

**ACCEPTANCE REMARKS OF AMB ALBERT DEL ROSARIO
AT THE LAUNCHING OF ROTARY CLUB MAKATI WEST'S
FIRST "ALBERT F. DEL ROSARIO AWARD"
TOWER CLUB
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I am deeply grateful for this honor given me today and I truly cannot thank you enough, especially the members of the Makati West Rotary Club and of course our other friends for their kind presence. Again, please accept my heartfelt appreciation.

In terms of my remarks this lunch, I want to be recycle-free, interesting, edifying and a bit amusing – if that is at all possible. So I thought of sharing vignettes or distinct personal memories of my decade of public service which include one or two misadventures. The late Ambassador Steve Bosworth had said many times that I should write my memoirs but that would be both beyond my reach and my appetite.

Weeks from 9/11 after I was given a singular 20-minute briefing by the DFA, I was put on an airplane as the Philippine Ambassador to the United States with files galore to study on the flight to DC. Three days after arrival in an unfamiliar city to undertake an even more unfamiliar job, I received a call from Wolf Blitzer of CNN if I could rush to the studio for an interview.

After brief amenities, he asked if I had ever been interviewed on TV. After I said no, he added that it would be like having a relaxing conversation in one's living room.

The cameras came on and he asked the first question which I was only beginning to answer when he was already on his third question. After the interview, he asked why I looked unhappy. I said that I did not do well in the interview. Mr. Blitzer disagreed, saying that I did very well to the extent I was responding even to questions Ambassadors are not suppose to answer. Oh no, I said to myself – I need to think faster and more clearly.

As another network was requesting for an interview the next morning, I sought immediate assistance from a media consultant on how to be interviewed. I can impart in one minute his threefold comprehensive advice: 1) Do not be interviewed unless you have a message to deliver. No matter what the question, deliver your message. 2) Make sure your response is short and to the point. Do not say anything beyond what is needed unless you want to establish the next question for the interviewer. 3) Do not allow the interviewer to take you into territory with which you are unfamiliar. Just say you do not want to go there. If you want to be clever, you can say – that's a very good question. A better question is..... to which the answer is.....

To move on, I wonder how many of you remember the late Sec. Angie Reyes who was a friend I had worked closely with in matters related to the Pentagon.

Contrary to past practices of submitting a long shopping list to the US department of Defense without an accompanying rationale, Sec. Reyes shared with me a new strategy just before we went to see Secretary Don Rumsfeld. Watch me, he said because I will not ask for anything. My reaction was wow! And so, we went to see the US Secretary of Defense and Angie clearly put him on edge by not asking for anything. On the way back to the office, Angie asked me if I enjoyed the show he had put on and what I thought was the reaction of Secretary Rumsfeld.

Angie could not stop laughing when I said that Don Rumsfeld was now probably gazing at nothingness in the direction of the Potomac, worried sick, thinking- Angie did not ask for anything. Now what the hell did he really want.

The very next day, again, we were at the Pentagon to see Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. Angie's instruction to me - this time you do all the talking, Albert. One of Wolfowitz's first question was "are you making head-way with the Abu Sayyaf". My response: I think we are at a gross disadvantage because we lack essential equipment. As we speak there is only one operational helicopter in Mindanao. As we do not have intelligence equipment, we must rely on human intelligence. Before intelligence is received at base camp and AFP troops are deployed to where the Abu Sayyaf has been spotted, chances are the Abu Sayyaf are no longer where they were last seen. What's more, if there is an actual engagement and injuries are

sustained by AFP troops, the death rate would be higher because there is no means to quickly transport the casualties to a base hospital. How many helicopters do you need? asked the Deputy Secretary. We need at least 30 helicopters urgently, I replied. Without hesitation, Wolfowitz said “you got it”. On the way back to the office, Angie decided he would treat for dinner and asked what I would like to have. “We should drink our dinner”, I said. “You got it”, Angie responded. I truly miss working with Angie.

While still in Washington, one great area of interest to the Philippines was how to attract foreign investments to the Philippines. The master key to this opportunity was the CALPERS government pension fund in California which was then the 7th largest economy in the world. CALPERS was not only an investor but on the basis of its research studies, it took on the task of deciding for others which countries were attractive investment locations and which countries were not. In 2003, notwithstanding the efforts of various major departments in government, the Philippines was notified that it would be delisted as an attractive investment location for foreign investors.

Unknown to Manila, we studied the situation and decided on our own to challenge the CALPERS decision even as we were advised that historically no one had ever done this.

We headed for San Francisco and enlisted the support of several busloads of Filipino Americans to accompany us to Sacramento in our intention to attend the public board meeting of CALPERS.

By the time we walked into the auditorium where the board meeting was taking place, the Filipino Americans had fully occupied the hall. On the way in, a stranger asked me if we were going to have a party.

Coincidentally, the board was already about to act on the resolution to delist the Philippines. I found myself jumping up and down the aisle, hoping to be recognized by the chair when at last former Mayor Brown pointed out that I was eager to speak. I really did not know what I was going to say but I went ahead. Finally, I said thank you for recognizing me.

Please allow me to say that I am truly awed by the power of this board composed of a few individuals who can unilaterally cause the economic demise of a nation composed of 90 million people without sound basis, especially since it is our belief that my country successfully made the grade to remain on the CALPERS list of attractive investment locations. I humbly protested this hasty decision since, given the opportunity, we could prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that we did not deserve to be delisted. I then rattled off several factors which we thought were not properly evaluated. The chair responded why we had not sat down to discuss our position with the CALPERS consultants. Mr. Chairman, I said, seeing the Queen of

England is far easier than seeing your consultant. This apparently was the right button to push as the meeting was thrown into turmoil with strong reactions coming from the Filipino Americans present. The Chair had to aggressively assert control over the meeting.

At this juncture, the Chair immediately consulted with the board and announced that the Philippines was being given one month to prove that it did not deserve to be delisted.

We succeeded in getting one foot in the door and were upbeat until we returned to Washington when I received a call from the palace informing me that – since I was proving to be an embarrassment to the Philippines – an appointed team from Manila would be coming over to correct the situation which I had created. I responded succinctly by saying that the palace can send whomever they want but to please tell them to stay out of my way because we are working very hard to get this done. After I hung up, I suddenly could not believe I had said that. Oh no, I again said to myself – this calls for a thousand Hail Marys.

The next several weeks were spent between Washington and California revisiting the many factors that had been analyzed and graded by CALPERS. After countless consultations with the various departments in Manila and confirmation of our qualitative and quantitative analysis towards achieving a passing grade, I chased the 15 board members throughout the United States for one on one meetings.

One month after our initial encounter with the board, we found ourselves walking into the CALPERS auditorium in Sacramento with double the number of busloads of Filipino Americans and with my voluminous inventory of files as I was prepared to debate the board the whole day if necessary. We were so many, I joked, that we might be water hosed. And I sat there feeling a bit forlorn at the same time hopeful and prayerful, waiting for the meeting to start. Then, the Corporate Secretary walked up to me to say you won't be needing those files Mr. Ambassador, and the Philippines will be maintained as an attractive location for investments. The Filipino Americans were jubilant and Manila was even more jubilant and celebratory.

Later, after having served as Ambassador for five years, I was recalled in 2006 for not supporting a plan to lift the writ of habeas corpus and the imposition of the emergency rule.

Having happily returned to the private sector from 2006 to 2011, I received a phone call requesting if I could meet President Aquino in Times Street. I truly had no idea what we would discuss as I did not have the privilege of previously having met the president.

Looking back, serving as SFA was without doubt the most difficult undertaking I had ever experienced. At all times I had to remind myself of the big picture which was twofold: 1) to do what is right for all Filipinos and

2) to courageously assert the rightful place of the Philippines in the community of nations.

As SFA, there were many challenges, the most important of which was the challenge related to the South China Sea / West Philippine Sea issue.

The core issue was China's position of indisputable sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea as represented by China's “nine-dash line” which was an excessive claim and was in gross violation of international law including UNCLOS. It means that we would have lost to China our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and our Extended Continental Shelf (ECS).

Our rights to fish, our rights to our natural resources (oil & gas) and our rights to enforce our laws within the West Philippine Sea as granted to us by UNCLOS would have been taken from us by China.

What is often lost to others is the significance of China's “nine-dash line” as an external threat to the Philippines. The totality of our EEZ and our ECS which we would have lost to China under its “nine-dash line” claim would have been larger than the whole land area of the Philippines. The “nine-dash line” of China, had we not contested it, constituted the most major external threat to the Philippines since World War II.

It was as well not believable that one state – no matter how powerful – could claim a whole sea as its own.

At another time, please allow me to recall one of our first meetings with Ambassador Joey Cuisia in the state department with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. At that meeting, Secretary Clinton asked how we were addressing the challenge posed by our northern neighbors on the South China Sea.

I asked if I could respond with an analogy: I felt like a scrawny Filipino kid being confronted by the schoolyard bully each time I entered the area when he would grab me only to beat me up behind the school building. I was constantly being beaten up and warned that I should not be seen in the yard without his permission and I should not tell anyone that he is perpetually beating me up. After so many beatings, I said to myself this guy must have a vulnerability.

This was obviously his desire not to be depicted as a bully who is constantly beating me and the likes of others like me. And so, from then on, we made a decision to stand up at every opportunity for what is right and we worked to internationalize our northern neighbor's use of muscle in order to achieve his unlawful expansion agenda.

With every multilateral and bilateral meeting, we depicted the Philippines as standing for what is right, promoting the rule of law to defend what is ours and opposing the use of force and of might. Clearly, this stand that we adopted and firmly adhered to was also

instrumental in gaining for the Philippines the respect of the responsible community of nations.

As part of our foreign policy to build a safe and strong neighborhood, the Philippines has to consider ASEAN as the bedrock of our policy for the 21st century.

By this, we should have been able to rely on ASEAN in resolving, for example, our territorial disputes with other countries. Unfortunately, as in the case of the most important dispute in the region involving the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea, the consensus rule in ASEAN has served as a major obstacle. Without a full vote of ten members, we could not move. This has been characterized by varying threats to economic cooperation from our northern neighbor which has been coupled with the use of unlawful force and intimidation. In short, official declarations of ASEAN dictated by our northern neighbor could not be made factual and were not reflective of what was happening on the ground.

The Philippines has been the first in taking a stand on stating what is factual, doing what is right and calling for adherence to the rule of law in defense of what is ours. We felt all alone in doing this then, but we continued and we persevered.

I recall our efforts to get others to speak, resorting to calling attention on the perils of remaining silent. During one important foreign minister's meeting, in an impassioned tone, I decided to quote before the ASEAN body the famous words of a pastor during the period of

Nazi tyranny in Germany: “First, I said, the Nazis came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me”. At the end of the day, we had more countries with us but we were still not able to obtain full consensus.

As it developed, the more outspoken we became, the more our northern neighbor became more proactive in silencing the Philippines. In a subsequent ASEAN multilateral, the host country was convinced to revise the agenda so that I was allowed to speak to an audience that did not exist. I was scheduled to speak for lunch when this was normally reserved for bilaterals so I would be virtually talking to myself.

And so, I looked at the program and noted that Secretary Clinton would speak first in a plenary session. I talked with Secretary Clinton if she could please speak about the South China Sea to end her talk so that I would then, without being officially recognized immediately follow her. She very sympathetically agreed. Thus after she spoke, I began to deliver my message on the South China Sea. Within a minute, to everyone’s surprise my microphone was suddenly shut off. I said to myself, I can either protest, be silent, or stand and continue to speak. I stood and continued to speak. Ultimately, they had to turn the microphone back on.

I do not know if this will ever reach her but thank you, Hillary, for your invaluable friendship and support which we could rely upon at all times.

As time progressed over the years, we were able to convince other countries within and outside of ASEAN to speak even as we continued to have problems with the South China Sea being factually inserted in the final document.

On yet another most important development which is our overwhelming and unanimous victory at The Hague, I would just wish to quickly give you the positive salient points for the Philippines as awarded by the arbitral tribunal: 1) China's "nine-dash line" has been declared as being contrary to international law; 2) Our fisherman has a traditional right to fish at Scarborough Shoal and China must recognize that right; 3) China is internationally responsible for environmental harm at the South China Sea caused by its destructive activity including artificial island-building and illegal and destructive fishing; 4) China's actions at Mischief Reef violate a host of China's international legal obligation; 5) The Reed Bank is exclusively ours as it is well within our EEZ and ECS and there is no overlap with Itu Aba which projects only 12 nautical miles.

For the record, there were 15 Philippine submissions and the Philippines was awarded 14 of them. The question often asked is how should the Philippines receive the Tribunal Award. The Award clearly defined

our entitlements in the West Philippine Sea based on UNCLOS.

We are bound by our Constitution to defend what is ours and what we are entitled to under international law including UNCLOS. For instance, if the President does not defend the award, he can be impeached.

Former President Aquino was the architect of the last administration's foreign policy and my job was to execute. How did it work? For example, the President as a matter of policy stated that what is ours is ours and we must defend it. That was our cue and that is what we have done to the best of our ability. At all times, we did what we believed was right. To allay our doubts, we often resorted to having surveys conducted to assess the acceptability of our actions. For example, on filing the arbitration, 9 out of 10 agreed with us.

Another example is the survey done in December 2015 on the Aquino Administration's performance.

Out of 14 issues which are most important to Filipino people, four have merited the highest grade of being rated as "Good" such as helping the poor, foreign relations, promoting the welfare of OFWS and defending the country's territorial rights. We are pleased with these survey results as 3 out of 4 issues are directly under the purview of the DFA which include foreign relations, promoting the welfare of OFWS, and defending the country's territorial rights. On the the first issue, which is "helping the poor", DFA's efforts

have directly and indirectly contributed by increasing to record –levels the Official Development Assistance or ODAs to the Philippines.

Finally, in last Saturday's announcement of the second quarter 2016 survey, outlining that President Aquino has led the best rated administration yet, on foreign relations the average grade under PNOY was a Good +43, well above the moderate averages under Arroyo +21, Estrada +22, and Ramos +23.

We have also noted that the above grade for Pnoy did not yet factor the July unanimous outcome of the arbitration.

We have been unequivocally blessed. Please allow me to recall that I had attended the only Jesuit military high school in the world where I found myself always being assigned to the dumbest section, simply because I could not get good grades. In Junior year, we started with 39 students in the section and through attrition ended up with 17 who survived the year. At one point, I was elected to the hall of fame and was asked to speak before a large group of alumni. I did not know what to say because I hated schooling there as I had difficulty in keeping up with the academic standards. So I talked about survival and how to do that by being devoted to the Virgin Mary which the Jesuits are known for. And that devotion has always been my source of courage and strength.

Finally, Isaac Newton, once said that if he has been able to see far ahead, it is because he has stood on the shoulder of giants. In my case, the giants have been Gretchen and my family as well as loyal friends such as yourselves.

We endeavored to do the best for all of us and we thank you for your most kind support at all times. END