

**“STRATEGIC THINKING IN A DYNAMIC AGE”
ADRI Pilipinas Conference
The Conservatory, The Peninsula Manila Hotel
8 December 2016**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Acknowledgments.

Good morning, everyone.

I would like to thank you all for joining us in this Pilipinas Conference. This event is a first for our Institute and, with the distinguished presence of everyone here today, we hope to be successfully constructive.

I am moreover delighted that we have the opportunity to host this conference especially in a year like this one. To put it kindly and succinctly, 2016 has been more than interesting.

Anyone paying attention to the news can easily believe that the Philippines, the rest of Asia, North America, and Europe are headed into rough waters. Dindo has described how currents of change in many countries promise to up-end political systems and behaviors that many of us have taken for granted.

In some corners, ‘unpredictability’ and ‘volatility’ have become catchphrases for the fourth quarter of 2016. All in all, the tumultuous events of the past year, both positive and negative, make it important and urgent for us as a society to think deeply about what lies ahead.

For today’s brief remarks, I would like to focus less on the specifics of the future, which will, in any case, be the subjects of our four panel discussions today.

Instead, I would like to focus on the role of think tanks, like ours, in bridging policymakers, experts, stakeholders, and the public at large and in serving as a bright example of Philippine democratic discussion.

In his book, *The Fifth Estate*, author James McGann discussed how think tanks can contribute to the policymaking process in democratic systems. He defines think tanks as “organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues that enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy.”

This is as good a description of how we see ourselves, but in our context, I would add that we also seek to provide a platform for experts to share their views and interact with stakeholders at events such as today’s conference.

As much as we hope to help inform and advise on national and international decisions, think tanks like ours are also influenced by global phenomena.

As the world globalizes, people have increased their demand for information on public policy responses to pressing issues. It is as part of this global demand that think tanks emerged to help fill the gap.

Here in the Philippines, there is a strong, democratic appetite for information and analysis. This appetite is part of a national tradition to demand more from our government.

Our democratic principles give privilege to the free flows of information and sustained discussion, which serve as the foundation through which citizens can contribute to policy and hold public servants accountable.

The current administration has recently shown a recognition of these freedoms by the the decision of the President to permit and tolerate protestors against the Marcos' burial in Libingan ng mga Bayani. That said, more evidence of the democratic process will show to our people and the world that our core values are being respected.

In our specific case, at ADRI, we are interested in “Thinking Beyond Politics.” It is a phrase that we use to mean ‘looking beyond the headlines’, ‘moving past the politics of elected officials’, and ‘analyzing without affiliation.’

Simple as it may sound, this phrase of “Thinking Beyond Politics” shows that we have taken an optimistic perspective. It is a perspective that asks us to believe that our country can discard partisanship and to believe that our people are able to seize and create opportunities to strengthen our society and our democracy.

For us to create these opportunities, we as Filipinos need to firmly understand the domestic and international environment in which we operate. We need to appreciate that a country like ours is not only a casualty of international trends, but we can also help to shape them by firmly standing for sovereign equality, while at the same time recognizing the import of interdependency among all nations within our global village.

For this reason, for today's discussions, we have chosen a few of the many important issues that our society will face in the year and years ahead. These are the possible shift to a federal system of government; the changes in the foreign strategic environment; and the engines of our economy. On these issues, I believe ADRi can play a valuable role in promoting and enhancing our discourse.

Finally, I would like to turn back to where I started; the 'unpredictability' and 'volatility' that appears to have taken over the news. The Institute's objective is for our country to develop more responsible governance, ensure inclusive and sustained economic growth, protect the environment, and improve our international standing. We would like to contribute to these goals in "Thinking Beyond Politics" by looking beyond the headlines.

Taking this approach, there are still good signs ahead for the country. As one example, our macro-economic fundamentals are well established.

For today's discussions, I hope that we can apply the same focus on fundamentals to our understanding of our political system, foreign policy, national defense, and the business environment. I look forward to hearing everyone's views today.

Again, our humble thanks to each and everyone of you for being here and for joining us in this Pilipinas Conference.