

OPENING ADDRESS

SYLVIA H. GUERRERO

PSS President, 1984

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the name of the officers and members of the Philippine Sociological Society, I would like to welcome you to this year's PSS Convention. The theme of this year's meeting is entitled "Coping with Crisis: The Filipino in the Mid-80's." It seems to me that the choice of this theme reflects the Society's deep concern not only for analyzing those problems that impede the development of our country but also for taking responsibility in seeking solutions to overcome these problems. In the face of the rapid deterioration of our economic, social and political institutions, it is imperative that social scientists and the Society's members, in particular, apply their expertise and analytical skills to understand these contemporary issues and urgent national problems and take concrete actions to resolve them.

This dual thrust of the Society, namely of analysis and understanding and advocative action underlies the Society's main activities over the years as shown in the themes and topics selected for previous conferences, conventions and public lecture series. My earliest recollection as a member of the PSS dates back to the 1973 National Convention, a year after the imposition of Martial Law. In that meeting held in U.P. Diliman, Quezon City, then U.P. President, S.P. Lopez, spoke on the renovation of Philippine society. He exhorted the participants "to pursue truth wherever it may lead," pointing out that "to be overcome by fear would be to betray not only one's academic mission but also the trust that our society has placed in us, the intellectual leaders of the nation." This call was made in the very early years of the Martial Law regime and quite expectedly, I recall, with the limited experience and with the high hopes for improvement that existed then, the call did not have that much emotional effect at that time.

Ten years later this call for courage and vigilance was re-echoed during the November 1983 congress of social scientists, then held at the PSSCenter in Diliman. The Congress came on the heels of the Aquino assassination which, as you all know, precipitated the worst crisis in recent years. The impact of that call for courage and commitment was profound and those of you who were present will remember the emotional atmosphere as Dr. Abueva, a political scientist, passionately explored and analyzed the various dimensions of the national crisis. In that emotion-filled National Social Science Congress, a statement of concern was passed unanimously taking to task the authoritarian regime and bemoaning the breakdown of moral values and the erosion of respect for the human being and his inalienable rights to life, liberty, truth, and other basic human rights. Social scientists were once again urged "to lead in sharpening and applying the nation's capacity to reflect, evaluate and innovate and more importantly, to get involved in reshaping Philippine society."

It may be useful at this juncture to review the Society's thrust over the past years to enable us to link current efforts with past endeavors. For now, a quick look at past convention themes will suffice. In 1975, the PSS engaged the public in a discussion-evaluation of the social scientist's roles as a researcher and as a technocrat involved in the decisive and constructive tasks of nation-building. The theme chosen, I recall, was "Strategies for Development" and the papers critically assessed the social scientists' option to cooperate with the government "in the nitty-gritty of making development programs work." This involvement was justified by some as a means of testing their hypotheses and models out there in the field instead of merely theorizing in their comfortable armchairs in the university.

Then in 1976, the Society focused on a very familiar theme: "Poverty: The Illusion as well as the Reality." Sociologists and other scholars analyzed the various dimensions of persistent poverty and inequality in the country, its impact on people's aspirations and behavior, people's coping strategies and their struggles to overcome this problem.

The convention of 1977 was held in Iloilo City. It alerted social scientists to the use and misuse of social science research in policy making and raised the question of "social science for whom?" It also cautioned scholars against "being enlisted to supply the necessary credibility and scientific aura to predetermined courses of action." The responsibility of social scientists to inform government planners of the social realities in which they operate was also reiterated.

Then in 1980, the Filipino peasant became the focus of the convention. The theme was "The Filipino Peasant in the Vortex of Development" and it played up the nation's concern for propelling the farmer into the mainstream of modernization. With "countryside development" as the key phrase of the 1970's, social scientists centered their discussions upon the impacts of development programs on the peasant and his family.

Nineteen eighty-three, as you all know, was a fateful year. The crisis triggered by the Aquino assassination has deeply affected the social science community in a very significant way towards more committed social science and transformative social actions. Apart from

the Congress's statement of concern and resolutions for action that were passed during the Congress and which were concrete outputs of the meetings to assess the crisis, social scientists since then have produced some very analytical, and commendable treatises on the crisis. Noteworthy here is the economists' analysis of the crisis in the U.P. School of Economics' "white paper." This is very critical and hard-hitting. It pinpoints authoritarianism and crony capitalism as the main cause of the crisis. For its part, the Philippine Social Science Council pursued more vigorously its advocacy function, articulating consensus statements on such national issues as the rights of national minorities, general amnesty for political prisoners, public accountability and repeal of Amendment No. 6, just to mention a few.

From all indications, 1985 and the years ahead will be even more difficult economically and uncertain politically. The PSS, thus, braces itself for the formidable challenges which lie ahead. It seems that nothing short of direct personal and professional involvement would be expected of social scientists in the difficult task of social transformation. It is our earnest hope that the two-day presentations and discussions on the impacts of the crisis and the coping strategies of the various groups such as coastal fishermen, sugar workers, other landless agricultural workers, overseas migrant workers, children, and rural households in general, will yield helpful insights and concrete, definitive courses of social actions which will guide the Society's pursuit in the mid-80's. Thank you.

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