

## **OPENING REMARKS**

**LUNCHEON WITH THE USIP  
MORGAN SUITE  
17<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
WALDORF ASTORIA  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
25 September 2003**

Your Excellency  
President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Your Excellency  
Secretary Blas F. Ople

Your Honors the Members of the Philippine Cabinet  
and of the Philippine Congress

Distinguished Guests from the United States Institute of Peace

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are gathered here today as good friends.

The presence of our distinguished guests from the USIP reflects the strong support for the peace process in Mindanao voiced by no less than President Bush during President Arroyo's successful State Visit to Washington, D.C., last May.

Our USIP friends number no less than four former US Ambassadors to the Philippines. This shows not only the level of commitment of American support but of the wealth of expertise that our American friends are lending to our effort to secure lasting peace in Mindanao.

In this regard, I commend President Arroyo for her firm vision of peace and Secretary Ople for his stalwart diplomacy in advancing the peace process in the international arena.

I congratulate Secretary Ermita on his recent appointment as Secretary of National Defense. I am confident that Secretary Ermita will, nonetheless, remain closely involved with the peace talks.

Our congressional leaders here present have also been keen advocates of the peace process. With their active participation, the Philippine Government comes with solidarity and sincerity to the effort to build a lasting peace.

Our friends from the USIP, led here today by USIP President, Ambassador Richard Solomon, have met previously with Secretary Ermita. They advised me that they are optimistic of the chances of peace and that they wish to be as active as possible in ensuring that we attain and sustain that peace.

We appreciate the support the United States has extended over the years to promote development and peace in Mindanao. Today, some two-thirds of all USAID assistance is focused on Mindanao. The US also provided post-conflict assistance for the implementation of the final GRP-MNLF peace accord.

We are now engaged in the historic effort to conclude a final peace with the MILF as well. The GRP-MILF peace process, despite ups and downs, has been moving forward. There is a general feeling that we can reclaim the peace, stability and prosperity that will bring a better life to all people of all faiths in the Southern Philippines.

We naturally must proceed with due deliberation. After long years of conflict, we must journey towards the future with sureness and steadiness, taking our partners with us every step of the way. I have no doubt that our partnership with the United States, and with the USIP in particular, will be an important ingredient in that journey.

(Turn to the next speaker as indicated)

*After*  
*Now we are embarking on a historic effort to conclude a final peace with the MILF as well. It is our policy that*

**ATTENDEES AT THE LUNCH HOSTED BY PGMA FOR THE USIP  
25 September 2003, Waldorf Astoria, New York, New York**

**USIP SIDE**

Ambassador Richard H. Solomon  
President, United States Institute of Peace

Ambassador Richard W. Murphy  
Senior Fellow  
Council on Foreign Relations

Ambassador Nicholas Platt  
President, Asia Society

Ambassador Frank G. Wisner  
Vice President, External Affairs  
American International Group

Dr. Harriet Hentges  
Executive Vice President, USIP

Mr. Eugene Martin  
Executive Director  
Philippine Facilitation Project  
USIP

Dr. Astrid Tuminez  
Senior Research Associate  
Philippine Facilitation Project  
USIP

**PHILIPPINE SIDE (To be finalized)**

PGMA  
SFA  
Sec. Edruardo Ermita  
Sec. Marita Jimenez  
Sec. Romulo Neri  
Sen. Manuel Villar

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel  
Cong. Rodolfo Bacani  
Cong. Abraham Kahlil Mitra  
Cong. Antonio Nachura  
Cong. Prospero Nograles  
Cong. Cynthia Villar  
Amb. Albert del Rosario  
Amb. Roberto Romulo  
Amb. Tomas I Alcantara  
Amb. Lauro L. Baja  
Mr. Evan Garcia