

**DEMOCRACY, DIALOGUE, DIPLOMACY**  
Remarks by the **Hon. Dr. ALBERTO G. ROMULO**  
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The Lowy Institute for International Policy  
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Allan Gyngell, the Executive Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy, the Fellows and Associates of the Institute, members of the Australian media, guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I would like to thank the Lowy Institute for International Policy for its kind invitation. I am immensely pleased and honored to be with the distinguished fellows and Associates of the Institute and to be part of this afternoon's discussion.

The dynamics of global relations have drastically changed over the last two decades. With the fall of communism, the advent of globalization, and the shrinking of the global village, our world and our region face challenges that transcend national borders and boundaries.

Our world and our region are changing at a pace that demands that policies are not only timely, but also responsive. The old constants that permitted the luxury of time in crafting policy have long disappeared.

I welcome this opportunity to share with you my country's policies and visions.

**Values and Foreign Policy**

It is always a welcome pleasure for me to address fora provided by organizations such as the Lowy Institute. This is a venue for open discussion of difficult and sensitive subjects. Here we can freely exchange ideas. Your institution and others like it are powerful symbols of a vibrant and active democracy.

Democracy is a value that both our countries share. Like your country, the Philippines gives the greatest importance to democracy, both as a means and as an objective of policy.

The foreign policy process of the Philippines is characterized by consultation, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. In terms of objective, Philippine diplomacy prioritizes the promotion of peace, dialogue and democracy in the world.

An important element in this foreign policy process is the involvement of academe and policy institutes.

We live today in a world that is increasingly interdependent, where challenges have become inter-related -- and most often shared -- and whose solutions similarly require an integrated and interlinked approach.

These realities emphasize the imperative for continuing communication and dialogue that track two diplomacy provides. This contributes to a better understanding of bilateral, regional and global issues.

The importance of communication and dialogue cannot be over-emphasized: As the world moves forward to broaden the democratic agenda, we need to also widen the democratic space for all stakeholders by encouraging a healthy and open discussion of ideas.

### **The Philippines' domestic democratic engagement**

The democratic ideals that drive Philippine foreign policy also drive our domestic policy.

Democracy is something that we had to fight for, against foreign invaders and corrupt dictatorships.

Today, the Philippines places a premium on democratic tenets and continues to guard against any form of repression.

To its credit, Philippine society is rightly characterized as open, where diverging and dissenting opinions can be raised and where opposing views can be freely expressed.

This accounts for the lively political environment in the Philippines.

And while "noises of democracy" enliven the political atmosphere in Metro Manila, they have not deterred the Philippine government -- under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo -- from pursuing its mandate of governance.

The Philippine Government remains steadfast and resolute in pursuing reforms needed for development in the long term even if these measures generate loud and dissonant voices in the short term.

The rule of law must prevail. We trust the constitutional processes and respect the wisdom of Congress to act on the impeachment issue with dispatch and to bring it to its logical conclusion the soonest possible time.

While it is true that political events in Manila today present challenges to the government, they will be overcome.

In the process, we look forward to the strengthening of the democratic institutions Filipinos have bravely fought to re-establish and protect.

And even under the most difficult circumstances, the Filipino people have shown that democracy works.

This week, we successfully held elections in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao or ARMM. Speculations were rife that these elections would fail.

I would like to commend the people of the ARMM for the peaceful, orderly and honest elections in the region. The support of our law enforcement officials, civil society groups and all stakeholders of democracy is also to be highly commended.

This is a triumph of democracy above the partisan noise and shows the maturity and great potential of regional autonomy as enshrined in our Constitution.

This is an important stage in our quest for political change and in bringing the power of the political center to the regions where the power of the people resides. The President has directed that law and order be strictly maintained during the canvassing of votes and until all the winners are proclaimed.

### **Building peace at home**

And it is in Mindanao that the Filipino people are facing -- and overcoming -- one of the greatest challenges to peace and democracy.

In Mindanao, we are pushing the frontiers of peace forward. At the same time we are also pushing back the advance of terror. Terrorists are finding it harder to plant roots in the Southern Philippines or build up their presence in our region.

We have intensified our diplomatic efforts, actively pursuing negotiations with our Muslim brothers and some radical insurgents.

We are working with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to ensure the successful implementation of the 1996 peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front.

We are also working with individual OIC members to conclude a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

At the meeting of OIC foreign ministers in Yemen last June, I received reiterations of support for our peace process.

In the same vein, we are working with the European Union and Norway to end the communist insurgency. We have displayed our sincerity and remain open to negotiations with the National Democratic Front (NDF) and the New People's Army (NPA).

Australia, Canada, the US and the EU have labeled them terrorists, for the NPA behave and act like terrorists. When they forswear terrorism and violence, and when they sincerely engage us in negotiating a peace agreement, then perhaps countries might begin considering them otherwise.

Taking the two-pronged approach, we build on and consolidate the gains achieved in conflict-affected and post-conflict areas, especially in Mindanao, through the simultaneous implementation of a targeted approach to development.

We are tapping our sources of foreign assistance to bring in development aid in the areas of basic education, primary health care and livelihood programs in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

For 2004-2005, Australia allocated the amount of A\$62.2 million for bilateral assistance to the Philippines and many assistance projects have targeted Mindanao. The Philippines is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest recipient of Australian ODA.

### **Building peace in the world**

This vision of peace and the ideals of democracy animates our engagement with the world. Thus, the Philippines plays a modest but fairly important role in building peace around the world.

As a member of the UN's multilateral force, we continue to maintain peacekeeping troops in Haiti, Liberia, East Timor, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sudan and the Ivory Coast.

In our region, in 2003, upon the invitation of Indonesia, we sent peace monitors to Aceh. Today, working closely with ASEAN and the European Union, Filipino peace monitors will once again help monitor the peace in Aceh.

We occupy a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council for the years 2005 – 2006. That seat enables us to deal with situations and threats to peace and security in many parts of the world.

It is our hope that the people of Iraq will find the security and stability that they richly deserve. During our presidency of the Security Council last year, we presided over the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1546—which calls on all United Nations members to work together to build a secure, a stable, and a progressive Iraq. The Security Council approved this resolution unanimously.

Members of the Council and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan lauded the Philippine presidency for bringing back unity to Council and the UN to the fore of multilateral diplomacy.

Resolution 1618, adopted this August reinforces Resolution 1546 and sends a strong message against acts of terrorism now occurring in Iraq and provides robust support for the constitutional drafting process and its referendum.

### **ASEAN at the Center**

In our region, the growing importance of ASEAN holds the promise of peace and progress.

This is best exemplified in the transformation of the South China Sea from an area of contention to an area for cooperation.

Peaceful dialogue does work. We are now poised to translate our political commitments enshrined in the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) into concrete policies, programs and cooperative endeavors.

Last week, the ASEAN-China Working Group on the Implementation of the DoC met in Manila. They discussed initiatives on policy directions and projects that ASEAN and China could take as they continue to strengthen the DoC as the framework and guidepost.

At the meeting, the Philippines emphasized the need for parties to work at continually expanding points of common understanding of basic positions and interests of the state parties, the principles and expectations of the DoC and shared options within its framework.

Recently, the national oil companies of the Philippines, Vietnam, and China concluded an agreement on a seismic marine undertaking – a project that is able to take root and prosper – because of the atmosphere of trust and security engendered by our common commitment enshrined in the DOC.

With ASEAN at the core, the East Asian Region is boldly moving towards closer integration. This December, the Leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea will gather for the first East Asian Summit. This will add a new dimension to dialogue in our region and better prepare us for a future of growth and stability.

With Myanmar foregoing its chairmanship of ASEAN, the Philippines will chair ASEAN for one year, starting in July 2006. We look forward to Chairing ASEAN on its 40<sup>th</sup> year. I also anticipate that the interest of other countries to become members of the East Asia Community will be further addressed, if not resolved, during our chairmanship.

ASEAN's renewed faith in dialogue and diplomacy is also fuelling our hopes for meaningful change in the United Nations, particularly in the Security Council. But, as we said in the ASEAN Ministerial Statement on UN Reform at our 38<sup>th</sup> meeting in Laos last month, we must avoid divisiveness and not lose focus on other, no less important and pressing matters.

### **On the war on terror**

Terrorism continues to be one such pressing issue. With the vile objective of sowing fear and terror and fueling intolerance and hatred, terrorism has taken the center of the global stage. It must be met by intensified transnational cooperation.

The Philippines condemns in the strongest terms terrorism in all its forms and joins the sustained fight against terrorism in all fronts.

At home we have scored major victories against terrorists. We captured key international terrorists, including Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the first World Trade Center attack, and Fathur Rahman Al Ghozi, who planned to attack western embassies in Southeast Asia.

We have decimated the Abu Sayyaf and neutralized 117 major Abu Sayyaf and other Jemaah Islamiyah-linked personalities, including Galib Andang (Kumander Robot) and Aldam Tilao (Kumander Sabaya). 24 terrorists have also been convicted.

The Philippines intends to continue stepping up its campaign against the malevolent specter of terror. We will strengthen our comprehensive approach of securing development and building a culture of peace, even as the military and the police continue with their active campaign to collar terrorist elements and neutralize terror cell groups.

Our success in apprehending and in prosecuting terrorists in the Philippines has been matched by our efforts at leading multilateral efforts to organize cooperation in the campaign against terror.

The Philippines chairs APEC's Counterterrorism Task Force, as well as the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee.

And we continue to build partnerships with other states—to share information and intelligence and to enlarge our mutual capacity to counteract terror.

U.S. President George Bush in his speech before the US National Defense University last March said:

“We're more secure because the Philippines new Anti-Terrorism Task Force has helped capture more than a dozen terrorist suspects....”

As pointed out in our op-ed page article in the Asian Wall Street Journal last May, we are working with our neighbors and many other countries to rid our nation of terrorists, and to do all that is possible to ensure our region is not used as a training camp by international terrorists.

The bombings in London and Sharm el-Sheikh are painful and tragic reminders that much remains to be done in the war on terror. We condemn these cowardly attacks against innocent people and pledge to double our efforts at promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation as a means to foster greater understanding, tolerance and peace

### **On Interfaith cooperation in the United Nations**

Bridging civilizations and cultures through dialogue is integral if we are to live in a world where one can live freely in an environment of understanding of and appreciation for the differences and commonalities of all peoples.

Like many other nations, the Philippines has seen the hope and strength that cooperation and dialogue among religious faiths can give to efforts at building peace.

To isolate extremists who advocate terrorism in the name of religion, the Philippines last November offered the General Assembly a resolution—which it accepted by acclamation—to promote interfaith cooperation and dialogue as a way of resolving civil conflicts.

Last month, I chaired, at the United Nations, the first fruit of that Philippine Resolution—a historic Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace.

The Conference—the first of its kind since the birth of the world organization—was unprecedented in terms of sectarian and secular collaboration.

In her message to that Conference, President Arroyo said that interfaith cooperation has proven crucial in our country's own search for peace and that, “in sharing our experience and in promoting interfaith cooperation, we hope to contribute to building peace throughout the world.”

Next month, the President will chair the first Summit on Interfaith Dialogue and cooperation at the United Nations.

### **The Asia-Pacific Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

As we resolutely take on the numerous challenges that face our region, we must reaffirm our commitment to democratic principles and the use of dialogue as an instrument of development and cooperation.

The Asia-Pacific region displays an incomparable diversity. In ASEAN alone, this diversity is very marked. Our religions, cultures, languages, history, colonial experiences, forms of government, political systems are noticeably diverse.

It is the kind of diversity that, at any other time in history, and in any other place in the world, could have led to ethnic strife or conflict.

Yet ASEAN today stands at center of the future of the Asia-Pacific region. It is the driving force of the coming East Asian Community. It is the core of APEC, ASEM and FEALAC.

Peaceful dialogue and diplomacy have been the key to overcoming diversity and conflict and to building a stable and progressive region.

Australia is no stranger to dealing with diversity. You have built a pluralistic and democratic society, based on respect and understanding of the differences between peoples, races, and religions.

You are well poised for greater engagement in our region and with those of us who have blazed the trail towards integrating Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

There is much that we can share, and I am confident in our success.

Good afternoon.●