



On the Occasion of the Regional Prison Facilities through Public-Private Partnership  
Project (RPF-PPP-Investors' Forum)

**20 March 2015**  
**9:00 AM**

**PICC, Pasay, Manila**

**OPENING REMARKS**  
**Transform Prisons, Rebuild Lives:**  
**An Investors' Conference**

**Delivered by**

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Secretary

First of all, allow me to express, most sincerely, my gratitude for your interest to help us reform our country's correction system.

**Introduction**

Imprisonment of criminal offenders, in the modern context, is a psychosocial intervention designed to protect society from the phenomenon of criminality. It exacts from the prisoner reformation or transformation needed for his reentry into society's mainstream after serving time within the confines of prison.

The Philippine correctional system has graduated from the punitive to the rehabilitative approach in dealing with the offender. This is a far cry from the pre-Spanish Code of Kalantiao (1453) which prescribed death, flagellation, mutilation, incineration, ant treatment and swimming under water for a long period of time<sup>1</sup> which are all inhuman and punitive in

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<sup>1</sup> Abelardo A. Albis, Jr., Eleandro F. Madrona, Alice P. Marino and Leonides S. Respicio. A Study on the Effectivity of Philippine Prison.

nature. By reaffirming rehabilitation, we believe that “offender treatment is an effective intervention that can reduce recidivism and thus foster public safety.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, though we espouse a rehabilitative system for corrections in our country, our correctional institutions have not lived up to the concept of rehabilitation. The present condition of our jails and prisons already serve as punishment to inmates. The community that awaits them after life in prison continues to view them with suspicion and most of the time refuses to give them a second chance in life.

As early as 1969, the Philippine Senate in its report on Penal Reforms noted that: “Society itself must broaden its narrow perspective and it must learn to accept the prisoner and ex-convict as human beings who possess certain fundamental rights which are inalienable and inviolate. ...Society must recognize its responsibility of reforming its erring members. In the final analysis, it is the society who suffers the consequences of its prejudices and predilections.”

### **Reforms in the Correctional System**

Reforms in the correctional system are an integral part of a comprehensive reform program for the criminal justice system which the Department of Justice is currently undertaking under my watch.

Implementing reforms in the correctional system will require us to review systemic gaps and challenges, institutional and organizational issues, external threats to the rehabilitation of the convicted offender and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs - what works and does not work.

### **Issues in Corrections**

George Bernard Shaw once wrote: “The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. This is the essence of inhumanity.”

More to the point is Nelson Mandela’s reminder: “It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

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<sup>2</sup> Francis T. Cullen and Paul Gendreau, *Assessing Correctional Rehabilitation: Policy, Practice and Prospects*.

We cannot continue to ignore what is happening in our prisons and jails these days. And we cannot deny the human sufferings going on inside the prison cells.

The state of our jails and prisons today can be seen through the burgeoning jails and prisons, and the decrepit facilities that are starting to fall apart and are in a state of disrepair. It can be seen through the empty eyes of inmates paying their dues in jails and prisons for the wrong done against society.

Age-old problems plaguing our correctional system continue to prevail until today. The situation in the 1950's and 1960's continue to exist even to this very day. The problems of congestion, low budget allocation, inadequate facilities, sanitation, food, medicines, medical and psychological interventions are just one of the most obvious concerns that governments, past and present, have been trying to address.

A US State Department Philippine Country Report on Human Rights Practices in 1998 even described the conditions of our jails as "harsh and life-threatening."

### **Criminal Activities in Prisons and Jails**

Today, we are even confronted with the most worrisome concern of lax jail and prison security which allows convicted felons to perpetrate crimes within the high walls of prison, working in cahoots with corrupt jail and prison officials and personnel. I am particularly referring to the prevalent drug trafficking, prostitution, money lending and other clandestine illegal activities going on within the jails and prisons.

We hear of "zombies" stalking out of prison in broad daylight. "Zombies" are inmates who are given privilege by corrupt prison personnel to leave the confines of prison without the authorized permit from prison authorities or the Department of Justice either for personal reason or, worse, to carry out nefarious activities out of prison.

And most recently, we all saw on national TV that shameful and shocking spectacle about high profile drug convicts living luxurious lifestyles and unabashedly using the confines of the national penitentiary to perpetrate high-value illegal drugs transaction and illegal gambling.

This brings us to the following question: “How can we effectively reform convicts when the very system assigned to do this is plagued with a lot of gaps and loopholes? And still another question: “Is our country’s correctional system working?”

## **The Project**

We are grateful to Congress for passing the Bureau of Corrections Modernization Act of 2013, a much-needed and long overdue piece of legislation which paves or ought to pave the way for reforms in our correctional system. One of such reforms, which is both a medium-term and a long-term one, is the construction of a modern prison facility in Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation in General Tinio, Nueva Ecija to accommodate inmates from the New Bilibid Prison and the Correction Institution for Women. The project was endorsed by the Investment Coordination Committee on 5 August 2014 and approved by the NEDA Board, chaired by no less than His Excellency, President Benigno S. Aquino on 3 October 2014. The project is made possible through Public-Private Partnership through the Public-Private Partnership Center.

The project structure is a Build-Transfer-Maintain (BTM) scheme where the private partner will finance, detail-design, construct, procure security equipment and maintain structural and technical facility. The government, through the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Corrections, on the other hand, will maintain the operational custodial and reformation services of the correctional institution.

With the new prison facility to be constructed and maintained through PPP, the Bureau of Corrections can focus on its core tasks – the safekeeping and rehabilitation of inmates. Our hopes are high that finally, we have taken a big leap into putting into realization what the Philippine government has envisioned for 15 years now.

## **Closing**

The Department of Justice shall continue to lead in reforms for the criminal justice system. The reforms shall be focused through good governance instituted in the justice sector agencies tasked to administer justice services. We get inspiration from the support given to us by no less than the President himself.

In his 2011 State of the Nation Address, he singled out the need to reform the Bureau of Corrections as among the priority agencies needed to be improved. We, who are involved in corrections, is finally seeing light. And this gives us the motivation to exert more efforts to realize true and honest reforms that will improve the plight of our prisoners that will ultimately benefit the Philippine society.

Investing in prison reforms will help rebuild broken lives. After all, the best investment that any government can make is investing in its human resources, no matter who they are and no matter where they come from. The most important thing is they become productive citizens capable of contributing to society's development.

Finally, I would like to personally thank the PPP Center for assisting us in the realization of this project, Secretary Voltaire Gazmin in behalf of the Department of National Defense for generously allocating part of the Fort Magsaysay Reservation for the location of the project, the local government of General Tinio, Nueva Ecija for agreeing to host the proposed facility and all those who have given their time and effort to see this project take off. May God generously bless you.

*Maraming salamat po.*