

Democracy in the Philippines-as in any other country-is forever a work in progress. Every democracy, of whatever origin and longevity, must remain progressive and forward-looking.

In this *never-ending* task of enriching our democracy, we Filipinos are inspired by the example and lives of our heroes and martyrs.

Let us honor today those who made the sun of democracy shine again in our land.

CORY AQUINO AS AN EXEMPLAR

Foremost among them is our beloved Tita Cory, who stands as an exemplar of what the Filipino can do.

Through her life and work, Cory Aquino showed us that our destiny-the destiny of our country-lies in our own hands.

Cory Aquino was much more than a President.

She *embodied* the aspirations and hopes of our people in a way no mere political leader could do. She gave us the leadership that-against nearly impossible odds-brought about our peaceful People Power Revolution of 1986.

When we needed a way to escape darkness and evil, she became our light, our beacon, of peace and non-violence. When we were beset with doubts and fears, she gave us the courage to stand up for our liberties. When we seemed close to defeat, she led us to *victory*-to the triumph of freedom and democracy.

President Cory Aquino - the courageous woman who led our country back to democracy - would say of our People Power Movement: "The world wondered as it witnessed . . . a people lift themselves from the *depths* of humiliation to the *peak* of greatest pride."

In 1986, democratic winds generated by Tita Cory's People Power swept throughout the globe:

-Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League of Democracy stood up for democracy in Burma's 1988 elections-and won overwhelmingly.

-Democratic forces rallied in Eastern Europe - in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania.

- The *Solidarity* Movement liberated Poland.

- In East Germany, ordinary people themselves tore down the Berlin Wall.

- And on Wenceslas Square, the "Velvet Revolution" returned democracy to Czechoslovakia.

Spreading from Central and Eastern Europe to the Caucasus, democracy lifted the Iron Curtain and, ultimately, swept away the Soviet Union.

Not the balance of nuclear power *but* democracy and people power inspired by the Filipino people under President Cory Aquino ended the Cold War.

Indeed, in the wake of People Power, Cory Aquino and the Filipino people *stood tall* among the leaders and nations of the world.

In Paris, New York, and London, cab drivers with Filipino passengers would hail Cory Aquino and People Power.

In France's bicentennial celebration, President Françoise Mitterand bestowed the celebration's place of honor to his special and honored guest - President Cory Aquino.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A FILIPINO

In my eulogy to Tita Cory last August, I said:

"You do not need to be an Indian to be inspired by Mahatma Gandhi; you do not need to be an American to be inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.; you do not need to be a South African to be inspired by Nelson Mandela or a Burmese to be inspired by Aung San Suu Kyi.

"And you do *not* need to be a Filipino to be inspired by Corazon Aquino."

For Corazon Aquino - and Mahatma Gandhi, MLK Jr., Nelson Mandela and ASSK- all belong to the ages-and to all the peoples of the world.

CORY'S ACHIEVEMENT HERE AT HOME

Cory Aquino did more than inspire people power all over the world.

In the Philippines, she defended the gains of People Power from the foes of democracy. She

faced down at least nine serious coup attempts by the remnants of the discredited dictatorship

Cory also laid the foundation that has enabled our democracy to endure.

The 1987 'Cory Constitution' enshrined the hopes and dreams of People Power-and transformed them into the organic law of the Philippines.

Cory restored Philippine democracy through checks and balance in governance, through accountability, and transparency, through the bill of rights.

The four freedoms-of conscience, of religion, of expression and of the press-she restored and protected through constitutional guarantees.

The Commission on Human Rights she established as the constitutional watchdog to protect and promote human rights in our country.

The institutions and policies emanating from the Cory Constitution-continuously reinforced by the Courts since 1987-give life and vibrancy to Philippine democracy.

CORY'S LEGACY IS WITH US TODAY

Today, Cory Aquino's legacy is clearly alive and permeates our lives.

And, our people's affection and gratitude to Cory remain deep and profound.

The massive and spontaneous outpouring of grief and sympathy following Tita Cory's death last

year was a tribute not just to the democratic government and institutions she bequeathed us, but to her as the person whom, more than any other, Filipinos love and trust as a friend, a protector, and a mother.

This year-as we move forward to another great national endeavor-we must keep in mind the sacrifices, the heroism, and the patriotic example of our heroes, martyrs and Tita Cory.

Next May, we elect a new President.

Free and fair elections are not just the product of People Power and the rebirth of democracy. They are also the tests of our maturity as a democracy and avatars of freedom. For elections give us the opportunity to exercise the single most important political right of free peoples - the right to choose our leaders.

OUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE OUR LEADERS

Cory Aquino, with our heroes and martyrs, sacrificed their lives to assure us that right. And so it is for us-whatever may be our party or political affiliation-to exercise wisely our right to choose and vote.

It is *not* for me to tell you *whom* to vote for in May.

I made my choice early; and I have declared my choice in public.

What is important is for us, for you, and for every Filipino, to choose the next President with discerning and judicious care.

Our new President must love our people as much as our heroes and martyrs did.

Our new President, must possess a moral and *noble vision* for our country.

Our new President, must have heroic valor, a self-sacrificing valor-as did Ninoy Aquino when he came home from years of exile to almost certain death.

In his words, "The Filipino is worth dying for."

ABIDING MORAL CLARITY

Lastly, our new President must *possess* the abiding *moral clarity*, the *integrity*, and the *courage* of Cory Aquino when she fought the forces of tyranny and oppression.

Our new President must *govern* with the moral *ascendancy* Cory Aquino *lived*, to ensure that democracy and freedom remain constant, strong and vibrant throughout our land.

Today on the 24th anniversary of EDSA I, let us remember the heroes and martyrs who made the EDSA dream come true.

Let us not forget them - on May 10 and every day of our lives. END