

PRESS RELEASE

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CITY OF TEL AVIV HONORS AMBASSADOR MODENA

15 September 2006 — The City of Tel Aviv awarded Philippine Ambassador to Israel H.E. Antonio C. Modena a "Certificate of Honor" on 13 September 2006 in recognition of his effort to bring overseas Filipino workers and Israelis closer together through the spirit of volunteerism.

Ambassador Modena, who was invited as special guest of the Mayor in a cultural show to celebrate the Jewish New Year, was not informed of the award. The organizers later explained that they intended to surprise the Ambassador who has gained the respect and admiration of the Municipality for his dedication to improve people to people relationship between the Filipinos and the Israelis.

In his speech before the two hundred guests at the Eivna Cultural Center near the Tel Aviv City Hall, Mayor Ron Huldai praised the Ambassador, the Philippine Embassy and the Filipino Community for their "initiatives which have never been thought of or done by any foreign community in Israel."

Mayor Huldai lauded the Ambassador and the Philippine Embassy's dedication to strengthen the ties between the Israelis and the Filipinos. "This is the kind of people to people cooperation that creates a true bond between our nations," Mayor Huldai said.

Mayor Huldai was referring to activities which brought the entire Philippine Embassy staff, the members of the Federation of Filipino Communities in Israel and the Israel Youth Volunteers together to clean up the old Tel Aviv Central Bus Station and to paint the walls surrounding the Rogozen High School.

As he accepted the "Certificate of Honor," Ambassador Modena thanked the Mayor and the city of Tel Aviv for the recognition and vowed that the Embassy will continue to come up with activities that will further enhance Philippines and Israel relations by strengthening the ties between Filipinos and Israelis.



Ms. Perla Bawnik, President of Israel's Volunteers Association, presents Ambassador Modena with a "Certificate of Honor" from Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai in recognition for the Ambassador's efforts in bringing overseas Filipinos and Israelis together through the spirit of volunteerism.

In his impromptu speech, Ambassador Modena said that the activities were undertaken by the Philippine Embassy and the members of the FFCI as a way for the Filipino community in Israel to demonstrate solidarity with the Israelis.

“The Filipino community in Israel wanted to put color to a place which has been twice visited by the blackness of death. It was our hope that by working together with the Israel Youth Volunteers, the Filipino attitude of joy and warmth despite adversity would bring the spirit of life back to a place which a suicide bomber tried to blacken with terror,” Ambassador Modena said.

The Filipino community in Israel wanted to tell the Israelis that “we live here and share with you the dangers’ in your aspiration to live in peace with your neighbors,” the Ambassador added.

Ms. Perla Bawnik, President of Israel's Volunteers Association, also lauded the Ambassador's personal active participation in their activities. The audience broke into applause when Ms. Bawnik said that the Ambassador proudly wore the volunteer shirt bearing the slogan - *I am a volunteer in Israel and I love it.*

She quoted an Israeli newspaper which wrote that “Ambassador Modena is unique since he is the only Ambassador who actually joined in painting of the walls of Rogozen High School during the entire three hours.”

Ms. Bawnik added that this gesture only proved the Filipinos' good nature, as they are known in Israel.

Ambassador Modena took advantage of the occasion to promote the Embassy's campaign for the recognition of the Philippines' role in saving Jews during the Holocaust.

Ambassador Modena recounted how the Philippines welcomed the Jews who were trying to escape the Nazi tyranny in 1939 and the indignation rally held by the Filipinos in front of the German Consulate in Manila to protest the *Kristallnacht*. He also mentioned the farm settlement in Marikina and Mindanao which was allotted to the Jewish refugees by then President Manuel L Quezon. Applause followed as the Ambassador concluded his speech by remarking that the “Philippines was the only Asian country which voted for the creation of the State of Israel in the UN partition vote in 1947, and that our vote was a deciding and crucial vote that passed the partition resolution.”

Mr. Chester A. Omega-Diaz, Attaché for Trade, Economic, Cultural and Tourism Affairs of the Embassy and Miss Justina Sales, President of the Federation of Filipino Communities in Israel (2003-2006) were also awarded “Certificates of Honor” by the city government of Tel Aviv. END