AIPO

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27TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Statement delivered by

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Speaker Jose de Venecia, our paramount leader and President of AIPO, leaders and Members of Parliaments of Asia and of the world, His Excellency Ong Keng Yong, Secretary General of ASEAN, distinguished guests, my friends:

Once again we extend our warmest welcome to all the great parliamentarians of Asia and of the world.

Maayong pag-abot sa sugbo!

Yes, friends, we are holding the 27th AIPO General Assembly in this historic and resplendent city, and no, you are not lost daydreaming in paradise. You are wide awake, pondering the role we are to play in the economic, political, and socio-cultural well-being of our collective peoples. But in the midst of all this serious work, please do not forget that just outside this hall, paradise awaits us in all corners of this hospitable island — Indeed, the entire Philippines beckons you to visit its varied land and seascapes scattered in its 7,107 islands. The turquoise warm waters of the sea against white sandy beaches, the succulent yield of the sea and the land, some of which we will sample at lunch and dinner in the course of this conference, and the maddeningly cheap but quality bargains in the shops and flea markets — these things and much more await us. For this is Cebu, a rare combination of leisurely living and efficient, serious business.

As I hail from this island paradise, you will allow me to say a few words to introduce her. Created on 10 March 1917, the province now has 47 municipalities, six cities, and several islets. Where we are now holding our convention is the heart of Cebu City, the provincial capital, dubbed the Queen City of the South. The island's area of 5,000 sq. km. supports 3.4 million vibrant, fun-loving, industrious, efficient, and hospitable people.

Cebu is a unique blend of idyllic isolation and urban sophistication. Here you have white sandy beaches, rich coral beds, breathtaking panoramas, mysterious hills and mountains. A few minutes away, you will enjoy the comforts and facilities of industrial and urban living supported by modern housing and sports and shopping conveniences. Businessmen and industrialists now prefer Cebu because of its deep sheltered water port, an international airport, excellent physical, legal, and financial infrastructure to ensure profits especially in the manufacturing, IT and tourism sectors. I hope you'll have adequate time later on to see for yourselves, but allow me now to invite you to take a look at the newest investment attraction of Cebu — the South Road Properties or SRP, with a total of 300 hectares of prime property which can house manufacturing, commercial, tourism, IT and other service enterprises. This property is now open for business and yours truly, and the distinguished Mayor of Cebu City, Tomas Osmeña, will be more than happy to assist you.

Honorable President, distinguished delegates, we are today meeting for the 27th time as a general assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization. Over the years, AIPO has become a vibrant forum for discussing cooperation in various fields in an atmosphere of brotherhood, equality, and a sincere desire to uplift the well-being of our people. We have graduated from a mere social gathering to a potent force in the Region.

While we have covered a lot of ground for the past 27 years, the challenges facing our countries and communities are becoming more complex and numerous we have to focus effort on issues that immediately confront us.

ASEAN member countries mutually benefit from the valuable contribution of migrant workers to the economies of the sending as well as the host countries. This makes urgent our call for the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the rights of migrant workers, in which we affirm the Vientiane Action Programme's common vision to achieve a "caring and sharing community" by improving the quality of life of the people of ASEAN and strengthening their cultural identity through the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers. We must commit to strengthen the economic and social pillars of ASEAN by promoting the full potential and dignity of migrant workers and their families in a climate of freedom, equity and stability.

The Philippine delegation would also like to place emphasis on efforts towards a people-centered approach to counter terrorism, particularly in the establishment of an AIPO Inter-faith Council in order to adopt counter terrorism strategies and measures that promote greater tolerance, understanding, and conflict resolution, including inter-cultural dialogue, as well as those aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people and their unequivocal condemnation of terror in all its forms and manifestations. While "hard approaches" such as border security, military deterrence, and others are needed, time and experience have proven that these are not enough and a holistic and people-centered approach is needed. The hearts and minds of people form a primary battleground in this global menace that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives, mostly innocent ones.

My friends, I am proud to inform you, that through the unique initiative of our current President, Speaker Jose de Venecia, at a time when such an idea was still not universally acceptable, the Philippines sponsored the first inter-faith dialogue in the United Nations, and soon after, forum after forum followed, each carrying a similar theme of countering the spread of radical and violent ideas for resolving disputes and fostering tolerance and understanding within and among diverse cultures and communities.

In March this year, the Philippines, in cooperation with Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand, co-chaired the Cebu Dialogue on Regional Inter-faith Conference for Peace, Development and Human Dignity which issued a Cebu concord bearing the same name. More than 200 delegates representing the Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and other faiths converged in this city to show the world how men of peace and faith can provide an alternative solution to the problem of terrorism.

My friends, many more complex issues confront us in ASEAN. The Philippine presidency of both the 27th AIPO and the ASEAN leaders' meeting this year, will be focusing on these and other economic and cultural issues to hasten the realization of a caring and sharing, safe and prosperous ASEAN community. We are all awaiting the outcome of our leaders' effort to craft an ASEAN charter that will fortify our common resolve. While parliamentarians work as separate and even independent branches of government in most of our countries, there is no doubt that we must cross over party, departmental, and even national affiliations when it is the very lives of our peoples that are at stake.

I look with expectant anticipation to the days ahead of this General Assembly. I am confident that when we harness our heads and hearts in unison to address our common problems, we will not be daunted by even the most stubborn of these challenges.

Thank you and I wish all of you a pleasant stay in Cebu. Mabuhay ang AIPO! Mabuhi ang sugbo.