



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

*On the Occasion of the Rotary Club of Metropolitan Malolos  
Turnover Ceremonies and Induction of New Officers*

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## **SPEECH**

*by*

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*Secretary*

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Friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me begin by congratulating the new set of officers of the Rotary Club of Metropolitan Malolos led by your incoming president, Attorney Rizaldy Mendoza.

*Ito lang ang masasabi ko: ang swerte mo, Attorney Rizaldy. Maswerte ka dahil presidente ka na. Ang iba diyan ... nangangarap pa lang.*

By the way, *dalawa yata kayong Mendoza na incoming officer ng inyong Rotary Club.*

*Pasalamat kayo na hindi pa pasado ang anti-dynasty bill.*

*Okay lang naman 'yan – dalawa lang lang naman yata kayong Mendoza na nasa puwesto. May kilala ako diyan -- apat yata silang magkakapamilya. Bahala na kayong mag-isip kung sino 'yun.*

Let me also thank all of you for the invitation to be part of this event. Thank you, too, for the warm welcome.

As you all know, I have just returned the other day from a quick trip to The Hague in the Netherlands. I was part of our country's team which presented our position on the West Philippine Sea territorial dispute before the international Permanent Court of Arbitration.

And what an honor it was to be a part of such historic proceedings: to stand, not just as a public official discharging an official mandate, but as a Filipino, who was given the duty *and* the privilege to represent our fellow Filipino people, the whole Filipino nation, as we stepped up in front of the whole world to stand by our position and defend our rights and, to an extent, our sovereignty, not through brute force, violence or intimidation, but through the civilizing authority and equalizing power of International Law.

It puts in the spotlight quite a different aspect of "Justice" and "Rule of Law" than what we more often encounter and think about: the idea that even a whole nation of sovereign people can and should take refuge in the Rule of Law in order to seek Justice for its grievances.

Gone are the days when might made right; when military force can prey upon others with impunity.

When we brought our case before the Arbitral Tribunal, we took a stance, not just in our own behalf, but in behalf of a human race that has reached a higher degree of civilization that, now, as Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert F. Del Rosario put it in his Opening statement, "principles trump over power; law triumphs over force; right prevails over might."

As a Filipino, it made me feel *indescribably* proud. It was truly a moment when I felt simultaneously and paradoxically insignificant in the face of the potentially incalculable legal, political and historical weight and impact of what I was witnessing, but, at the same time, immensely powerful, especially knowing that I was with a powerhouse of government lawyers, legal luminaries and officials

and, behind us, the power and mandate emanating from no less than the Sovereign Filipino People.

If you know me well enough, you know how much I loathe to travel out of the country. If I could help it, I would rather be here in case, as it often happens, something comes up that requires my immediate attention. If I go on official travel abroad even once a year, that's one travel more than what I would have preferred. I am thankful for modern communications technology for making video conference calls a viable option, which I have taken advantage of multiple times before.

You could call it separation anxiety, if you will – but it's anxiety that is borne of experience these past five years.

So it took a great deal of convincing before I agreed to fly to The Hague. Most of the delegates were already there when I arrived on the morning of the very day that the proceedings were to officially start, and I only stayed for the two days that we believed to be most crucial for me to attend: the Opening Statements on the jurisdictional issue.

Some might ask why that is important. I asked that myself, as I already said, and the answer I got was simple: while the other party has money and military force to spare; we, the Filipino people, have in our arsenal the Law, our legal experts, our legal minds, and the unrelenting and immovable commitment of our government to defend our rights as our strongest weapons.

It was symbolically and, in a way, literally, a show of force. And, though traveling across multiple time zones back and forth in a span of three days can truly take a toll on one's body, I am grateful and honored for the opportunity to stand for, and defend the pride and dignity of my country.

I got in late last night, and this morning, I was back in the saddle at the DOJ – not that I ever truly left, for I still attended to urgent matters remotely through, again, the magic that is modern telecommunications and information technology.

*Nakakapagod ang biyahe. Nakakaubos ng lakas. And so, I made sure I would make it to your event. Nandito ako para mawala ang pagod ... at makabawi ng lakas.*

There is something in Malolos that refreshes the tired, weary human spirit.

Perhaps, it is because of the history of your beloved city. Perhaps, it is because of the greatness of the Filipino heart and soul that is embedded in that history. Sabi nga nila, number one ang Bulacan province kapag ang pinag-usapan ay hero-density.

Ibig sabihin, this city and this province has produced more Philippine heroes per square kilometer than any other part of our country. Friends, it feels good to be in the land of heroes tonight.

While we were at The Hague, a question crossed my mind. *Ang tanong ko sa sarili ko ay ganito: naiintindihan ba ng ating team kung gaano kalaki ... kung gaano kalakas ... at kung gaano kamakapangyarihan ang kalaban natin sa isyu ng teritoryo sa West Philippine Sea?*

*Sabi ko pa sa sarili ko: anong karapatan nating mga Pilipino na bumangga ... na manindigan sa isang kalabang higante?*

Tonight, I found my answer. The answer to my doubt is this : *tayong mga Pilipino ay meron talagang pinaghuhugutan ng tapang. Mula't sapul, bumabangga talaga tayo sa mga puwersang mas malaki, mas malakas at mas makapangyarihan sa atin.*

And, the proof of that is Malolos. Here, our heroes and patriots framed the first constitution of the first-ever republic in this part of the world. In so doing, they declared that they were standing up to a power bigger and stronger than them.

Here, twenty young Filipino women stood up against two powers bigger than them: the colonial political authorities and that age-old enemy called ignorance.

Those twenty Women of Malolos declared that no one can stop them from conquering ignorance – not even the powers-that-be. In taking that stand, they won the admiration of many, including that of our national hero.

*Saan ka pa ba naman hahanap ng mas magandang halimbawa ng katapangan?*

*Ang Pilipino ... pumapalag ... hindi tumitiklop. At ang pruwera niyan ay ang mga kasaysayan naganap dito sa mahal ninyong lungsod ... ang mga kasaysayang naganap mismo dito sa Malolos.*

I guess, that is precisely your “gift to the nation” and your “gift to the world”– the history, the tradition of heroism, and the spirit of Filipino greatness .

Such is your city’s legacy to the present and future generation of Filipinos.

At this point, let me ask a question.

Among the famous 20 Young Women of Malolos were two sisters. One was named Eugenia. The younger sister was named Aurea.

Their family name was Tanchango.

Now, here’s the interesting part: their middle name ... was ...“Mendoza”.

Posible po ba na sina Eugenia at Aurea Mendoza Tanchango ay mga lola ninyo, Atty. Rizaldy?

*Kung anupaman, ito lang po ang masasabi ko sa inyong lahat na kasapi ng Rotary Club of Metropolitan Malolos: those 20 great Women of Malolos who graced our history ... would be very, very proud of all of you.*

*Ikararangal nila kayong lahat*

Let me explain.

I am aware that among the many causes and advocacies which your Club champions, two things stand out.

First, supporting education.

Second, advancing maternal and child care.

Education. Women. Children.

Are those not very same causes and advocacies championed by the 20 Women of Malolos?

Here's my view. Sa pananaw ko, bawa't tulong na ibinibigay ninyo sa ating mga paaralan at mag-aaral; bawa't gawin ninyo para tulungan ang mga kababaihan, mga ina at mga anak – lahat ito ay pagpapatuloy sa sinimulan ng mga Kababaihan ng Malolos na hinangaan ni Dr. Jose Rizal.

That is why I said that they would be very, very proud of you.

Let me state for the record that I, too, am proud of you.

I guess one can say that your Rotary Club is unique in a way. Come to think of it: you are more than just a civic organization. *Iba kayo. Ang dahilan ay ito: you have a tradition to live up to.*

You have an obligation to history. You have to keep alive the legacy handed over by the many heroes of your city and province.

Our heroes and patriots converged here more than a century ago to take a stand against powers bigger than them.

Today, there are still many powerful forces with which we have to contend. Among them – poverty, ignorance, sickness, infant and child mortality, child abuse online, criminality, especially proliferation of illegal drugs, and corruption.

Poverty, most people think, is because of scarcity of resources. That there is not enough food, funds for adequate health service, education and decent standard of living to go around.

I know that to be a lie – perhaps mostly told by the rich and especially the “filthy” rich, to get them through their lives, turning a blind eye to the plight of their fellow man. A lie that is meant to perpetuate a state of ignorance in our society.

I know that there is more than enough resources for us to live lives that are fit for human beings, enough to fight the terrible companions of poverty: ignorance, sickness, infant and child

mortality, general malnutrition among an unforgivably huge percentage of the population.

It just requires us – all of us – to see and admit it, and to truly commit to bringing about the realization of the principles that we, the sovereign Filipino people, claim to be what we stand for in our Constitution: the promotion of the general welfare – not our personal interests; the promotion of a just and dynamic social order; ensuring the freedom of the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life for all; the promotion of social justice in all phases of national development; the protection and promotion of the right to health of the people; and so forth.

You have dedicated yourselves to the fight against these forces which sometimes seem bigger and more powerful than us.

More powerful than us, like the evil forces of criminality that proliferate in society. Crimes that prey on the vulnerable: human trafficking, possibly the worst and most galling of which is child abuse and sexual slavery, including and especially those committed online. For all the advantages of modern technology, it has been a double-edged sword that gave a whole new platform that facilitate criminal activities such as child online pornography and abuse, human and drug trafficking, etc. Most of you probably haven't heard of the terms the "deep net" or the infamous "silk road" – but these are realities the evil use of which we must fight and guard against. Hopefully, the conviction of the Silk Road creator Ross Ulbricht to life imprisonment sends a message that crime – no matter what form it takes in the future – will be punished and those who commit and profit from it will be brought to justice.

I know all about forces that seem "bigger and more powerful than us", such as drug-trafficking, which is permeating every aspect of our lives, and is efficiently undermining and corroding our peaceful, orderly way of life. With so-called "narco-politics", even our very democratic institutions are being compromised. There are areas in our nation where the drug lords and the officials and authorities meant to hunt them down are two sides of the same rotten coin. We must cull this practice and trend into extinction by bringing them to justice – regardless of who is behind them. I know this struggle better than most because, as you well know, we

are currently waging a campaign to make our penitentiaries drug-free, and it is a long-term and unrelenting battle we are facing.

But the first step to fighting the enemy is knowing its face or, in this case, faces.

One enemy that has different faces is corruption. It can so many forms, and can be perpetrated *and* perpetuated in so many ways.

One way, apparently, is a habit of certain members of the media – perhaps urged on by certain interests – to misquote me and misrepresent the law in order to promote impunity of corrupt elements.

In fact, while I was at The Hague, I have had to set straight certain reports that claim that I have said that the Vice President, like the President, is immune from suit!

I have never retracted from my position that impeachability is different from immunity. Except for the President, all impeachable officials are not immune from suit. To an extent, they are merely protected from certain actions that would violate their impeachability, which is nothing more or less than the principle that they cannot be removed from office except by impeachment. My statement even pointed out that the Supreme Court has ruled, in the case of COMELEC Commissioners, who are impeachable officials, may still be subject to criminal suits, such as citation for criminal contempt.

The absurdity! That this should be attributed to me is the height of frustrating irony and sheer absurdity, especially in light of the various probes for several allegations of corruption, including plunder, against the Vice President that are currently ongoing. Such a claim, undoubtedly, is meant to curtail these investigations and, ultimately, declaw the Filipino people's effort to fight corruption and protect its interests.

That such clear statements can be misinterpreted and mangled until they take a meaning completely opposite to what was actually stated is a wonder. I do believe that it is a skill and, perhaps, a highly paid one.

What struck me, however, is it appears there are those who want to make it appear that the Vice President is immune from suit.

Have we, by this turn of events, uncovered one of the motivations why the Vice President is keen on becoming President?

It is the President that has immunity from suit.

The elections are still several months away. I would think the claim to immunity is, therefore, premature. He has to win it first. Or does he believe the end-result to be a forgone conclusion?

If so, that is his biggest error because it is not in his hands, but in the Filipino people's, and their decision is far from being a forgone conclusion because they are neither deaf, nor blind, nor ignorant to untruths and machinations.

I fully believe that the Filipino people are no longer willing to put their future in the hands of those who have demonstrated that they cannot be trusted with the power, affairs and property of even a local government unit, much less the whole country. We are already in the path away from the years of corruption and impunity of the previous administration. I know that they will not let our nation backslide.

I know that *you*, and organizations like the Rotary Club of Metro Malolos and their leaders will not let us backslide.

When you do battle against corruption and these other social foes, you showcase the legacy and tradition of heroism and greatness for which your city and province are known.

Thank you for keeping them alive.

To the outgoing set of officers, congratulations for a job well done.

To the new set of officers, my best wishes.

To all of you, *maraming salamat po sa pagkakataon na maging bahagi ng kasaysayan ng inyong samahan.*

Let us each individually, and all of us collectively, be the heroes that this country needs. There are villains in our midst and none of

them could ever be as strong as we are when we work together to make our democratic processes and justice system work.

*Maraming salamat po!*

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