

## Closing Address

EDILBERTO A. DEL VALLE

Our guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

I am really very happy that this afternoon I have again the opportunity to meet my old friends here in Region VIII, especially those from the province of Leyte and the subprovince of Biliran. Mayor Reyes is here, my friends from Samar and Eastern Samar, my *kababayan* from Northern Samar, my friends from Southern Leyte, and, of course, my old colleagues in the University of the Philippines.

I left Manila the other day. I decided to take the South road because I really wanted to see how it is today. And I reached Matnog very early yesterday morning. I took a motorboat from Matnog to Allen, and from there I proceeded to my hometown, and finally to my house in Catarman. Very early this morning also I left Catarman for Tacloban and it took me four hours only. The distance from Catarman to Tacloban is about three hundred kilometers. So, there is really a change, at least in the transportation side.

Before I proceed with my short talk — you know I've decided to deliver a very short talk here after a very long travel — I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the people of Region VIII, especially those who, in one way or another, helped me in being elected to the Interim Batasang Pambansa. Despite the fact that the session of the Assembly is going on — and we are now deliberating the Appropriations Bill, as Bill No. 1 which has to be approved within a period of thirty days — I have to come to Tacloban to fulfill an engagement.

I had to come, as I have said, to fulfill the promised engagement. I told myself that I should not limit my time to one place and in one form. And that I should be generous with my time for I know that

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Assemblyman, Region VIII, Interim Batasang Pambansa.

when you give your time generously for a worthy cause and with eagerness, the sacrifice is worth it and is richly rewarding.

As one of your small leaders — but big in body — in the region, I am indeed very happy that this stimulating conference is held in our regional capital. It is a rare opportunity to hear, once in a while, great ideas from great minds. This conference will go a long way in our development efforts in order to improve the living conditions of our people to the level of human decency. Our greatest appreciation should therefore go to the organizers of this conference, to our resource persons, the discussants, to our participants, and to all those who, in one way or another, made this conference a real success.

I thought that this conference would last for about a week. But I was surprised the other day when I received the copy of the program and noted that your conference was for two days only. I said to myself, "It is so short." Our organizers here are probably trying to fathom how intelligent or how well-developed we are in Region VIII in accomplishing something tangible under time pressure. Because if you really have something in your mind, and you can accomplish it in a few moments' notice then we could say that you have some "gray matter." And that is probably the purpose — I do not know if that is the purpose — or one of the purposes, of the organizers. I was reading the reports of the different groups here and I would say that you have made a very good observation, especially the group which disagreed with one of your discussants here.

As a young man, I learned to love politics. My election to the governorship of the province of Northern Samar was the fulfillment of my fondest dream. This was made more interesting and satisfying when the President appointed me sometime in 1975 as Chairman — first, as acting Chairman, then Chairman — of the Regional Development Council. As Chairman I learned a lot of things about our region and about our people. I was "sad" because I consider myself already resigned from the Chairmanship of the RDC although my very good Executive Director here is not happy about it because there is no formal notice yet that I am indeed resigned as Chairman of the Regional Development Council. But because of the pressure of work in the Interim Batasang Pambansa, I am sorry to inform our friends here that I have considered myself resigned. And the Constitution by operation of law also says that I am resigned.

At the time we drafted our plans here — the five-year development plan, the ten-year development plan, and the long-

term development plan of the region which were finally incorporated in our national plan for NEDA — the Interim Batasang Pambansa was not yet in existence. As a matter of fact, it was not dreamed of. As a local leader and politician, I was praying then, "Please God, do not give President Marcos the idea of declaring another election," because we have no resources to spend in such an election. But suddenly there was such an election. And the Interim Batasang Pambansa came into existence. But we have these development plans already which do not say anything about the National Assembly or the *force d'affaire*. At this moment, I believe that in our planning, we should reckon with — we should recognize — the existence of the Interim Batasang Pambansa.

As an active member of this group I could very well inform you that we were the subject of attack before. We said that the Regional Development Council is only good for number one, planning; number two, planning; and number three, planning. No implementation. Now that the region is represented in the Interim Batasang Pambansa and now that your ex-chairman is a member of that Assembly, I believe we could do something about these plans by way of translating these into immediate action. We have in the past practised the so-called imagineering; we visualized our plans and then we provided these with some energy — the so-called energization — and we come now to the actualization. Now with the Interim Batasang Pambansa and with your humble representative, we could go into a faster development of our region.

A certain kind of a working arrangement could be made in the Interim Batasang Pambansa. This is a must. I said it is a must because in the few days that I was there, hearing the deliberations about our Appropriations Bill, I came to know that about 90 per cent of the members, except the local officials, did not know the workings of the RDC. They did not know that the budget presented by the President really came from below. That it originated from the different agencies, went up to the regional level, to the regional directors, and then was discussed in the Council where we conducted hearings, and then, we went up to Malacañang to defend the budget of the region, and finally, it was submitted to the President.

The majority of our members there did not know about this process. They did not know that we first held a number of hearings regarding our budget; that it was the subject of much debate. They said, "Why is it that you have not consulted us? Why is it that we are deprived of a hospital? I had in my mind the putting up of an

emergency hospital with about ₱400,000. There is a feasibility study. But you have already that budget. And you said that it cannot be increased, it cannot be decreased. And we were not consulted." Those people who were knowledgeable as to how this budget came about rose and took the floor to defend the executive budget of the President. Dr. Laya and Minister Sicat, the great husband of our great lady here who introduced me a while ago, had to stand up there once in a while to defend the budget.

So there is really a necessity for a working arrangement, and I would suggest at this juncture, that the Assemblymen in the region should be involved, at least in the planning at the regional level so that there will be no misunderstanding when we present our plan for funding and for implementation in the Interim Batasang Pambansa.

Region VIII has been dubbed as the most depressed area. And it is really so. As a matter of fact, when we talk of depressed areas, our people would say, especially those in Metro Manila area, "The most depressed area is Eastern Visayas: Samar and Leyte... and then they would mention perhaps Cagayan Valley and then some parts of Mindanao. And if the subject matter is the provinces in Region VIII, and someone would ask me, "By the way, Mr. Governor or Mr. Assemblyman, from where are you?" I would say, "I am from the province of Northern Samar." And invariably, the people from Metro Manila would say, "Where is Northern Samar, in Leyte?" So it is not only a depressed area; we are totally an unknown area.

But while this has been the impression for the last many, many years, it is slowly but certainly changing. Why? Because we are fortunate today that we have such great leaders, like the President, who are concerned with the upliftment of the living conditions of our people. And, of course, we have the First Lady, we have the Governor of Leyte, Governor Romualdez, and the other leaders of this island.

And, of course, in Samar we have Minister Roño and the rest of the leaders in that island. We are slowly but surely changing the fate of our area. As we could see today, there are so many projects which are being implemented right here in Leyte, left and right, in accordance with our plans and priorities. As I have said, we owe this to our great leaders today.

We say, "*An kinabuhì tawo diri pareho. Pareho ba hin malidong nga bola. Sige han tuyok.*" (The life of man is not always the same. It is like a ball that is spinning.) Before, we were below. But today we are up. So the wheel of fortune is now in our favor.

Samar, which was unknown for the last many years, is becoming known. We have the Samar Integrated Rural Development Project, which although delayed in implementation, will probably pave the way to make the island catch up with Leyte in a few years. The Samar Integrated Rural Development Project, otherwise known as SIRDP, would mean concrete roads, concrete bridges, irrigation dams, power, health and medical services, social services, and many other things. All of these will improve the living conditions of our people in the island of Samar. I hope that in accordance with the development plan of the region, within a period of five years, we will succeed in changing the face, at least physically, of the island of Samar. Mayor Rivera will no longer complain that he comes from a depressed province.

Well, as I've said, we will be changing the picture of Region VIII. And in my cursory examination of your reports here, the different reports of the different groups, I noticed predictions about the very bright future of Region VIII. I am with you in this. In the 21st century, we will turn this place into a well-developed area, the people's standard of living will be above average, the region's agriculture will be fully developed, surplus production will be enough to supply the need of probably the Central Visayas, which will then be lacking in food. And in the entire area, there will be contentment for everyone. But why are the predictions in terms of a long period of time? What intrigues me is the immediate future.

Right now in our region, there is fast development in terms of infrastructure, or physical development. But how about our human resource? How about our people? Is there also a fast development in order that our people, our human resource, would take advantage of these blessings in our development? And since this is a very intriguing question, . . . I am addressing it to you that you will think about it either tonight, tomorrow, or tomorrow after next. Is there a way to develop our human resource as fast as the infrastructure or physical development of our region? How can our people be benefited? These are some questions that we have to ponder on if we have to succeed. Our people must be given proper attention by giving them more education at a faster rate so they can have more wisdom.

In my travel the other day, yesterday, and today, I have observed the development in Northern Samar, from Allen to Calbayog City, all the way to Western Samar and to Tacloban. The road there is almost finished. In Northern Samar, the Allen-Calbayog section has only

about four or five kilometers more to go. The new section to be concretized, on the whole, is about 96 or 97 per cent finished. There is a great change in physical terms. But I knew that there is no change in our people. They have not changed their attitudes. They have not changed their ways. They have not changed anything. I noticed that there is no effort on their part to try to take advantage, as I have said a while ago, of the blessings of development. But, why is this so? I believe that this is one factor which we failed to consider. And that is the lack of training of and information for our people.

I am not ashamed to tell you today, and I want this to be known to everybody — if my statistics will not fail me — that in terms of literacy we are the lowest, one of the lowest in the country. The national average is 87. Metro Manila, the highest, has 97. But Region VIII had about, as of 1976, only 77.6 on the average. This is very, very low compared to the national average. And, of course, Eastern Samar is the highest, 82 per cent, that is, in the regional level; Southern Leyte about 81; Leyte, about 80; Eastern Samar, about 73; and the lowest, my home province, 72. But my consolation there is that, speaking of the ratio of population to the number of college graduates, we have more college graduates now in Northern Samar than in the rest of the region because, probably, of the existence of the University of Eastern Philippines, of which Dean Fernandez was once considered as one of the candidates for presidency. But I am sorry to tell you that he turned down the offer. I do not really know the reason. It would have been excellent, if the good Dean here accepted our offer because he could have assisted us tremendously in the development of our education in the region.

Realizing these factors, history as well as all current experiences point to the fact that it is man, not nature, who provides the primary source. That the key factor to all economic development is the mind of man. Suddenly there is an outburst of energy, perhaps initiative, sometimes invention, and constructive activity. Not in one field alone but in many fields. No one can say where they came from, in the first place. But we can see how the mind maintains and even strengthens itself through various kinds of schools, in other words, through education. In a very real sense, therefore, we can say that education is the most vital of all resources, and this we need very badly in Region VIII.

In order, therefore, to assist this region in its proper development, a careful planning, especially in the field of education, is desirable. The mistakes in the past, especially during the past

administrations, that is, before the declaration of martial law, should not be repeated by us today. A repetition of past mistakes might be fatal here in Region VIII.

Now that we have this New Society, we must be guided with new ideas coming from the great minds of our great leaders. We have experienced plenty of mistakes. But I do not want, as much as possible, a repetition of the same mistake for a second time. And this reminds me of Cicero who said, "To stumble twice on the same stone is a proverbial disgrace."

Again, my friends, before I end my short talk I would like to extend again my sincerest congratulations to the participants of this conference, and of course, to the organizers; and to the discussants, the rapporteurs, and everybody who has made this conference a total success.

Thank you.