

# SARA, IMEE FORGE 9-PARTY ALLIANCE

Led by President Duterte's daughter, Hugpong ng Pagbabago and its newfound allies pledge to support the senatorial candidacy of Imee Marcos and the reelection of Sen. Cynthia Villar, as well as six others in the 2019 midterm elections.

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A supercoalition is emerging as Hugpong ng Pagbabago, the regional party formed and chaired by Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte, has forged an alliance with nine other political parties, including those of Ilocos Norte Gov. Imee Marcos and Sen. Cynthia Villar.



Hugpong joined forces on Monday with three national parties—Nacionalista Party (NP), Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) and National Unity Party (NUP)—and six local parties—Ilocano Timpuyog, Alyansa Bol-anon Alang sa Kausaban (Abaka), Aggrupation of Party for Progress (APP), Kambilan, PaDayon Pilipino (PP) and Serbisyo sa Bayan Party.

The NP is Villar's political party, while the NPC was founded by tycoon Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. The NUP was formed by former members of the Lakas-Kampi-CMD and allies of former President and now Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Mayor Duterte, the influential daughter of President Duterte, and representatives of the nine parties signed an agreement to form an alliance at The Blue Leaf Filipinas in Parañaque City.

Among the signatories were Senator Villar; former Batangas Rep. Mark Mendoza of NPC; Reginald Velasco, NUP secretary general; Imee Marcos of Ilocano Timpuyog; Pampanga Gov. Lilia Pineda of Kambilan; Quezon City Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte, head of Serbisyo Para sa Bayan Party; Norris Oculam of Abaka; Zamboanga del Norte Rep. Seth Frederick Jalosjos of APP; and lawyer Nadya Emano of PP.

Also present at the signing ceremony were former first lady and now Rep. Imelda Marcos, Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr. and Quezon City Mayor Herbert Bautista, among others.

Hugpong was called an opposition party in February by then Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, president of the ruling PDP-Laban. Mayor Duterte countered that it was her father, the President, who had given her and her supporters the go-ahead to form Hugpong.

In July, during the third State of the Nation Address of Mr. Duterte, Alvarez was ousted as Speaker and replaced by Arroyo.

Hugpong's senatorial bets

The signatories to the agreement pledged to support all the eight senatorial candidates Hugpong would endorse for the midterm elections in May 2019.

Davao del Norte Gov. Anthony del Rosario, Hugpong secretary general, confirmed reports that the alliance would endorse the candidacies of Marcos and Villar for the Senate.

Del Rosario said talks had been going on for weeks with the remaining six senatorial hopefuls. He declined to name them, saying he did not want to preempt other party officials.

At least two other prospective candidates were present during Monday's signing of the covenant—reelectionist Sen. JV Ejercito and Taguig Rep. Pia Cayetano, a former senator.

Last month, Mayor Duterte personally endorsed Ejercito, Sen. Sonny Angara, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque, former Chair Francis Tolentino of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, and Secretary Martin Andanar of the Presidential Communications Operations Office for the Senate.

No Senate run

She denied anew that she would be one of the senatorial candidates.

"I am not running for senator. We are just really trying to unite everybody who wants to help the administration of President Duterte until 2022," she said.

The Davao City mayor ranked between fourth and seventh in a Pulse Asia preelection survey released in April, but Del Rosario said on Monday that she was "definitely" not gunning for a Senate seat.

"We've talked about it several times," he said. "She doesn't want to leave Davao City yet."

Del Rosario said Hugpong was endorsing eight candidates, rather than 12, to allow its allied parties to select four of their own.

Common denominator

The common denominator between Hugpong and the nine political parties, which hailed from areas as varied as Ilocos Norte, Bohol, Zamboanga, Pampanga and Misamis Oriental, was their support for Mr. Duterte's policies, he said.

Imee Marcos said the alliance was the "first step on the road to federalism" as it sought to empower regional parties over "monolithic, hierarchical Metro Manila-based parties."

She hinted at resurrecting Kilusang Bagong Lipunan, the political party of the late dictator President Ferdinand Marcos, in a talk with journalists in Davao Occidental last week.