



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION
27TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
10 - 15 SEPTEMBER 2006 ▲ CEBU CITY, PHILIPPINES

Address

H. E. NOLIDE CASTRO
(Vice President, Republic of the Philippines)

*The Honorable Members of AIPO,
President Fidel Ramos,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

I would like to thank the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization for inviting me to the 27th General Assembly of ASEAN Parliamentarians, and more particularly, to the President of AIPO for 2005 to 2006, our very own Speaker of the House – Speaker Jose “Joe” de Venecia. And we are also honored to have with us Senator Manny Villar, The Senate President.

Although I am here as your guest, it is also my pleasure to act as one of your hosts and extend my warm welcome to all of you to our country and to the City of Cebu.

I hope that you will have enough time in between sessions to discover the many aspects of Filipino culture in Cebu. Cebu is likewise rich in history – as the place in the Philippines where the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan first landed in 1521 and as a thriving center of commerce and trade even before western powers came to these islands.

As all of you probably know, in December this year, Cebu will also be hosting the 12th ASEAN Summit. And I guess, it is but fitting to recognize the efforts of the local leaders who will make sure that your stay in Cebu now and in the future will be truly memorable and comfortable. Thus, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the Governor of the Province of Cebu – Governor Gwendolyn Garcia; and the Mayor of the City of Cebu – Mayor Tommy Osmeña, and the rest of the local chief executives of the other cities.

AIPO and ASEAN's Vision

The 27th General Assembly comes at an auspicious time as the Philippines assumes the Chairmanship of the ASEAN Standing Committee for the period July 2006 to July 2007.

Our Chairmanship will be highlighted by the hosting of the 12th ASEAN Summit (which as I mentioned, will be held here in Cebu) in December. The theme for this year's summit – One Caring and Sharing Community – captures our country's aspiration for genuine community-building in the ASEAN region.

Thirty-nine years ago, the founding fathers of the ASEAN had a similar dream. They envisioned a community of nations encompassing all the countries in the region. At first, nobody gave the association a fighting chance to survive. After all, it started as a loosely-knit political grouping whose members had their own misunderstandings.

But look at what we have achieved in less than half a century.

Today, the ASEAN has ten member countries, bound together in multi-dimensional ties where ideological differences no longer matter. We are now reaping the fruits of the labors of our founding fathers.

As the ASEAN enters its fourth decade of existence, it must reinvent itself to be more relevant to our modern society.

ASEAN has made great strides in the establishment of several milestones: The ASEAN free trade area, the Vientiane action plan, the Bali Concord II, and other agreements and declarations.

And yet, much work still needs to be done to realize its goal of building a people-centered community of caring societies.

Towards Greater Relevance

We in the ASEAN must exert greater effort to make the common people feel that they have a stake in ASEAN's future.

As you, the Region's parliamentarians, spend the next few days to talk about serious issues like regional economic integration, terrorism, and transnational crimes, it is our fervent wish that you also consider ways of bringing the ASEAN closer to the people of the region.

The Philippines intends to work towards that vision for the duration of its chairmanship of the ASEAN Standing Committee.

We fervently support civil society's initiative for greater participation in ASEAN's decision-making process. In December, we will hold the Fifth ASEAN Peoples Assembly in Manila.

We will prioritize regional environmental concerns through the ASEAN center for biodiversity.

We also intend to work for cooperation in energy security and in counter-terrorism.

Most importantly, the highlight of the 12th Summit will be the framework for the ASEAN Charter which is being crafted by the ASEAN eminent persons group. [We are very honored to have with us today former President Fidel Ramos, our country's representatives in the ASEAN eminent persons group, for his substantive contributions in drafting the charter].

AIPO's inputs to the work of the eminent persons group will be most useful.

Parliamentary Diplomacy

My friends, I myself was once a parliamentarian like you. I am aware of the many difficulties that each of us face in the course of preparing legislations for our respective countries.

But our work here extends beyond law-making. We are giving life to parliamentary diplomacy in a manner that truly benefits the ASEAN Community. This type of diplomacy is less rigid, more informal, and with lesser protocol and processes that characterize the “regular and formal channels” and yet, achieving the desired results.

Indeed, the AIPO can be a key mechanism for building friendship and mutual cooperation as well as regional peace and prosperity.

In AIPO we have an effective tool to contribute to a more solid ASEAN – one that is willing and able to face the new challenges that the world brings. Lest we forget, the establishment of AIPO stemmed from the awareness that the strength of the ASEAN emanates from the roots of its societies and the fact that its respective legislatures would encompass participation by the peoples of ASEAN countries. Specific targets of cutting poverty following a people-centered development framework. The approaches of the MDGs are different from all the development plans that you – policy makers, and I as implementor – have been introduced to. Different in the sense that the targets aim at ensuring that our gains are translated into real benefits that our people can feel. We say sometimes that we have done much. Yet if we look around, no sooner would we realize that we have not really done enough. I sincerely hope that AIPO will take a conscious effort in championing the MDGs among its Member-Parliaments. And hopefully (slowly but surely), we can soon start seeing results, results that really matter.

In closing, I wish you success and I am confident that your sessions in this conference will be productive and will contribute to the attainment of our common dreams for the ASEAN.

Thank you and good day to all of you

MABUHAY ang AIPO!