

SPEECH DELIVERED BY

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**AT THE OPENING OF THE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE 14TH CONGRESS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

28 JULY 2008

FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE:

WE OPEN OUR SECOND REGULAR SESSION IN THE 14TH CONGRESS AT A TIME OF AN IMMINENT ECONOMIC STORM. IT POSES A GRAVE DANGER IN SUSTAINING OUR ECONOMIC GROWTH AFFECTING THE SUPPLY AND PRICES OF OIL, AND PUSHING OUR ECONOMY TOWARDS THE EYE OF THE STORM.

THE SPIRALLING OIL PRICES IN THE GLOBAL MARKET HAVE UNLEASHED RAMPAGING INCREASES IN THE PRICES OF BASIC COMMODITIES AND SERVICES. IT HAS TRIGGERED UNPRECEDENTED EROSION OF THE VALUE OF INCOMES PUSHING INFLATION TO DOUBLE DIGIT SPIKES IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, POVERTY CAN ONLY BECOME MORE OPPRESSIVE.

HUNGER, DISEASE, AND THE ABSENCE OF NECESSITIES FOR SURVIVAL HAVE BECOME THE CALAMITIES THAT WE HAVE TO FACE DAY AFTER DAY.

IN THE MIDST OF THIS IMPENDING ECONOMIC STORM, WHAT, THEN, ARE WE EXPECTED TO DO, AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE?

LET ME BEGIN BY STATING IMMEDIATELY THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR RHETORICS. THIS IS A TIME FOR CLEAR AND DECISIVE ACTION.

MY ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES, TODAY WE MUST HAVE TO WORK EVEN HARDER TO MAKE THIS HOUSE THE REFUGE OF ORDINARY CITIZENS, THE REFUGE OF THE COMMON WAGE EARNERS, THE POOR, AND THE MARGINALIZED.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE MUST CONTINUE THE REFORMS WE HAVE SET IN MOTION IN THE LAST FIVE MONTHS.

WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE PEOPLE'S NEEDS ARE PARAMOUNT, THEIR WELFARE IS SUPREME, AND THEIR WILL IS SOVEREIGN IN THIS HOUSE.

ADDRESSING VULNERABILITIES

THE SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE 14TH CONGRESS MUST MOVE TO ADDRESS THE HEIGHTENED SENSE OF POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY IN THE COUNTRY TODAY.

THIS MEANS THAT MORE RESOURCES ARE REQUIRED FOR HEALTH CARE, FOR EDUCATION, FOR HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES, AND FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY OF ADEQUATE SUPPLIES OF FOOD AND BASIC COMMODITIES.

WE NEED POLICIES TO ENCOURAGE MORE PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENTS. WE NEED TO RATIONALIZE THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR DOING BUSINESS IN THE COUNTRY. WE NEED TO CREATE MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR GROWING WORK FORCE.

WE NEED TO PROVIDE SHORT TERM SOCIAL RELIEF FOR THE POOR, BUT WE CANNOT SACRIFICE THE IMPERATIVES OF MEDIUM TO LONG TERM ECONOMIC GROWTH.

WE MUST CHANNEL MORE BUDGETARY SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR SOCIAL SERVICES.

INCREASING BUDGETARY RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL SERVICES FOR EDUCATION, HOUSING AND HEALTH, ALSO REQUIRES POLICIES THAT CAN AUGMENT OUR REVENUES INCLUDING THOSE THAT REALLY OPTIMIZE TAX COLLECTION EFFICIENCY.

WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPERATIVES OF ENSURING COMPREHENSIVE FARMERS' ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS BECAUSE OF THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE IN OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY.

WE HAVE TO INSTITUTIONALIZE POLICIES THAT ASSURE TIMELY ACCESS OF OUR FARMERS TO SUFFICIENT CREDIT, APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY, AND FARM TO MARKET INFRASTRUCTURES.

WE NEED POLICY REFORMS IN THE LAND MARKET REGIME AND IN OUR LAND REGISTRATION SYSTEMS.

IT IS THEREFORE IMPERATIVE THAT FOR THIS SESSION, WE MUST BUILD THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR LEGISLATIVE REFORM AGENDA ON FOUR (4) PILLARS OF LEGISLATIVE POLICY:

- 1ST SOCIAL PROTECTION;
- 2ND ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING;
- 3RD COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT; AND
- 4TH FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.

ON SOCIAL PROTECTION TARGETS:

WE ARE FAST-TRACKING VARIOUS BILLS NOW PENDING BEFORE US THAT AIM TO PROVIDE SOCIAL SAFETY NETS ESPECIALLY FOR THE POOR.

WE HAVE TEN (10) PRIORITY BILLS TARGETED FOR THIRD READING BY OCTOBER, 2008 AND FIFTEEN (15) MORE BY YEAR-END. ALLOW TO ME TO

HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE FOLLOWING BILLS THAT CONSTITUTE THE CORE OF OUR SOCIAL PROTECTION SUPPORT MEASURES.

- 1. THE JOINT RESOLUTION ON THE USE OF THE WINDFALL COLLECTION OF VALUE ADDED TAXES.**
- 2. THE VAT EXEMPTION ON THE SALE OF ELECTRICITY TO MARGINALIZED CONSUMERS.**
- 3. THE BILL TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE GRANT OF STUDENT FAR AND SENIOR CITIZENS DISCOUNTS ON LAND, WATER AND AIR TRANSPORTATION.**
- 4. THE BILL TO PROMOTE CORPORATE FARMING AS A STRATEGY TO INCREASE GRAINS PRODUCTION. AND TO ENCOURAGE GREATER FLOW OF CREDIT AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR.**
- 5. THE BILL TO REWARD PERSONS WHO COULD HELP GOVERNMENT IDENTIFY AND PROSECUTE RICE HOARDERS AND RECOVER HOARDED RICE.**
- 6. THE BILL TO EXEMPT FROM WITHHOLDING TAX THE INTEREST EARNINGS ON BONDS ISSUED BY THE LAND BANK OF THE PHILIPPINES TO OWNERS OF LANDS COVERED BY CARP.**
- 7. THE BILL THAT SEEKS TO ESTABLISH A CREDIT INFORMATION SYSTEM.**
- 8. THE BILL TO STRENGTHEN CONSUMER PROTECTION BY WAY OF A CONSUMER WELFARE AND BILL OF RIGHTS.**
- 9. AND THE PRE-NEED CODE TO REVIVE AND STRENGTHEN OUR PRE-NEED AND INSURANCE INDUSTRIES...**

ON ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING:

WE ARE TARGETING TWENTY SIX (26) PRIORITY ECONOMIC BILLS FOR APPROVAL ON THIRD READING BY YEAR-END. FOREMOST ARE BILLS THAT AIM TO RATIONALIZE THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR DOING BUSINESS IN THE COUNTRY. THESE BILLS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- 1. A FISCAL INCENTIVES BILL TO AMEND PROVISIONS OF THE TARIFF AND CUSTOMS CODE AND THOSE SEEKING TO EXEMPT AGRICULTURAL INPUTS FROM VAT COVERAGE.**

- 2. THE BILLS PROMOTING "POCKET" OPEN SKIES POLICY, LIBERALIZING THE CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY, AMENDING THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS ACT, ENACTING THE MARITIME CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES, STREAMLINING THE PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY AND CREATING THE MINDANAO RAILWAYS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

- 3. BILLS LIKE THE REVISED INVESTMENT COMPANY ACT (RICA), ESTABLISHING THE PERSONAL EQUITY AND RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS (PERA), AND THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR REAL INVESTMENT TRUSTS (REITS).**

- 4. ECONOMIC BILLS THAT INCLUDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES, DEVELOPING THE DOWNSTREAM NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY, BOOSTING OUR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY, AND SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF THE HOUSING SECTOR BY STRENGTHENING THE HOME DEVELOPMENT MUTUAL FUND.**

- 5. BILLS AIMING TO FURTHER DECENTRALIZE INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES AND**

FREE PORTS IN TWENTY-ONE STRATEGICALLY LOCATED PROVINCES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

6. **BILLS FOCUSED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RESOURCES SUCH AS WIND POWER, SOLAR ENERGY, OCEAN, HYDROPOWER, GEOTHERMAL, AND BIOMASS.**
7. **AND, THE BILL TO AMEND THE BUILD-OPERATE-TRANSFER LAW THAT SEEKS TO CORRECT UNCLEAR GOVERNMENT POLICY IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND APPROVAL OF B.O.T. PROJECTS.**

ON COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT:

WE AIM TO PROCESS THIRTEEN (13) BILLS TO BE PASSED ON THIRD READING BY YEAR-END. THE FOLLOWING BILLS ARE IMPORTANT IN OUR EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT.

1. **THE BILL AMENDING THE AGRI-AGRA LAW OR PD 717**
2. **THE FARMLAND COLLATERAL BILL TO ACCEPT CERTIFICATES OF LAND TITLES AS COLLATERAL FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION LOANS INCLUDING A NEW MEASURE PROVIDING FOR A RURAL AGRICULTURAL CREDIT FINANCING SYSTEM.**
3. **THE BILL CREATING LOCAL HOUSING BOARDS AND THE CREATION OF A DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT.**
4. **BILL AMENDING THE COOPERATIVES CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES AND THE CHARTER OF THE COOPERATIVES DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.**
5. **BILLS TO PROTECT OUR COASTAL ENVIRONMENT AND ENRICH OUR MARINE RESOURCES IN EVERY COASTAL MUNICIPALITY.**

6. MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE ARE ALSO FAST TRACKING A NATIONAL LAND USE CODE AND A BILL THAT FACILITATES THE TITLING AND DISPOSITION OF PUBLIC LANDS TO CONVERT MORE OF OUR LAND RESOURCES TO PRODUCTIVE CAPITAL.

ON FISCAL AND GOVERNANCE ACCOUNTABILITY:

FIRST, WE MUST SERIOUSLY ADDRESS THE NEED TO RETHINK AND REFORMULATE THE (IRA) INTERNAL REVENUE ALLOTMENT OF OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS.

I PROPOSE THAT WE VIGOROUSLY PURSUE CRUCIAL POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE REFORMS TO MODERNIZE OUR GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS AND REORIENT OUR BUREAUCRACY TO HIGHER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AND A MORE SERVICE-ORIENTED WORK ETHIC.

WE ALSO NEED TO PASS A NEW CIVIL SERVICE CODE, AND A NEW GOVERNMENT CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION SYSTEM. WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN OUR POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM, AS WE ADDRESS THE REQUIREMENT OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR THE HIRING OF MORE LAWYERS TO DISPOSE OF OVER 20,000 PENDING CASES BEFORE IT.

MAY I ALSO PROPOSE THAT A MORE RATIONALIZED PLANNING PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING PROJECTS TO BE FUNDED BY THE PDAF BE FORMULATED AND IMPLEMENTED BY INSTITUTING A CONSULTATIVE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT PLANNING PROCESS TO STRENGTHEN TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

FINALLY, WE MUST ALSO CONSOLIDATE THE LEGISLATIVE MACHINERY

LET ME TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PUBLICLY THANK OUR DEPUTY SPEAKERS WHO HAVE TAKEN CHARGE OF MOBILIZING AND SHEPHERDING

THE ACTIVITIES OF SIX COMMITTEE CLUSTERS TO ENSURE THAT THE EIGHTY-SEVEN (87) PRIORITY MEASURES WE HAVE TARGETED FOR APPROVAL BEFORE END-2008 ARE PROCESSED BY THE COMMITTEES AND DELIBERATED IN PLENARY WITHIN TARGET SCHEDULES AND TIME LINES.

1. DEPUTY SPEAKERS ARNULFO FUENTEBELLA AND ERIC SINGSON ARE LEADING THE ECONOMIC CLUSTERS TO FACILITATE SWIFT COMMITTEE AND PLENARY ACTION ON OUR ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING AND COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY MEASURES.
2. DEPUTY SPEAKERS SIMEON DATUMANONG AND PABLO GARCIA ARE COORDINATING THE ACTIVITIES OF OUR POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE CLUSTERS IN PROCESSING OUR POLITICAL REFORM AND GOVERNANCE MEASURES.
3. WHILE DEPUTY SPEAKER AMELITA VILLAROSA IS COORDINATING COMMITTEE ACTIONS ON OUR PRIORITY SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES.

WE ARE TARGETING, A TOTAL OF, EIGHTY-SEVEN (87) PRIORITY BILLS FOR APPROVAL BEFORE END-2008. AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE VALIANT EFFORTS OF OUR ESTEEMED COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS TO ENSURE THAT THESE MEASURES, WILL BE APPROVED AS SCHEDULED.

THESE PRIORITY MEASURES EMBODY THE SUM OF OUR COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO OUR PEOPLE.

THEY ARE THE MEASURES AGAINST WHICH OUR COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE AS A LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTION SHALL BE MEASURED AND JUDGED.

OTHER IMPORTANT ACTIONS

AND WHILE WE ARE FOCUSED ON OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, WE ALSO NEED TO EXERCISE, WITH MORE VIGOUR AND JUDICIOUSNESS, OUR INSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF OVERSIGHT.

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT IS A DEMOCRATIC TOOL TO PROMOTE GOOD GOVERNANCE BY HELPING CURB GRAFT AND CORRUPTION, FOSTERING ECONOMY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES, ENSURING FIDELITY TO DUTY AND OUR LAWS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC FUNCTIONS.

THE LEADERSHIP LOOKS FORWARD TO MORE REVIEWS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND ITS AGENCIES. THIS SHALL BE THE ORDER OF THE DAY. WE NEED TO DEMAND MORE REPORTING AND GATHER MORE INFORMATION ON ALL PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS.

WE NEED TO KNOW HOW MAJOR LAWS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED. ESPECIALLY, WHY THEY ARE "PERCEIVED" TO BE IMPLEMENTED SO POORLY.

THE HOUSE OVERSIGHT FUNCTION OF REVIEW IS NOT IN EXERCISE OF LEGISLATIVE SUPREMACY OVER THE EXECUTIVE. RATHER, IT IS IN PURSUIT OF THE HIGHER INTEREST FOR MORE INFORMED LEGISLATIVE POLICIES.

LOOKING AHEAD

IF WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED MUCH IN THE PAST FIVE MONTHS. WE CERTAINLY CAN DO MORE.

OUR PERFORMANCE, NOT STATISTICS, NOT RHETORICS, OR "PRAISE" RELEASES, WILL REDEEM THE FAITH OF OUR PEOPLE IN THIS HOUSE.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE, THE LATEST SURVEYS HAVE GIVEN THIS HOUSE ITS HIGHEST NET SATISFACTION RATING IN THE LAST TWO DECADES: A + 35. MY CONGRATULATIONS TO ONE AND ALL.

LET ME ALSO PUT ON RECORD, THAT AFTER CONSULTATIONS WITH THE LEADERS OF ALL THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES, THE LEADERSHIP HAS STARTED TO IMPROVE THE "PHYSICAL FACILITIES" OF THIS 31 YEAR OLD HOUSE.

AND, BELIEVE ME, THIS IS NOT FOR SHOW. THIS IS BEING DONE TO "RESTORE" THE INSTITUTIONAL "DIGNITY OF THIS HOUSE!"

I URGE AND ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO WORK EVEN HARDER TO PROVE TO OUR PEOPLE, AGAIN, AND AGAIN, THAT WE ARE EQUAL TO THE TASK OF PROTECTING PUBLIC INTERESTS.

BUT, WE NEED TO DO MORE BEYOND THE REALM OF LEGISLATION.

WE MUST PROVIDE THE LEADERSHIP IN TERMS OF EXEMPLIFYING VALUES THAT CAN BEST STRENGTHEN OUR PEOPLE'S WILL TO OVERCOME ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

LET US INSPIRE OUR PEOPLE.

LET US LIVE SIMPLY.

BUT LET US ALL WORK HARD.

AND MOST OF ALL, LET US USE RESOURCES OF GOVERNMENT JUDICIOUSLY AND WISELY.

PERFORMANCE, TRANSPARENCY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY – THESE ARE THE HALLMARKS OF THE REFORMS WE HAVE LAUNCHED IN THIS HOUSE. THESE CONSTITUTE THE WORK ETHIC OF THE 14TH CONGRESS OF THE HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE.

LET US ALL LOOK FORWARD TO A COLLECTIVE AND FRUITFUL SECOND REGULAR SESSION.

THANK YOU AND GOOD DAY!