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Towards a Nationalist Education in the Era of Globalization

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IF THERE IS ANY PLACE WHICH NEVER FAILS TO STIR in me the spirit of challenge and exuberance, it is the University of the Philippines and its studentry, ang mga *iskolar ng bayan*. I am indeed very happy to be here among you today at the UP Manila campus. Mainit na pagbati sa inyong lahat!

Let me start today's discussion on the imperative need for nationalist education by citing the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Our charter is quite explicit in this regard, and very detailed. It provides that all educational institutions shall – let me tick off one by one –

- “inculcate patriotism and nationalism,
- foster love of humanity, respect for human rights, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country,

- teach the rights and duties of citizenship,
- strengthen ethical and spiritual values,
- develop moral character and personal discipline,
- encourage critical and creative thinking,
- broaden scientific and technological knowledge, and
- promote vocational efficiency."

If only these were achieved, even partly achieved, I firmly believe that our country will not be where it is now – a laggard among Asian countries, regarded as a basketcase by much of the world.

The importance of giving our people basic quality education, particularly, nationalist education cannot be overemphasized. An educated citizen benefits not just the individual but the larger society as well. In economics, this is called positive externality. Those who have obtained basic, quality education are able to find not just gainful employment but also active and meaningful participation in the country's development. They tend to be more critical and choosy of the government officials they vote for, they observe the law and understand major political and social events.

In today's era of globalization, global trade is no longer governed by the usual goods and services that we are so familiar with. The world is now rapidly being moved by information technology, the so-called "knowledge economy" powered by human brain power that designs programs to quickly shift capital from one country to another. In this changing landscape, we need to invest in what is now labeled as "social infrastructure," a key component of which is our people's education.

My friends, what do the statistics show about the state of education in our country? Tingnan natin ang mga statistika higgil sa edukasyon ng ating bayan:

First, the good news. According the Philippine Human Development Report 2000, elementary and high school enrolment has grown. In fact, enrollment in basic education has grown faster than population. The number of teachers has also risen. The government, which is the dominant provider in basic education, now operates 92 percent of all elementary schools and almost 60 percent of all high schools.



From one viewpoint, the Philippines seems not to be doing too badly as 95 percent of children who should be in elementary school are actually enrolled. The participation rate for high school is 64 percent.

However, because of the burgeoning student population, there is the perennial shortage of classrooms and the lack of textbooks. We are now all too familiar with cases of students going into three shifts just to be accommodated in cramped classrooms and of teachers handling grades 1 to 3 all the same time.

Yet, there's more bad news.

First, as pointed out by the Philippine Human Development Report 2000, despite the growth in enrollment, the quality of our education is deteriorating.

This can be gleaned from local indicators of current education standards in comparison to the performance of schools abroad. Our NEAT or National Elementary Achievement Test passing score is pegged at a lowly 36 percent rather than the conventional 50 percent just so we could reach a decent number of passing students. For the SAT or National Secondary Achievement Test, the passing score is equally woeful at 37.5 percent.



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The Philippines ranked 39th out of 42 countries, besting only Kuwait, Colombia and South Africa in the Third International Mathematics and Science Test in 1985. This was administered to 13-year old children in different countries. The tiger economies of Asia – Singapore, South Korea, Japan and Hongkong – topped the test. Filipino students in both lower and higher secondary schools obtained only 31 percent of the correct answers in the math portion. Further, their scores were way below the international median.

Second, a Development Academy of the Philippines paper pointed out that sustaining students just so they finish high school is still a problem. While survival rates in elementary education have been improving, it is not the same case in secondary education. More than half of those who enter elementary do not finish the entire education cycle. To illustrate, in 1999, out of 100 pupils who entered elementary school, about 70 finished Grade 6, but only 47 got to finish high school.

Third, even if there are lucky ones who get to enroll in college and graduate, there is still this mismatch between what our educational institutions supply and what our economy demands. The result is a shocking and saddening revelation: 77 percent of our country's unemployed belong to the youth. There are now 3.52 million people, aged 15 to 34 – supposedly the most productive age group – wanting to work but are unable to find gainful employment.

But that's not all. The brain drain is worsening. More and more of our best scientists, engineers, computer programmers, doctors and even middle-level managers – the people our economy need most – are trooping to high-growth Asian countries like South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and, for all we know, contributing significantly to the growth of these countries.

My dear friends, so where does nationalism in our educational system begin?

Now, more than ever, in this era of globalization, our schools should start with the basics. It is not enough to teach our young children that "A" stands for "atis" as it does "apple." More importantly, "A" stands for the great revolutionary hero Apolinario – *"Ang A ay para kay Apolinario, ang pangalan ni Mabini na isa sa ating mga magigiting na bayani."* This way, we begin to inject a sense of nationhood and heroism into young and receptive minds.

Nationalism in our educational system means producing elementary graduates that have a deep sense of pride for being Filipino. It means inculcating real appreciation of our nation's history and struggle for independence and emancipation from the time of the Spanish and American colonial eras to the period of people's resistance during the Marcos dictatorship.

Nationalism in our educational system means producing a citizenry of critical thinkers and movers, not a bunch of individualists, oblivious to and uncaring about the deep seated problems that plague our society like poverty, corruption, foreign mendicancy and landlessness.

But nationalism does not begin and end with the rhetoric of love and country, pagmamahal sa bayan at pagtangkil sa gawang Pilipino.



Government itself must clearly show its own sense of nationalism by upholding the constitutional mandate of giving education the highest priority in our national budget. But sadly, not only has the share of education to total government spending declined from 19 percent in 1999 to 17.5 percent to the proposed 2001 budget, real per capita spending will decline by almost four percent in 2001.

Now, what can the much lauded *iskolar ng bayan* do to change the depressing situation?

I have always held UP students in high esteem. UP students, for me, by virtue of their education being subsidized largely by the State, should be nationalistic by choice and occupation. I have great faith that its studentry will always rise equal to the challenge demanded by the times.

Thus, I certainly hope that after you graduate, you will all be part of our country's quest for peace and genuine development, in whatever push you take, whether actively working within the country, and inside or outside government. ***Sa inyo nakasalalay ang kinabukasan ng ating bayan.***

Always remember that it is not enough to do well in class or to improve one's condition in isolation or disregard of others. Individual advancement is barren if not infused with sensitivity and compassion for others, especially the majority poor in our midst who are in greatest need.

The best student is not the one who gets the highest marks but he or she who also engages in thought and action for country and people. In the end, it is the element of thoughtful, concrete service which gives a sense of direction and purpose to our lives.

In this regards, let us heed one message of Recto which was as valid in his lifetime as it is even more relevant today. "Nationalism, if it is ***not*** to be a mere fad or an exercise in lip service, must embody a deep conviction in favor of social change. Social change, on the other hand, can only be real if it is buttressed by the nationalist premise. ***The genuine nationalist, therefore, is an advocate of social change and the advocate of social change must be a true nationalist.***"



On the note, I hope you live up to your true calling as an agent of change, armed with a social conscience and the spirit of nationalism. May you, in solidarity with others, help our whole nation find the ways of peace and authentic development together, specially for the war-torn island of Mindanao.

Maraming salamat. Mabuhay ang mga *iskola ng bayan*!

