

PGMA's Speech during the New Year's Vin D' Honneur

Rizal Hall, Malacañang
January 20, 2010

His Excellency the Papal Nuncio and other members of the Diplomatic Corps. Former President Ramos, Secretary and Mrs. Romulo and other officials of the Philippine government, guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Please join me first in a moment of silent prayers for the late Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, who passed away yesterday.

We also offer our sympathies to the people of Haiti , along with our prayers that they will soon be made whole again. We know how they feel.

A few months ago, we too were recipients of the international generosity after successive super typhoons unleashed their wrath on us.

On this day, I ask the members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organizations to relay to your respective governments and agencies the sincere thanks once again of the Filipino nation.

The world got off to a difficult start last year, with the economic recession coming down on two-thirds of the world. But rather than giving in to our fears, our country trained our sights on the economic stimulus program we had begun, and focused on the tools that would sustain jobs and eventually return us to the track of growth that can bring us to the verge of the first world in twenty years. As a result, even at the height of the global economic tempest, the Philippines was able to post a positive growth.

The level of economic activity in the country, in fact, has improved as highlighted by the expansion of various business conglomerates like Ayala Corporation, San Miguel Corporation, the Gokongwei Companies, Jollibee Foods and SM among others. More medium-sized businesses flourished while the rate of houses being built has surpassed that of previous years boosted by the fact that we cut in half the interest on Pag-Ibig loans from 12 percent to 6 percent.

Two million Filipinos graduated from extreme poverty and the size of the middle-class has increased considerably thereby increasing the demand and production for consumer goods and other items. All of these have made a tremendous impact on the lives of the majority of the people. They're not just mere lip service.

Our program of government - spanning nine years- has proven to have lasting positive effects on the lives of Filipinos. Yes, our program of government was often blocked as it evolved but it had to be done. Before our reforms our debt was bigger than our GDP -- not anymore. Our average

highest ever

GDP growth and our average annual job creation during our administration has been the highest in the last 30 years, including the highest quarterly growth of 8.3% in the second quarter of 2007. Our average inflation has been the lowest since my father's administration. Our unprecedented 35 quarters of continuous growth, and our average annual job creation is the highest ever.

I worked hard every single day to bring real, lasting results to lift up the lives of our people. Our focus from day one has been to turn around the economy, create jobs, and invest in human and physical infrastructure. We made very tough and often unpopular choices like raising taxes, but we did so to break the cycle of economic misery we had operated under.

With the new revenue we raised, for the first time in many years, we were able to invest money in our people. We expanded healthcare, from 29 million health insurance beneficiaries to 82 million. We built more schools, brought water and electricity to our remote towns and barangays, and built an internal transportation system from one end of the nation to the other to improve the daily lives of our hardworking people.

Infrastructure development has been at the center of our development agenda since the day we took office. It is working to create a more competitive Philippines, both as a place for doing business and as a place to be a good employee. Tourist arrivals more than doubled, and the BPO industry grew from scratch to a half a million young workers. Subic-Clark is developing into a strong logistics and service center, one of the fruits of our super regions strategy. RORO connects the whole archipelago.

We have improved roads and bridges and rail transport so that our workers have an easier time getting to work. Our annual road construction is more than double that of the past, not only the NLEXs, SCTEXs and SLEX but farm-to-market roads as well in the countryside.

We have boosted investments in education so that our young can have more and better options for higher paying jobs. Government teachers of salary grade 10 who used to receive P9,000, now receive P14,000. Billions have been invested in TESDA training and English teaching has been intensified from 45% to 70%. As a result, dollars come into the tourism and BPO industries that do not require having Filipinos having to go abroad.

Before I end my term, I aim to continue to reach out to the youth of this nation. They are the future. Education is essential. And I want to instill in our youth a pride in our nation and a desire to get involved in the civic life of our country.

To that end, I call on all school age children to help our society become

more safe and less violent. Our young can begin to help ensure that we have not just a free, fair and open election, but one that is free from violence. They can help be the guardians of non-violence as they interact with adults and others in their communities.

As we look forward, ladies and gentlemen, Excellencies, please join me now in a toast to continued warm friendships with all the countries of the world, and to peace and economic recovery for the whole world.

Mabuhay!