private organizations such as the Philippine Ulama Congress Organization and Kasama Halal Producers Cooperative. The halal meat processor role was identified as a broad career category requiring further refinement to address specific occupations within the field.

Ms. Audije also discussed TESDA's efforts to expand international collaboration in halal program development by seeking technical assistance from the Malaysian government and explored potential partnerships with organizations

such as the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP) and the Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC). TESDA aims to leverage these partnerships to enhance its training initiatives and align them with global halal standards.

Additionally, TESDA conducted an exploratory meeting with the Al Qalam Institute of Ateneo de Davao University in May 2024 to establish a partnership for designing and implementing training programs for Bangsamoro youth and adult learners outside the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The proposed project aims to enhance the skills and resilience of Bangsamoro youth in provinces such as Cotabato, Davao del Sur, and Davao del Norte, with TESDA providing program registration and scholarship support for these initiatives.

Ms. Audije concluded by outlining TESDA's work plan for the continued development and implementation of its halal programs. This includes the creation of institutional assessment tools, the training of regional lead trainers, and the rollout of pilot projects for the five identified competency standards by August 2024. She emphasized the agency's commitment to addressing the specific needs of local communities through area-based and demand-driven technical education and skills development. TESDA's collaborative approach with both local and international stakeholders underscores its dedication to fostering a robust and globally competitive halal industry.

Philippine Ulama Congress Organization Incorporated

Mr. Abdurazaq B. Madale

Representative, Philippine Ulama Congress Organization Incorporated

Mr. Abdurazaq B. Madale, representing the Philippine Ulama Congress Organization, Inc. (PUCOI), began his presentation by extending heartfelt gratitude to the Center for Integrative and Development Studies and the Institute of Islamic Studies for their invaluable support and efforts in organizing the event. He emphasized the significance of their dedication, expressing optimism that the impact of such initiatives would grow in the future. He also conveyed deep appreciation to the attendees, highlighting the Islamic principle of *Ummah*—the concept of community and unity—as a vital aspect of gatherings like this, which strengthen bonds among individuals.

Founded in 2005, the PUCOI is a non-profit religious organization dedicated to preserving, propagating, and promoting Islamic values and teachings. Mr. Madale outlined PUCOI's mission to serve as an effective instrument in establishing a balanced and harmonious society through excellence, partnerships, and services. The organization focuses on integrating Islamic education, legal counsel, halal certification services, pilgrimage guidance, and social welfare initiatives. With a 19-year history, PUCOI has expanded its reach locally and internationally, serving over 1,000 trade clients, awarding more than 1,000 scholarship grants, and providing food packs and other social services to communities in need.

Halal certification is one of the PUCOI's cornerstone services. Mr. Madale emphasized that for PUCOI, halal certification goes beyond procedural compliance—it is an act of worship (*ibadat*) and a responsibility to be held accountable for in the hereafter (*Yaumil Akhirat*). The PUCOI also offers comprehensive halal training programs for organizations and private sectors, led by expert *ulama* and Shari'ah scholars. These training programs provide in-depth knowledge of halal standards and best practices, helping to develop

the growing Muslim cultural market and contributing to the expansion of the halal industry.

In addition to halal certification, the PUCOI provides a wide range of services, including Islamic education, Shari'ah counseling, legal guidance, and administration of *zakat*, *sadaqah*, and *awqaf*. The organization also offers guidance and assistance for the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, ensuring a seamless spiritual journey for Muslim travelers. These services are complemented by partnerships in education, internships, marketing, volunteerism, and collaboration with various stakeholders.

Mr. Madale highlighted the PUCOI's unwavering commitment to excellence in all its endeavors. The PUCOI, with the theme "Proficient Scholars Striving for Perfection," ensures that its certifications, initiatives, and services adhere to the highest Islamic principles and standards. Collaboration is central to the PUCOI's vision, and the organization actively forges partnerships with government agencies, academic institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders to leverage collective expertise and resources.

The scope of PUCOI's halal certification services spans both food and non-food products, including food manufacturing, processed foods, beverages, cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, cleaning products, and packaging. The PUCOI also certifies services and facilities such as restaurants, catering, logistics, supply chain operations, slaughterhouses, meat processing, hotels, and travel and tourism services. Financial services, including Islamic banking, insurance, investment funds, and portfolio management, are also part of their offerings, along with animal feed production and biotechnology.

Mr. Madale proudly shared that the PUCOI's team is comprised of esteemed *ulama*, Shari'ah scholars, and experts in various fields, including economics, Islamic finance, medicine, biology, agriculture, microbiology, chemistry, and criminology. He noted that their president, Mr. Luqman Bin Usman Imam, is a respected Shari'ah counselor and instructor at the UP Institute of Islamic Studies. This multidisciplinary team ensures that PUCOI's services are comprehensive and of the highest quality.

As part of its ongoing efforts, the PUCOI is actively collaborating with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to establish

halal standards for various sectors. Mr. Madale expressed pride in this partnership, emphasizing its importance in enhancing the halal industry in the Philippines. He concluded his presentation by reaffirming PUCOI's dedication to serving the community and contributing to the greater good through its diverse range of services and initiatives.

Roundtable Discussions



■ Participants engaged in the roundtable discussion at the Halal Forum on June 25, 2024

The second part of the program was a roundtable discussion moderated by Prof. Julkipli M. Wadi, the Dean of the UP Institute of Islamic Studies. The discussion provided an opportunity for experts, stakeholders, and participants to share their insights on the current state and future trajectory of halal development in the Philippines. Throughout the session, a variety of questions, inputs, comments, and suggestions were raised, focusing on the critical issues affecting the halal industry.

The session began with Prof. Wadi reflecting on the morning's discussions, which he described as truly inspiring. He emphasized the remarkable enthusiasm and commitment of individuals and groups who champion the cause of halal development. Prof. Wadi expressed immense satisfaction not only in recognizing but also in witnessing firsthand the dedication of these advocates. He acknowledged the progress made, noting the growing

engagement among government agencies, private sectors, and the ulama, which has led to the creation of a broader and more inclusive space for halal initiatives. This was seen as a significant achievement compared to previous years.

Prof. Wadi suggested that the roundtable discussion focus on four key areas identified during the UP Halal Forum: harmonizing roles, addressing challenges, moving toward a common direction, and offering recommendations for the future.

HARMONIZING ROLES

Citing the importance of policies related to halal, such as Republic Act No. 10817, as well as other laws and regulations that influence the halal sector, Prof. Wadi proceeded to ask whether the existing policies were contributing to varied interpretations and contradictions, as was seen in the differing positions of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF).

Dr. Anthony Sales of the Department of Science and Technology responded to the question by outlining the agency's mandates as prescribed in the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Act, which forms the basis for the nation's halal initiatives and explained that a significant issue pertains to the delineation of responsibilities between local and export halal products. According to Republic Act No. 10187, products intended for export fall under the jurisdiction of the Philippine Halal Board, while products for the domestic market are managed by the NCMF. He further clarified that this also applies in the aspect of quality assurance.

Dr. Sales emphasized that DOST's role in halal development is well-defined, especially in the area of research and development (R&D). Republic Act No. 10187 stipulated that the DOST leads in mobilizing resources, establishing R&D centers, and implementing programs related to halal R&D, including providing funding opportunities for academic institutions, government agencies, and private sector entities involved in halal-related research. Regarding human resource development, he highlighted that the DOST was responsible for R&D initiatives, which could include basic, applied, or experimental research. He

cited the Halal-HACCP best practice document, developed through DOST's R&D efforts, as an example of the department's contributions to halal science. He also mentioned that further R&D was needed to deploy the Halal-HACCP document effectively.

Prof. Wadi followed up the discussion and highlighted the existence of the local and export halal domains respectively managed by the NCMF and the Philippine Halal Board. He stressed the need for close collaboration between these offices to ensure a cohesive approach. Prof. Wadi was concerned that overemphasis on export and trade could result in the neglect of the local halal market and potentially create a bias in the national halal development program. He emphasized that equal attention should be given to both local and export sectors to ensure a balanced and inclusive halal ecosystem. Prof. Wadi proceeded to ask if there was sufficient collaboration between NCMF and DOST regarding their respective responsibilities and urged both agencies to align their efforts and avoid any gaps in the development of the halal program.

Agreeing with Prof. Wadi's perspective, Dr. Sales acknowledged that the halal framework should be viewed as an interconnected ecosystem. He emphasized that a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities was essential to avoid duplication or overlap. Dr. Sales reiterated that the local and export halal domains must function in harmony. Dr. Sales also highlighted DOST's role in supporting the entire halal process, from production to distribution, through research and the application of halal science and technology. He stressed that DOST's involvement was crucial in ensuring the advancement and harmonization of the halal ecosystem.

Joining the conversation, former NCMF commissioner Atty. Mehol Sadain suggested that the NCMF focus on the religious foundation and certification of halal products, while DTI should oversee distribution, particularly for export products. He argued that such a collaborative approach would ensure consistency and streamline the halal ecosystem. He underscored the importance of approaching halal as a holistic ecosystem that integrates religious, production, and distribution components. Atty. Sadain also discussed the transition of certain functions from NCMF to the Halal Board and the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB) as outlined in Section 19 of Republic Act no. 10817. He noted that PAB's expertise was not limited to

halal and requires further coordination with international bodies such as the International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF).

Atty. Sadain also stressed the importance of strengthening local halal production, marketing, and consumption as a foundation for export readiness. He called for greater collaboration among government agencies, including the DOST, TESDA, and Department of Agriculture (DA), to support local halal industries. A centralized database would also help facilitate data sharing and resource allocation. Furthermore, Atty. Sadain emphasized that human resource development was crucial for the halal ecosystem. He proposed that training programs, modules, and harmonized standards should be developed, leveraging existing resources to avoid duplicating efforts. The UP Institute of Islamic Studies and the Center for Integrative and Development Studies could play a key role in coordinating these efforts.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dimnatang Radia, Program Manager of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Halal Industry Regional Development and Capacity Building, proposed the development of a comprehensive matrix that consolidates key elements essential for the advancement of the halal ecosystem which would include a centralized database of halal stakeholders, training modules, and roadmaps from various agencies. Such a unified framework would facilitate coordination and serve as a foundation for securing funding and fostering collaboration. Mr. Radia also highlighted the potential for the halal industry to contribute significantly to trade and investment opportunities. By aligning efforts and securing funding, the industry could experience substantial growth, benefiting from a unified and coordinated approach to halal development.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Prof. Wadi continued the discussion and recognized Dr. Azanza's earlier presentation as a prime example of a successful, synergized effort that met the specific halal requirements for the Southeast Asian Games. Prof. Wadi acknowledged the commendable nature of this initiative but emphasized that it could be viewed as an episodic intervention tailored for a specific event. He further explored the broader potential of this model, not only as a reference for future sports events but also as a scalable framework for wider applications. With these in mind, Prof. Wadi invited Dr. Azanza to elaborate

further on the Southeast Asian Games halal initiative. Specifically, he inquired how this model could be adapted and scaled to establish comprehensive national halal standards.

Dr. Azanza, Professor Emeritus at the UP College of Home Economics, responded by sharing her perspective on how their activities impact the interpretation and implementation of halal-related laws by recalling her collaboration with the Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI) and Dr. Sales, where they worked on defining DOST's relationship with other agencies in the halal sector. Dr. Azanza recognized Atty. Sadain's clear and sensible interpretation of the law concerning halal as a valuable foundation for all agencies involved in halal development. She suggested that this interpretation should be central to all discussions, harmonizing the roles of various agencies and addressing discrepancies. She emphasized that halal quality assurance, particularly in the food sector, required a shared foundation that integrates both national and international standards. Without such an integration, the industry would face ongoing challenges with confusion and inefficiency.

Dr. Azanza hoped that this interpretation would be recognized and internalized by all stakeholders, particularly by the Halal Board, NCMF, and PAB, who must collaborate closely. Dr. Azanza reflected on the experience during the Southeast Asian Games, where no established regulations existed for halal food handling. In response, she and her team developed a system that allowed for rapid personnel training and demonstrated to other countries that the Philippines could meet international halal standards. Looking ahead, Dr. Azanza proposed that this system be validated at the national level, starting with events like the Palarong Pambansa. Additionally, she suggested leveraging the Southeast Asian Food Science and Technology community to promote this system as a benchmark document for halal food certification in the Philippines.

Adding to the discussion, Mr. Radia referred to a recent meeting with the Halal Board and its partners. The meeting clarified the accreditation scheme for halal products, which distinguishes between local and export certification. The NCMF is responsible for accrediting halal certifying bodies and for local halal certification, while for exports, the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB), under DTI, oversees the accreditation process. A significant development from

the meeting was the recognition of halal certifying bodies already exporting products abroad, even if they had not yet obtained accreditation from PAB. This recognition allowed bodies to continue supporting international trade while awaiting formal accreditation. Mr. Radia viewed this as a breakthrough in expanding the halal market.

Regarding earlier discussions, Mr. Radia echoed the importance of revisiting existing laws to facilitate smoother transitions and ensure alignment with the evolving needs of the halal ecosystem. He suggested that revising the law could help strengthen the NCMF's ability to support domestic halal production, further bolstering the halal industry's foundation and ensuring better integration across both local and international markets.

Ms. Rahima Solaiman, the Acting Chief of the NCMF-BMEA Halal Division, acknowledged the discussion, particularly in addressing the challenges in halal policy. Citing the issue's proximity to her mandate, Ms. Solaiman shared insights on the delineation of functions between export and local halal, which had been a persistent issue. Before the enactment of Republic Act No.10817, NCMF struggled to engage other agencies in halal initiatives despite already partnering with DTI. The NCMF's expertise had been limited to local halal matters, while export-related concerns were within DTI's scope. The legislation marked a bittersweet moment for NCMF, as it clarified that halal export development was now part of the mandate of the Halal Export Board, while NCMF continued to focus on domestic halal certification.

Ms. Solaiman outlined the ongoing challenges faced in clarifying the roles of various agencies involved in halal certification. This included the absence of a finalized Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for Republic Act. 10817, delaying full implementation. Discussions that involved the Halal Export Board, DTI, and other agencies revolved around the confusion regarding the responsibility for domestic halal. NCMF has consistently asserted its responsibility in overseeing halal certification for local consumption. One pressing issue highlighted by Ms. Solaiman was a case where DOST identified halal products that were contaminated with porcine substances and falsely certified as halal. This raised concerns about the well-being of Muslim consumers. The NCMF insisted that protecting the welfare of Muslim Filipinos, particularly in the domestic halal sector, fell under its mandate.

TOWARD A COMMON DIRECTION

Prof. Wadi proceeded to revisit Dr. Lazarte's presentation on herbal medicine, which provided valuable insights into bridging traditional remedies and modern synthetic medicines. Prof. Wadi mentioned that many raw materials historically used by ancestors, such as Sambong and Lagundi, were inherently halal. However, he noted that the advent of industrial processing and commercialization might have altered or compromised the efficacy of these raw herbal remedies. Prof. Wadi raised a question on the effect of added processing steps to the original properties of these herbal remedies. He asked whether processed herbal medicines offered clear advantages over raw remedies or if they were inherently safer due to their lack of chemical additives.

Dr. Cecilia Maramba-Lazarte, Director of the UP Manila Institute of Herbal Medicine, clarified that not all synthetic medicines are derived from herbal sources and explained that more than 60 percent of synthetic medicines are developed without a direct plant-based origin. In validating their scientific merit, Dr. Lazarte explained that while many traditional remedies have a scientific basis, others do not hold up under laboratory scrutiny. She stressed that the effectiveness of herbal remedies like Lagundi tea may vary depending on factors such as preparation method, plant variety, and storage conditions. She notes that herbal products developed by the Institute, which undergo rigorous processes to ensure stability and consistency, offer a more reliable alternative to raw herbal remedies.

Ustadz Karim from Mubaarak Fresh Food joined in, sharing his experiences and challenges in the halal ecosystem. He highlighted the scarcity of standardized slaughterhouses dedicated to halal practices and the shortage of trained Muslim butchers, which posed significant challenges in maintaining halal standards. He also noted that despite efforts such as the Oridoo Halal Delivery Services, which aimed to address the needs of Muslim constituents who could not leave their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB) had yet to develop standards or modules for halal transport systems, highlighting another gap in the halal ecosystem.

Ustadz Karim raised concerns about the struggles of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with the complex and costly process of halal certification. He proposed a streamlined certification process through a centralized online portal, which would simplify the application procedure while maintaining transparency and accountability. Ustadz Karim also urged collaboration among key agencies such as DTI, NCMF, DOST, and others to create a unified and entrepreneur-friendly halal certification system that would better support local businesses and position them for success in both local and international markets.

Prof. Wadi expressed appreciation for Ustadz Karim's input and agreed that the idea of a centralized portal for halal certification was compelling. He suggested that a unified system, coordinated among key stakeholders, could streamline the certification process, enhance accessibility, and improve efficiency for businesses. Prof. Wadi emphasized that such a system would not only simplify procedures but also ensure consistency and transparency across all agencies involved in halal certification.

Ustadz Karim, who is also a web program developer, responded and expressed his belief that a centralized halal certification portal, similar to those implemented in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, is entirely feasible. He shared an example from Indonesia, where the banking sector has integrated a portal that requires banks to offer Shari'ah-compliant options and formal procedures. He suggested that a similar approach could be applied to the halal certification system in the Philippines. He envisioned a system where businesses, for example, could easily test products like burger patties for halal compliance. They could take these products to accredited halal testers at the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and receive results in a short period, depending on the complexity of the test.

Ustadz Karim also noted that even simple products like homemade sausages (longganisa) could undergo testing to ensure they comply with halal standards. However, he emphasized that the success of such a system hinges on the availability of halal-certified meat supplies. While his focus extended beyond meat, he highlighted the critical issue of ensuring a steady supply of halal-compliant raw materials. Despite these challenges, he reaffirmed that creating a centralized halal certification portal is a viable and practical solution to

streamline the process and ensure greater accessibility for businesses and consumers.

Prof. Wadi acknowledged Ustadz Karim's insightful observation, emphasizing the importance of addressing foundational requirements for halal certification, particularly the availability of essential resources like slaughterhouses. He pointed out that the issue of inadequate slaughterhouses and halal-certified meat suppliers was a significant challenge in the development of a robust halal ecosystem. He referenced earlier remarks by Dr. Sales, who mentioned the limited number of laboratories available for halal certification, which raised concerns about the capacity of these labs to meet growing demands. He also echoed the shortage of certified trainers for halal butchers and slaughterers, which further complicated the efforts to meet national certification standards.

Prof. Wadi reflected on his own experience of the challenges in accessing halal meat before the pandemic. Despite the pandemic providing temporary relief with delivery services, the difficulty in finding halal restaurants locally persisted. This discrepancy between the ambitious goals for halal development and the basic needs of consumers underscored the need for a more empathetic approach to the issue. In discussing these gaps, Prof. Wadi referred to a conversation with Dr. Sales about the possibility of creating a halal testing kit—similar to a pregnancy test—where a simple application to a product could immediately determine whether it meets halal standards. He suggested that such a tool could revolutionize the halal certification process and provide significant value. He invited Dr. Sales to share his insights on this innovative idea and its potential for the halal industry.

In the conversation, Dr. Sales noted that a researcher from the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) had developed a rapid test kit capable of detecting DNA from various types, including insects, pork, and other animals. However, the technology was still in its early stages and not yet ready for commercialization. He acknowledged the potential of such a technology, but also emphasized the need for a commissioned project for it to be successful. He also emphasized the importance of assessing the gaps in the current halal system and focusing efforts on specific areas. He aligned with the suggestion of establishing a comprehensive database or system that would serve as an inventory of halal resources, including policy standards, halal-compliant materials, and information on halal hotels and restaurants. He mentioned that

UPLB had already submitted a proposal for a similar project, which could be reviewed and expanded to address these needs. Dr. Sales further suggested that research outputs, such as scholarly books, be included in this database or portal. This would be a valuable resource for researchers and policymakers, helping to translate academic research into actionable strategies and programs for the halal sector.

Prof. Wadi thanked Dr. Sales for his insights and requested a further discussion with Ms. Bernadette Audije to elaborate on TESDA's role in the halal sector.

Ms. Audije, representing the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), elaborated the agency's role in producing competent workers in various sectors, including halal certification. She explained that TESDA's mandate involves developing and implementing standards, training programs, assessments, and certifications, all aimed at ensuring that workers are both locally and globally competitive. To successfully implement these, she also stressed the need for robust training infrastructure, including facilities and qualified trainers. Ms. Audije further emphasized importance for trainers, ideally Muslim practitioners, aligned with the specific needs of the halal sector.

Finally, Ms. Audije expressed strong support for the idea of a centralized database system. She suggested that TESDA's website, which already lists training regulations, standards, and certified graduates, could be expanded into a networked community portal that links the websites of various agencies involved in halal certification. This platform would further enhance coordination and accessibility for all stakeholders in the halal ecosystem.

After Prof. Wadi thanked Ms. Audije, he proceeded to revisit a point raised earlier during one of the presentations. His uncertainty about a statement made by Ms. Solaiman regarding the state of halal certification in the Philippines led him to raise several important questions: 1) Can anyone obtain halal certification in the Philippines? and 2) Is the current certification system well-structured and reliable? He noted that during the presentation of the Philippine Ulama Congress Organization Inc., numerous certifications were mentioned, and it was unclear whether these certifications were accredited by a national agency like DOST or DTI. Prof. Wadi expressed concern about the potential problems involved in halal accreditation and the proliferation of

organizations conducting their own certification processes. He emphasized that these issues were deeply tied to policy development and the need for harmonization within the halal certification system. Furthermore, Prof. Wadi asked how the system could be harmonized effectively and what steps should be taken to achieve this goal.

Mr. Abdurazaq Madale, a representative from the Philippine Ulama Congress Organization Inc. (PUCOI), responded to Prof. Wadi and asked about the adequacy of the mandated DTI board meetings, which are held twice a year. Specifically, he raised a concern about whether it was sufficient to gauge the seriousness of halal activities in the country. Citing an instance in Cagayan de Oro, he highlighted how authorities are unable to intervene when unregulated bodies conduct their own halal certification. Mr. Madale concluded by stating that the core issue was the inadequacy of the current legal framework, which lacked the necessary structure to regulate halal accreditation and certification effectively. They emphasized the need for stronger laws to address these challenges.

Ms. Solaiman responded to the ongoing discussion, emphasizing the importance of the law in uniting various agencies working on halal-related issues. However, she raised a critical question: If the law is meant to unify and align efforts, are there areas within the law that require improvement? Ms. Solaiman insisted on a unified roadmap for halal development that includes all government agencies involved in halal, such as the NCMF and DTI. She also addressed the issue of local halal demand, noting that despite the Philippines' Muslim population of over 12 million, access to halal meat remains a challenge.

Ms. Solaiman further raised how issues in the legal framework could be addressed to ensure that the law effectively harmonizes stakeholders and efforts to strengthen the halal industry. She highlighted that the law must support both the export potential of halal products and the local demand. Additionally, Ms. Solaiman inquired about the progress of the new halal law, which was currently on its Second Reading in Congress and asked how stakeholders could ensure that the issues discussed during the forum were incorporated into the bill before it advanced further.

OFFERING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A participant raised a clarifying question directed at PUCOI, asking which specific provisions of the law they believed were weak and problematic, suggesting that it would be more effective to pinpoint them rather than address the entire law.

Mr. Madale responded by identifying the primary issue as the absence of a penal clause in the current law. He emphasized that this gap significantly weakens the accreditation system, as there are no penalties or enforcement mechanisms for those engaging in haram practices or issuing false halal certifications. They argued that without a penalty clause, accountability could not be ensured, and the system lacked the necessary enforcement to prevent violations.

Ms. Solaiman referenced the proposed Halal Bill by Cong. Amina Dimaporo, titled “Promotion of Global Halal Enterprises and Product Development.” She emphasized the importance of penalty clauses in the law to address violations. Ms. Solaiman recalled that Republic Act No. 10817 had originally included such a clause, but it had been removed during the final stages of the legislative process, leaving a significant gap in accountability.

Agreeing with Mr. Madale and Ms. Solaiman, Mr. Radia cited that in Singapore, halal-certified restaurants that serve non-halal food face strict penalties, including the potential closure of the establishment. He proposed that this model be adopted in the Philippines to ensure accountability and compliance with halal standards. Mr. Radia also added that certain actionable points could be raised with DTI secretary Alfredo Pascual. He also supported the idea of conducting an environmental study of the halal industry in Quezon City, which would help identify infrastructure gaps and address foundational needs. He also proposed the establishment of a centralized halal portal that could streamline access to resources such as training programs, scholarships, and financial support. Mr. Radia also shared how the DTI, in collaboration with local authorities, were able to upgrade the facilities of a halal slaughterhouse in Tanauan, Batangas. He stressed the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders to address issues in the development of halal industries in the country.

Prof. Wadi then revisited a point raised earlier by the Department of Agriculture (DA) about the alignment of local, national, and international halal standards. He posed the question of how far the country has progressed in achieving alignment, particularly concerning agencies like the DA. Prof. Wadi highlighted that uniformity across these levels is crucial to avoid double standards, where foreign needs are prioritized over local ones.

Ms. Soghra Mahbouby Pirdehy, DA representative, emphasized the importance of achieving absolute conformity in halal standards rather than partial conformity. She underscores that halal standards should adhere to universal religious standards. She also referenced Republic Act No. 10817, which focuses on ensuring food security for Muslim Filipinos and utilizing halal exports to strengthen the country's economy. To address the problem of conformity, she suggested establishing a working group to develop a clear roadmap for halal standards that would avoid fragmented local standards. Additionally, Ms. Pirdehy highlighted the need to improve local halal production, particularly for livestock, to reduce reliance on imports.

Ms. Pirdehy also shared a suggestion to develop a cataloging system for halal-certified food products, similar to those used in countries like Malaysia. This could involve collaboration with IT professionals to create programs that allow consumers to verify whether a product is halal by scanning a product for certification details. This would enhance transparency and consumer confidence in halal products. She concluded by stressing the need for greater inclusivity in the halal standards process to also include the broader participation of Filipino constituents in the global halal ecosystem.

As the discussion neared its conclusion, Prof. Wadi inquired about the status of the Halal Bill in Congress. Already in its Third Reading, Prof. Wadi hopes that the proposed bill could address significant contradictions in previous laws that have plagued halal certification and practices in the country. With this, Prof. Wadi asked if there have been sufficient consultations with different stakeholders on the bill. He also proposed the establishment of a Department of Halal to eliminate existing contradictions and centralize matters within the halal industry.

Prof. Wadi sought feedback from Dr. Sales and other officials present at the forum on whether this idea could be a feasible vision for the future.

Dr. Sales responded by acknowledging the existing platforms already governing halal-related matters, such as the Halal Board for exports and the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF). He then outlined two possible solutions in the halal sector. First, to maintain the status quo and work within the existing framework to resolve ongoing issues. Second, to create a separate department dedicated to halal matters which could take a considerable amount of time and effort. Dr. Sales favored the first option, emphasizing that it would be the more cost-effective and timely approach.

Prof. Wadi thanked Dr. Sales for his perspective and highlighted that the recommendations made by DTI regarding the creation of a matrix and database for halal resources align with a vision the University of the Philippines (UP) long held. When President Alfredo E. Pascual was in office, he expressed a desire for UP to become a halal hub, excelling in research, resources, and expertise. Despite slow progress due to lack of infrastructure, the upcoming new building for the Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS), expected to open next year, would provide the necessary facilities to act on these recommendations.

Prof. Wadi explained that the Institute's goal to play a leading role in halal research and development, with plans to expand collaborations across various university units. These collaborations would contribute to interdisciplinary research necessary for advancing halal standards in the Philippines. He also emphasized the broader concept of *Halalan Tayyiban* as an entire way of life that should be integrated into all aspects of society, in line with the ultimate goal of pleasing the Creator. Prof. Wadi assured the forum that the matrix and database could be established, as UP already had access to curricular data and research outputs from various departments. The Institute's efforts to advance halal research would also include additional events such as the UP Islamic Finance Forum and the UP Shari'ah Forum. Prof. Wadi expressed his excitement about these initiatives, especially in collaboration with the Supreme Court, which had many plans in the area of Islamic law.

Meanwhile, Mr. Radia added that he proposed to draft a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the DTI Secretary and the UP President, facilitated by the Institute of Islamic Studies. The purpose of this MOA would be to incorporate these initiatives into the Halal-Friendly Quezon City Program, ensuring local government support and focused attention on halal efforts.

Mr. Radia sought Prof. Wadi's approval to move forward with drafting this proposal.

Dr. Sales further suggested that the Halal Board should serve as the signatory to the MOA, representing all the parties and stakeholders in the halal ecosystem. He proposed expanding the plan to include the creation of a niche sector dedicated to halal issues, encompassing research, training, consultancy, and most importantly, a knowledge center. This center would translate academic knowledge into actionable programs and policies. He emphasized that this approach would be similar to what DOST had already done by establishing niche centers across the country in various fields.

Following this, Prof. Wadi thanked Dr. Sales for his valuable input and expressed gratitude to all participants for their active engagement and insightful contributions in the roundtable discussion. He expressed his hope that the insights shared would lead to actionable steps in strengthening the halal ecosystem in the Philippines and emphasized the importance of ongoing collaboration and collective efforts.

Synthesis and Closing Remarks

Halal Forum Synthesis

Atty. Mehol K. Sadain

Former Commissioner, NCMF

Atty. Mehol K. Sadain, former Secretary of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) and Professorial Lecturer at the UP Institute of Islamic Studies, in his presentation, acknowledged the broad range of topics covered during the Halal Forum, highlighting the importance of aligning various elements to provide clear direction for the Philippine halal industry. His synthesis aimed to offer insights into existing structures, challenges, and potential improvements within the halal ecosystem in the Philippines.

Atty. Sadain began by referencing Section 8(h) of the NCMF charter, which grants the commission authority to promote and develop the Philippine halal industry and accredit halal-certifying bodies. He clarified that the NCMF's mandate extends to representing the interests of the entire Muslim community across the Philippines, emphasizing the importance of partnership and cooperation with relevant agencies, both domestic and international. He recounted the three halal-certifying bodies, namely the Mindanao Halal Certification Board (MMHCB), the Mindanao Halal Authority (MINHA), and the Halal International Chamber of Commerce and the Industry of the Philippines (HICCIP), accredited in 2013 under the commission's purview. However, subsequent updates on accreditation activities remain unclear, requiring attention from stakeholders.

Addressing the legal framework, Atty. Sadain discussed Republic Act No. 10817, which establishes policies to make Philippine halal exports more

competitive through research, quality assurance measures, and product development. Despite these policies, he observed that the Philippines has yet to achieve significant competitiveness in the global halal market, partly due to constitutional constraints that separate religious and secular domains. He contrasted this with countries like Thailand and Turkey, which have ministries dedicated to religious affairs, enabling comprehensive support for halal industries.

He then explained the distinction between accreditation and certification, emphasizing their unique roles. Accreditation involves assessing the competence of certifying bodies, rooted in the government's regulatory powers, while certification pertains to verifying conformity with halal standards for products, processes, or systems. He illustrated how these processes form part of the broader halal ecosystem, which includes standardization, accreditation, certification, and distribution. Atty. Sadain stressed that local and export markets should adhere to identical standards to ensure uniformity and credibility.

Atty. Sadain highlighted the role of international halal bodies, such as the International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF), in setting global standards. He explained that these standards are adopted by the Philippine Halal Board and implemented by the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB) to accredit certifying bodies. He acknowledged gaps in PAB's halal accreditation capabilities, noting the need for capacity building to ensure alignment with international benchmarks. He emphasized that certification standards must be grounded in Shari'ah principles, as halal practices derive their legitimacy from Islamic law.

Turning to governance, Atty. Sadain pointed out structural issues in the management of the halal industry. He recommended streamlining processes, such as simplifying the signing of Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) by authorizing the Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to act on behalf of the Halal Board. He also suggested that the roles of the NCMF and DTI could be better coordinated, leveraging the NCMF's expertise in religious aspects and the DTI's strength in export promotion.

Addressing broader challenges, Atty. Sadain called for improvements in government capacity to oversee the halal industry. He advocated for continuous

education, skills upgrading, and adequate budget allocation to enable effective accreditation and policy formulation. He stressed the importance of synergy among government agencies, including the DTI, Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DOH), and the NCMF, to create a cohesive national strategy. He also recommended the establishment of a unified training module approved by the Halal Board to ensure consistency across agencies and sectors.

He expressed concern about the lack of enforcement mechanisms in the current halal law, noting that the Halal Board lacks authority to penalize violators. He emphasized the need for clear legal provisions to address issues such as fraudulent halal certifications. He also called for the development of a centralized halal portal, a comprehensive road map, and a technical working group to address industry needs systematically.

Atty. Sadain concluded by reflecting on the need for a stronger legislative framework to address gaps in the existing halal law. He encouraged stakeholders to review pending legislation, collaborate during the bicameral process, and propose amendments to strengthen the regulatory environment. He expressed hope that the forum's outcomes would be presented to national leaders, ensuring that the voices of stakeholders in the halal industry are heard.

Atty. Sadain ended by thanking the participants for their enlightening presentations and thoughtful contributions. He emphasized that the success of the halal industry in the Philippines relies on collective efforts guided by a shared commitment to excellence and adherence to Islamic principles.

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