

Opening Remarks

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I bring you greetings from the mother organization of the Philippine Political Science Association. I would like to emphasize the singular significance of this conference, it being the very first regional conference of the PPSA. The only conference we ever held in the past was the Annual National Conference. For the first time we are holding a series of regional conferences, and, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Guinomla, we are registering a first in the history of the Association in the holding of this conference in Cotabato City. It would not be misplaced, even this early, to pay tribute to Mr. Guinomla for making this conference possible at all. (Applause)

I will leave it to Mr. Guinomla to make the appropriate acknowledgments to the various individuals, local and from this region, who have helped him organize this conference; I am sure they are here with us today and their active participation will give more life to the conference itself.

What I would like to do instead is to place this regional conference within the network of activities of the PPSA.

The PPSA this year will hold four regional conferences. This one is for Mindanao and Sulu; the second one will be held in Iloilo City for Western Visayas; the third, in Tacloban City for Eastern Visayas; and we are planning a fourth regional conference for Luzon, the tentative site of which is Baguio City. The four conferences will feed into the National Conference which will be held in September.

The other major activity of the PPSA is the traditional national conference.

This year, however, we are departing from the traditional format of the National Conference. Practically simultaneously with the regional conferences, we are organizing six working groups or Seminar Workshops which will be in session for two months focusing on specific national policy issues. These are on agrarian reform and rural development, constitutional problems, particularly the evolving

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mechanisms for greater citizen participation, political theory and the quest for social justice, problems in development administration, the national resource budget and the National Development Plan, Philippine foreign policy, and the problems of relevance and responsibility in political science. Their findings and recommendations on these vital issues will constitute the agenda for the National Conference.

At the conclusion of the series of regional conferences and the National Conference, we will put the proceedings together between hard covers and present it to the President of the Philippines, with the explanation that the volume represents the hard thinking of the professional political scientists of the country on the vital policy issues facing a nation in crisis.

Having placed the Maguindanao Conference within its proper context, I hope the last thing that the participants and the public will have in mind is that we are here for partisan purposes or to espouse partisan causes.

That is not the case at all.

It is only unfortunate that we are holding this conference in the unexpected midst of exciting political activities, with the elections for the Interim Batasang Pambansa less than a month from today. In order to clear the air, let me say emphatically that we will not wilfully interfere in local political affairs. We are a national professional organization, and we came here in response to the invitation of a group of colleagues—professional political scientists—who wish to hold this conference in this part of the country to address, not local political issues, but regional development problems.

I would like to admonish that throughout the conference, all of you—all of us—should forget our important individual roles out there in our respective communities and for once put on the robes of scholars looking disinterestedly and dispassionately at the problems which are on the agenda for discussion.

The topics we will take up are important—important enough to warrant funding support from the NSDB. Indeed, we wish to acknowledge publicly our deep appreciation to the National Science Development Board, and to its distinguished Chairman, the Honorable Dr. Melecio S. Magno, for their moral support and generous financial assistance.

I think you will agree that today all the energies and resources of the government are being harnessed to the task of nation-building. And as we hold this conference I would like to believe that the eyes

of concerned Filipinos are focused upon us as we tackle the many seemingly imponderable problems of the Southern Philippines. From the perspective of those of us who come from Greater Manila, we look on the Southern Philippines as a vital part, inseparable, and indivisible part of one country—a part, moreover, that is most vital to the economic development, the social well-being, and the political security of the entire country.

Mine is merely a personal view, but I see two important prongs in the government program for the Southern Philippines.

The first represents the herculean efforts to lift the standards of living of Muslim Filipinos through development projects that would provide this part of the country roads and bridges, schools, an effective health delivery system, hydroelectric power, irrigation, and an entire complex of infrastructures—with the aim that Filipinos everywhere, and certainly in this part of the country, should equally enjoy the blessings of a better quality of life.

The second thrust of the government program, as I see it, is the effort, not at *national integration*, as in the past, which, unfortunately, implied the destruction and annihilation of ethnic cultures, but at *nation-building*, the creation of a nation united in cultural diversity and enriched by a contribution from all groups which comprise it. In the case of Muslim Mindanao and Sulu, the sincerity of the national leadership is seen, not only in the physical infrastructure we have just described, but also in the formation of an autonomous regional government, which would insure the preservation and flowering of local culture, customs and traditions, and way of life.

There is nothing more important than these to discuss in this place and at this time. It is a subject which, pursued to its ultimate logical ramifications, involves the life of the country itself and of all our people. Its discussion is worth our best energies and talents, as well as the funds we are expending. Let us do it with open minds, if also with the passion that it necessarily entails.

As to the specifics of this conference, I will leave that to Mr. Guinomla. As Conference chairman, he will give you an overview of the Conference objectives and explain the conference format and mechanics.

May I end up by saying that we who came from out of town, strangers in the dark seeking light, would like to thank you for your very generous and very warm hospitality which we have already begun to enjoy.