

Keynote Speech

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Thank you in the first place for advancing this number in the program. For those of you who have the program, I think you will be surprised to find out that I precede the opening remarks. In fact I would like to apologize to the Rector of the University of San Agustin for advancing my time frame. Actually, I have another engagement in Bacolod City at 9:30 and I'll have to be at the airport at 9:15. So, with your humble indulgence, I would like to thank the Coordinating Committee for granting me this favor, although this should not, I think, be a precedent.

President Fernandez, our Regional Coordinator (Atty. Segundina Navarro), fellow students in Political Science, good morning to you all. I say fellow students because I still study political science. When I was at the University of Iloilo, I taught Political Science. It is required before you take up Law. Thus, most lawyers end up as politicians because they study too much political science.

I am at a loss what to say. When you keynote a symposium, seminar or conference, you set the tone of that conference. I believe that the most appropriate subject to keynote a conference of this nature is to say something in line with the new development in the political structure of the Philippines today. Perhaps, I can give you an overview of this present stage of our political life, from my experience as an administrator, facilitator and at the same time a partner in the process of socioeconomic and political development. When the President declared martial law, he did it only for a primary purpose: to put things in order and create a New Society. There were troubles from the left and from the right, so the President decided that there should be a revolution, but it should start from the center. The revolution really started from the center; within the government itself. Because the people demanded change, especially the youth, it would be fatal and tragic if the change becomes violent

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and at the same time divisive. So, the President on his own initiative, and based on all information available, decided to declare the revolution himself.

The first move was to reorganize the government. The President did not abolish Congress. It was the New Constitution that abolished Congress, because we shifted from the Presidential to the Parliamentary system of government. For the first time, the Philippines was divided into twelve administrative regions and later Region 4 was split into Regions 4 and 4-A—the former comprising Metro Manila and the latter, the rest of the provinces of Southern Tagalog and the island provinces of Marinduque, Mindoro, Palawan and Romblon. Actually, we have thirteen administrative regions. The idea is to make these regional areas autonomous. Regional directors have been appointed in various regional agencies, granting them autonomous powers. About 85 per cent of the Regional Directors now throughout the country have the power to appoint their own employees, which in the past were appointed by the Department Secretary. Even the Civil Service Commission has been regionalized, that prompt and adequate service can be rendered. And to top all these, we have, under the reorganizational plan of the government, the Regional Development Councils, that the aspirations, the dreams, desires and ideals of the regional population can be translated into regional plans and programs for development and planning.

As of the moment, therefore, we have the equivalent of the thirteen Regional Development Councils, but as of now, we have only twelve, because Metro Manila is run by a Commission, a special type of government. Here in Region 6, we are the first to organize the Regional Development Council in the country and we are fully operational. The purpose is to plan for the Region. The RDC is composed of all governors, city mayors and all Regional Directors. The President appoints the Chairman.* We meet occasionally and we develop three kinds of plans—the five-year plan, the ten-year plan and the twenty-five or the perspective plan which will reach up to the year 2000. We just don't plan for today, but for the future.

The inputs here are not only regional agencies' data but also projections from the barangays, the municipalities, the cities and the provinces comprising the region. From all these data, we derive a

regional plan, and on the basis of the plan, the national government through the Budget Commission releases funds. The national government does not release the funds because there is a project study and this is a priority of the region.

Congress before planned regardless of whether we liked it or not. You could just imagine the horse-trading and bargaining going on in Congress. So, for one bridge here, a Congressman in Ilocos got another bridge. And if there we was no river to put a bridge, they created a river first.

This is a different society. We have prepared studies of the projects that you see now. Many are on-going projects and many more are coming within the pipeline. Commissioner Laya does not just release the funds because he is your cousin or your friend. And there is a new program in regional dimension known as regional budgeting. We have been trained to support our plans with funding and we have to convince the Budget Commissioner that the plans are viable, appropriate and are top priorities. In other words, the plans of the RDC in the twelve regions of the country are not uniform. What is needed in Mindanao, may not be needed here. What is a priority in Central Luzon may not be a priority in Western Visayas. But our Filipino taxpayers are wondering about all these things, because in the past, most employees were under Republic Act 1530, and you know what I mean. They only came on the 15th and at the end of the month. With all these planning efforts and projections, can we implement these, even 50 per cent of it, if these people are still working under Republic Act 1530? The problem now is to get the right people with appropriate training and academic background and experience to man the various sensitive positions requiring technical knowhow.

Thus, we have a program to train executives for development goals. The Development Academy of the Philippines trains career executives like Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors and heads of agencies. Then we have the LADP (Local Administrators Development Program) sponsored by the UP Law Center. LADP is a training program for local executives like me, as well as for local coordinators. We have the future leaders program—a tieup between the Civil Service Commission and the National Defense College, as well as the young Buklod-Kawani Program. The length of tenure of local officials has been extended. But it is faster to replace local officials now. In an election, one can never be sure whether the person he is trying to elect is better than the one he is trying to

change. Now, he can be sure, because we are trained. We are rated in our performance. If the local official is undesirable, the President extends him a love letter accepting his resignation.

The conference this morning will deal more with the political aspects of development. But you see, we cannot divorce the socioeconomic aspects from those which are political. In fact, no government can be stable unless it is socially and economically stable; that is very basic. When a man is hungry, he can no longer listen to your lecture. While you are lecturing on discipline, he cannot hear you anymore. His ears are bugged with air coming from his stomach because he has not eaten his breakfast and lunch.

When we build this New Society, we try to strengthen the physical, spiritual and moral fiber of the citizens. I don't think we can realize all these plans while we are alive. But, as emphasized by the President himself, all these planning efforts are for the youth, because they will soon take over the rein of government. These young leaders must realize that there is no returning to the old situation — to chaos and disorder.

When we speak of freedom, we speak of democracy. I don't think there is a better definition than that. But even as we have a private right to rebel for a cause we believe in, the state, on the other hand, has the public right to defend itself and to improve conditions if so required by the situational milieu.

We look forward to the Interim Batasang Pambansa as a new vehicle, as an instrument of lawmaking, in spite of the fact that, in the amendment of the new Constitution last year, the President still exercises his powers and prerogatives as President and Prime Minister under the 1935 and 1973 Constitutions, respectively. But on March 3, 1978, President Marcos announced publicly in the papers that he would voluntarily relinquish his legislative powers to the Interim Batasang Pambansa. It was too much of a burden for him these last five years, performing his executive functions and at the same time legislating. It is amazing how he survives with strength, vigor and vision.

Under the New Constitution, the Interim Batasang Pambansa is equivalent to the regular National Assembly with only a difference. Members of the Interim Batasang Pambansa do not have a fixed term of office, while the Regular National Assembly members are elected for a six-year term. What is significant in the new setup is the fact that, aside from the regional representatives (16 for Western Visayas), there are representatives representing the sectoral

groups—the youth, and the industrial and agricultural labor sectors. These sectoral representatives would be elected by primary elections within 30 days from April 7.

In a parliamentary system of government, we know that the Executive power cannot be delineated from the legislative power, since the majority of the members of the cabinet, as provided in the 1973 Constitution, should be members of the lawmaking body. So that as we go deeper into a new government setup, a study of regional and local government agencies like the Sanggunian Bayan, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan and Sangguniang Panglungsod should be made to determine whether these are relevant and effective instruments for political decisions and lawmaking.

Based on my experience as governor, Iloilo has one of the biggest member components of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan. There are fifty members sitting with me, because we have 46 municipalities and each is entitled to a seat in the body, in addition to the four members of the previous Provincial Board. I feel that this is a big body and quite unruly. When the agenda is not very long, some of them could not even speak before the session is adjourned. In fact, others choose to keep quiet, because, after all, there is no place for them to do a duet or a trio. A lot of funds are wasted because we pay ₱200.00 per session. And I don't think we are developing their skills and expertise. Even the Kabataang Barangay representatives don't say anything. While before they were busy denouncing bureaucracy in the streets, now that they are being given their chance, they are not being heard. So there is something to be done. An in-depth study could perhaps be made.

The big question is still there. Are we ready to undergo reorganization? Or, are we going to maintain the existing local structures of government? This should be clearly defined. Where we had eight members of the Municipal Members before, now we have doubled that number to sixteen for the Sangguniang Bayan. Where we had ten councilors for the city before, now there are twenty. Have you ever bothered to come and observe the sessions? Then, you'll find out the changes we're putting up in a political structure that will decide the policy, the budget and the socioeconomic plans. In other words, we repose the destiny of the local population in these sanggunians. I think we should study the advantages and disadvantages of these local government structures. Perhaps, students of political science in Iloilo can put up a position paper. Perhaps, you can have a discussion here on the matter.

I understand, of course, that one of the subjects here is "The Development of Local Government: The Philippine Structural Approach" by Dr. Ventura. Bureaucracy will also be discussed by Atty. Rodolfo Alcantara while the NEDA Regional Director will talk on economic issues in regional development. I'm giving you the overview—the preliminary, with the hope that I can set the tone of this conference.

In closing, I like to thank you for extending me this invitation, and, again, I apologize for disrupting this morning's program. I congratulate all of you for attending this historic conference, the first of its kind in our region. I congratulate the people behind this conference. God speed and more power to you all!