

TRANSCRIPT

ASIA ON THE MARCH

**Speech of H. E. President Fidel V. Ramos
Ramon Magsaysay Award Ceremonies
August 31, 1992**

Mrs. Magsaysay, distinguished awardees, members of the Board of Trustees, friends and fellow Asians:

I am truly delighted to be here as part of the ceremonies of the awards for the Magsaysay Foundations today.

First of all, I would like to inform you that as a young lieutenant serving the Armed Forces of the Philippines, I had the temerity to say "No!" to the Secretary of National Defense Ramon Magsaysay. He offered to me an assignment I could hardly refuse – and that was to be one of his aides in his office. My answer was very similar to what was said here this afternoon: "Sir, I prefer to be in the field just like him."

And if I may further explore and exploit the situation, maybe to have the others with their permission serve as consultants with the Philippine Government.

On behalf of the people and Government of the Philippines, I am here today to express our congratulations and gratitude to the five recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay Awards this year.

As Asians, we feel a deep sense of gratitude to our distinguished awardees, for it is all of Asia whom their life and work truly honor.

As Filipinos, we feel great pride that it is in the name of an illustrious countryman that these awards are given.

When he was President of our Republic, Ramon Magsaysay once said: "We cannot escape the fact that the destinies of nations are closely linked. Our Asian brothers are beset by problems of the same nature and complexity as those that confront us. It is my hope that we can exchange experiences and information in subduing illiteracy, poverty, disease, under-productivity, and

other common evils which afflict our countries."

It was in this spirit that these awards were founded a year after his untimely death in March 1957 -- the idea of nurturing our sense of community and brotherhood as Asians, and in the hope of transforming our region into one in which freedom and progress would both flourish.

How much of this vision has been accomplished in the 35 years since, no one can truly say. For if anything is true of our region today, it is the fact that Asia is in the midst of great transition and transformation. But this we already know.

In our time, this vast region of the world, which has cradled great religions and civilizations, is again on the march. Individually and together, our countries are coming into their own and taking charge of their own destinies.

Economies are growing. People are becoming more prosperous. Even here in the Philippines, schools are yielding new generations of educated citizens. Asia is getting abreast with the rest of the world in knowledge and technology.

In place of age-old wars and revolutions, an era of peaceful building and transformation has taken hold.

In place of the ideological strife that once cut our region into warring camps, Asia has been made almost whole again.

And it is not for nothing that today humanity speaks of Asia as the fastest growing part of the world.

To this story of Asia on the march, the Ramon Magsaysay Awards stand as a kind of witness and chronicler. For year after year, the process of change has been told in the lives of the 156 men they have honored.

These awards presented tonight testify to the advance of Asia in our time. But as our awardees will be the first to tell us, there is also another side to our changing region. And this is the reality that our dream of a new Asia is still in the making. The work goes on.

While some among our peoples have touched the wheels of progress, many more continue to live in great poverty and deprivation.

While our productive capacities have risen, oftentimes our advance has been thoughtlessly predatory, taking resources from the environment faster than nature can replenish them, and degrading the patrimony of future generations.

And the scourge of tension and strife, fueled by religious and racial differences, still threaten peace and stability in some parts of the region.

Times of change, let us never forget, are also times of questioning. How can we effectively manage our growing prosperity alongside its risks and costs? Can we produce more and share the fruits of progress more equitably? Can we restrain private greed in the interest of public good? Can we preserve the ancient beauty of our lands while extracting from them a reasonable bounty? And in all the changes that we unleash, can we preserve in the process that which has made our cultures unique and vibrant? Can we make democracy and freedom prevail for the common man as Magsaysay fought for?

These are the concerns uppermost among our governments and our peoples today. And I believe we can only fully answer them if we turn to the wise words of a previous recipient of these awards -- the filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, who said: *"This is a question of values."*

The true measure of progress lies in the fulfillment of what we hold dear and cherish.

This sense of values constitutes the indispensable dimension that has moved our awardees in the grand adventure of building the new Asia. In their achievements is embedded the ageless lesson that our future is not only to be won by massive development programs and heroic political leadership. It is won even more surely by diligent attention to the little things -- to the village and the neighborhood and their micro-projects; to each number on the accountant's ledger; to each note of a song; to each tiny piece of scientific data -- in sum, to the way individuals, families and communities live. For it is from such commonplace achievements that mighty mansions are built.

To honor our awardees today -- these beacons of hope and light among us -- is to believe that the new Asia that is coming to be will fully match Asia's past glories and greatness.

To the awardees then, let me say on behalf of my countrymen: We in the Philippines salute you! And may others follow in your path!

I thank you.