

MY VISION: A MARRIAGE OF INTERESTS & OPINIONS THROUGH OUR INSTITUTIONS

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We are into the dawn of the 21st century, a crucial age in our history where so many inventions, innovations are made in different parts of the world, where many of our neighboring countries have already achieved progression, and where our country lies at the verge of development. I say verge, because we have not yet achieved our fullest potential, and we have not yet reached the penultimate stage of our History.

The Philippines, described one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the world, a hub of great sportsmen and women and home to the Icon of Modern Day Democracy, former President Corazon Aquino. Indeed, these images show a glimmer of hope for our country. It is no less than our National Hero, Jose Rizal, who echoed in a very popular saying, that the youth is the hope of our motherland.

These things sound like a chorus to many Filipino's, as we continuous to languish and mire in different social ills and decays. Our countrymen continue to aspire, dream and inspire themselves to toil day in day and day out to provide ably for their families. Many of us want to have their own defining moment, whether it be in entertainment, in television game shows, in politics and in many other fields.

We are a race defined by individual events, short stages in history, our values of hospitality, but never about our institutions. Institutions which would have allowed every individual to have equitable access to basic social services, institutions which could have served as an effective bridge to gap the demarcation between government and citizens, institutions which could have made our development faster and more progressive, than regressive.

We have failed to capitalize on our historical gains, on our cultural values, on our individual promise, to strengthen long-term solutions to our problems, to enact reforms in our institutions. So much so, we have allowed personalities to take shape of our future and an isolated host of approaches to be the solutions to a wide range of comprehensive yet correlative problems.

Often, there is no social order and cooperation in many of our endeavors, thus we fail immensely and disappoint other people who depend on our leadership to make their lives better.

It is indeed true that institutions have the capacity to shape, motivate and influence behavior.

And so, our solutions must begin by strengthening our institutions.

Where does political and socio-civic engagement stand in today's current state of affairs? That, I can identify as seasonal. It is merely reactive than pro-active. It is always short-term, but never sustainable.

There is so much imbalance in our society today that many are just content with the concept of online journalism, that they think once they take shape in that culture, then they are already doing their share. Again, this notion must be changed and must be outmoded by a new order of participation. Our citizens have to take part, not only in reporting irregularities in their community, but they must have the capacity to organize themselves to help in the solution of those irregularities. We cannot depend on our government to perpetually intervene, because of the many constraints it is strapped with. This is what I call institutionalization of an active citizen's action network. Citizens have to be part of the solution, if some of their constituents become part of the problem. Our citizens have to be educated not only of their rights, but also their responsibilities towards society.

However, we must continuously promote the potential of Filipinos to volunteer and become part of the new socio-civic movement. We have seen the great promise of volunteerism during the time of Ondoy and Peping, but we must have the capacity to sustain that drive with a channel for formal participation. I stress the need for people to become part of advocacy driven organizations, to become part of socio-civic organizations, to aid government for whatever it fails to do for people.

Let us face it; our government does not have the sufficient capital resources to finance for all of the people's needs, and to eradicate poverty in the country, thus the need for collaboration between non-government organizations (NGO's), the private sector and the religious groups. However, the dole out system of government must not be replicated by these aforementioned agencies. We must endeavor to build the capacities of people towards self-sufficiency and financial independence, free from the bondage of dole-outs. We are not a welfare state, and we cannot afford to be one. We must work towards maximizing the potential and skill of the individual to actualize his personal needs.

But even as we have all these actors in society, the ultimate channel of reform is through governance, thus certain people will have to sacrifice and run for public office. And this must not come from individual choices alone, but procedures must be made as well to ensure only the best and the well-represented can be fielded in the electoral system.

Political parties must not be a den of personal and patronage aspirations, but it must be able to secure encompassing representation from different sectors. We must see to it that even an ordinary farmer, or an ordinary laborer can be part of an ideological movement capable of actualizing programs, projects and policies aimed at providing equitable opportunity to grow and develop for everyone. Ideological movements remain relevant today, because it is the heart and foundation of every policy initiative. We must endeavor to strengthen our political system, not just by legislation, but by also guaranteeing that simple and ordinary people can be part of the political party system, not just for mere membership purposes, but for the greater calling of participation in search of the best leaders for our country. Political parties must be drivers for reform, not a way to keep political clans and families afloat in power.

Essentially, political and socio-civic education and engagement shall capacitate the system to realize efficiency and transparency in many of our societal processes. We must endeavor to shift the paradigm from shallow participation to political and socio-civic action, through legitimate and formal means only.

In reality, it is never and will never be easy to overhaul the current system that most of us hate in this country. No matter how good one or two politicians maybe, if the institution remains the same, and if the rules of the game remain played at by some interest-seeking individuals, we are in for another century for dormancy.

However, this long and tasking road can be shortened, if and only if, sacrifices will be made.

Our vision for the country is not enshrined only on dreams, aspirations of every Filipino, but is also rooted in certain political and societal realities.

Strengthening our institutions is only a step, but it shall not be the end all of the miseries that most of us experience. Thus, we must also re-think our holistic strategies in facing these myriad of problems.

We must think and act strategically to ensure the best possible future for our country. We must come up with dynamic solutions, rather than re-implementing outmoded ones. We must cope up with the times.

In Education, for an instance, our government cannot be in a repeated state of giving out scholarship and other dole out programs. We must realize that investments must have a rate of return. Conditional Cash transfers can be a mechanism by which we can bridge them temporarily out of poverty. But our program on education must not be treated on a wholesale, one size fits all approach. We need to diversify our creativity, thus we must explore on viable means of realizing our investment so that we can pool more resources for other equally important services. One avenue we can look at is a student loan mechanism, where students can send themselves to school, at the promise of repaying their financial obligations once they work, through their government contributions. We can also explore on school caravans where education will be available to far flung areas on scheduled dates and times. Again, we cannot run out of ideas because the problems will continue to evolve.

And instead of trying to win over certain sectors on contentious issues, we must also try to focus on taking a look at alternatives that will cover the encompassing interests of all people, where all of their mutual interests can be filled. And while we believe we must do these in certain issues, our leadership must also have the capacity to make tough decisions that may warrant unpopular reactions from the people.

There are a lot of challenges that the country is facing, and so great are these problems that to try to solve them with haphazard and makeshift programs would be futile, and to leave our country to the floods of temporary exigencies would be calamitous, not only for our present, but also for our future.

But I always remain to have faith in the Filipino, faith in the skill and ability of one to think of new ways to live, faith in the inspiration that modern day heroes can provide for all of us, faith in the fact that we value our history and the heroism of our forbearers.

However, faith must be concretized and must be converted into action, because faith alone will not bring development to this nation. Faith should always be founded in the fact that something can be done.

My vision for the country is not as complicated as many previous speeches or many people may have identified. My vision is simple and fundamental.

Change must be made institutionally, and must not be dependent on personality. Change is made by a group of people, not by a single person.

Change is only possible if we respect the co-existence of all peoples in the country, where their diversities, different opinions are heard, listened to and most importantly,

converted to positive responses. We talk of the many Christians, Muslims, Lumads; Filipino's, Cebuano's, Davaoenos; Native Filipino's and Fil-Foreigners- because change only rewards those whose hands work, and mouths that inspire, and not destruct.

I am not ending my vision with the conclusion of my speech, nor will I be putting a stop to my drive of pursuing a brighter future for all of us. I am only beginning, and you are only beginning, at the conclusion of the enumeration of these great challenges besetting us.

After this speech, you will have done something positive for our institutions, for the sake of your country.