

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, excellencies of the diplomatic corps, fellow workers in government, mga minamahal kong kababayan:

It is good to be here with you to commemorate ASEAN Day. I would like to use this occasion as an opportunity to address you on my administration's policies and objectives concerning our region, and the role the Philippines intends to play in it during my administration. As I have said in my Inaugural Address, the Philippines under my administration will fulfill its international commitments without undermining and forsaking its national interests.

A Philippines that is an exemplar, as well as exponent, of the rule of law - including international law - is a country attractive to investments. A Philippines that harmonizes its national interest with its international responsibilities, is a nation that can earn, and maintain, its dignity and self-respect whether on a bilateral or multilateral level.

We can achieve this by making sure that our country is a predictable and consistent place for investment. The security and well-being of Filipinos throughout the world will be best protected, if our country enjoys international amity. That amity will be fostered by our ability to honor contracts and give due protection to investors.

In my administration, we will be more conscious of our commitment to fostering improved ties with our ASEAN neighbors. We will be a good neighbor, a productive partner, and a consensus-builder as we work towards our common goals.

We in the ASEAN have reached a point of transition. The founding generations of our respective governments - the leaders of our respective struggles for self-determination and independence from Colonialism - established our countries as modern nation-states. They also laid down the foundations for ASEAN as a regional organization. The dream of a Malay Federation, for one, in which Filipinos, Malaysians, and Indonesians could rediscover our historic ties of friendship and commerce, dates back to the era of my own grandfather.

With their passing from the political stage, the second generation of leaders of our respective nations entered the scene. These were statesmen secure in the independence of their countries, and who began the transformation of ASEAN from a regular gathering of leaders, into a fully multilateral organization. Their legacy is the ASEAN Charter itself.

It is a Charter that enshrines the evolution of our respective nations into nation-states devoted to the rule of law, conscious of human rights, and who seek harmony: between different sectors and classes, and between growing our economies and nurturing our environment.

Today, the ASEAN Charter is more of an aspiration rather than a reality. My administration will do its part in the long process of creating a more binding commitment to our mutual economic and political interests.

I note that ASEAN aims to build a people-oriented regional community through **three key pillars, namely Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural**, by 2015. That is a year before I leave office. My administration will do everything it can, to make sure our region achieves this goal. Let me indicate just a few ways the Philippines intends to do this.

**The first is in peace and security.** The Philippines will continue to participate in discussions on issues of concern within the region, and abide by the ASEAN declaration on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

**The second area where the Philippines intends to contribute is in its economic participation.** Cognizant of our free trade agreements which were forged before my time, we will ensure that these agreements increase employment and expand the market for our goods and that of other nations. Growth would be enhanced by the ability of these free trade agreements to enhance mobility of capital, products and people.

In light of this, our country will continue to support the ASEAN Connectivity project. This hopes to create an ASEAN connectivity masterplan that consists of sectoral body plans in transport infrastructure, information and communications technology, energy power grids and tourism. The Philippines has major interests here, with its existing nautical highway or RORO project. Once it is implemented, ASEAN Connectivity will bridge our nation to our neighbors, shorten

transfer distances and open more economic opportunities for more people.

**Finally, the Philippines can foster the success of our common goals through culture and the arts.** The greatest antidote to war, the most effective instrument of peace and mutual understanding, is cultural exposure and cooperation. A new generation of increasingly prosperous citizens in our respective nations are interested in getting to know their neighbors. With this curiosity comes a greater understanding amongst our peoples over the long term that would strengthen cooperation on several fronts: political, economic and social. In turn, ASEAN's improved integration will reinforce its capacity to deal with the rest of the world.

Already our cooperation has borne fruit. We have merged as a bloc to enter into agreements with Japan, China and Korea under the ASEAN +3 and other frameworks.

Today's commemoration, then, is a demonstration of our commitment to ASEAN's success. The translation of the Charter into Filipino is a necessary step in growing our citizenry's awareness of their identity as members of a region. I am tasking the Chair of the Commission on Higher Education and the Secretary of Education, to see to it that this Charter is disseminated in our schools.

In the coming months, I look forward to meeting many of my regional counterparts. The Philippines looks with confidence to a regional celebration of our collective success in 2015. That will surely be a historic year: the year of fulfillment, the year of a truly people-centered ASEAN community.

There is much work to do. There is very little that can stand in our way, so long as our governments and our peoples grow in understanding, increase in cooperation, and share the fruits of our hard work and dedication. The future is bright for our part of the world.

Mabuhay ang ASEAN!