

**THE PHILIPPINE-AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP:
PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS
Remarks of H.E. Albert del Rosario
Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines
At the Guarini Center for Governmental Affairs
St. Peter's College, Jersey City, New Jersey
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At the outset, allow me to thank you for inviting me to this dialogue. It is always a pleasure to meet with students and learned faculty around the United States who have an interest in my country. The national hero of the Philippines, Dr. Jose Rizal, once described the youth as the hope of the motherland. What applies to the Philippines applies to all countries, as well as to this world we live in. I, therefore, hope that you will come away from our dialogue with some new insights not only on the Philippines, but also on how we might all work better together for peace, security and progress among our nations.

In this regard, I believe I am fortunate to be the Philippine Ambassador in Washington, D.C., at this momentous time. Philippine relations with the United States are now at the closest they have been for a decade, ever since the US bases closed in the Philippines in 1992.

Let me recall that Filipino-American relations have been intertwined for more than a century. In 1898, Filipino Revolutionaries fought alongside the United States against Spain. Our patriots declared Philippine independence from Spain on June 12 of that year and shortly thereafter, inaugurated the First Philippine Republic. In the Philippines, we take pride in the fact that our forbears fought to create Asia's first experiment in constitutional republican government.

The United States, however, was in an expansive mood. America's Manifest Destiny and Filipino nationalism clashed when the United States moved to annex the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Despite valiant resistance on the part of Filipino patriots, American arms prevailed and the Philippines became an American colony.

Fortunately, the colonial relationship was not mired in the bitterness of a lost war. The American colonial administration was the most enlightened of its era. It deliberately prepared Filipinos for greater self-government, in stark contrast with the behavior of the other Western, Russian and Japanese imperial powers in what we now call the Third World.

Filipino nationalists pursued their quest for independence under these positive political conditions. In 1935, the Philippines became a self-governing Commonwealth.

Confident in America's commitment to grant independence, Filipinos fought bravely against fascism and militarism in World War II. In the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor, through the nightmare years of enemy occupation, and during the Philippine Liberation Campaign, Filipino soldiers, guerillas and civilians fought for freedom and the Allied cause.

After victory in the Pacific, the Philippines sought to enhance its national security in solidarity with the democracies. We were, therefore, with the United States in the Korean War, in the Vietnam War, during the Cold War and in various post-Cold War United Nations and multinational peacekeeping efforts.

We had some misunderstanding during the long years of authoritarian rule under Ferdinand Marcos. Washington's support for Marcos and his dictatorial regime was deeply resented, and many Filipinos came to view America's interest in the Philippines as being less about democracy than about the US military bases in the country.

When the Cold War changed the global picture, negative views on the bases came to the fore. The Philippine Senate failed to ratify an extension of our bilateral bases agreement and, in 1992, the bases closed after almost a century-long presence in the country.

Nonetheless, the Philippines and the United States remained friends and allies. We still have a bilateral Philippines-United States Mutual Defense Treaty. The United States is still the only treaty ally of the Philippines.

This is so because, unlike with so many other so-called alliances, our partnership with the United States is not based solely on either political expedience or strategic necessity. We share many values that give special significance to our relationship that is not perhaps present elsewhere in Asia. Among these values is a firm commitment to democracy, the rule of law, free enterprise, individual initiative and the requirements of an open, tolerant and forward-looking society.

The Philippines and the United States have been more than just allies. We are democratic allies, having stood together for freedom and liberty from World War II down to the present time in our common struggle against global terrorism. It is because we are defending freedom and democracy in our own countries and around the world that the Philippines is part of the coalition against global terror and in Iraq.

This is a proud tradition of partnership, which President Arroyo has made even stronger through vision and leadership. Nowhere is this better illustrated than with the unprecedented exchange of State Visits last year. President Arroyo came to Washington, D.C., in May, and President Bush went to Manila in October, the first American President in three decades to pay a State Visit to our country.

As a result, Philippine-American relations are today at their closest point in many years. US assistance to the Philippines has been significantly increased. President Bush recognized our role when he designated the Philippines as a Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States.

We are implementing a Joint Defense Assessment, approved by the two Presidents, which provides a blueprint for bilateral cooperation to support Philippine defense reform and modernization.

President Bush pledged diplomatic and financial support for the peace process in Mindanao.

USAID also has major programs for peace-building and development promotion in Mindanao, which benefit former rebels who want to return to the fold of the law and areas that have suffered from conflict.

The Philippines and the United States also have solid economic ties. The US is our largest export market, our largest foreign investor in cumulative terms and one of our top sources of foreign tourist arrivals. Our annual bilateral trade exceeds \$18 billion, while American cumulative direct foreign investment stands at \$3.5 billion.

We have a material foundation upon which to build for the future. The United States is today the single biggest foreign export market for the Philippines. American direct foreign investment is the largest in the country in cumulative terms. Americans constitute a major part of our annual tourist traffic.

Business and commerce have a direct impact for people and companies in both our countries. American brands have been household names in the Philippines for decades. As the Filipino consumer market grows in wealth and sophistication, so too will demand for American goods.

American technology, investment and consumers have been important over the years as the Philippine economy diversified into new product lines. The strategic location of the Philippines, right in the heart of Asia, has also been valued by American companies seeking a center from which to reach the rest of the region.

On this side of the Pacific, American companies and even local governments have turned to the Philippines as a source of skilled workers. Computer professionals, doctors, nurses, other health care specialists and teachers from the Philippines have been recruited to work over here.

In addition, President Arroyo has won trade concessions to expand market access for Philippine products in the United States and has increased US food aid for the country.

Under her Administration, we have also launched a project with the United States to lower the transaction costs on remittances. According to an Asian Development Bank study, this project could lead to as much as \$500 million to \$1 billion in annual savings, which would add to the remittance inflow.

Allow me to reiterate that we, in the Philippines, are very proud of compatriots here in the United States. We share in the sense of achievement whenever a Filipino-American excels, and there have been many success stories.

However, what makes us happiest is that Filipino-Americans have not forgotten the mother country. Indeed, over the years, Filipino-Americans have played a yeoman's role in defending Philippine democracy and in helping Philippine national development.

Filipinos in America supported our two momentous Peoples Power Revolutions. Peoples Power One restored Philippine democracy in 1986. Peoples Power Two rescued our democracy from the forces of corruption in 2001.

Filipino-Americans remain the largest source of foreign remittances that boost the Philippine economy. The Filipino-American Community has also been generous in sending home medical and other humanitarian missions and donations.

To honor and respect the rights of our compatriots abroad, we passed historic legislation last year that allow, for the first time, voting by Filipinos overseas and dual citizenship. This year, we are holding our first-ever overseas elections. The door is now open for Filipino-Americans to make their voice heard at home.

Promoting bilateral Philippine-American cooperation serves not just government, but also Filipino and Filipino-American families on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. The democratic Philippine-American alliance, therefore, should be a major concern for the Filipino-American Community now and in the years ahead.

In addition, there are critical non-economic dimensions that shape the future progress of the Philippines. Most critical among these is peace.

President Arroyo has been firm in pursuing a peace process in the Southern Philippines. She has a vision of peace, which can be attained through a comprehensive strategy of enhancing both security and development.

We are fortunate, in this, to have the support of friends, especially Malaysia and the United States. Long-standing USAID programs have helped reinforce peace and stimulate local development in Mindanao. We will continue this important partnership with the United States.

The President has also adopted stern measures against terrorism at home and abroad. In the Philippines, the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group has been severely degraded. Regional cooperation has deepened, ever since the Philippines spearheaded a trilateral counter-terrorism agreement with Indonesia and Malaysia in 2002, which was subsequently joined by Thailand and Cambodia.

The Philippines has joined its neighbors in the region to neutralize the Jemaah Islamiya and international terrorists. In the wake of the Madrid tragedy, even as we stand in solidarity with the brave people of Spain, we remain vigilant in the protection of our country.

The Philippine Government has also resumed formal peace talks with the armed communist movement. In doing so, however, the government will continue to hold the militant communist rebels accountable for any acts of terror.

I would now welcome your questions.

Thank you very much.

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