

I am deeply honored to be here this afternoon, to pay homage to our new heroes and martyrs – six of them.

All of them have stories that must be told — stories that must be kept alive in the hearts and minds of our people.

Indeed, we are here not just to remember –not just to honor our heroes. We are here to celebrate their lives, and the high cause they so valiantly fought for – the cause of freedom and democracy.

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, such as the six we especially remember today.

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 Francoise 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 this 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.

The five other heroes and martyrs we honor today—Antonio G. Arriado, Melito T. Glor, Alfredo L. Malicay, Asuncion C. Martinez, and Ronald Jan F. Quimpo—each has a cherished place in our nation's collective memory as well.

We honor Antonio Ariado who fought for change in the face of injustice and abuses and died fighting for his ideals.

We honor Melito Glor who left a life of comfort, went to the mountains and made the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle against the martial law regime.

We honor Alfredo Malicay who dedicated his life to the tenets of nationalism and patriotism in the battle against persecution and tyranny.

We honor Sr. Asuncion Martinez who committed her life to Christ and the struggle of her people for freedom.

We honor Ronald Jan Quimpo who – in all his youth and vigor – gave up his life to fight oppression and abuse.

Ariado, Glor, Malicay, Sor Asuncion, Quimpo: They, stood up for our people and for freedom. Each is an inspiration to every one of us. Each deserves our accolades.

Next year—as we move forward to another great national endeavor—we must keep in mind their sacrifices, their heroism, and their patriotic example.

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 the words of Ninoy, “The Filipino is worth dying for.”

ABIDING MORAL CLARITY

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

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 the birth date of Andres Bonifacio, we honor six men and women and inscribe their names on the roster of the Bantayog ng mga Bayani.

On this Wall of Remembrance, they join 174 distinguished individuals - heroes and martyrs all.

Let us never forget them.

We must never forget them –

Everyday of our lives. END.