

THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

**Speech of H.E. President Fidel V. Ramos
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OVER THE PAST YEAR, I HAVE BEEN A GUEST OF THIS PRESTIGIOUS PRESS CLUB ENOUGH TIMES TO BE ABLE TO CLAIM SOME FAMILIARITY, WITH MOST OF YOU AND EVEN FRIENDSHIP. AS YOU CAN SEE, JESS SISON HAS TAKEN LIBERTIES WITH PROTOCOL BY EMBARKING ON A VERY VERY LONG UNAUTHORIZED INTRODUCTION OF YOUR GUEST SPEAKER.

BUT HAVING APPEARED HERE SEVERAL TIMES, THERE IS ALSO WITH IT SOME PERILS. FORTUNATELY, I DON'T HAVE A REPUTATION FOR RHETORICAL EXTRAVAGANCE. BY TEMPERAMENT, I AM NOT THE PROVERBIAL ORATOR WHO, BEFORE HE SPEAKS, PRAYS: "OH LORD, LET MY WORDS BE TENDER AND SWEET, FOR TOMORROW THEM I MAY HAVE TO EAT."

THE COURSE IS SET

INDEED, IF I UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY SOME CRITICISMS OF MY ADMINISTRATION, I AM FAULTED BY SOME FOR BEING CAUTIOUS WITH MY WORDS, PROMISES AND ACTIONS. AND ALTHOUGH BUSINESS OPTIMISM IS IN THE AIR, AS REPORTED IN SOME QUARTERS, IT IS NOT THE KIND THAT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS EUPHORIA OR HYSTERIA.

I DO NOT SEE THE TASKS OF ADMINISTRATION, HOWEVER, AS A RACE FOR PUBLIC APPROVAL, THOUGH CHEERS ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGING. IF IT IS A RACE AT ALL, IT SHOULD BE A RACE WITH NATIONAL PROBLEMS. AND TO WIN THIS RACE, I BELIEVE WE OUGHT TO BE PREPARED FOR ITS RIGORS AND CHALLENGES, AND WE MUST NOT RUSH HEADLONG WITH HALF-BAKED INITIATIVES AND PROPOSALS. I HAVE SAID BEFORE -- AND I DO BELIEVE I AM STILL FAITHFUL TO THIS COMMITMENT -- THAT I SHALL HIT THE GROUND RUNNING, BUT I MUST MAKE SURE THAT THE GROUND IS FIRST STABILIZED BY ME.

IN MY 37 DAYS IN OFFICE, I HAVE BEEN CONCERNED WITH LAYING SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, AND FOR THE MACHINERY THAT MUST CARRY THEM OUT.

DECISION-MAKING PERHAPS COMES EASY ONLY FOR THOSE THAT DO NOT HAVE TO DECIDE. OF COURSE, WHEN ONE IS IN MALACAANG, THE PERSPECTIVES AND MAGNITUDES ARE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT.

FOR THE KIND OF DECISIONS AND INITIATIVES WE MUST TAKE -- INITIATIVES OF FAR-REACHING IMPORT BECAUSE THEY ARE INSTITUTIONAL AND REFORMIST IN CHARACTER -- WE MUST BE BOTH PURPOSIVE AND PRUDENT. AND WE NEED IN MANY OF THESE THE ENERGETIC COLLABORATION OF CONGRESS AND OTHER CONSTITUTIONAL BODIES AS WELL AS KEY NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS.

OUR PROBLEMS ARE NO MERE HEADACHES THAT CAN BE BANISHED BY SWALLOWING A PILL OR TWO. THEY ARE RATHER DEEPLY ROOTED IN OUR SOCIETY -- IN SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES THAT ARE NO LONGER WORKABLE, IN POLICIES THAT HAVEN'T WORKED AND WILL NEVER WORK, IN INEQUITABLE RELATIONSHIPS THAT FAVOR A FEW AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MANY, IN PROJECTS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS FROM THE SAME PROVINCE PERHAPS THAT HAVE STAGNATED FROM PARTISAN INTRAMURALS. THESE ALL REQUIRE NOT JUST THE WISH TO BE RID OF THEM, BUT THE WILL AND THE ENERGY TO ROOT THEM OUT.

AS PRESIDENT, I DO NOT WANT TO RAISE EXPECTATIONS WHERE I CANNOT DELIVER. NOR DO I WANT TO LAUNCH INITIATIVES THAT WILL WITHER ON THE VINE, FOR LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL PREPAREDNESS OR SUPPORT FROM CONGRESS WHEN SUCH IS INDISPENSABLE.

THIS COUNTRY HAS HAD ENOUGH FALSE STARTS AND FALSE DAWNS. THIS TIME, OUR COURSE MUST BE SURE AND TRUE.

NOW, AFTER 37 DAYS IN OFFICE, I BELIEVE THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS ALREADY SET THAT COURSE CLEARLY AND COMPREHENSIVELY, AND ONLY THOSE WHO ARE RESOLVED NOT TO LISTEN COULD POSSIBLY MISUNDERSTAND IT.

WE HAVE SET OUR PRIORITIES IN WORDS AND ACTIONS THAT MOST CAN UNDERSTAND. AND THERE IS NO NEED FOR US TO WASTE THIS TIMELY OCCASION BY REITERATING THEM. RATHER, MY DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE MOPC, LET US FOCUS ON KEY ISSUES VITAL TO ACHIEVING OUR NATIONAL AGENDA, AND SOME OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS THAT HAVE ARISEN DURING THE PAST FIVE WEEKS.

CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT

ONE KEY ISSUE IS THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE COLLABORATION OF THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS IN FILLING THAT AGENDA. GIVEN BOTH THE NATURE OF OUR CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM AND THE COMPOSITION OF CONGRESS TODAY, WE CAN HARDLY OVEREMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT TO WORK IN CONCERT RATHER THAN IN RIVALRY OR AT CROSS-PURPOSES. CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT CAN BERATE EACH OTHER AND TRY TO SCORE POPULARITY POINTS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE OTHER. BUT THEN THE BUSINESS OF THE NATION WILL NOT MOVE FORWARD.

THUS, IT HAS BEEN MY PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE THESE PAST FIVE WEEKS TO MOLD A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH CONGRESS THAT WOULD ENABLE US TO CONSTANTLY CONSULT AND HOPEFULLY MOVE TOWARD CONSENSUS ON WHAT IS TO BE DONE. AND BEYOND JUST REACHING OUT TO CONGRESS, I HAVE SOUGHT TO CONSULT ALSO WITH THE MANY BROAD SECTORS OF SOCIETY.

THIS IS NOT A DEVICE TO BUY TIME. OR POSTPONE DECISION. THIS IS RATHER TO RECOGNIZE THAT ACTIONS THAT CAN RESULT IN REAL CHANGE HANG UPON THE BALANCE OF GOVERNMENT CONSENSUS AND PUBLIC SUPPORT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE A FEW WHO FEAR THAT ALL THESE EFFORTS TO RALLY CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT BEAR THE SEEDS OF DICTATORSHIP. OBVIOUSLY, THEY'VE MISSED THE POINT ALTOGETHER.

THESE MEETINGS, AS EVERYONE WILL NOTE SHOULD THEY CARE TO REVIEW THEM, HAVE EACH BEEN CONCERNED WITH DISCUSSING "PUBLIC BUSINESS." AND EACH TIME, I'D LIKE TO BELIEVE, THAT WE HAVE MOVED THAT AGENDA FORWARD. IF NOT ALWAYS THROUGH A MEETING OF MINDS, AT LEAST THROUGH UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT OF EACH OTHER'S POSITIONS ON ISSUES.

I AM VERY CONVINCED THAT DIVIDED LEADERSHIP OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, I AM CONVINCED, CAUSED THE SHIP OF STATE TO LIST AND FALTER. AND TODAY, WE HAVE REASON TO HOPE THAT WE ARE BRINGING OUR ACT TOGETHER -- NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF HEALTHY DIFFERENCES OF OPINION, BUT TOWARD GREATER CAPABILITY TO OVERRIDE IMPASSE AND TO REACH DECISIONS.

LIBERTY AND PUBLIC ORDER

I FIND A MEASURE OF SUCCESS IN THE WAY WE'RE MOVING IS THE AREA OF SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER. THE DEGREE OF PUBLIC CONSENSUS ON THE ISSUE IS SO HIGH THAT WE HARDLY DEBATE ANYMORE THE THESIS THAT TO DEVELOP, OUR COUNTRY MUST BE AT PEACE AND SECURE. AND THIS IS ALSO WHY CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT HAS MET OUR KEY INITIATIVES IN THIS AREA, AMONG THEM:

- THE CREATION OF A PRESIDENTIAL ANTI-CRIME COMMISSION TO SPEARHEAD THE EFFORT TO COMBAT CRIME IN OUR SOCIETY;
- THE GRANT OF AMNESTY TO THOSE WHO HAVE APPLIED OR WILL APPLY FOR AMNESTY UNDER AN EXISTING EXECUTIVE ORDER;
- THE REPEAL OF REPUBLIC ACT 1700, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE ANTI-SUBVERSION LAW; AND
- THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL UNIFICATION COMMISSION TO PURSUE PEACE TALKS WITH ALL REBEL GROUPS FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEVELOPING A NEW AMNESTY PACKAGE.

WHAT INVITES PERHAPS ANXIETY IS THE MISGUIDED THINKING THAT THE PEACE PROCESS WILL ADVANCE SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE DECLARED OUR COMMITMENT TO PEACE. OR THAT GOVERNMENT CAN BEST PROMOTE IT BY LOWERING ITS GUARD OR BY DESISTING FROM ANY MOVES DESIGNED TO PRESERVE AND ENHANCE PUBLIC ORDER AND SECURITY.

YESTERDAY, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WERE SOME PRETTY HYSTERICAL COMMENTS THAT WE'RE ON THE WAY TO MILITARIZATION, BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT RUSHED TO DECLARE UNCONDITIONAL AMNESTY FOR EVERYONE OR BECAUSE WE HAVE MOVED TO STRENGTHEN THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT TO IT AND TO THE GOVERNMENT.

THESE FEARS ARE ENTIRELY BASELESS AND ABSURD. TO MAKE PEACE A COMMITMENT OF THIS ADMINISTRATION SHOULD NOT REQUIRE US TO SURRENDER OUR VIGILANCE OVER THE NATION'S SECURITY AND STABILITY. WE OWE THIS TO THE MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE WHO ARE LAW ABIDING AND TO OUR FOREIGN FRIENDS WHO LOOK FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND PERSONAL SECURITY AS A CONDITION FOR INCREASED INVESTMENTS AND TOURISM.

WE CAN ONLY ADVANCE THIS PROCESS IF WE MATCH OUR RECONCILIATION AND UNIFICATION EFFORTS WITH CAREFUL CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF OUR FORCES IN THE FIELD WHO GUARD THE NATION'S INTEGRITY. THE INCIDENT IN MISAMIS ORIENTAL LAST WEEK WHERE SEVEN PEACE OFFICERS WERE KILLED AND THREE REMAIN MISSING WHILE EN ROUTE TO A PEACE DIALOGUE IS A TRAGIC REMINDER OF HOW DIFFICULT IS THE COURSE WE ARE PURSUING.

NEITHER SHOULD WE ALLOW THE PEACE INITIATIVE TO DISTORT THE LARGER PERSPECTIVE OF IMPROVING AND MODERNIZING THE REAL CAPABILITIES OF OUR ARMED FORCES TO MEET NEW REQUIREMENTS POSED BY POST-COLD WAR CHALLENGES.

THIS IS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROGRAM TO MODERNIZE THE CAPABILITIES OF OUR ARMED FORCES AND RE-DIRECT THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY TOWARDS ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND NATION-BUILDING SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD.

PEACE AND STABILITY ARE NOT IDENTICAL, BUT COMPLEMENTARY, GOALS. OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO ATTAIN BOTH.

PUSHING ECONOMIC GROWTH

BESIDES PEACE AND STABILITY, WE HAVE STARTED THE PROCESS OF INITIATING OR ADJUSTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO GET THE ECONOMY MOVING FROM RECOVERY TO GROWTH.

WHEN WE ASSUME OFFICE, THE POLICY CHOICES BEFORE US WERE FAIRLY CLEAR.

- WE EITHER WANT PRIVATE ENTERPRISE TO BE THE ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, OR GOVERNMENT AS THE PRINCIPAL ENTREPRENEUR IN THE COUNTRY.
- WE EITHER WANT FOREIGN INVESTMENTS TO HELP IN THE ECONOMIC GROWTH, OR WE PREFER TO DO IT

WITH OUR OWN RESOURCES, LIMITED THOUGH THEY ARE.

- WE EITHER WANT TRADE WITH THE WORLD IN THE PROTECTIONIST TRADITION, OR WE WANT TO EXPAND OUR COMMERCE WITH IT.
- WE EITHER PAY THE PRICE FOR DEVELOPMENT BY RAISING THE REVENUES NECESSARY FOR GROWTH, OR WE STAY WITH THE POLICIES THAT HAVE CONTRACTED ECONOMIC EFFORT ALL AROUND.

THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE ITS CHOICES MANIFESTLY CLEAR. WE WILL PURSUE GROWTH AS THE FUNDAMENTAL GOAL OF OUR ECONOMIC PLAN WITHOUT SACRIFICING BASIC SERVICES FOR THE NEEDY AMONG US. TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CAN DO THIS BY THE EXERCISE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP. WE WILL DO IT. IN FACT WE ARE ALREADY DOING SO IN MANY, MANY PLACES.

BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT CONGRESS MUST COLLABORATE IN THE LARGER EFFORT OF RECASTING POLICY AND PROGRAM. THIS IS THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA I HAVE SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS, AND I PRAY THAT OUR LEGISLATORS WILL MOVE IN CONCERT WITH US. I AM HAPPY TO SEE SENATOR BLAS OPLE IN THE CROWD. I HOPE HE IS HERE, NOT ONLY AS AN OLD MOPC STALWART, BUT ALSO AS A SUPPORTIVE EDDIE RAMOS.

BUT EVEN US WE MOVE TO RESTRUCTURE AND REDIRECT-GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, THERE IS ALREADY NOW AMPLE ROOM FOR ENTERPRISE TO MOVE WITH VIGOR IN THE ECONOMY. THE DOORS ARE OPEN. SO ARE THE WINDOWS. NEW OPPORTUNITIES EXIST. FROM MY TALKS WITH BOTH LOCAL BUSINESSMEN AND FOREIGN BUSINESS LEADERS, I AM CONCINCED THAT OUR OPTIMISM IS MATCHED BY THEIR GROWING CONFIDENCE.

TO THOSE WHO SEARCH TODAY FOR PLACES IN WHICH TO INVEST, I SAY THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE THAN THE PHILIPPINES. AND THOSE WHO ENTER NOW WHILE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC RESURGENCE ARE BEING PUT IN PLACE WILL NATURALLY HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF REALIZING THE GREATEST RETURNS ON THEIR INVESTMENTS.

FIGHTING POVERTY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

FINALLY, I WOULD TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT THIS ADMINISTRATION'S PROGRAM TO INVOLVE THE WHOLE COUNTRY IN THE DEVELOPMENT EFFORT, AND TO FIGHT MASS POVERTY AT ITS ROOTS.

THE PROCESS AND ATTAINMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY GO TOGETHER. I DO NOT BELIEVE WE CAN HAVE ONE WITHOUT DOING THE OTHER.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THAT RESOURCES ARE BEST SPENT ONLY ON THOSE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY THAT ARE ALREADY FAIRLY MODERNIZED. I DO NOT BELIEVE THIS. THIS HAS BEEN THE ORTHODOX POLICY FOR DECADES AND THE NET RESULT HAS ONLY BEEN A DUAL LEVEL ECONOMY AND A SOCIETY TORN BY THE GREAT INEQUALITIES AND CONFLICTS.

THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF DEVELOPING NATIONS IN SEVERAL DEVELOPMENT DECADES PROCLAIMED BY THE UNITED NATIONS IS NOW CLEAR: POOR COUNTRIES CANNOT DEVELOP WITHOUT MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF MASS POVERTY. THE GRASSROOTS ARE THE KEY TO CHANGE.

AND WE CANNOT AIM FOR LESS.

THREE WEEKS AGO, I TOOK THE UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF ESTABLISHING EXTENSION OFFICES OF THE PRESIDENCY IN THE VISAYAS AND MINDANAO. BY THIS I MEANT TO EMPHASIZE MY RESOLVE TO END THE PERCEIVED NEGLECT OF NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF OUR FAR-FLUNG REGIONS AND TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS OF DEVOLUTION AND DECENTRALIZATION INAUGURATED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991.

YESTERDAY, I ALSO SIGNED AN EXECUTIVE ORDER CREATING THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION TO FIGHT POVERTY. AND I APPOINTED FORMER GOV. DANIEL LACSON AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION.

LET ME EMPHASIZE HERE THAT WE ARE NOT TRYING TO FIGHT OUR GRAVE PROBLEMS BY THE CREATIONS OF COMMISSIONS OR COMMITTEES. THESE ARE NOT TOKEN GESTURES OF NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION -- MEANT TO "FATTEN THE HEART" OR AS WE SAY IN FILIPINO "PATABA SA PUSO". MY GOVERNMENT FULLY INTENDS TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS SQUARELY ACCORDING TO MEASURABLE TARGETS AND SPECIFIC TIMETABLES WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY.

THE VITAL CENTER OF ACTION

IT HAS BEEN WELL OBSERVED IN THIS COUNTRY, AS ELSEWHERE, THAT IN THE END WHAT IS VITAL TO SUCCESS IS NOT SO MUCH THE POLICY VISION, AS THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. MEN SHARING THE SAME POLICY VIEWS HAVE SAT IN THE THAT OFFICE AND PRODUCED VASTLY DIFFERENT RESULTS. I PROMISE YOU, GOOD RESULTS IN THE END.

I THINK THIS IS WHAT THE MANILA OVERSEAS PRESS CLUB MEANT TO EMPHASIZE WHEN IT DESIGNATED ONE NIGHT OF EVERY YEAR AS "THE PRESIDENT'S NIGHT."

ULTIMATELY, THE GRAVEST RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL RESTS UPON THE PRESIDENT. HE CAN EXHORT OTHERS. HE CAN PLEAD FOR THE SUPPORT OF CONGRESS AND OTHER BODIES. HE CAN CAJOLE THE PARTICIPATION OF MANY. AND HE CAN PETITION OR CAMPAIGN FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE.

YET IN THE END, THE NATION WILL MOVE FORWARD DEPENDING ON THE VIGOR, EFFECTIVENESS AND VISION OF THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIVITY IN OFFICE AND THE CONFIDENCE HE INSPIRES IN THE MAJORITY OF THE CITIZENRY.

THIS I FULLY RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT. AND ON THIS NOTE, I THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY AND BID YOU MABUHAY!

MARAMING SALAMAT PO.