

Fulfilling Mindanao's Promise

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First let me congratulate the graduates of the Ateneo de Davao University College of Law and Graduate Schools. I know that it was a lot of hard work to get your degrees. I went to law school myself and to graduate school for a number of degrees (two of which I finished and one, my philosophy masters, well, I will forever be an MA Philosophy Cand.) For many of you, it must feel good to take away that purgatory-like designation - Cand.

To the PhD graduates - there are 16 of you today - I specially congratulate you. Mine from Yale was easy as a JSD does not require course work and it took me only 3 years to finish that law doctorate. But my wife, who is on the final stretch of her dissertation work for a Pastoral Counseling doctorate from Loyola University in Baltimore, is now on her 12th year of being an MS/PhD student. I know what it took for you to get here. I congratulate you for your discipline and your commitment.

I congratulate also your families and loved ones, with special mention to wives, husbands, daughters, sons, parents, and for other significant others. You must be very proud of and grateful for this moment.

I congratulate, of course, the faculty and staff of the Ateneo De Davao University who taught the graduates and made sure you would walk up this stage later.

I would like to give my special thanks to Fr. Antonio Samson SJ, President of this university, who recruited me to Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) from Xavier University High School 36 years ago, was my prefect in Cervini Hall in ADMU, and became my freshman teacher in a one unit course in Chemistry where I did very badly. But Fr Ting, don't worry, I learned my lesson from that fiasco in first year college. When I did my JSD dissertation

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on climate change at Yale, I had to master the science – a combination of physics and chemistry – and I actually did that well.

I understand that this is the final commencement exercise of Fr. Ting here in Ateneo de Davao. Let us thank him for his many years of service, 25 I think, in Mindanao – 13 years as president of this university and 12 years as president of Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro.

To the graduates, I would like to share a few encouraging and challenging words at this moment of commencement. For that, I will begin by borrowing the words of a great Jesuit: the late Father Horacio De La Costa. 58 years ago, in 1953, Fr. De La Costa spoke before a graduating class of this university, and begun his speech with these words: “When a brand-new plane taxis up to the runway and pauses for a moment before the take-off, one question is uppermost in the minds of everyone on board. Will it fly?”

Paraphrasing De La Costa’s words in 1953, this morning, as I look at you in your bright and shiny *togas*, you are like a row of brand-new planes ranged at start of a runway. And all of us, your university president, your loved ones, your teachers, are asking the same question. Will you fly?

I quote again from Fr. De La Costa: “There is no doubt at all, of course, that you will. You will speed down the runway like a streak and glide into the wide blue sky, flashing your silver wings, and we shall all be very proud of you. However, you have probably noticed one thing about take-off. Before a pilot starts his run, he revs up his motors and takes a final check. Gas tanks filled? Engines turning over properly? Oil pressure at the right level? Rudder and wing flaps working? If everything checks – fasten your seat belts, here we go. The pilot’s check doesn’t tell him whether his aircraft will actually fly or not. But it does tell him that it has everything it should have, nothing that it shouldn’t have. It tells him that it ought to fly. It might not be a bad idea to do something of the sort here. Let’s take a quick check and see whether you have everything that you should.”

Today, graduates, let me ask that question of you - will you fly? Are you ready and capable to help and build this island? Are you ready and capable of becoming nation builders?

Let me share with you my checklist. I think that, after studying in a Jesuit University like Ateneo de Davao, you ought to be persons with at least these three qualities plus a fourth which I will reserve discussion for later:

- You should be persons of practical excellence;
- You should be persons of principles; and,
- You should be leaders.

You should be persons of practical excellence, what Fr. De La Costa described in his 1953 speech as “persons of judgment”. Your Ateneo education should make you a better businessman, nurse, lawyer, teacher, manager, administrator, supervisor and employee. Practical excellence means that you have a set of competencies that will enable you to do your work better regardless of what profession or business you are in.

You should be persons of principles. This means knowing your principles, and sticking to them. You need to have a moral compass in the complex world we live in. For my students at the Ateneo School of Government, many of whom are public officials, I encourage them to learn how to do the right thing the right way. It’s not enough to be and do good. You have to be able to defend your actions; your actions have to be effective.

Finally, you should be leaders - effective, ethical servant-leaders. Let me quote directly again from Fr. De La Costa: “We need national leaders; the best we can get. But make no mistake: it is local and regional community leaders that our people need most of all. Not leaders who reside in some distant capital, out of touch with them, out of their reach, but leaders who are right here with them, who know them and whom they know; who understand their problems, their hopes, their dreams, and who can, because of the education they have received, give substance to these hopes and dreams.”

Yes, you should be leaders. Mindanao needs leaders. The Philippines need leaders.

But in Mindanao, today, what does it mean to be leaders, what does it take to fulfill the promise of our great island?

In answering this question, I think the first thing we should do is to first ask why up to now we continue to be a broken promise, a potential unfulfilled.

I propose that there are four major barriers to a prosperous, sustainable, just and happy Mindanao: (1) violent conflict; (2) social injustice and inequity especially in the allocation and use of land and other natural resources; (3) corruption in all levels of government; and finally, and underpinning all these other barriers, (4) poverty. Some of these barriers are rooted in the nature of the Philippine state as a unitary, centralized system of government, and thus require national reforms, even constitutional changes. But by and large, these barriers to progress and authentic human development can be dealt with locally, in our island, by our local governments, and in our communities.

Bearing in mind these barriers, the solutions for each should be clear. From a conflict-ridden island, we want to work for a permanent peace among our peoples. To ensure a fairer allocation of land and natural resources, we need to enact and implement reforms in such areas as land use and mining. To stamp out corruption and I would add to that incompetence in government (which is also a form of corruption), we have to improve governance. And finally, if poverty is central to all of these, then we have to prioritize wealth-creation.

The truth is that in Mindanao, as in the Philippines, we do not have a very large pie. Redistributing the current pie - the wealth which is in the hands of the few - will not really mean a lot and especially in the long term.

Let me now discuss each of these solutions one by one, but with emphasis on how to solve the poverty challenge, I will talk at length about social entrepreneurship as the best approach to create wealth and promote inclusive development.

On the peace process, I have never been as hopeful as now, at least not since the Ramos administration, that peace is at hand. I believe that President Aquino really means business and wants to resolve our long-standing political conflicts once and for all. He has appointed the best possible peace adviser, Secretary Ging Deles and competent, committed, credible and creative individuals as chief negotiators on the government side for the negotiations with the MILF and with the communists.

Just this week, in Kuala Lumpur, according to reports and the statements issued, the negotiations with the MILF has advanced forward with the

government having the opportunity to ask the MILF clarificatory questions on the MILF proposal for the peace agreement. The government will now have to consult its stakeholders extensively and draft its counter proposal. What is striking is that the MILF itself has been consulting not only its own mass base but also non-Moro groups. Even better the MILF has released its proposal publicly which means that the government will, if it chooses, be able to do so as well for its own draft, something previous panels could not do because it would have violated confidentiality. I am very happy with this development. The secrecy that has characterized peace negotiations in this country has not been good and has not resulted in peace. For the peace process to succeed there must be transparency and inclusiveness. That is probably the clearest lesson from the MOA-AD experience.

I urge you to support the peace process, to say no to the spoilers and the cynics. Without peace, our great island will never fulfill its promise.

Let me now go to mining as an example of dealing with the challenge of social injustice and inequity in utilizing natural resources. Last week, we saw what happened in Compostela Valley - once again a deadly landslide, once again calls to ban small-scale mining, once again what appears to be the incompetence and impotence of government.

When I read and saw the news of the deaths of the small scale miners, I had a sense of *deja vu*, and was transported back to 1997 when I was a DENR Undersecretary. I was one of the first high level government officials to argue strongly that it was time for government to do something about Mt. Diwalwal and the small scale mining happening the which, by that time, have in fact escalated to medium scale mining using dynamite and chemicals, tools that small scale miners are not allowed to use. When I started advocating government intervention at that time, many of my colleagues actually thought I was foolish, maybe even stupid. They did praise me for my courage and idealism in taking on something that both national and local government had ignored for decades but rationalized that I was doing this because of my youth and inexperience.

To be honest though, my hand was actually forced by the fact that arrayed against the small-scale and medium-scale miners of Diwalwal was a Manila based large scale company who wanted the government to use force to take out the small scale miners. That was not acceptable to me. I could for

see what that would mean in terms of human rights and social conflict, and certainly it would be socially unjust.

I tell this story of Diwalwal to make one point, that the environmental problems of this country are best seen and resolved through the prism of environmental and social justice.

For the record, I am not against mining in *per se* - but I am against mining that is environmentally destructive and a mining governance system that does not distribute benefits properly which unfortunately is true for the Philippines. I actually think that the latter is more important because if we solve the inequity of revenue distribution in mining, we can ensure that enough resources are set aside to minimize its negative environmental and social impacts. Besides, there are many best practices in environmental management; the challenge always has been implementation.

I do think that there are places where mining should not be allowed, where the risk to important biological, environmental and cultural resources are too serious and cannot be mitigated. In this regard, I am for an absolute ban of mining in Palawan, given its unique biological diversity and its potential for ecotourism.

The point is that even a problem as difficult as mining has solutions. We only have to work hard to find consensus and to move forward as a people and island so our natural resources do not become a curse, a cause of conflict or injustice, but in fact a blessing which benefits are shared fairly among all relevant stakeholders, and especially with indigenous peoples and local communities who bear many of the risks but gain the least from resource extraction. Consensus on burden and benefit sharing is particularly important in the face of climate change which will have severe impacts on our beautiful island.

I dare say that a good and just governance system for environmental and natural resources is achievable but for that to be realized, we need solid, dependable and credible public institutions.

Unfortunately, that is not the case in many parts of our island and in much of the Philippines. BY all accounts, even with the "straight and narrow path", many of our governance institutions are still perceived to be corrupt and incompetent.

What do we do with corruption? How do we deal with the political economy of incompetence, a phrase inspired by Michael Dove, a Yale professor who coined the term "political economy of ignorance" to refer to the fact that elites benefit from the purported ignorance of decision makers and regulators. In other words, there is incompetence in government because, like corruption, some people benefit from it.

What is the solution to corruption and incompetence in government? Can we defeat these modern day scourges that prevent us from progress and development?

I think so. I believe it is possible to improve governance by building capacity in local governments and by promoting a culture of social accountability in society.

I strongly believe that local governments are the most critical government agencies in the country, far more important than any department or national agency. Governors and mayors are the most powerful and important government, excluding of course the President who is still the most powerful official of the land as we have seen yesterday with the successful effort to make the ombudsman resign. But capacity of local government is still limited and they need help. For us in the Ateneo School of Government, this is our priority. When I became Dean in 2006, we articulated an ambitious goal - for us to be able to work with 1000 local governments - municipalities, cities and provinces, 60% of the total - by 2020. We are reviewing that target now and will probably affirm it, knowing that after 5 years, we are working only with around 300 local governments, less than a third of our goal.

For those of you with the opportunity, I encourage you to work for your local government. Even better, for those of you (and not just the lawyers) with the inclination, I encourage you to run for local office.

As for social accountability, this is the engagement of citizens with government through monitoring, participation in decision making and implementation and through sustained interaction. In the Ateneo School of Government, we have prioritized mainstreaming this approach in our work to build the nation. In fact, we are a world leader in implementing social accountability research and capacity building programs. Social accountability is a pillar, an essential ingredient, of good governance.

Peace, environmental justice and improved governance - these are achievable. But there will be no permanent peace, effective environmental justice, and lasting governance reforms if poverty is not defeated. Unless we are able to create wealth and enlarge the pie, as I mentioned earlier, our gains in the other fronts I discussed will be ephemeral.

In creating wealth, the private sector would have to take the lead but their efforts would not be enough. That is why in the last four years I have been promoting a development approach called social entrepreneurship, a term coined first by Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, and now widely accepted by the development and business community. Social entrepreneurship articulates an approach to solving societal problems using business and entrepreneurial skills. These include developing and being guided by business plans, using marketing and branding strategies to expand reach, raising capital from diverse sources and markets, following best practices in finance management - these are some of the skills that many of are finding relevant and effective in running and scaling up social enterprises.

In the Philippines, social entrepreneurship has become more visible, with young women and men taking the lead in the field. Two examples are Rags2Riches and Hapinoy whose founders are all in their 20s and thirties. Rags2Riches have found a business model to add value to the work of urban poor women by injecting design to their work with "rags" while Hapinoy is an upgrade system for sari-sari stores to enable them to compete with convenience store chains like 711 and Ministop.

Let me note though that social entrepreneurship is not a completely new thing, even for Mindanao. Some people have practiced it for years, including Fr. Emeterio Barcelon SJ, the first president of this school when it became a university. Fr. Barcelon is a pioneer of social enterprises especially in the field of agriculture and continues to practice in this field today - this time in the Cagayan de Oro and Bukidnon area.

Social entrepreneurs challenge the prevailing system through a constructive revolution, a transformation where everyone has the opportunity to work and build another world. And let me repeat that - everyone - whatever field you are in, whatever degree you are completing

today - whether law, nursing, business, governance, or in the arts and sciences, each of you is called to be a social entrepreneur, to be an innovator so that transformation may happen.

Indeed, a new world is possible. But only if we put new wine in new wineskins by working together and acting innovatively to overcome both the repetitions of the past and the challenges of the future.

Putting new wine into new wineskins, not new wine into old wineskins or old wine into new or old wineskins - this is a good image, from scripture, with which to end my address. Because come to think of it, what is really needed to fulfill Mindanao's promise is transformational leadership. What we need are leaders who have vision, take risks, and put themselves on the line for social change and renewal.

The change necessary is societal - economic and political. But as you must also have learned from this university, personal conversion underpins all structural change. For the world to change, world views must change.

That is why it is so important to pay attention to culture, especially those of indigenous peoples in our island, as this university has done through the work of Jesuits like Fr. Albert Alejo and through the research some of you in the arts and social sciences must have done. Culture goes to the heart of mindsets and unless the good is renewed and the bad changed, we are stuck with a violent, unjust, badly governed and poor island of Mindanao.

And so, let me end by quoting and paraphrasing again from Fr. De La Costa In that 1953 speech, the last item he said that we should check to know if you graduates can fly is this: "As Ateneo graduates, you should be persons of God." You are not just servants of the people; you are servants of the Lord. *Fortes in fide* - strong in faith - your school motto, that means something, right?

If true that you are persons of God, then you will be persons of practical excellence, your judgment is based on truth and God is truth. You will be persons of principles for He will give you the strength and courage to do the good thing the right way.

This first week of Easter, let us remember that the resurrected Jesus Christ has the power to change you and remind you - you are persons of God, therefore, if you choose, you will be persons for others and persons for the people. *For God is love. And to love God is to love each other and all others.*

And so with this in our minds and hearts, I urge you to go love each other. Serve the poor. In this vineyard of the Lord called Mindanao, become a worker for peace and justice and a good steward of creation. Create wealth and share it. Fulfill the promise of our great island. Transform your communities. Build our country.

Thank you and again my congratulations.