



PHILIPPINES

Address by

H.E. Dr. ALBERTO G. ROMULO

Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of
the Philippines

at
the Sixty-First Session
of the
United Nations General Assembly

New York
22 September 2006

(Please check against delivery)

(short, reading copy)

COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

H.E. DR. ALBERTO G. ROMULO

Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines
General Debate of the 61st Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations
New York, 25 September 2006

Madam President,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you the felicitations of my government, our people and my own for your well-deserved election to the presidency of our august assembly.

My delegation stands ready to extend to you its fullest cooperation not only as a member of your bureau but as a close friend of Bahrain as well.

Your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, has left an indelible mark in the UN. Under his leadership, we were able to carry out a substantial part of the package of reforms mandated by the largest gathering of leaders of the world, as contained in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

Renewed Hope

Last year, our Leaders met to commemorate 60 years of the United Nations. Their meeting gave all of us renewed hopes for peace, growth, progress and the preeminence of the rights of all peoples.

Those hopes remain.

Even in the face of the continuing threats to the peace and security of mankind from terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Even in the face of grinding poverty and financial uncertainty.

Even in the face of intolerance and misunderstanding.

And certainly even in the face of our fast-changing world.

Those hopes remain because the spirit of cooperation and community, which lies at the very heart of our Charter, though often battered, continues to live on.

Cooperation remains the key to reaching the goals set by our Charter. Cooperation, according to a 20th century philosopher, is the only thing that will redeem mankind.

The Quest for Peace

It is in that spirit that the Philippines welcomes and supports the continued work and the call made this week by the Middle East Quartet, for greater progress towards a just and comprehensive peace.

(short, reading copy)

We strongly support the Road Map for Peace and maintain our hopes for the realization of two democratic states – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security.

Together with ASEAN, we were gravely concerned over the deteriorating situation and the escalation of violence in the Middle East, particularly the disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Lebanon.

The United Nations peacekeeping operations now underway in Lebanon renews our hope for peace and offers a big opportunity for the UN to demonstrate its relevance and impact on the world stage.

Our own quest for peace in the Philippines is boldly moving forward, thanks to the support and cooperation of key members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other members of the international community.

The Fight Against Terror

Our own experience as a country is convincing proof of the efficacy of collective action in fighting terrorism. Working closely with our neighbors and others, we are ridding our country of terrorists.

The recent adoption of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy will help strike another blow against terrorists. I commend the Ambassadors of Spain and Singapore for having successfully steered the negotiations on this strategy.

One of the anchors of this strategy is an initiative that is a primary concern for my country – the promotion of interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Fostering Dialogue, Breaking Down Intolerance

In pursuit of this initiative, the Philippines organized and chaired two key meetings yesterday here at the UN: the First Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and the Tripartite High-Level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace.

As founder and current Chair of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, a new movement of governments, UN agencies and religious NGOs accredited with the UN, the Philippines will initiate the holding of another high-level tripartite conference, this time to focus on small and light weapons.

In addition, the Philippines announced last week at the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, that we will organize and convene a Special Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace in Davao City in southern Philippines.

Meanwhile, I commend Spain and Turkey for their new initiative on the Alliance of Civilizations. I believe this that will complement and reinforce, in a mutually inclusive fashion, the Philippine initiative on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace.

(short, reading copy)

The Burden of Debt

We have barely nine years left to achieve the millennium development goals set by our leaders of cutting poverty in half by 2015. This target might remain a mere vision if no effective mechanism for resource mobilization is in sight. It is in this context that the Philippine initiative for a Debt-for-Equity-in MDG Projects was launched last year and I thank the Group of 77 and China for their support.

This initiative does not call for debt cancellation, moratorium or reduction. It merely calls for the use of part of payments from the debt stock of low and medium income developing countries not eligible under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) of the Group of Eight, as equities of creditors in such MDG projects as in infrastructure, education, livelihood and health.

Energy Security

Multilateral cooperation in the field of energy security has gained and will continue to gain importance.

Other sources of energy have to be developed. My delegation recommends that the Secretary-General commission a group of eminent persons to look into this matter, whose output should be the subject of a high-level dialogue before our current session ends.

Disaster Relief

One of the historic achievements of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly was the decision to establish the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for the rapid deployment of relief and assistance to countries stricken by natural disasters.

The Philippines is ranked third globally in terms of the number of people exposed to earthquakes and tropical cyclones annually. For this reason, the Philippines calls on all nations to support the CERF. We also call for enhanced cooperation to effectively respond to natural disasters.

Migration and Development

Migration and development was the subject of last week's UN High Level Dialogue. This is an issue that is close to our heart.

The Philippines has about one tenth of its people overseas. We are the largest supplier of seafarers. Our land-based workers can be found in practically all parts of the world. It is with this in mind that the Philippines joined the call for the creation of an informal Global Forum on Migration and Development, as an outcome of the High Level Dialogue, provisionally outside the mantle of the UN, to enable the international community to continue the dialogue on important issues relating to migration.

My delegation invites Member States to accede to the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families to demonstrate and reaffirm the universality of human rights.

(short, reading copy)

The Promotion of Human Rights

For my country and its people, human rights and the sanctity of the life of the individual is a paramount value. For my government, the protection of human life is a sacred commitment.

Last week, the Philippines renewed this commitment with the signing of the Second Optional Protocol to the Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

Enshrined in our Constitution is powerful language against the death penalty. Three months ago, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo gave this Constitutional mandate further expression when she signed into law Republic Act 9346, which removed the death penalty from our statute books.

Such is the value that we give to life that in our Constitution, we are bound to protect the life of the unborn child.

With the signing of the Second Optional Protocol, the Philippine Government reemphasizes its unrelenting commitment to strengthen the protection of human rights.

A Lasting Legacy

Madam President, may I also take this opportunity to express the profound appreciation of the Philippines and that of ASEAN to outgoing Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his dedicated and tireless service to the United Nations. He leaves behind a more invigorated and dynamic UN organization, a legacy of reform with new and needed institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, and an eloquent re-commitment of the UN and its membership towards alleviating the plight of the less fortunate through the articulation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Philippines is particularly appreciative of Mr. Annan's support and cooperation during our recent term as UN Security Council member (2004-5) and for his steadfast support for the Philippines' Interfaith Dialogue initiative.

A Gift of Cooperation

Madam President, two world wars ago, a future US president and advocate of global organization, defined power in terms that finds relevance even today, when he said:

"Power consists in one's capacity to link his will with the purpose of others, to lead by reason and a gift of cooperation"

The drafters of our Charter and the challenges of the present provide us with the reason. We must now find within ourselves, as nations and as peoples, the gift of cooperation.

Thank you.