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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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No. 9

CALL TO ORDER

At 4:00 p.m., Deputy Speaker Eric D. Singson called the session to order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is called to order.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Everybody is requested to rise for the singing of the Philippine National Anthem.

Everybody rose to sing the Philippine National Anthem.

PRAYER

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Please remain standing for a minute of silent prayer.

Everybody remained standing for the silent prayer.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, I move for a few minutes suspension of the session.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is suspended.

It was 4:02 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:46 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is resumed.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, I move that we defer the calling of the roll.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNALS

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, I move that we approve the Journals of the previous sessions: Journal No. 5 dated August 10; Journal No. 6 dated August 11; and Journal No. 7 dated August 12, 2009.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chairs hears none; the Journals, as specified by the Dep. Majority Leader, are hereby approved.

REP. GARIN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I further move that we take up the Reference of Business and that the Secretary General be directed to read the same.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Secretary General is directed to read the Reference of Business.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary General read the following House Bill and Resolutions on First Reading, and Committee Reports, and the Deputy Speaker made the corresponding references:

BILL ON FIRST READING

House Bill No. 6694, entitled:

“AN ACT TO ENSURE THAT EVERY FILIPINO IS GRANTED WITH BASIC HEALTHCARE SERVICES, PROVIDING FOR THE PURPOSE A MANDATORY UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE COVERAGE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Bonoan-David
TO THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

RESOLUTIONS

House Resolution No. 1315, entitled:

“RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE COMMITTEE ON GOOD GOVERNMENT TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ALLEGED ONE-MILLION-PESO DINNER OF PRESIDENT GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO AND HER ENTOURAGE OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

AT THE LE CIRQUE RESTAURANT IN NEW YORK LAST AUGUST 2, 2009 WHILE MILLIONS OF FILIPINOS SUFFER FROM WIDESPREAD POVERTY AND INVOLUNTARY HUNGER”

By Representatives Ocampo, Maza and Casiño
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1316, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEFENSE TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION ON WHETHER OR NOT THE ABNORMAL PRESENCE OF U.S. NAVY AIRCRAFT CARRIER *USS GEORGE WASHINGTON* WITH 6,000 STRONG US TROOPS AT THE MANILA BAY HARBOR IS PART OF THE DEAL FORGED BY PRESIDENT GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT DURING HER RECENT TRIP TO THE U.S., AS WELL AS ON THE TRUE NATURE AND SCOPE OF SAID US NAVY AIRCRAFT CARRIER VISIT, AND RECOMMEND MEASURES THEREOF INCLUDING A REVIEW OF THE VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT AND OTHER MILITARY AGREEMENTS WHICH FREELY ALLOW U.S. TROOPS TO LAND ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY AND APPARENTLY INFRINGE ON OUR SOVEREIGNTY”

By Representatives Maza, Ilagan, Ocampo, Casiño, Colmenares, Mariano, Maglunsod and Palatino
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1317, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE PRESENT STATE OF RICE PRODUCTION WITH THE END OBJECTIVE OF ESTABLISHING LONG TERM PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TOWARDS RICE SUFFICIENCY”

By Representative Bonoan-David
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1318, entitled:

“RESOLUTION CALLING FOR A COLLECTIVE ACTION BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO NAME THE CIRCUMFERENTIAL ROAD 5 OR C-5 ROAD AS THE CORAZON AQUINO FREEDOM HIGHWAY”

By Representative Plaza
TO THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND HIGHWAYS

ADDITIONAL COAUTHORS

Rep. Antonio T. Kho for House Bill No. 5583;
Rep. Catalina G. Leonen-Pizarro for House Bills No. 5619, 6439, 6320 and 3124;

Rep. Daryl Grace J. Abayon for House Bills No. 1955, 6095, 6277, 6291, 6350, 6427;

Reps. Eric D. Singson, Rommel C. Amatong, Carmen L. Cari, Yevgeny Vincente B. Emano, Exequiel B. Javier, Maria Milagros H. Magsaysay, Victoria Hernandez-Reyes, Mary Ann L. Susano, Thelma Z. Almario, Maria Zenaida B. Angping, Thomas L. Dumpit Jr., Francisco T. Matugas, Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez and Joseph F. Violago for House Bill No. 6590; and

Reps. Belma A. Cabilao, Franklin P. Bautista, Neil Benedict A. Montejo, Erico Basilio A. Fabian, Marcelino “Marcy” R. Teodoro, Mark Llandro L. Mendoza, Joseph F. Violago, Jeci A. Lapus, Vigor Ma. D. Mendoza II, Marina P. Clarete, Arthur F. Celeste, Daryl Grace J. Abayon, Rolando “Klarex” A. Uy, Victor J. Yu, Ma. Victoria R. Sy-Alvarado and Arturo B. Robes for House Joint Resolution No. 41.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Report by the Committee on Revision of Laws, the Committee on Welfare of Children and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2280), re H. No. 6699, entitled:

“AN ACT PROHIBITING ALL CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND ALL OTHER FORMS OF HUMILIATING OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN AND PROMOTING POSITIVE AND NON-VIOLENT DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 682

Sponsors: Representatives Aggabao, Prieto-Teodoro, Cua (J.) and Piamonte

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2281), re H. No. 3547, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE EDAY WATERFALLS AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED AT BARANGAY EDAY, COLUMBIO, SULTAN KUDARAT, AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Mangudadatu

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2282), re H. No. 4878, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING AS TOURIST SPOTS AND DESTINATIONS THE PROVINCE OF DAVAO ORIENTAL, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.), Almario and Dayanghirang

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2283), re H. No. 3548, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE FEKUNG BULA WATERFALLS AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED AT THE BOUNDARIES OF BARANGAYS NEW BANTANGAN AND LASAK, COLUMBIO, PROVINCE OF SULTAN KUDARAT, AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Mangudadatu

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2284), re H. No. 254, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE TAGBIBINTA FALLS AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED IN BARANGAY CORONBE, MARAGUSAN, COMPOSTELA VALLEY PROVINCE AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Zamora (M.)

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2285), re H. No. 3815, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE PROVINCE OF KALINGA IN THE CORDILLERA REGION AS AN ECO-TOURISM ZONE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Agyao

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2286), re H. No. 3550, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE BAMBAN FALLS AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED IN BARANGAY KAPALA, BAGUMBAYAN, PROVINCE OF SULTAN KUDARAT, AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Mangudadatu

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2287), re H. No. 887, entitled:

“AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FILIPINO–JAPANESE FRIENDSHIP GARDEN PRINCIPALLY IN BARANGAY ABATAN, HUNGDUAN AND WITHIN THE TRI-BOUNDARY OF THE MUNICIPALITIES OF HUNGDUAN, TINOC, AND KIANGAN, ALL IN IFUGAO PROVINCE

AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Chungalao

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2288), re H. No. 3585, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE MALINGEN AND ALIP HOT SPRING AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED IN BARANGAY MALINGEN, COLUMBIO, SULTAN KUDARAT, AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Mangudadatu

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report by the Committee on Tourism and the Committee on Appropriations (Committee Report No. 2289), re H. No. 3549, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE DATABLAO FALLS AND ITS PREMISES LOCATED IN BARANGAY DATABLAO, COLUMBIO, SULTAN KUDARAT, AS A TOURIST SPOT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

recommending its approval with amendments

Sponsors: Representatives Chatto, Cua (J.) and Mangudadatu

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the distinguished Lady from the First District of Iloilo, the Hon. Janette Garin, who wishes to rise on a personal and collective privilege.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Garin is recognized. What is the pleasure of the Representative from Iloilo?

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise on a matter of personal and collective privilege with regard to the rising incidence of HIV and AIDS in our country, as well as to the measures that should be taken to address this.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Garin has 10 minutes.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF REP. GARIN

REP. GARIN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Distinguished colleagues, last week I was privileged enough to be invited to the Ninth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Bali, Indonesia to speak about how our country is faring in the fight to reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS. I must admit, compared to our neighbor countries, the Philippines relatively fares better in terms of the number of cases of HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, this fact

also seems to make us rest on our laurels and made us a little laidback in providing interventions to halt the increase of HIV/AIDS cases in the country.

The truth of the matter is that the HIV/AIDS situation in the country is definitely getting worse. From the “low and slow” status of the Philippines, the HIV/AIDS data of our country is now described to be alarming but heeded. Apart from the increasing trend in the cases of HIV and AIDS, there are other two significant proofs of our disappointing effort on HIV/AIDS.

First, the youths in our adolescent sector which comprise a bulk of our population do not seem to be effectively protected against HIV/AIDS. Second, despite our previous efforts, we have forgotten to defend the rights of those who are already infected with this horrible disease.

Mr. Speaker, before I elucidate further on these factors, allow me to draw the picture of the current situation of HIV/AIDS in our country.

Social stigma is so far one of the greatest factors that inhibits the coming out of patients. The Philippines is nearing a full-blown HIV epidemic. Who could forget the first two faces of HIV in the Philippines—Dolzura Cortez and Sarah Jane Salazar?

Dolzura Cortez was the first confirmed HIV/AIDS victim in the Philippines, who came out in 1984. Her story made HIV/AIDS more real for people. Again, in 1991, another woman provided a face to this disease. This was the young Sarah Jane Salazar. Theirs were both tragic stories that haunted the entire nation, hence, the subsequent programs launched by the government at that time.

The government established the National AIDS/STD Prevention and Control Program (NASPCP) and the AIDS Registry, and even developed the first AIDS Medium-Term Plan (AMTP) as a guide to informing national strategies and interventions needed given the prevailing HIV and AIDS situation. The Philippine National AIDS Council (PNAC) was also established by virtue of Executive Order No. 39.

In 1998, the Philippines AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998 or Republic Act No. 8504 was enacted. It was said to be the first national and comprehensive legislation in HIV/AIDS on the region.

The number of HIV infections has consistently increased in the Philippines since 1984, with sexual intercourse as the leading mode of transmission accounting for 89.6 percent of the total cases. The Department of Health-AIDS Registry reported that:

- As of June 2009, there are 3,951 people living with HIV/AIDS in the Philippines; and
- Of the total reported cases, eight out of 10 or 3,137 victims were asymptomatic, or in a stage of chronic infection during which there are no symptoms of HIV infection, and 814 or two out of 10 were full-blown AIDS resulting to 312 documented deaths.

Let me go back to the graph and let us take a look at it.

Surprisingly, I am sorry the year of the low is quite small and incomprehensible. But then, the longest graph is a reflection of the incidents of 2008.

Next to that is a reflection of the incidence of confirmed and reported HIV cases covering the period January to June of 2009. Look at the vast difference, with barely half a year in 2009, we have an incidence of confirmed HIV/AIDS patients which has surpassed more than half of the incidence

of 2008. And surely it can be predicted that it will be way, way beyond the incidence in the previous years.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is that it is continuously increasing, but they persist on saying that it is not alarming. On the contrary, it is alarming. Why? Because this confirmed reported HIV and AIDS cases are those that seek consultation because they are already symptomatic. Those who are asymptomatic, who were in the latent stage and who continuously infect others, are continuously infecting other patients and other members of the youth sector, and are not aware that they are actually on the brink of a very deadly disease.

From January to June alone, the Department of Health recorded 362 HIV/AIDS positive cases, 350 of which are asymptomatic, 12 are full-blown Aids, and one is already dead. Of the reported cases of infections, 71 percent were males and 29 percent were females.

In addition to this, an increasing number of HIV/AIDS cases is being reported each month. In March of 2009 alone, 59 cases were recorded. Official government records also show that there were 85 new HIV cases for the month of May alone, which is a 143-percent increase in the number of cases posted for the same period last year.

Mr. Speaker, though the information already implies that we are facing a probable epidemic, this still does not reflect the true HIV/AIDS situation in the Philippines. Why? Simply because testing in our country is not mandatory and testing has an accompanying stigma which deters the voluntary testing of suspects and high-risk individuals.

According to experts from the World Health Organization and the Department of Health, there is an estimated 11,200 undocumented and unreported HIV and AIDS cases in the country in 2005. Imagine, that estimate was during the year 2005 and those 11,200 undocumented and unreported cases might have been infecting thousands and thousands of Filipinos nowadays.

The UNDP Country Director Renaud Meyer also said that the HIV/AIDS situation is being regarded as “hidden and alarming” and that “all the main ingredients of an epidemic” are now present in the Philippines.

MDG 6 or the Millennium Development Goals No. 6 is to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. The local target is to maintain HIV prevalence in the Philippines below one percent of the general population. The UNDP, however, said that the government appeared likely to fall short of achieving MDG 6.

Meyer cited three factors contributing to this failure:

- First is the apparent rise in the AIDS epidemic situation;
- Second is the dismal condom use, especially among the high-risk groups; and
- Third is the existence of social stigma on the disease.

While stigma persists, we are therefore convincing our patients not to seek consultation, thereby increasing the spread of the virus. The Filipino youths are in great risk.

What is more disturbing is the data that HIV/AIDS victims in the Philippines are getting younger and younger. The UNAIDS said that the AIDS epidemic in the country is now shifting from the overseas Filipino workers to the Filipino youths with more HIV cases coming from the 20 to 24 age group. The younger generation of today is just simply more sexually active and is grossly misinformed on HIV and AIDS.

With the mushrooming of call centers and business

process outsourcing in our country, it has contributed to an ambiance conducive to the spread of HIV in our country. And these young professionals ought to be educated and to be protected.

The paper released by the UP Population Institute, entitled: "Knowledge on HIV by the Filipino Youth" revealed that, while 90 percent of the youth has heard of HIV/AIDS, majority of them lack accurate information on said disease.

These are the results converted into a graph. As we can all see, more than 70 percent of the youths think that only those with multiple sexual partners can have AIDS. That is wrong. Contact with an HIV-positive individual would make one HIV suspect and would even make one HIV-positive. It is not true that this will only apply to those with multiple sexual partners. It can even apply to young children.

Almost 75 percent think that they have no chance of contracting AIDS or they are immune. That is, again, false. Almost 30 percent think that AIDS is curable. This is not true. While it takes so much years—sometimes five, seven, or an average of 10 to 15 years for HIV to transform into a full-blown Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The virus just waits for the proper and right opportunity.

In addition, the 2002 Young Adolescent Fertility Survey of the UP Population Institute also revealed the alarming sexual practices of the youth, making them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS. It says:

There is a limited level of protection either against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. This apparent lack of concern for protection is partly attributed to the fact that most first sex experience was not planned. I do not know if our colleagues here would plan their first sexual encounter, but most of the time, it is unplanned.

In most instances, condom use, specifically among young people, is still equated with pregnancy prevention, and not so much with its role as protection against STDs.

Twenty-three percent of our youth is engaging in premarital sex, and a considerable number of sexually active youth have had multiple partners with almost half of the males, that is 49%, and 11% of the females reporting more than one sex partner. One in five of the sexually active males had paid for sex while 12% of the males had accepted payment for sex.

This is the current social situation that we have now, and it is disheartening to note that we are leaving our youths to be continuously affected with a viral disease that, as of the present time, does not have any cure, but can actually be halted when it comes to prevention or deterring its spread.

The social stigma on HIV and AIDS must be eliminated.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, as alarming as the increasing number of youths contracting HIV and AIDS, is the social stigma on this disease that has been prevailing even with the supposedly massive information campaign on HIV. The very reason Dolzura Cortez and Sarah Jane Salazar publicly declared that they are infected is to encourage other people living with HIV to come out in order to be treated accordingly and to help the government halt the spread of the disease.

Distinguished colleagues, the Global Fund provides for

a free treatment of anti-retrovirals which would halt or delay the increase of HIV virus in HIV-infected individuals. But even with the available free medical treatment, even with free medicines, the social stigma deters our infected patients to come out and to be medically treated. Why? It is because our society does not seem to give the infected people a chance to do so, as can be seen in the continuous underreporting of HIV and AIDS cases in our country. Many of the people living with HIV are afraid of the possible discrimination if they make themselves known.

Allow me to cite cases that will prove such conjecture. In 1999, the Lunduyan NGO reported that a family woke up to the blaze of fire engulfing their tiny hut in a remote village near Olongapo City. It was found out that their neighbors allegedly colluded to torch their house amid fears of getting infected by HIV as one of the members of the family is a carrier.

As a medical doctor, what is even more disheartening is my knowledge that such discrimination extends even in the healthcare institutions, the foremost place where people living with HIV should feel free to disclose their condition.

Republic Act No. 8504 states:

- The right to privacy of individuals shall be guaranteed;
- Discrimination, in all its forms... against individuals with HIV or persons perceived or suspected of having HIV shall be considered inimical to individual and national interest; and
- Provision of basic health and social services for individuals with HIV shall be assured.

The study by the Remedios AIDS Foundation, Inc. cites examples on how these provisions were violated repeatedly in some hospitals. One instance was when an attending dermatologist of a government hospital refused to conduct skin biopsy on a patient who was HIV-positive. Another, while at a national government hospital for a caesarean delivery, says every morning, the nurses would make rounds and would say to her, "So, you are HIV-positive? Why did you still decide to get pregnant?"

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, an HIV-positive patient can still get pregnant and we have the technology now so that transmission to the fetus or to the baby will be deterred. We are not in a position to judge them, we are in a position to help them.

One respondent also described this doctor talking to a colleague about his case while standing at the nurses station. Seemingly, everybody in that place heard her and looked at the patient from head to toe. A more common form of refusal is the denial of free and post-test counseling even though this is explicitly required under RA 8504.

Mr. Speaker, what happened to their right to privacy? What happened to the promise of the law to free them from discrimination? Above all, whatever happened to their basic right to health and social services? Is this law just passed because the times called for it? Is this a law that will remain sleeping? Is this a law that is waiting to be awakened upon an epidemic?

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, acceptance is the key. If we cannot accept them, we cannot find a cure, we cannot treat them and it will continuously be spreading.

With a rapid increase of these patients, the shift of the face of a HIV patient from OFW to the youth, and the

horrifying discrimination being felt by people living with the disease, I firmly believe that the key to addressing this is acceptance.

Gone are the days when we felt triumphant with the slow progress of HIV and AIDS cases in our country. Gone are the days of rejoicing because we were the first in Asia to pass a law.

We are now facing a possible epidemic. Our youth's future is now compromised as well because of the lack of accurate information.

It is time to accept that HIV and AIDS will be inevitable unless we consider reversing its spread a priority in government programs at both the local and national levels. We should also be able to accept that the more we allow stigma to thrive, the more we allow HIV virus to spread. The virus remains hidden but is effectively spreading and transmitting simply because we, in the society, is highly responsible for deterring the surface of affected patients.

Even we, Members of Congress, are not fully aware that in our respective districts and constituencies, this virus is spreading like wild fire.

It is only by accepting the gravity of the situation that we may be able to break the barriers created by the stigma and our nonchalance, and finally respond accordingly to defeat this disease.

Let us do away with the stigma; let us do away with the hypocrisy of not accepting the real situation.

As policymakers, we have an ennobling responsibility to lead in effecting policy changes on a national level regarding HIV and AIDS cases in our country. We must make certain that our response to HIV and AIDS is sustainable and coordinated at both the national and local levels. Our failure to thoroughly oversee the implementation of this law is reflected with the failure of private health care settings to adopt appropriate internal policies conforming to RA 8504. As a result, we have allowed serious opportunities for discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS patients.

I also believe that the time is ripe to craft new laws that would amend or introduce new policies that will provide comprehensive services to the people and also focus on three important interventions, to wit:

- 1) A multi-sectoral approach in combating HIV and AIDS;
- 2) An intensified information and education campaign on HIV and AIDS;
- 3) There should be an intensification of the integration of HIV and AIDS in the elementary, secondary and vocational curricula. It is imperative that the current school-based AIDS education program should be able to result in behavior change among our young people. It is all right to advocate abstinence. But who among you here, except those who are married, are practicing abstinence? Who among us here can define the physiological aspect of the animalistic instinct of human nature?

Now, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, now is not the time for us to lie down to sleep and persist in hypocrisy. Now is the time for us to act; now is the time for us to look after our future. Now is the time for us to wake up and realize that, in fact, we have laws. It is not simply by making laws that we succeed. It is simply by making our laws effective and in looking after our people with a heart that

cares can we be more effective in taking care of our country, the Philippines.

Let us act now before it is too late.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, distinguished colleagues.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. BELLO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Bello is recognized. What is the pleasure of the Gentleman?

REP. BELLO. I would just like to ask a number of questions to our speaker from Iloilo.

First of all, I would like to congratulate our honorable speaker for really giving us a very cogent and very important elucidation of the situation with respect to HIV/AIDS.

I would also like to join her very impassioned plea for us to no longer have any denial with respect to the situation because it is, as she says, a very grave situation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe that one of the countries that was able to effectively deal with and contain the AIDS epidemic is Thailand, and I understand from my speaking with the public health authorities there that it was not just a question of public information. It was not just a question of acceptance, but it is a very proactive process of accepting the realities of extramarital and premarital sex and coming up with a very effective program of dealing with these, the cutting edge of which was the massive widespread distribution of condoms in the population. I believe that if one speaks or looks at what, indeed, happened in Thailand, that it was this aspect, the non-denial and the coming to grips with a real situation that demands that emergency, the cutting edge of which, as I said, was the massive distribution of condoms with the appropriate instructions among all sectors, including sex workers, that turned the tide.

I would just like to ask the honorable speaker if she feels that this is the kind of public action that we need to be able to deal with this crisis at this point in time. If it worked in Thailand, it probably should be able to work here, too, in our country.

REP. GARIN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

In comparison to Thailand, I believe that we are still insisting that we have a low incidence. In contrast, Thailand was fortunate enough to have accepted the reality, accepted the situation and accepted the real truth that is happening—that most of the members of their youth sector are engaged in premarital sex. So, there was a massive campaign, a massive advocacy and at the same time, instead of telling the people to practice abstinence, they tried to win the people to coordinate with the program and thus, it made possible the coming out of HIV patients. It likewise made possible the early treatment of HIV-infected patients so that they would have a longer span before their condition transforms them into full-blown AIDS cases.

REP. BELLO. I see the contrast, honorable speaker, but I would just like to, in fact, pose the issue that, in response to

stopping the denial, in response to massive public instruction, in response to reaching out to all sectors including sex workers, do we, in fact, adopt something that was very successful that was headed by Mr. Mitchai in Thailand of advocating, indeed, the massive distribution and use of condoms which I think everybody would agree was what reversed the process in Thailand?

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, if condom is even in the list of essential drugs in our formulary, if its use is accepted by both couples and if it is well-accepted by the individual, then nothing deters them from doing so. It is not mandatory to use condoms, but these should be available for those who would like to use it. Come to think of it, the shift of the incidence of HIV-positive individuals has shifted from OFWs to the youth sector of our society with the mean age range of infected patients at 20 to 24 years old. What a waste of life! A condom could have saved them from that disease.

Allow me to give you a copy of the many stories of women who are currently infected, who were found to be positive simply because their husbands were very much afraid to tell them about this because they believe that their husbands have always been loyal to them. But then the husband who also knows that he might be infected, who thought that they might have infected others but because of the social stigma which deterred them to be open with their wives and so, this female, the wife of an HIV-positive husband, turned out to be infected as well. We have a lot of similar stories, they are all written in many literatures, and it is a sad thing that they are there unprotected.

REP. BELLO. Thank you very much, honorable speaker. I would just like to register that I would fully agree with the Lady and again, congratulations for a very cogent and passionate speech.

REP. TAÑADA. Mr. Speaker.

REP. ESCUDERO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Escudero is recognized.

REP. ESCUDERO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the distinguished doctor-Representative yield to some questions?

REP. GARIN. Willingly, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ESCUDERO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for a while, most Filipinos were fearful that the OFWs will be the main carriers of this disease. But here, we are faced with the reality showing that something which we are very proud of, the BPOs—and according to our distinguished colleague yesterday, we are now number three in the world with India, number one and Canada, number two—it is turning out that this phenomenon which we thought would bring more economic benefits to our country, has a negative consequence. So, Mr. Speaker, may I know from the good doctor-Representative how comfortable she is in the capability of our DOH to deal with this disease in the light of other problems like the resurgence of malaria and

tuberculosis and the threat of new diseases like H1N1, ebola, dengue and many more. How prepared is a devolved structure of the DOH compared to the old centralized structure of the DOH, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, to be honest, I am not really confident that the present setup of the Department of Health can combat this rising epidemic. Why? Simply because there is no coordinated movements from the national and the local levels. Second, Mr. Speaker, programs in relation to HIV and AIDS prevention seemingly are not being handed down to the local government units.

And when we talk about inflammation, if we have a Department of Health which persists on saying that we have low incidence now without regard to what we have seen, the 70 percent increase and the 143 percent increase in the number of incidence from 2008 to 2009, then how can we solve the problem?

Prior to solving HIV, the Department of Health should accept that, first, our youths are becoming sexually active; second, we have a lot of males. I do not know if I am just biased, but most of the males are promiscuous and that promiscuity causes the spread of the virus.

If we persist on believing that this is not happening in our society, then we will end up with younger children and younger victims. These diseases can actually be countered by a major mechanism and a major mode of action that the department can take. Why? Malaise, especially tuberculosis, is very predominant in HIV-infected patients and usually, HIV and AIDs patients are diagnosed after several bouts of tuberculosis and pneumonia, and even diarrhea. So, these are all interlinked and interrelated.

We will not be able to achieve a community with a zero incidence of tuberculosis if we will not be able to deter the spread of HIV. Why? HIV alone and the presence of the virus predispose our endemic TB country into having full-blown and granulomatous tuberculosis.

REP. ESCUDERO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Representation is happy about the reaction of the good doctor Representative because this Representation is not comfortable with the present devolved structure of the DOH. In fact, this Representation filed a bill, which is now a subject of a technical working group, to return to the national government, not only health, but also agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, finally, before I close this short interpellation, may I take exception to the statement of the Lady claiming the animalistic instincts of human beings as a possible reason for the spread of this disease because, may I make it off record that, as a veterinarian, I have observed that animals are more formal when it comes to lovemaking. Just to give two examples, carabaos make love only in the evening and most animals make love only when they are in heat. Unlike we, human beings, when we feel like doing it, we do it anytime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, thank you for that input. I admit that has been scientifically documented and we, doctors, usually forget that.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Ronaldo Zamora, our Minority Floor Leader, is recognized.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Mr. Speaker, I wonder if our distinguished colleague from Iloilo will answer a number of questions.

REP. GARIN. Willingly, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, distinguished colleague.

Distinguished colleague, am I correct in characterizing that in the Philippines, HIV/AIDS is predominantly an urban phenomenon? Would that be correct, distinguished colleague?

REP. GARIN. The cases that we have now, Mr. Speaker, seems to point to HIV as a predominantly urban disease. However, I myself is not really that comfortable with the zero positive cases that we identified because it also shows that testing was done by residents of urban areas.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). I am concerned, distinguished colleague, because as my distinguished colleague knows, Congressman Zamora (R.) represents a highly urbanized district and, in fact, on category that she was mentioning a little earlier on BPOs, call center agents—what the government describes as the cutting edge of our sunrise industries—these are heavily in place in districts like San Juan, like Congressman Gonzales' district of Mandaluyong, like Congressman Roman Romulo's district of Pasig, and like our Congressmen from Makati. All of us are beneficiaries of the phenomenon of BPO resurgence in the Philippines. What worries me now, distinguished colleague, is that apparently, there is also a dark side to this phenomenon and that dark side is, I suppose, the kind of behavior that would have been frowned upon by our parents and grandparents in earlier years. That is correct, is it not, distinguished colleague?

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, yes, it is correct. I was even surprised, not only myself but other people working with HIV positive infected individuals. We have realized that the youths would sometimes, most of the time, and oftentimes consider sex as a stress buster. Gone were the days when you make love to somebody out of passion—out of a relationship. The term CS—which among us, doctors, would mean caesarian section—has involved into another meaning which connotes CS or casual sex. This has been predominantly happening in stressful work areas like the call centers, in the urban lifestyle and, somehow, in congested areas. I do not know if it has something to do with misinforming our children. I do not know if it has something to do with the Filipino youths being grossly misinformed because there is no fear in them when they have premarital sex.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). It is an interesting question, distinguished colleague, because I suppose, at some point, we have to arrive at a consensus on how to deal with this. Obviously, we cannot tell our children to just stop doing it because that is not going to work, will it, distinguished colleague? You cannot just tell people to stop having sex after you have already engaged in it once or twice because, after all, after a while, you will find out that there are a lot of better things to do in your spare time than reading books or writing

laws in this legislature.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly true. That is why I have been repeatedly saying that, while it is true that we say “avoid premarital sex” to our children, if they do not know the danger of what they are doing, and if these children believe that they can always be protected, then they are in danger of being infected. In addition to that, as what we have heard from our good colleague, Congressman Escudero, he mentioned that animals have a certain schedule of their sexual hormones going up. But in contrast to human beings, we have our own minds, we have our own beings but sometimes we just do not care about the timing and where it is. Sometimes, the children now would do it as a part of being “in” the community if they have experienced CS or casual sex. And this is quite alarming.

In addition to that, it is sad to note that there is the spread of group sex wherein they exchange partners, and that is what they call casual sex.

The Gentleman mentioned that we can tell them to stop this or not to do it. But like patients who are diabetic, during the first instance that you will be diagnosed as a diabetic patient, when the doctor tells you to stop eating this and that, you end up being lured into eating more. It is very difficult to stop something that is either palatable, consensual, or is considered as an appetizer by us.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). That is really true, distinguished colleague. In the end, almost all of us will agree that the things that we like are either immoral, sinful or fattening. I mean, that is the way of life. I do not know of anybody who really can avoid those temptations so readily. My point is a simple one, distinguished colleague, and it is this: Looking at Congressman Zamora (R.) as a Representative of a highly urbanized district, looking at this problem as being a problem especially of Metro Manila and of the different metro areas of the country—should we not be doing something really, really affirmative about it? Consider this, distinguished colleague. Mr. Speaker, if you are to go to Sub-Saharan Africa, then you will see whole populations, whole countries where gross national products, where economic progress, and where everything has collapsed and death rates have become even more pronounced. Why? It is because of HIV/AIDS. There are countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where half of the adult population or 50 percent is infected and, therefore, living with death sentences. How are you going to have any kind of real economic investment? How are you going to get any kind of real economic progress when half of your population around there have a death sentence? That is exactly, distinguished colleague, what we want to avoid in this country. Do we not?

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, that is definitely true and is basic.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). How do we do it, distinguished colleague? I mean, at the end of your very fine exposition, should we not take a look at how we are going to stop this once and for all. Right now, I suspect that our numbers—if DOH were to do its work properly—will be at least four or five times what the official numbers are.

REP. GARIN. Definitely.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). That is correct, is it not, distinguished colleague?

REP. GARIN. It is definitely correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). So, we are not at that level of one percent or so of the adult population.

REP. GARIN. We are not.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). We are, in fact, at the level of maybe five or six percent of the adult population.

REP. GARIN. It can be even more, Mr. Speaker, because the 1.5 percent are those patients who are coming out in the open and having themselves tested because they are already very sick come to think of it.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). But most people will not go and have themselves tested. Why? Because the moment you test, even if the results turned out to be negative ...

REP. GARIN. You become a suspect.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). ...you already fall under suspicion and that is what Filipinos, who are always so conscious about face, about shame, about social status, are trying to avoid. So, where are we now, Mr. Speaker? How do we stop this clear epidemic of what is one of the most vicious of all maladies in the medical profession? How will we do it?

REP. GARIN. I firmly believe that we can do it, but it needs the political will of the Department of Health and the society as well. First and foremost, as the Gentleman has mentioned, the social stigma deters people from coming out for testing. The social stigma deters patients from claiming the free medicines from the Global Fund. The social stigma deters people from speaking up and telling the people that they are there, they are infected and that they do not want it to happen to us. While there are actually real proposals that are doable, non-acceptance is a major hurdle that we have to overcome. First and foremost, we are in a very predominantly Catholic country where it has been persistently said that the use of condom is a sin, but on the contrary, it is there to save the lives of people. If it is there to save the life and protect the health of a mother in a family with an infected husband/father, then we should accept it.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Let me ask a question, distinguished colleague. Right now, suppose one of relatives turns out to be HIV positive, where does he turn to? Where does he go? What government agency or what NGO will be available to help him get on with his life? Is there any right now?

REP. GARIN. In Metro Manila the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) is where they ...

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Yes, but that is also the one responsible for, perhaps, even equally important diseases. I mean, if I remember right, RITM is also responsible for H ...

REP. GARIN. ... for H1N1.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Yes, H1N1.

REP. GARIN. Yes.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). It is responsible for the new influenza virus and new viral diseases that are always popping up. And when ...

REP. GARIN. But they really ...

REP. ZAMORA (R.). We do not really want something as widespread as HIV/AIDS to be handled by an agency that really should be research-oriented. We want somebody or something or some agency that really, in fact, does curative, preventive or possibly, a guidance work?

REP. GARIN. We do have the HIV/AIDS Council. So, after testing, anybody who is positive will be turned over and reported to DOH where they will receive some counseling, medication and reporting on a regular basis, initially, bi-monthly and then, sometimes...

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Yes, distinguished colleague, that is an approach when we are dealing with a small number of individuals. What happens when we reach much higher levels? Even now, definitely, we have already reached those higher levels. Is there anybody going around all of these call centers to tell the call center agents? Maybe, a good 10 percent of our agents are HIV-positive. Does anybody administer the test? Does anybody make it compulsory? So, not everybody is responsible.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, the Gentleman is right. That is basically the reason I decided to stand and speak up because these issues should be addressed. While there is an HIV/AIDS Council in our country, it is seemingly voluntary that you have to go there to be treated, but there is nobody telling the businessmen, telling the society, telling the concerned agencies, especially the sectors where it is rampant, where there is an increase of 134 percent in incidents, and telling them that this is happening in our neighborhood.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Aside from that, distinguished colleague, is there anybody providing free medicines?

REP. GARIN. Yes, we take them from the Global Fund and even in the Philippines, if you are HIV-positive individual, you will have free medications on a lifetime basis as long as you go there on a monthly check up. But the problem is, a patient who is diagnosed to be positive sometimes would end up not reporting and taking medications because of the public stigma, especially if the health worker who examined him will spread that. There is a lack of tact among medical professions in dealing with these patients.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). How much will it cost to maintain an HIV patient, an HIV positive individual in, let us say, one or two years?

REP. GARIN. Actually, it is on a case-to-case basis because a purely HIV positive individual would just be

receiving antiretrovirals, but those with complications with the concomitant TV drugs, diarrhea drugs and what is being handed over to our country are already medications that were purchased by the donor country.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Now, that is extremely important, distinguished colleague, because at some point, I think, we must introduce some element of compulsion.

REP. GARIN. Yes.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). We must introduce some element of widespread screening. I think, at some point, we must introduce some element of widespread information. The idea being, this is not something that we want to sweep under some rug. This is something that is deadly serious and we better behave as if we understood that it is, in fact, deadly serious. That is the only point I really want to make, distinguished colleague. I am grateful that the Lady has taken the effort and the initiative to address this issue.

I hope more people will listen to you, I hope you will spend a little more time to make sure that this message is in fact received by more and more people. Whatever we can do with Metro Manila, obviously, we have enough Congressmen who are prepared to help you, because we understand what the problem is. The problem is with us—with the years that we have ignored this disease, with the years that we were fooling ourselves with the idea that Filipinos, for some reason, were immune to HIV/AIDS. I am sure my distinguished colleague, as a doctor, will remember all of these stories in the newspapers, talking about how Filipinos are genetically immune to these diseases. Well, the sad truth is, we are not immune, we are as susceptible as anybody else, all of this talk that if you undergo circumcision, then you are going to be just a little bit safer.

REP. GARIN. Yes.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). But all of this is really . . .

REP. GARIN. Actually, Mr. Speaker, that is definitely true, because circumcision is widely accepted in our community and the male members of our community would presume that they are protected from HIV simply because circumcision minimizes the spread of the virus, but it is not a guarantee.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). It would be so, but in the end, distinguished colleague, we have to tell everybody that that is not true.

REP. GARIN. Yes, precisely.

REP. ZAMORA (R.). Because in the end, people are going to get sick of HIV/AIDS, not because they are circumcised or uncircumcised, but because they engaged in risky behavior more than anything else. I am grateful my distinguished colleague has brought this up, and I hope that at some point, she will prepare an action plan that we can adopt and perhaps even put into legislation so we can address this issue properly and responsibly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, distinguished colleague.

REP. GARIN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I would be very much willing to accede and to do that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of the Hon. Garin and the interpellations thereto to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. TAÑADA. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Tañada is recognized.

REP. TAÑADA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last August 12, this Chamber took up House Bill No. 6633, under Committee Report No. 2220, entitled: AN ACT DEFINING AND PENALIZING CRIMES AGAINST INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW, GENOCIDE, AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY, OPERATIONALIZING THE UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION AND DESIGNATING SPECIAL COURTS AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

Mr. Speaker, I rise just to seek the permission of the Chair to insert a prepared sponsorship speech as part of the records of this Congress.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection to the motion of the Gentleman? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The following is the text of Rep. Tañada's speech as submitted for insertion into the Congressional Record:

Mr. Speaker, my dear colleagues,

Today, we seek to approve on Second Reading a very important piece of legislation – House Bill No. 6633, “An Act Defining and Penalizing Crimes Against Humanity, Operationalizing Universal Jurisdiction, Designating Special Courts, And For Related Purposes.” This bill will once more affirm our country’s sincere desire to implement our commitments under international laws and agreements.

This legislation comes at an opportune time when countries all over the world celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Convention. On August 12, 1949, our country was among the first countries to sign an international agreement known as the Geneva Convention which governs the laws on war and armed conflicts.

In truth, this has been a long-delayed legislation. It is unusual, nay, incomprehensible that we only pass such a significant document 60 years after we have committed ourselves to its observance and implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we cannot afford any further delay in the passage of this bill.

Armed conflict is evident in our country today. We have the longest running communist insurgency in Asia. The

Muslim secessionist movement in Southern Philippines is also of similar, if not more, urgent concern. Both armed conflicts have taken their toll not only of the combatants from each side but more unfortunately, on the civilians caught in the crossfire. Both armed conflicts have become compelling reasons for our country to have a law that will protect civilians in an armed conflict.

House Bill No. 6633 defines and criminalizes crimes against International Humanitarian Law, genocide and other crimes against humanity. It aims to protect non-combatants to an armed conflict. It protects children, women, the injured and the captured during armed conflict.

It also provides protection to witnesses as well as reparations for the victims.

Likewise, it provides for the criminal and administrative liability of the commanders and other superiors under the principle of command responsibility. More importantly, the crime committed under this law is not subject to prescription.

Mr. Speaker, International Humanitarian Law will not deter war. The law seeks to humanize war and to protect the people who are not direct participants of the armed conflict.

Habang walang malinaw na kalutasan o habang hindi natin malutas ang kasalukuyang umiiral na giyera sa ating bansa, nararapat lamang na ibigay natin sa ating mamamayan ang lahat na proteksyon at pagkalinga sa mga ganitong kritikal na kalagayan. It is our most urgent task to pass this law.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, to pass this law. The passage of this law will not only affirm our country's international commitments, it will also address the long suffering of our people caught in the midst of an armed conflict.

Thank you.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Antonio Cuenco from the Second District of Cebu City who wishes to rise on a personal and collective privilege.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). What is the pleasure of the Gentleman, the Hon. Antonio Cuenco of Cebu?

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF REP. CUENCO

REP. CUENCO. As stated by the Dep. Majority Leader, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal and collective privilege.

Mr. Speaker, we mark on Friday, the 26th death anniversary of Benigno S. Aquino Jr. His assassination on August 21, 1983 wounded the Filipino soul, and focused the world's attention to our nation's agonizing drama.

Today, we no longer feel the shock and grief of that tedious moment, which we shall never forget all the days of our lives, and yet the memory of his heroism still pervades our land. His sacrificial offering is etched, imperishably, on the soul of this nation. His name is forever stamped upon our hearts and our collective memory.

Those of us who were privileged by his friendship cannot be blamed for luxuriating in that honor. Anyone who has been personally associated with him will always glory in that fact.

We who were his friends; we who were his party colleagues; we who were advocates of his cause, fighting the

same battles, we carry until now our association with him as a medal that we shall always proudly pin on our breasts.

For he was a giant among Lilliputians, the warrior-in-residence of our political formations, the battleship among tugboats, both the spearhead and the beacon light whom our people lionized in life and revered in death.

So today, Mr. Speaker, I talk of this great and immortal man for my own special and personal reasons. Even before I got elected to this Chamber in 1965 at age 29, I had already been honored by his friendship for he used to come to my home city of Cebu as he perambulated magnificently all over the country in search of his impossible dream.

He always travelled with dazzling speed and liberating impact. Amid the political thunderstorms of those days, he was like a flash of lightning in the dark horizon.

After his election to the Senate in 1967 against formidable odds, since he was a primary target of Ferdinand Marcos, he gathered around him the Liberal Party's "Young Turks," where he was like a resplendent eagle flying above the raging sea, emerging as a spinning, whirling, exploding oppositionist wizard who rained fire and brimstone on the Marcos administration.

Not even the mailed fist of martial law, not even the debilitating sorrows of solitary confinement stopped him. The rest is history, Mr. Speaker, and I shall not presume to retell the epic of his valiant struggle. But permit me to recall my experience with him just a few days before he met his heroic fate and took his place in the Pantheon of the Ages.

Before he left the United States of America on that final journey, I was able to talk with him through long-distance telephone for the benefit of Cebu's radio and television audiences. Speaking at his characteristic fast clip, it was clear that he was still the same fighting Ninoy that we had known all along. He was vibrant, forceful, eloquent, defiant of the odds, and he was focused on what was happening to our country and what he could do to help. In a word, he wanted not only to observe but to serve.

At the time of our telephone conversation, my father-in-law was sick in Ninoy's home-province of Pampanga. Ever thoughtful, Ninoy asked how he was. I did not know how he came to know my father-in-law was in the hospital, but that was Ninoy—Ninoy the politician. He was always better informed about everything than anybody else.

In our telephone conversation, he said he was determined to return. He saw it as his duty to his people, which he intended to carry out regardless of the consequences. While some of us doubted the wisdom of his move, not a single one doubted his courage. He was the bravest man that we ever met and his bravery was founded not on recklessness, not on ulterior motives, not on plain indifference to fate, but on the resolve to carry out the duty the patriot owed his country.

He also noted to me that some of the anti-Marcos oppositionists were being harassed by the dictatorship. He felt his homecoming would take much of the heat off them. In other words, he was coming home not as a matter of personal convenience, but to carry on his peaceful struggle to restore the rights and liberties of our people.

Today, 26 years after his murder, there are those who strive to denigrate his heroism or derogate his ideals. But they will fail to remove him from his place in the eternal and universal shrine of honor for he had validated his greatness

and patriotism—to the jubilation of his friends and the consternation of his enemies.

There is nothing now that they can do or say to detract from his glory, and we who had been his friends—we who had mourned his loss beyond tears, even while we celebrated his victory beyond words—we will always feel that deep and abiding admiration for him, his heroism, his epic struggle, and his stirring words. We will always live with the ineffable memory of his watchful concern for this land that he loved and for our people in whose name he died.

It is true that Ninoy Aquino has suffered. It is true that he went through moments of great anguish. And it is true that his enemies succeeded in taking his life. But it is no less true that, ultimately, he was victor rather than vanquished, and for a long time to come, this nation will celebrate that triumph. For as Ernest Hemingway once phrased it: “Man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.”

And so, Mr. Speaker, the lessons we have learned from Ninoy’s heroism can be measured only in astronomical proportions. Such is the magnitude and meaning of his sacrifice, that it set off a succession of events leading to the liberation of our people. Surely, this was no ordinary man and his assassination was no ordinary murder. Surely, this was of Himalayan dimensions. Surely, he was hero undeniable and complete—deserving of the highest honor within the gift of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I close by quoting a few lines from an elegy written by the poet, Nina Puyat, just before Ninoy was buried 26 years ago:

What shall we offer him tomorrow
When they return him to the waiting earth...
Shall we send him our unredeemed national shame?
To take with him to eternity...

Or shall we be united with his spirit, at last free,
That spark of God within us:
Our concern for our neighbor, no matter how distant
and unknown,
The purity of our motivations,
The unswerving faithfulness of our commitments...

EACH ONE OF US, ONE BY ONE, MUST
DEFEND THE ONE FOOT SQUARE OF LAND
ON WHICH WE KNEEL OR ON WHICH WE
STAND.

The Battle for Freedom is not over;
It is NEVER over!
The blessings of Peace have not yet arrived.
Our...dream of national reconciliation
Is still floating...in our tormented...skies.

But dry our tears; dry your tears, my brothers,
Ninoy is dead, but we and our children live.
In all of us, he will continue to live...

Mr. Speaker, our country through all these years has been rocked by many upheavals. Again and again, we have seen our people rebel against tyranny and injustice. Many times we have seen blood spilled and yet we remain captive to our own vices and frailties. We are shackled with poverty and yet we know not how to solve this perennial problem.

Mr. Speaker, what I believe we really need are not rebellions, not seditions, not coups *d’etats*. What we need, badly, is a genuine revolution of the heart.

To achieve this inner revolution, we as people must internalize the example of our generations of heroes.

Ninoy, inspire us with your heroism, now and forever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, allow us to acknowledge the presence of guests in the gallery, the visitors of the Hon. Arturo Robes, from South Korea; Dr. Woo, Hyung Sik, President of Kumoh National Institute of Technology; Dr. Ae, Doh Kwon Cho of Enderlin Colleges; Dr. Young Hwan Lee, Department of Industrial Management of Kumoh National Institute of Technology; Mr. Hyukwon “Nick” Kwon of Ederlin College and honorary member of Rotary Club, San Jose del Monte, Bulacan; Col. Danilo M. Florentino, PNP Chief, City of SJD, Bulacan; Mr. Jay Bernolia, Past President, Rotary Club of San Jose del Monte Central. *(Applause)*

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Please rise to be recognized. *(Applause)* Welcome to the House of Representatives, the guests of Hon. Robes.

REP. GARIN. We also have in the gallery, honorable Speaker, the guests of the Hon. Darlene Antonino-Custodio, the representatives from AKAP Bata, Anti-Child Porn Alliance, ECPAT, the Council for the Welfare of Children, and representatives from the United Nations International Children’s Fund. *(Applause)*

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Please rise. *(Applause)*

Welcome to the House of Representatives.

REP. GARIN. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Al Francis Bichara of the Second District of Albay.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Bichara is recognized. What is the pleasure of the Gentleman?

REP. BICHARA. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of collective and personal privilege regarding the controversy surrounding the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group, the PASG.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Gentleman has 10 minutes.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF REP. BICHARA

REP. BICHARA. Not very long ago, this Representation has publicly condemned and denounced the abuses committed by that controversial agency which was created at the behest of the Office of the President —the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group, also known as the PASG.

In December 2007, through the employment of Gestapo tactics, the PASG arbitrarily included three of my vehicles for investigation and later on, for distraint and seizure.

Despite the clear absence of evidence and even probable cause, this Representation was a victim of an abuse of authority by an agency supposedly created to help the Bureau of Customs in enforcing our customs and tariff laws.

That was more than a decade ago. As much as I would like to let "bygones be bygones," I cannot play deaf from the resounding call for the abolition of the PASG.

The PASG, which is supposedly the very agency tasked to aid and cooperate with different government agencies and offices in order to curb smuggling, is now confronted with a glut of complaints and protest from the same agencies which they are tasked to assist and support.

Just recently, we bore witness to the much-publicized verbal tussle between PASG Chief Antonio Villar and Optical Media Board (OMB) Chairman Edu Manzano regarding the missing DVD replicating machines worth P60 million which is under the custody of PASG. Not long before that, the head of PASG has again been involved in a disagreement with Bureau of Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales amidst the PASG's allegation linking the Commissioner to oil smuggling. And now, we have legitimate customs brokers and truckers staging a sit-down strike and calling for the abolition of the PASG or removal from office of the PASG Chief Villar. Professional Customs Brokers Association of the Philippines, Inc. (PCBAPI) President Agapito Mendez Jr. even fearlessly called the PASG the "Presidential Abu Sayyaf Group" or, at times, "Pekeng Anti-Smuggling Group."

Mr. Speaker, we really have a serious problem in our anti-smuggling efforts. These groups calling for the abolition of PASG—the Professional Customs Brokers Association of the Philippines, Inc. (PCBAPI), Alliance of Concerned Truck Owners and Operators, Aksyon Agad Personero't Personera, National Confederation of Customs Brokers of the Philippines, Visayas-Mindanao Customs Brokers Association, and the Fruit Imports-Brokers Association, Inc., to name a few—would usually suffer in silence when abused by our customs officials since, naturally, they do not want to lose their business. But then the abuses perpetrated by the PASG appeared to be so rampant, so blatant and so rapacious, so much so that these groups came out in the open and risked their very own livelihood.

This Customs Brokers and Truckers Association has presently, or just early this morning, held a sit-down strike and threaten to continue its picket unless and until the PASG is abolished or PASG Chief Antonio Villar is removed from office. According to news articles, the strike organizers plan to paralyze at least 16 ports nationwide, including those in Cebu, Mactan, Davao and General Santos. The reason for the strike, according to PCBAPI President Agapito Mendez Jr., is PASG's arbitrary seizure of container vans already released by the Bureau of Customs, and which would also be released by the PASG in exchange for a ransom. Mendez further said that the ransom would include P20,000 per 20-footer container and P40,000 per 40-footer container.

This is alarming! Instead of being an agency tasked to curb smuggling and curtail corruption amongst customs officials and employees, the PASG has yet become another breeding ground for crooked and dishonest government employees and officials. It has created a venue for the exploitation of legitimate and honest businessmen who bring money to our economy. It made matters worse now than before it was created.

The PASG was created by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo by virtue of Executive Order No. 624 on May 21, 2007, and is tasked to apprehend, seize, investigate and prosecute acts involving smuggling, unlawful importation and other similar violations.

Under said executive order, the PASG would be composed of elements from our law-enforcement agencies and from other government agencies that may be needed by the PASG in the performance of its functions. Notwithstanding this mandate, the PASG has allowed non-government employees particularly fixers, and certain practicing brokers to be included as agents of its special operations group, giving them access to the different areas of the Manila International Container Port and, worse, allowing them to conduct cargo examination even without lawful authority. Mr. Speaker, I have the list of these non-government personnel who are duly endorsed by the PASG to the Bureau of Customs to perform functions reserved to government employees and agents by the very law creating the PASG. This is patently unauthorized and illegal, to say the very least.

It has been two years since we have heard of cars being seized and once, being crushed, sugar impounded and other goods distrained by the PASG. And of course, the media, for all what these stories are worth, lapped them up with screaming headlines of the day—headlines like smuggled luxury cars seized, warehouse of smuggled goods raided, luxury cars crashed, et cetera. But after all these brouhaha in the media, what then is the final score in our efforts to fight smuggling?

Where are the cars allegedly seized by the PASG? How much taxes were paid? Were these smuggled luxury vehicles crushed or destroyed? What happened to the sugar seized? What happened to the raids and seizures conducted by the PASG? Are there any persons charged, prosecuted or eventually convicted in cases arising from smuggling? Are there customs officials involved?

Customs records show that the Bureau of Customs has issued several warrants of seizure and detention—call them WSD—for the PASG to enforce. But then, how many of these WSDs were actually returned to the Bureau of Customs together with the inventory of goods seized? How many smugglers were actually prosecuted? How much taxes were collected as a result of these efforts? As the customs records show, only a handful of these WSDs issued were actually returned by the PASG, which list I have. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is about time that we assess the true and real performance of PASG—devoid of its "praise," not press releases—praise releases and photo ops.

The PASG has also a sorry distinction of having detainees with a remarkable skill of escaping or disappearing from the long arm of the law. Foremost among them are the alleged Subic drug lord, Anton Ang, and suspected jewelry smuggler, Alpha Kwok. She has been missing since Friday. Today, she appeared in the Bureau of Immigration and is now detained at the Bureau of Immigration. The question is: why was this particular smuggler, Alpha Kwok, not charged under our customs laws? It is ironic that, after holding press conferences trumpeting the arrests of these prominent police characters, the PASG's detainees simply disappeared after all the brouhaha have died down. If these people were detainees of the PNP or the Bureau of Jail Management personnel, cases would be filed against erring personnel. But in the case of PASG, there seems to be no accountability.

This has been said a lot of times before and I will say it again here. It is the Bureau of Customs which is tasked to enforce our Customs and Tariff Law. As a matter of fact, under our Customs and Tariff Code, our Congress has given enough powers, duties and responsibilities to the Bureau of Customs to prevent smuggling and other frauds. Aside from tasking the Bureau of Customs in the assessment and collection of revenues on imported articles, we have given the agency enough authority to prevent smuggling which includes supervision and control over the entrance and clearance of vessels and aircraft engaged in foreign commerce, to the supervision and handling of foreign mails arriving in the country and so forth.

As properly stated in Ducky Paredes' column in *Malaya* on August 7, 2009, and I quote: "Creating ad hoc units to fix what is not done at all or is poorly done by the assigned agency is a duplication of government bureaucracy." The functions of the PASG could be undertaken by the Bureau of Customs. In fact, the Bureau of Customs is more than capable and competent to perform the tasks being performed by the PASG. There is no need for the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group. As I have said earlier, the PASG made matters worse than before it was created.

As such, I call upon our President to abolish the very controversial Philippine Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG) and save the government not only of its budget of millions of pesos in salaries, wages and other expenditures, but more importantly, from the more harmful effects of graft and corruption.

As I speak today, the ongoing protests and strikes are causing our economy P200 million to P300 million a day as a result of the delay in the release of needed, imported raw materials and other goods necessary to fuel our industries. Let us not allow our economy to bleed further by the continuous existence of PASG which, not unlike a house termite, is slowly killing business in this country.

Instead, let us strengthen our anti-smuggling group. Yes, let us institutionalize an effective collection of our customs duties or taxes. Yes, let us prosecute and jail smugglers and economic saboteurs. But then, we cannot do these things with the continued existence of the PASG.

I, therefore, urge my honorable colleagues here to join me in calling for the abolition of the PASG for the good of our economy and our country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of the Hon. Bichara to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The speech of the Hon. Bichara will be referred to the appropriate committee.

REP. VELARDE. I move that we recognize the distinguished Lady from Gabriela Party-List, the Hon. Luzviminda Ilagan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Ilagan is recognized.

REP. ILAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Representation would like to make a brief manifestation with regard to the call for justice for the comfort women on the 64th World War II Commemoration.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, last August 15 marked the 64th year of Japan's surrender to the Allies and the end of the World War II.

While almost seven decades have passed, the passage of time has not healed the wounds caused by what was considered the "deadliest conflict" in history.

Among those who will never forget the horrors of World War II are the *lolas* who sat in the gallery yesterday.

Many of them were barely in their teens when the Japanese Imperial Army occupied the islands of the country. Some were as young as 13 or 14 years old when the Japanese soldiers took them from their homes and forced them to become sex slaves.

One of them was Francisca Acido, known to her family and friends as Lola Kikay. She was among those who gave face to the Filipina comfort women more than 10 years ago. She braved social discrimination and stigma in order to seek justice for the crime that was committed against her and her fellow victims of one of the gravest crimes against humanity.

In April 1993, together with other comfort women from other countries, Filipino comfort women filed a class action in the Tokyo District Court demanding compensation from the Japanese government. This, as well as other lawsuits that followed, was junked by the Japanese courts.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kana, in 1993, issued an apology for the ordeal of the women victims of military sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army, but Japanese officials have recently expressed their desire to retract the statement.

The Japanese government claims that it has no obligation to provide compensation for the victims since the matter was already settled when the San Francisco Treaty and other bilateral treaties were signed. It also insists that "compensation" in the form of reparations had already been given to the Philippine government after the war.

This attitude received wide condemnation from the international community. United Nations' first independent expert on minority issues and former global rights partners and Justice Executive Director, Ms. Gay McDougall, in her report in 1998, severely criticized the Japanese government's handling of the cases of the comfort women and strongly recommended that Japan raise the issue of compensation to the state level.

Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Miss Radhika Coomaraswamy, in her report to the Commission of Human Rights in 1996, similarly urged the Japanese government to recompense the former comfort women.

Mr. Speaker, the Japanese government's only response to the mounting international pressure was the creation of the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) which collected "sympathy money" from the Japanese citizens. But this, obviously, was only to evade its legal responsibilities as a state in addressing the cases of the comfort women. The said fund ended on March 31, 2007.

On July 31, 2007, the United States House of Representatives approved House Resolution No. 121, expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the government of Japan formally acknowledge, apologize and

accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its imperial armed force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as "comfort women," during its colonial occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands.

This House has a similar resolution authored by Gabriela Women's Party, House Resolution No. 124, which has been pending since 2007. The main objective of this legislation is to restore the dignity and honor of women victims of wartime sexual slavery.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, Gabriela calls on this august Body to help the comfort women achieve the justice they long seek and deserve. Our comfort women are not getting any younger. In fact, last Tuesday, Lola Kikay, 89 years old, succumbed to old age. She was the 63rd comfort woman who died. Let us not let these *lolas*, already in the twilight of their years, suffer the same fate and pass on to the great beyond without getting the justice they so deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of the Hon. Ilagan to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The speech of the Lady is referred to the appropriate committee.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. VELARDE. May I move for a one-minute suspension of the session, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is suspended.

It was 6:19 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:20 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is resumed.

The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. VELARDE. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Hontiveros of Akbayan Party-List.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). What is the nature of the matter for which the Lady rises?

REP. HONTIVEROS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is part of the *contra* SONA that is being offered by the House minority.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Lady has 10 minutes.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF REP. HONTIVEROS

REP. HONTIVEROS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

G. Ispiker, mga kapwa Kongresista, magandang gabi po sa inyong lahat.

You did not say goodbye, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. That would have been the most welcome of all the things that you could have said, or the least grating to the ear. But you did not say goodbye. Instead, you said "Let them eat cake" and "*Bon Appétit*," wasting P1.7 million of taxpayers' money for two dinners in New York and Washington D.C.

Kung anu-ano na ang narinig ng sambayanan galing sa mga kaalyado mo, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, para ipaliwanag kung sino ang gumastos sa mga hapunang iyon at kung bakit. Hindi naman daw marangya ang gumastos ng isang milyong piso para sa isang hapunan, kung ang kapalit nito ay bilyun-bilyong investments. Ang ginamit naman daw ay personal na pera ng ilang Mambabatas na kasama ni GMA sa kanyang entourage at hindi pera ng mamamayan.

You dare imply that lavish is relative, and you seemed surprised that much fuss is being raised over the Le Cirque dinner. How can lavishness be relative in an impoverished country? Whether the money used to pay for the meals was public or private is not the issue. The issue is that the entourage represented a country of impoverished people, and there is nothing relative about this truth. Hunger is hunger, poverty is poverty.

How can a P1-million dinner be explained to a nation where poverty has become so extreme that the poor are driven to invisibility, and where desperation has driven some to climb billboards just to force the government to pay attention?

Remember Mariannet Amper, the 12-year old girl who committed suicide after being told by her parents that they could not afford the P100 she needed for a school project. The immediate reaction of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was to blame the so-called heartless politicians who would rather criticize the government than work for national unity. There would be no nuances for the likes of Mariannet Amper, or for children whose innocent hearts have grown heavier due to desperation: for them, a P1-million dinner is not just lavish, it is heartless. It can only be explained by sheer insensitivity and the absence of any understanding of the real state of the Filipino people.

But we are used to your insensitivity, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. We saw that again when you delivered your version of the State of the Nation. Lahat ng kakaunting maganda na nangyari sa ating bansa, inako mo na para lang pagtakpan ang napakalaking kakulangan ng iyong administrasyon. Kulang na lang ay akuin mo na ikaw ang nag-train kina Charice Pempengco at Arnold Pineda at ikaw ang nagturo ng boxing kay Manny Pacquiao.

Marami kang inako, at marami kang pangako na sabi mo ay iyong natupad. Inako mo pati ang Cheaper Medicines Law, na hindi mo naman pinaghirapan na maisabatas. When the bill was finally enacted, you even dragged your feet in implementing its provisions. You, in fact, sided with the pharmas and attempted to dilute the measures that the law provides. We do not owe cheaper medicines to you, since you have never really shown the political will to have the bill enacted. The least you can do is implement the law.

You have said that you would focus on improving health care to cover 86 percent of the population. How that can be

done, we would like to know. After all, this administration did not only fail to prevent the exodus of doctors and nurses, it has even encouraged the migration of health professionals. One remedy could have been the full implementation of the Magna Carta for Health Workers, an unfunded law which this administration has consistently refused to finance.

Pinangalandakan mo rin, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, na sa ilalim ng iyong administrasyon, nakapagbuhos ang pamahalaan ng mas malaki para sa edukasyon. Ipinagmalaki mo na gumastos ang gobyerno ng P139 bilyon noong nakaraang taon para sa edukasyon. Only a fool would claim triumph over these figures. It is like applying a band-aid to a dike with multiple leaks. The recommended spending for education is five percent to six percent of the GDP.

The 2008 budget was only equivalent to 2.51 percent of the GDP, lower than the 2.64 percent of 2004 or 2.52 percent in 2007. You have claimed that the Philippines is world-class, but how come our education spending is below the global standards?

The question, too, is how the money was spent. Sinabi ninyo na 60,000 classrooms ang naipatayo simula ng 2004, 49.6 milyong textbooks ang nabili at 2.4 milyong scholarships ang naipamigay. Maganda sana kung totoo, lalo na at nakita natin ang samut-saring anomalya sa loob ng Department of Education. Hinahamon ka namin, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, na patunayan itong ulat na ito sa pamamagitan ng isang audited report mula sa COA.

You went around to different parts of the country and claimed that by 2009, all barangays would be fully energized. The government has almost achieved this goal with 97.8 percent electrification. But what is there to celebrate? Access is not just about ensuring power sources for our communities. Access is also about lowering the cost of energy. True, the cost of power has slightly gone down from P9.07/kwh in 2007 to P8.54/kwh in 2009. But this is still higher than our Asian neighbors', largely due to a policy environment that allows monopolies in the energy sector. Whatever reduction there was in the cost of power was offset by increase in the cost of water.

Access, too, should complement environmental concerns and yet, despite the passage of the Renewable Energy Bill, the government has allowed the establishment of several coal-fired power plants. What is cheap and accessible energy if it means more hospital expenses due to lung-related illnesses or the destruction of the environment?

You promised water for all. You targeted to provide water to 116 waterless communities through 691 water supply projects. You were only able to provide water to 66 municipalities, and barely 50 percent of your total water supply projects were delivered.

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, hindi ko alam kung magkano talaga ang mga mamahaling *vino* sa Le Cirque, pero sana ay maalala ninyo na nauhaw ang sambayanang Pilipino.

There is no denying that the incidence of poverty has increased in the country. One way that the government could have eased the burden of poverty and of unemployment should have been in the area of social services. The programs in education, health care, electricity and water are supposed to level the playing field. They should have expanded opportunities and have allowed all of us to reach our potential, regardless of our class background, age, gender or ethnicity.

But you have been indolent. You have left social services in the hands of the market, exposed the delivery of health services and education to the abusive and profit-driven nature of the private sector. The so-called state intervention, under your term, actually meant distribution of perks and privileges. Social services under the GMA administration is not about delivering basic needs to the people; it has been about the dispensation of patronage to your allies, scholarships in exchange for votes and classrooms for kickbacks.

There were no goodbyes in your SONA, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. In so many words, what the SONA actually meant to say to the people is, "You go and eat cake." To that, the only response we can muster is this: "No thanks, and good riddance."

Marami pong salamat, G. Ispiker, at magandang gabi sa inyong lahat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Floor Leader is recognized.

REP. ANTONINO-CUSTODIO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Hon. Custodio is recognized.

REP. ANTONINO-CUSTODIO. Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Floor Leader whether we are going to have the roll call anytime tonight.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The Floor Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. DE GUZMAN. I move for a one-minute suspension of the session, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is suspended.

It was 6:31 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:32 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). The session is resumed.

REP. DE GUZMAN. Yes, we are going to call the roll later.

REP. ANTONINO-CUSTODIO. At what time, Mr. Speaker?

REP. DE GUZMAN. After we have referred the speeches of the Hon. Cuenco and the Hon. Hontiveros.

REP. ANTONINO-CUSTODIO. Right after?

REP. DE GUZMAN. If it is the wish of the Dep. Minority Leader.

REP. ANTONINO-CUSTODIO. Mr. Speaker, I just asked this because obviously, yesterday we did not have a roll call as well. We have several pending measures that were actually impressed upon this House by the Speaker during the opening of this Congress. As of date, iisa pa lang po iyong naipasa at na-discuss nating bill. I am wondering whether again, this time around, we are not taking up anything at all. Pagkatapos, pagdating ng panahon na malapit na po tayong mag-adjourn, sasagasaan na naman po ninyo ang minority dahil mahaba po iyong ating mga diskusyon. Gusto ko lang pong malaman kung talagang mayroon pong agenda ang majority na ite-take up. In these past few days, Mr. Speaker, we did not have a quorum to actually take up any business.

ROLL CALL

REP. DE GUZMAN. May I move that the Secretary General be directed to call the roll.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Secretary General is directed to call the roll.

The Secretary General called the roll, and the result is as follows, per Journal No. 9:

PRESENT

Abante	De Guzman
Abayon	Defensor (A.)
Ablan	Defensor (M.)
Aggabao	Dela Cruz
Agyao	Del Mar
Antonino-Custodio	Diasnes
Arnaiz	Duavit
Arquiza	Escudero
Arroyo (D.)	Estrella (C.)
Arroyo (M.L.)	Estrella (R.R.)
Asilo	Francisco
Bello	Garcia (P.)
Bichara	Garin
Bravo	Golez
Briones	Guanlao
Britanico	Hataman
Cabilao	Hernandez
Cari	Hontiveros
Casiño	Ilagan
Castro	Joson
Cerilles	Leonen-Pizarro
Chatto	Lim (T.)
Chavez	Limkaichong
Clarete	Lopez (J.)
Climaco	Maglunsod
Codilla	Magsaysay
Cojuangco	Mandanas
Colmenares	Mangudadatu
Coquilla	Marcoleta
Crisologo	Mariano
Cruz-Gonzales	Maza
Datumanong	Mendoza (R.)

Montejo	Roman
Montemayor	Romarate
Nicolas	Romualdo
Noel	Salimbangon
Nogralles	Salvacion
Ocampo	Santos
Ong	Singson (E.)
Osabel	Soon-Ruiz
Padilla	Sy-Alvarado
Palparan	Tan
Piamonte	Tomawis
Pichay	Uy (E.)
Puno	Uy (R.A.)
Ramiro	Velarde
Remulla	Villarosa
Rodriguez-Zaldarriaga	Yu

APPEARED BEFORE AND/OR AFTER THE ROLL CALL

Agbayani	Jaafar
Albano	Jala
Alcala	Javier
Almario	Jikiri
Antonino	Kho
Arenas	Lagdameo
Bagatsing	Lagman
Barzaga	Lapus
Bondoc	Lopez (C.J.)
Bonoan-David	Macapagal Arroyo
Cagas	Madrona
Cajayon	Malapitan
Canonigo	Marañon
Castelo-Daza	Matugas
Chong	Mendoza (M.)
Chungalao	Mendoza (V.)
Coscolluela	Mercado
Cua	Miraflores
Cuenco	Mitra
Dangwa	Olaño
Dayanghirang	Omar
Daza	Ortega (V.)
De Venecia	Pablo
Del Rosario	Palatino
Diaz	Pancho
Domogan	Pancrudo
Dumarpa	Pingoy
Durano	Piñol
Dy	Prieto-Teodoro
Ecleo	Puentevella
Emano	Reyes (C.)
Ferrer	Reyes (V.)
Fua	Robes
Fuentebella	Rodriguez
Garay	Romulo
Garcia (A.)	San Luis
Garcia (V.)	Sandoval
Gatchalian	Santiago (J.)
Gatlabayan	Santiago (N.)
Gonzales (A.)	Silverio
Gonzales (N.)	Singson (R.)
Gonzalez	Solis
Gullas	Suarez

Susano
Taliño-Mendoza
Tañada
Teodoro
Teves
Tieng
Umali (A.)
Umali (C.)

Valencia
Vargas
Villafuerte
Yap
Zamora (R.)
Zialcita
Zubiri

ay, Santiago (N.), Seares-Luna, Tupas and Valdez.
The Speaker is present.
The roll call shows that 96 Members responded to the call.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Singson, E.). With 96 Members responding to the call, the Chair declares the absence of a quorum.

The session is adjourned until Monday, August 24, 2009.

It was 6:47 p.m.

THE SECRETARY GENERAL. The House is in receipt of the official notice of absence of the following Members: Reps. Alvarez (G.), Amante, Amatong, Aquino, Balindong, Biron, Chiongbian, Enverga, Jalosjos-Carreon, Lazatin, Ping-