

**A Stolen, Not a Strong, Republic**  
**The State of the Nation According to Former Senior Government Officials**  
**Manila, July 25, 2008**

**Fellow Filipinos, Friends of the Filipino people:**

On Monday, July 28, 2008, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will make her 8<sup>th</sup> State of the Nation Address. The abundance of the number eight may make the occasion lucky for her. We gather today to consider if it marks a lucky day for the rest of the Filipino people.

The President will once again enter Congress with members of both Houses assembled, wade through crowds of costumed officials lined up with hands extended in welcome. She will take the podium and proceed to deliver her State of the Nation Address to cheers inside the hall and boos in the streets outside.

Diminished and trivialized as this political rite has become under GMA, we, former senior government officials, nonetheless persevere to take this occasion seriously. The State of the Nation Address or SONA is an important “ritual of the state” symbolizing the coming together of the nation as one family to hear its head, or Pangulo, speak on how stands our common collective enterprise. It is a unique opportunity each time for the whole nation to take a look at itself, assess its state of well-being and lay out a program of action for strategic priorities to be pursued.

Only the President of the Republic as head of state has the responsibility to address Congress on the state of the nation. This mandate grants our country’s leader the privilege of charting our actions toward our collective future but also demands an accounting of results from actions promised in the past.

Even as Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is poised to make her 8<sup>th</sup> SONA, she still has to be held accountable for results from her seven years in power thus far.

**Seven Years**

In our people’s history, periods of productive seven years marked the birth of our country as a free nation. Seven years of publishing *La Solidaridad* laid the intellectual foundations for imagining a sovereign Filipino nation.

Jose Rizal, after writing and publishing *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, returned to the Philippines, where, within seven years, he was executed at Bagumbayan and thereby triggered the Philippine revolution.

Thereafter, within another dramatic seven-year period, Christian Filipinos revolted against Spain, the Spanish-American war was fought, the Philippine-American war raged and Muslim Filipinos fought the American occupation of their land. These four wars over a seven-year period defined the country that we are today.

Our founding fathers have shown that so much can be achieved in seven years. What has the GMA administration achieved in seven years?

Being former senior government officials, with our respective experience at different departments and agencies of government, we examined the record of this administration from 2001 to 2007. We reviewed the President's stated intentions declared at seven past State of the Nation Addresses on a wide range of matters from managing the economy to fighting corruption to ensuring food security, among others. But our nation's true state cannot be found in studying the speeches of the President. We must discern it from the evidence around us about the state of development of our dearly beloved nation. We examined the evidence from 7 years of her administration.

We hereby report our conclusions to the nation.

#### Review of Performance

The Philippine Constitution, ratified in 1987 after our people's victory over the Marcos dictatorship, seeks a society with "a more equitable distribution of opportunities, income, and wealth; a sustained increase in the amount of goods and services produced by the Nation for the benefit of the people; and expanding productivity as key to raising the quality of life for all, especially the under-privileged". This would be achieved by the State promoting "industrialization and full employment based on a sound agricultural development and agrarian reform".

The past seven years of this administration have seen repeated, persistent and gross violations of this Constitutional mandate. The willful and systematic violation has harmed the Filipino nation, and we have identified at least seven curses that harmed us in the past, harm us today and will continue to harm us in the future. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has used the powers of the presidency so irresponsibly and selfishly that her administration has either inflicted, or worsened, or did nothing about, these 7 curses that gravely enfeeble our nation.

We warn our people that in her address to the nation next Monday, the President will blame global causes for higher food and fuel prices and cite how she is spending our money supposedly to alleviate the hardships of a suffering people. We will review the curses that define our shared suffering as a nation these past

seven years. We ask the thoughtful citizen to evaluate the Administration's plans for our country's future in the light of this past record.

Here are seven curses that seven years of GMA has wrought upon our nation.

## Agriculture

The first is the curse of a country unable to feed its own people, due to gross neglect of agriculture and rural development.

Since the start of the GMA administration seven years ago, 12 million more Filipinos were added to our already teeming numbers. Millions more are on their way. Yet our vital capacity to feed these more mouths has been left grossly neglected.

In her very first SONA in 2001, she made rice self-sufficiency a priority and even held office at the Department of Agriculture in order to make sure her programs were implemented. She repeated the promise of food on every table in her 2003 SONA. Yet in every year throughout her administration thus far, the country was importing increasing quantities of rice every year that this year the Philippines achieved an odd milestone in rice self-sufficiency: our becoming the world's largest rice importer.

Each year our government declares its commitment to implement the Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act. Yet in the past 7 years, the Department of Agriculture never got the P17 billion in incremental funds mandated under the law. Reported amounts released were repeatedly puffed up and window dressed to include costs of projects unrelated to agriculture and activities already undertaken. Safety nets promised farmers when tariff protection of agricultural products was lessened were not provided.

Instead of extending adequate funding, the President let loose in the Department of Agriculture people who waste and steal whatever limited funding there was; people like Joc-Joc Bolante who, as agriculture undersecretary, was accused of masterminding the diversion of P728 million in fertilizer funds to "ghost" foundations and urban congressional districts, thereby denying farmers the benefit of this vital farm input.

Our agricultural trade deficit, that was already just short of a billion dollars in 2000 (\$967 million in 2000) ballooned to more than one and a half billion dollars in 2006 (\$1,535 million in 2006). Each year we needed to create 1 million new jobs in agriculture and fisheries, but we were able to realize these additional 1 million new jobs in seven years. In 2006, less than 2% of total direct foreign investments went to agriculture and in 2007 only 6% of all outstanding loans financed agricultural projects.

The high food prices pushing more people into hunger and poverty are a direct result of our government's neglect of agriculture. This is a fundamental failure because so many of our poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture, because anemic agricultural production leaves urban Filipino consumers at the mercy of volatile world markets, and because weak agricultural output constrains the overall competitiveness of the rest of the economy.

## Poverty

The second is the curse of worsening poverty and increasing disparity between rich and poor, due to economic mismanagement that ignores the needs of the many to serve the interests of the few.

We acknowledge that many external factors, beyond the reach of government, influence our economy. When global food and fuel prices were low and stable, when the economies of our trading partners were humming along, and when international credit markets were fine, this administration claimed credit for whatever was going right. Now that inflation and interest are rising, this government blames higher food and fuel prices on world markets for our current economic woes. One cannot claim credit for what goes right while avoiding blame when the same things go wrong.

Government policies often affect the economy, when they do, after a lag period. Some policies taken by previous administrations could help or hinder current economic performance. The crucial task of government policies is to build the foundations of sustained economic growth by harnessing our people's own desire to meet their own needs and achieve their highest aspirations through the good or bad times brought about by changing global economic conditions.

And here we must point out that our present economy was already yielding increased joblessness and widening poverty even before the current worsening of global economic conditions which, we fear, will yield even more job losses and greater hardship in the near future. Despite last year's much ballyhooed record GDP growth rate, this year we have 2.9 million workers who are unemployed and another 7 million workers who are looking for more work to supplement their incomes.

Some new jobs created in 2007 were good jobs such as in call centers and their support services and real estate activities, and in teaching. But many more new jobs were in sari-sari stores, bagsakan, namamasukan, katulong, labandera, househelp, trisikad, padyak-cycle, colorum and FX transport. Apart from unemployment and under-employment, the quality of available jobs in our economy has significantly deteriorated. The loss of jobs is further abetted by rising incidence and volume of smuggling possible only by those with political connections to the administration.

A major side-effect of the serious failure in job creation, which should be a major policy concern of all government policy, is that poverty incidence increased to 26.9% in 2006 (from 24.4% in 2004). This comprises 4.6 million poor families or 27.6 million poor individuals.

The severe constraints that extreme poverty imposes on many more millions of Filipino families are triggering a process that could transmit poverty into the next generation and become self-perpetuating. Women from the poorest quintile are having an average of 6 children over their reproductive life compared to women from the richest quintile who have only 2 children. Children from poorest families are 25 times more likely to die than children from the richest families.

The tragedy of extremely poor families does not end with bearing more children than they can support, more of whom will die in infancy or childhood. It continues on to their surviving children's reduced access to schooling and education. School attendance levels in elementary have been falling: from 90.3% three school years ago; to 87.1% two school years ago; to 83.2% last school year (2006-2007). These percentages mean more than 2 million children aged six to 11 years old who do not attend elementary schools. Drop-out and repetition rates have increased by 30%.

Public education's ability to rescue poor families from the poverty trap has suffered due to severe under-spending by government. While enrollment grows at 2.5% each year, the education budget grows at only 2% in real terms. While the Estrada administration with its more constrained budget spent P5,830 per student from 1998 to 2001 (in 2000 peso terms), the Arroyo administration with its supposedly stronger fiscal condition spent only an average of P5,304 per student from 2001 to 2006. The Philippines remains one of the lowest spenders on education in Southeast Asia. Today, the Philippines, which was a leader in our region in the nineties in education-for-all indicators, has fallen in ranking below such countries as Indonesia, Mongolia and Vietnam.

### Public Spending

The worsening of education indicators is just one among many other symptoms of the third curse, which is, the curse of deteriorating basic social services essential to the survival and welfare of the people, due to callous disregard of the public good. Public money is spent on the wrong things, not enough on the right things, and all with little results, thereby wasting a precious and scarce resource for national development.

Our current fiscal state was improved, not by solid revenue effort, but by deep cuts in social and economic spending. Our national government revenues as a percentage of GDP remain among the lowest among the major economies of Asia since 2001. Our government's allocation of resources for development expenditures has been the lowest in the region. Our continuing tight fiscal

situation constricts the available resources for infrastructure development and educational modernization, the two most important investments we must make as a nation.

The Filipino workers, farmers, professionals, businessmen and consumers are financing the government from their blood, sweat and tears. Every centavo and peso the government collects and spends comes from someone's productive effort. Every legislator's salary and allowance, every government executive's budget, and every contract or agreement with government is paid for by the economic output of the Filipino nation. Yet the allocation, management and use of public funds are marked by such greed and disregard of the public good that can only be condemned as scandalous.

Consider the behavior of this government in the face of the latest typhoon that lashed the Visayas last month.

While homes, farms and businesses in our country were taking precautions given storm warnings, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, her husband and sons together with a specially selected delegation were packing their gowns and suits for what is always a great treat: visiting friends and relations in the USA.

While they were hosting cocktails for the candidacy of Senator Santiago to join the International Court of Justice, Senator Santiago's kasimanwa were suffering strong winds, heavy rain, flooding and the fear of dying in the elements.

While GMA was enjoying the 50 minute meeting with President Bush that included laughing at a cultural stereotype joke about Filipinos being cooks and maids, sirens were sounding in Iloilo warning that rising flood waters are no joke.

While the President's staff were chasing Democratic Party Presidential candidate Barack Obama all over the US for a precious meeting, which eventually resulted in a brief telephone call, victims in Iloilo, Capiz and Aklan were chasing after rice, food and water in many damaged towns and barangays short of supplies for their essential needs.

While many Ilonggo families were staying on their roofs shivering in the cold and gray daylight and subsisting on whatever food some neighbor or friend could share, our government officials were occupying 30 rooms at Willard Hotel in Washington DC at between \$300 to \$5,000 a night and having dinners at \$400 – \$500 per plate.

And as the hungry, dirty and wet homeowners of farms and subdivisions all over Panay island confronted their devastated neighborhoods caked in mud and strewn with debris, many of our highest officials from Congress and the Cabinet were rushing to ringside seats at the Pacquiao fight in Las Vegas, with the certainty of hitting the shows, gaming tables and slot machines.

The image of Emperor Nero fiddling while Rome burned has an echo for us Filipinos today. It is the image of our officials' downing toasts to the leadership of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in New York, Washington and Las Vegas while Filipinos were gasping for air and drowning in the Visayas, a region which up to this time had always been a loyal believer in this government.

It grieves us greatly to remember that authoritarian leaders like Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Russian President Vladimir Putin each cut short their respective state visits abroad and returned when their countries were hit by calamities. Yet our President did not see it fit to do the same thing for her people that the Pakistani and Russian presidents did for theirs.

Our back of the envelope calculation is that this Philippine delegation visit to the USA while the Visayas was being visited by calamity cost at least P300 million. In contrast, how much did our government spend on relief for typhoon victims? While our national treasury was being freely bled by the costs of this particular junket, including the costs of mounting early morning video-conferences to show how high technology can faintly substitute for real sympathy, what stringent restrictions attended every release of every sack of rice and every bag of relief goods provided to our suffering people?

Around 8 million people were affected by disasters each year from 2004-2006. Only half of these affected people received any assistance from government and private sector. Of those who were assisted, presumably among the poorest victims of disasters, the value of the assistance did not even approach 1% of the low average incomes of these poor households during normal times.

And while we are examining the government's behavior in the last typhoon, which featured a terrible man-made sea disaster within a larger calamity, let us pause and consider how well the Department of Transportation and Communications under this administration performed. The DOTC was previously occupied with touting the merits of the cancelled NBN-ZTE project, which would have cost \$329 million. Yet we now find out that the same DOTC has been neglecting the implementation of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System that was started in 1997 and has, in fact, been contracted and delivered but never implemented.

Why does the DOTC persist in pursuing the scandal-ridden NBN-ZTE project while it desists from completing an approved, contracted and implemented project that could make travel on Philippines seas safer? Maybe the answer lies in the far greater opportunities for corruption in starting new projects versus the much lesser opportunity for bribes in putting on stream a completed project.

Corruption

Thus the fourth is the curse of a national government gripped by a metastatic cancer of corruption.

The World Bank reports that in 2007 our country is the most corrupt among 10 of East Asia's leading economies, even worse than Indonesia, and we are among the most corrupt one fourth of 212 countries in the world. Transparency International in 2005 ranked us among the countries with "severe corruption", ranking 117<sup>th</sup> most corrupt among 159 countries. Another World Bank study in 2006 showed a worsening of our control of corruption from an already weak 50% in 1998 to an even weaker 37% in 2005. A global competitiveness survey in 2006 ranked us 60<sup>th</sup> worst among 61 countries in terms of bribery and corruption.

Corruption has become pervasive, persistent, and prolific. And the President, instead of fighting it, has become its prime practitioner and protector. She corrupted the already weak electoral process. She corrupted the already diminished civil service. She corrupted the already politicized public investment and fiscal programs. By committing crimes without punishment, abusing power without restraint, and violating rules with impunity yet suffering no adverse consequence, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has turned our most valued principle of "public office is a public trust" into a perversion: "public office is a key to whatever you can get away with".

Our system of checks and balance is being torn apart. And a culture of impunity has taken root and grows by the day. Like a crocodile biting its tail, bad government chases after corruption, which drives even worse government grasping after more corruption.

A corrupt president leading a corrupt system of governance to the nation's perdition spawns many grave consequences in its wake:

There are the enormous financial costs of corruption that increase public spending without corresponding increases in public benefits and make the burden on every Filipino born and yet to be born much harder to bear for being so much heavier and so infuriatingly unjust.

There is the treason of selling off sovereignty to those willing to condone corruption from foreign powers, to large companies, to well-connected persons, to private interests. This involves the systematic sacrifice of national interest for personal gain, the effect of which directly worsens the situation of the poor and marginalized, and further limits the possibilities of a better future for everyone.

There is deepening damage from long-standing crises, unattended by a government whose attention is on committing corruption, fending off exposure of corruption committed, and buying or scaring off those fighting any corruption exposed. Meanwhile the nation's state deteriorates: Crises in health and nutrition, education, food, water, energy, environment, deepening and widening

poverty, urban chaos, rural development, rule of law crisis, human rights, Mindanao.

There is the perpetuation of the cycle of corruption spawning bad government demanding more corruption. Destruction of constitutional bodies. Eroding the independence of the Supreme Court. Turning local governments into puppets. Buying off the military and police hierarchy. Militarizing the bureaucracy. Cultivating a Malacanang wing of the Church. Usurping the House of Representatives.

A very large share of these truly enormous burdens from dysfunctional governance is added to the already heavy burden on the poorer half of the Filipino nation, making their suffering much harsher, their poverty much harder to overcome and even impeding their own efforts to survive and prosper.

### Appointments

This corruption is fed by and feeds from the fifth curse, which is the curse of wanton abuse of presidential prerogatives.

We have cited the case of Joc-Joc Bolante who represented the worst of the President's appointees from 2001 up to the 2004 elections. The President used her prerogative to appoint senior executives of government to put in place someone willing to cut corners to help her secure election in 2004. After she appeared to have obtained a legitimate mandate from the 2004 elections, many more good and capable people joined her government to serve our people.

After the "Hello, Garci" scandal broke in 2005, however, and through the many scandals since then, many good and capable people left the government for various reasons. The balance of power within the GMA administration between its dark and bright sides tipped radically in favor of the dark side. A new type of presidential appointee along the Joc-Joc Bolante brand dominates. The appointments of others already rejected by the electorate in 2007 will further darken the complexion of her Cabinet. You can name your own favorite presidential appointee belonging to the following categories:

- a. They have no pretense of serving the nation, just the President. Whatever credentials they might possess to qualify them for the jobs they occupy are secondary to the only real requirement: blind loyalty to the President.
- b. They are former politicians who eat scandals for breakfast and have acquired callousness to controversy.
- c. They are bureaucrats who see this administration as an opportunity for one more feeding at the public trough before retirement and obscurity.

d. All of the above.

A special place is reserved among the Joc-Joc brand of GMA appointees for Secretary Romulo Neri, former NEDA Secretary, former CHED Chairman, now SSS Administrator and head of the Social Welfare cluster of the Cabinet. After exposing the attempted bribery surrounding the NBN-ZTE deal, he became one of the keepers of evil secrets, protected by the talisman of “executive privilege” as long as he remains in a Cabinet position.

It is worse enough that the abuse of presidential prerogatives in the administration of government hobble the effectiveness and responsiveness of GMA’s administration. Unfortunately, it also damages future administrations by destroying the norms, standards and practices essential for a stable and well-functioning professional bureaucracy.

Nearly 60% of the 4,000 positions from directors to undersecretaries belonging to the career executive service are occupied by GMA appointees who do not possess eligibility in the career executive service. She has appointed more than 80 assistant secretaries and under-secretaries whose positions are not even provided by law.

She has usurped the power of government Boards, Councils and Commissions to appoint their officials by abusing the courtesy previously extended to the president using so-called “desire letters” which essentially intimidate these collective bodies to elect her chosen ones. She has even directly violated the law by such maneuvers as placing a quasi-judicial body like the National Telecommunications Commission under the control and supervision of the DOTC Secretary.

Her latest machination is the vesting of Cabinet rank on such positions as SSS Administrator, which is a position in a government corporation, and TESDA Director, which is position in an attached agency of DOLE. These actions destroy institutional arrangements established by decades of practice essential to clear and simple lines of administration in the bureaucracy. The results are predictable: confusion, demoralization, and more opportunities for corruption.

Politics

Many of these curses are linked to the sixth curse, which is the curse of an illegitimate president.

In her SONAs of 2001, 2002 and 2003, she promised clean computerized elections.

And in the 2004 SONA, just after the presidential elections, to an audience that probably included then Comelec Commissioner Garcillano, then Comelec

Chairman Abalos, and maybe, still Comelec employee Lintang Bedol, she said with a straight face: "Thanks to many of you, I emerged from the last election with more votes than any previous president."

In her 2006 SONA, she once again promised automated elections. And after the 2007 senatorial elections, she delivered another SONA before a Congress that included Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri, whose election is still being disputed as tainted with dagdag-bawas. To this day, she has not taken any sure step to clean computerized elections after seven years of promises. Her recent appointments of new Comelec commissioners of unknown reputations still do not offer any comfort about our future elections.

In her 2002 SONA, she declared: "I will lead our country towards a strong republic." She defined "a strong republic" as a government making policies independent from such class and sectoral interests, as for example, Lucio Tan, Ricky Razon and others. It is also a government with strong institutions, like an Ombudsman that is not headed by a classmate of her husband. It is government with a strong bureaucracy where appointees are chosen free from political consideration and strictly on their merit, not the likes of Mark Lapid at Philippine Tourism Authority or Tito Sotto at Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo promised us a strong Republic we have realized that she is running a stolen Republic. Thus far, we have seen her trying only to keep what she had stolen.

Many people note that the President works so hard, rising early and sleeping late, hardly resting, following punishing schedules day in and day out, traveling the length and breadth of the land. She goes to every nook and cranny of our archipelago pushing her 5 super regions, her BEAT THE ODDS priorities. Her appointees and political allies are mystified why she continues to have such low ratings, why people say they are dissatisfied with her performance.

In the 5 super regions she unveiled at her 2006 SONA, and amplified with scores of projects costing P1.7 trillion pesos during the 2007 SONA, more than half of people are dissatisfied with her performance, 62% in Mindanao, 56% in the Visayas, 63% in Metro-Manila and 60% in rest of Luzon.

Yes, the President works very hard. But who is she really working for? It is not for us and our future; it is for her and her future. She is like the over-dedicated accountant who is never absent, who always works overtime, who never allows anybody else to do her job, because she is hiding her stealing of the company's funds. Or the Customs collector who works so hard he returns to his post directly from the hospital even with an IV line still attached to his arm because he wants to keep the bribes coming.

We are witnessing the unfolding consequences of illegitimate politics, which uses incumbent position to secure continuation at whatever cost to country and its institutions. Even as we condemn and resist every unfair and unjust act we encounter, we must work first against the politics of despair, alienation and cynicism, which this administration has spawned and continues to foster.

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at the head of our government is the worst threat to the state of our nation. The person pretending to tell us about the dire state of our nation next Monday is the very same person who has done the most to destroy the very foundations of our nation, sell its future to its exploiters and abusers, and consign the poor and middle class to deeper poverty and worse despair.

Nation

Finally, we come to the seventh curse which combines the malignant effects of the first six curses. This is the curse of a nation robbed of its dignity, unity and future.

Under this administration, our country has acquired a global reputation for pervasive corruption which can only hurt and humiliate us. Under this administration, our country has been investigated by international bodies as a violator of human rights for extra-judicial killings and assassinations of political activists and journalists. Under this administration, our national patrimony from mineral resources to possible oil deposits has been put on sale to foreign interests like so much ukay-ukay. The loss of our country's good international standing and credibility has been a sad victim of GMA's bad governance. We will suffer from these losses as a people for a long time, just as we suffered from the ridicule and humiliation as the country of Imelda's shoes.

The President talks and acts as if the thousands of Filipinos who leave for work abroad and the millions of our countrymen already working abroad are an achievement of her administration. Overseas employment is more often an act of desperation and only incidentally an act of heroism. Leaving one's home, family and community to seek jobs in strange, difficult and dangerous places is rarely a decision of visionary enterprise on the part of our overseas Filipinos. Much more often it represents a repudiation of what GMA has wrought on this land and a rejection for the limited choices her policies created.

It is true that continued growth in the amounts of remittances from overseas Filipinos has benefited many families as well as the whole economy. Poor families with an overseas worker have a 70% chance to getting out of poverty. The foreign exchange flows have financed consumption, growth in retail and wholesale trade and real estate.

But economists Felipe Medalla, Raul Fabella and Emmanuel de Dios have written recently about looking beyond the remittances-driven economy. The

currency appreciation due to remittances has a cost to our economy. It has eroded the competitiveness of manufacturing and all tradeables for both export and import-competing sectors, causing investment and output in these sectors to weaken. Investment has declined from 24% of GDP in 2000 to less than 18% in 2006. Even the families of overseas workers themselves suffer from the consequences of the currency appreciation. They have lost the equivalent of P188 billion in purchasing power since 2004.

The worst unintended side effect of remittances has been to allow the government to abdicate on doing many difficult and urgent tasks. For example, public investment has perversely become less necessary since the production sector makes less demands on infrastructure. Yet, we must recognize that a remittances-driven economy is limited and self-undermining because remittances cannot be expected to remain high and grow at an increasing rate. We must, therefore, use whatever breathing space remittances provide to accelerate investment spending on infrastructure and education as the common facilities for remittance-dependent and other sectors of our economy.

### Reclaiming Democracy

Will we get a government able to lead us through our problems and sensible enough to build on our strengths? Only when it is a government we can trust.

The Jesuit historian Fr. Horacio de la Costa provides us with some guidance:

*The survival of democratic government in our country depends on whether or not the people have confidence in the ability of democratic government to reform itself. And they will have this confidence only if they actually see government making a serious effort to reform itself. They will lose confidence, they will lose hope, not only in their government but in themselves if our ship of state continues to be, in the words of T.S.Eliot, “a drifting boat with a slow leakage”. We must stop the leakage; put an end to drift; find a direction, and steer.*

We will persevere in working with our political institutions as our instruments for reform and justice, not parties to anomalies and scandals. We will continue to build a government that mobilizes the nation to greater achievements and not a mere machinery for delivering patronage to favored supporters. We will keep looking for a presidency that fights the enemies of social justice and is a reliable platform for serving those who have less in life that they may have more in law; not this one temporarily in Malacanang fighting only its critics and serving only self, family, relations and cronies.

The Philippines, even under this administration, continues to have the strengths of a democracy: informed citizenry; free media; a robust civil society; communities of decent and civic-minded people; allies of good governance all

over the world and throughout our country. We will build institutions that stand solidly for the nation's interests and resistant to the corrupt and crooked.

We can re-imagine the nation as something far better and more capable than the one that the President will paint in her SONA this Monday. We can find deep and enduring ties and connections with millions of other fellow Filipinos and sympathetic foreign friends around our re-imagined vision of our nation. And we can devote our lives, careers and resources to the effort to ultimately realize this re-imagined vision of our nation. This is how the Filipino people will prevail over this current patch of bad governance.

This administration may have stolen the Republic, but it will not rob us of our hopes.

Thank you, and good day to all.