

**THE PHIL-AMERICAN DEMOCARTIC ALLIANCE
REMARKS OF H.E. ALBERT DEL ROSARIO
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
FOR THE LUNCHEON METING
WITH THE MILITARY ORDER OF THE CARABAO
ARMY NAVY CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C., 17 MAY 2006**

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to once again join the officers and members of Military Order of the Carabao. Filipinos and Americans remain today the closest of friends, despite the less fortunate events of the past. This friendship, I believe, was made possible largely through goodwill, open-mindedness and generosity of spirit on both sides of the Pacific. The militaries of both our nations have made very positive contributions towards this end, and the members of your distinguished Order are among their number.

Indeed, Americans probably share a greater degree of cultural and political affinity with Filipinos than they do with any other people in Asia. This is the product of a shared history, and of what our countries have experienced in more recent times.

The Philippines and the United States are not simply allies that share certain strategic interests which may shift from time to time. More significantly, our countries are allied democracies. While the actual form and flavor of democratic government may differ in each country, the substance of democracy does not. We commonly subscribe to a representative and accountable government, to a free market economy, to respect for civil liberties and individual freedoms, and to the promotion of social justice.

The members of the military in both our countries have always carried the greater burden in protecting and promoting the freedom we cherish. Even in the Philippine-American War, which gave rise to your Order more than a century ago, the conflict was for freedom as each side saw it.

While the long years of Philippine-American colonial interaction enhanced our mutual understanding, it was the Second World War that forged our strongest bonds. Bataan, Corregidor, the Bataan Death March, the Philippine Guerilla Resistance, the Philippine

Liberation Campaign, and many other events brought Filipinos and Americans together, from all walks of life, as comrades-in-arms.

Last June, Miramax came out with a movie, "The Great Raid," on the Cabanatuan Prisoner-of-War Camp rescue. Cabanatuan was the most successful rescue operation in US military history, and Filipino resistance forces were crucial to this success. The movie was a reminder of the valiant resistance we waged together against the forces of fascism.

Last month, in another testimony to our unique ties, I participated in a special tribute organized by the Japanese-American Foundation to recognize the services of the Philippine Scouts. As you may recall, the Philippine Scouts fought with great distinction to defend Filipino and American freedom in the Second World War.

It was a matter of immense pride to be able to see the old surviving veterans of that famed unit remembered with such honor.

However, the injustice done to Filipino Veterans of the Second World War by the U.S. Government still remains to be addressed. Our Veterans are now old and feeble. All are ailing and many pass away every year. When he visited Washington, D.C., just a few days ago, former Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos, a West Point Graduate, called attention once again to this unresolved issue.

We will continue the campaign, together with our friends and supporters on Capitol Hill, in the executive branch of the US government and throughout the United States, to secure the recognition and benefits that our old World War II Veterans had been promised to them and rightfully deserve. In this regard, I hope that we can also count on your vital support.

Today, our countries stand together once again to defend liberty, this time, against the scourge of global terrorism and Islamic extremism. As we do so, we may recall the central importance of the Philippine-American alliance.

The Philippines is America's oldest security ally in Asia. Our Mutual Defense Treaty is over half-a-century old. This security pact, together

with the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), and the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), are the triangular framework of our security alliance.

This alliance has endured the test of time – the Philippines stood together with the US not only in the Second World War, but also during the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and now, the global war on terror.

The tragedy of 9/11 served to bolster our alliance as never before because even before this horrific attack, the Philippines was already combating terrorism. In 1995, for example, the Philippines arrested an Al Qaeda operative named Abdul Hakim Murad. In turn, this led to the capture of the notorious Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who was one of the masterminds of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Murad's arrest, interestingly enough, also pointed to the discovery of a plot to crash commercial planes into high-profile American targets, which information we shared with the US.

We, moreover, shut down a front charity organization set up by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, named Mohammad Jammal Khalifa, which funded terrorist activities.

Immediately after 9/11, President Arroyo was the first Asian leader to support the US-led "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan. The Philippines subsequently enlisted in the "Coalition of the Willing" for "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

We believed that taking down Saddam Hussein and addressing Iraq's potential threats would reduce the danger of terror and improve our security. With the fall of Saddam, we sent a 97-man humanitarian contingent to Iraq.

The Philippines has been confronting terrorism with resolve. In 2001, with US support, assistance and training, we decimated in southern Philippines the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). It has been degraded from its peak strength of 1,200 to a ragtag band of around 300.

We are also aggressively pursuing the elements of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a satellite of Al Qaeda in Southeast Asia. With our capture of JI operative Fathur Rohman al Ghozi, for instance, we preempted a plan to bomb the US Embassy and other Western interests in Singapore.

We moved on to arrest Ahmad Santos, the leader of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), an extremist Filipino group that is assisting the JI in its terrorist operations. We also convicted an Indonesian terrorist Rohmat Abdurromin, a top JI associate sent to the Philippines to train bombers. This marked the first time that our government was able to convict a member of the Indonesian-based JI terror network.

The US Government placed a US\$11 million reward for the arrest of two JI terrorists, Dulmatin and Omar Patek, who are key suspects in the 2002 Bali bombings and believed to have fled to the Philippines. We are vigorously pursuing them so that they could be brought to justice.

As we uncover JI cells and their operatives, we endeavor to immediately neutralize them.

We have already neutralized two out of five terrorists identified in the US State Department's "Reward for Justice" program. We have neutralized at least 138 terrorists, improved anti-money laundering activities, and disrupted terrorist funding flows.

Most recently, with U.S. cooperation, we are conducting an all-out offensive against terrorists in Jolo which has already cost us a number of casualties. By striking at the terrorists in our frontlines, the Philippines is doing its share in securing the American heartland.

President Bush himself acknowledged the Philippine contribution in the war on terror in his speech last March at the National Defense University. He stated that Americans are more secure because the Philippines' new Anti-Terrorism Task Force has helped capture terrorist suspects, including members of Al Qaeda and affiliated networks.

Likewise, the U.S. State Department cited the Philippines as being among those countries whose fight against terrorism has matured beyond arrests towards prosecution. The Philippines is considered by the U.S. as one of its most reliable allies in Asia in the war on terror.

To ensure interoperability between our armed forces, the Philippines and the U.S. are working on the Philippine Defense Reform Program (PDRP). The PDRP is a broad-based, multi-year cooperative defense reform effort designed to address systemic organizational deficiencies, correct root causes of strategic and operational shortcomings, and achieve long-term, sustainable institutional improvements

Due to the imperative of having a reformed military capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st Century, I believe that this cooperation is one of the most important initiatives we have been able to accomplish in Washington.

To enhance our readiness, several joint military exercises are conducted in the Philippines by Philippine and US forces each year. The Philippines has also been designated as a Major Non-NATO ally, another indication of our close security ties.

We have also started a joint assessment of the deficiencies and weaknesses of the Philippine National Police (PNP) who are our first responders in terrorist incidents. This initiative is expected to lead to reforms and increased capability.

On the diplomatic front, the Philippines is in the process of negotiating a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – the main Muslim secessionist group in southern Philippines. To encourage the peace process, we have obtained diplomatic and financial support from the U.S. Government, mainly through USAID and the U.S. Institute of Peace. Funding assistance will provide for livelihood, basic services, human development and the reintegration of the ex-combatants into the mainstream.

Two-thirds of development assistance which the Philippines receives from the US is being channeled to development programs in southern Philippines and for Filipino Muslim communities.

Most recently, the hospital ship, US Navy hospital ship Mercy, has left San Diego for a tour of the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia. In this connection, we should recall how effective the U.S. military's humanitarian mission was in our operations against the terrorists in Basilan in 2002. The provision of humanitarian assistance by the U.S. military was very important in attracting the local population. The visit of the USNS Mercy, in this light, will further reinforce the message that we seek to improve the lives of the people and to protect them from the terrorists.

In closing, let me add that this year, 2006, is the Centennial Anniversary of Filipino Migration to the United States. In 1906, the first contracted farm laborers from the Philippines were brought to Hawaii. Despite the racial discrimination and the economic exploitation of those days, those early pioneers set down roots and were followed by other Filipinos.

What began as a stream became a great river, as immigration quotas expanded in the 1960's, and the Filipino-American population grew. There are some two-and-a-half million Filipinos and Filipino-Americans in this country, while 120,000 American citizens are in the Philippines.

Filipinos form the second largest Asian-American group after the Chinese. They fought the civil rights battles for inclusion and opportunity alongside their fellow-Americans. Today, as a result, they are productive American citizens, proud to be here and to serve. Many are in the American military, which they joined even before winning citizenship. A significant number of them have made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and the toll is increasing with each day of combat duty.

Filipinos and Americans, therefore, share a great many things. And as I have also indicated, while we have a great deal to remember and to celebrate, we have the challenging task ahead of us to secure and to defend the ramparts of freedom in this century. I have no doubt the present generation will ensure that liberty's torch, passed on by previous generations, will continue to shine brightly.

Thank you very much. **END**