

Message to the Second National Assembly
Court Stenographic Reporters Association of the Philippines
Cebu City
27 April 2000

Facing the Challenges of the New Millennium

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Representative
Fourth Congressional District of Quezon Province

and

President
Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement

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MAAYONG BUNTAG SA IMONG TANAN!

3

Good morning to all the hardworking, dedicated and efficient court stenographic reporters of the country. It gives me great pleasure to be in the company of the unsung heroes behind every courtroom drama and landmark decisions of our judiciary. I therefore wish to express my deepest appreciation for your invitation to join you in this historic occasion of the Second National Assembly of your association.

Your theme today – “Strengthening Our Unity and Face the Challenges of the New Millennium” – gains deeper meaning as we, as one nation and people, try to visualize the challenges that lie ahead. For me, there is but one singular challenge of the new millennium. This is the challenge of **globalization** and how to cope with its fast and dizzying pace.

But what in the world is globalization? Globalization is the breaking down of economic barriers of nation-states, the integration of markets for the free and unhampered flow of goods, services and capital. And according to my pro-GATT colleagues in the Senate during the time of the debates on the GATT-WTO Treaty some six years ago, globalization envisions a better society if government's role in the economy is reduced to a minimum. With globalization, they say that the market is no longer limited to the Philippines. The market is actually the world, and it is ours to conquer.

Yet, when the Senate finally ratified our accession into the GATT-WTO in 1994, except for a few businesses engaged in the electronics and high value added manufactures, what we saw was not the blossoming of Filipino entrepreneurs that were really to conquer the world. Rather, we witnessed the demise of Filipino industries – the tire industry, the steel, textile and garments industries, chemicals and chemical products. And today, we also stand tragic witness to the suffering of our rice, corn, onion, garlic, livestock and poultry farmers.

We are now all too familiar with the deluge of imported products entering at lower tariffs and flooding our domestic market. Its direct effect has been disastrous not only on Filipino industry and agriculture, but on our vast and growing army of the labor force. Jobs are getting more and more difficult to find these days. Last January, the National Statistics Office reported that of the 32 million Filipinos in the labor force, 3 million or almost 10 percent are unemployed, the highest ever recorded January unemployment rate in thirteen years. Six million Filipinos are underemployed. Put together, 9 million out of 32 million able bodied Filipinos or almost one-third of our labor force are either unemployed or lack gainful employment. What a tremendous waste of human resources.

But we Filipinos are survivors. In the face of job losses due to the influx of imported products that kill both our industry and agriculture, there has been an intensified exodus of Filipinos in foreign lands in search of jobs that have become continuously scarce in our country. But we all know that turning the Philippines into the world's largest migrant nation is not without costs. It has been at the expense of the deterioration of the family as an institution, the weakening moral fabric of our society, the brutalization of many of our overseas contract workers who have



fallen victim to abuses and human trafficking, and yes, it has also been at the great sacrifice of our dignity and self-respect as a nation.

Indeed, the point is, ***the Philippines has yet to see the promised benefits of globalization***. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that globalization has further widened the gap between the rich and poor countries. Thus, those who were so much in favor of our early accession into the GATT-WTO are now admitting having second thoughts on their position. When I opposed the GATT-WTO Treaty in the Senate and later took up the matter in the Supreme Court, how I wished that I would be proven wrong. But the hollowing out of our agriculture and industrial sectors, followed by the failed talks in Seattle for the GATT-WTO, are proof enough that we rushed the ratification of the treaty without adequate preparation for the affected sectors and our entire economy.

Where does the government come in all of these? Government has been harping on the need for our industry and agricultural sectors to be competitive and face the challenge of globalization. But, my dear friends, how can these sectors be competitive when we have the second highest power rates in the whole of Asia, when our countryside lacks far-to-market roads and post-harvest facilities, the urban centers are plagued with traffic and pollution. Congress is slow in enacting important pieces of legislation like the national land use policy and bills that strengthen workers' rights to cushion the negative effects of globalization, when the Executive is flip-flopping on key policy decisions, and the judiciary is slow as a snail in resolving cases?

It is one thing for government to ask our industry and agriculture sectors to be competitive. ***It is another thing for government itself to be competitive***. For me, this is then the bigger challenge of the new millennium in the face of globalization – ***the challenge of good governance***. What are the ingredients of good governance? I call them the “three Cs.” These are 1) Competence; 2) Credibility; and 3) Consistency in policy.

These three “Cs” are not an exclusive turf of the private sector. But I hasten to add that before these three “Cs” can take root, government must discard the two big bad “Cs” that have been plaguing it to its very core like the Big C of cancer – these are Connection and Corruption.



These two have always been at the very heart of government inefficiency. The judiciary, being one of the three branches of government, must be able to gear itself to the pressing demands of the new century and withstand the temptations and blandishments of corruption.

Before I end this short talk, I want to take up three matters with you pertaining to our country's efficient and fair administration of justice.

First, I wish to push for the full computerization of our courts. I believe that, like all branches of government, we must strive to achieve this at the soonest possible time. We all know how companies make our work easier and quicker. Rather than pounding on those manual or electric typewriters when transcribing stenographic notes, computers would definitely ease your work as corrections would be done without those while correction fluid and definitely with a lot more accuracy and ease. Immediately after encoding and copy editing your notes, you already have a clean copy of your transcription.

Second, with the use of computers, you would have to retool yourselves. The courts must invest in its people by allowing you to attend training seminars that will enhance your skills so that the technological capacity of the computer is maximized.

Thirdly, and finally, I challenge you to consolidate and fortify your ranks to ensure that there is transparency, fairness and integrity not only in the judicial system but in the entire government bureaucracy as a whole.

When the Senate ratified the GATT-WTO Treaty, it envisioned us being citizens of a global community. But for me, it is always important to remember that we are citizens of the Philippines before we are citizens of the world. Nationalism is not simply harping on "love of country" which is a hollow call if not linked to actual practice. As public servants, nationalism means not only doing one's job well but being an active part of the bureaucracy's cleaning process towards better governance and better service to country and people.

On this note, I wish your Second National Assembly every success in its programs and endeavors. Maraming salamat muli sa pag-imbita ninyo sa akin. Mabuhay ang Court Stenographic Reporters Association. Mabuhay tayong lahat!

