

AFTER THE NIGHTMARE
A NEW BEGINNING
OCTOBER 5, 2004
(PRIVILEGE SPEECH by SEN. ALFREDO S.LIM)

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. President, I would like to relate a dream, probably a nightmare, I had last week; and, I do not want to be unfaithful to you by not sharing it.

Although a sheer dream, I think it is worth telling this chamber about. Dream interpreters say that what one dreams is the opposite of what happens or has happened and others say the meaning depends on how the dreamer reacts.

Malcom S. Forbes of the Forbes Magazine says "Dreams come true to those who tackle the nitty-gritty". And he quotes Kahil Gabran who says "Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity".

Dreams are fictions and I wish mine remains unreal.

And, my dream was:

A man darted out of nowhere, with lightning speed, shot some of the personalities who graced the testimonial dinner that evening, along some notorious figures who equally attended the gathering in the company of their political patrons. I saw a prominent politician felled by bullets, bloodied and lifeless. It was tragic and revolting but

in the wink of an eye, a magistrate dodged but failed to escape from the fatal gunshots of his assassin. A cabinet member and a lawyer affiliated with a popular Law Firm were not spared from the massacre.

The burst of fatal shots claimed other targets that included a notorious smuggler, a callous drug lord, an infamous gambling lord and a wily tax evader.

There were splashes of blood, slugs and spent shells, and dead mortals all over the scene amidst a sea of silence leaving me helpless and terrified.

I missed the ensuing scene and found myself awakened and had to ponder on the mind-boggling puzzle why I witnessed the horrible killings and strange nightmare, occurring at a time when our nation is enduring a crisis.

Perhaps, my dream was inevitably induced by the political, economic and moral crisis our nation is now facing.

Mr. President, I rise today in the midst of a great crisis - a crisis that may devour and engulf our country in a vast ocean of economic damnation.

I rise today with my words drowned out by the wailing lamentations of the hungry and the destitute - the many poor millions who have not enough food for their stomach,

while the few who are rich have not enough stomach for their food. I cannot stomach both situations.

I rise today outweighed by the groans of the disinherited and the dispossessed - and the victims of injustice who must bear their torments in silence, while the powers-that-be connive and conspire, collude and confabulate, to keep themselves fat and glamorous, or dominant and supreme.

I rise today stifled by the cries of the distraught and the downtrodden tolling in this Senate Hall - of pleas ignored, requests denied, remonstrances betrayed - and the poorest of our poor must now walk without faith, dream without hope, live without trust and speak without voices.

I rise today crying out with questions which you, my Colleagues, all of whom I respect, and hold in my highest personal esteem, also nurture in your hearts and minds:

How many of our people, and how many of us here in this Senate hall, believe that in the face of grave uncertainty and peril, the government's cost-cutting measures are only

a public relations gimmick, and its money-saving techniques are only a political gambit?

How many of our people believe that donations, or the so-called *ambagan* or *bayanihan* by the rich and the famous, are only a kind of pakitang-tao?

How many of our people believe that these *ambagan* or *bayanihan* - which to many forced donors are actually *paiyakan* - are only a scheme to distract our minds from the administrations debauchery in public funds and bankruptcy of policy?

How many of our people dismiss these million-peso pledges as useless, futile and vain? For they are only a drop, or even just a molecule, in the sea of our colossal fiscal tribulations.

How many of our people condemn this Government's cost-cutting measures as only a teaspoon of mercurochrome applied to a disease that needs a kidney transplant?

As Philippine Star publisher Max Soliven wrote, it is wrong to treat a patient who needs a triple-heart bypass operation by applying on him the cure for athlete's foot.

How many of our countrymen detest, despise and abominate the deceptive postures of the administration - leaders who have failed to find effective solutions to our problems, administrators who have turned to the Lilliputian mental output of presidential advisers and insipid hallucinations crafted by speechwriters who are muddled in thought, infantile in suggestion and impertinent in advocacy?

Mr. President, because of our gigantic burdens today, I do not only predict but I warn, and I do not only warn but I dread, that day when the people themselves will finally say, "ENOUGH!"

I dread the day when the people will finally discover that this government is treating the coming deluge not as a mortal peril to the Republic, but only as a passing public relations problem.

I dread the day when the people themselves will overturn our government as they despair of the forthcoming fury and flurry of unprecedented economic tempests.

I dread the day when most of our suffering countrymen will choose to place their survival in the hands of a dictator than in the failed workings of our much-abused political system.

Today is the time for leaders of courage and determination, not for the timid and the fainthearted. It is not the time for propagandists, apologists and spin-masters -- and not especially for magicians.

But this government, Mr. President, prefers to be a magician. It is very bad magician, because it cannot even conceal its own tricks, and therefore it deserves to be laughed out of the stage.

Allow me to illustrate. Right on the front pages of the newspapers, Malacañang said it will retrench employees, who are simple and small people, in order to save money.

But at the same time it is known to have already created new offices and positions for its bigtime favorites.

Malacañang has limited the use of airconditioning units in its offices. It has abolished heavy meals in conferences and gives only meriendas. It has prohibited official travel to executive officials.

Malacañang is trying to save on small but politically visible moves -- or impact demonstrations -- while concealing the big but invisible and economically disastrous situations, which are the real problems, and which it knows it cannot solve. Hence, the unbridled gimmickry.

Mr. President, we can expect more public relations tricks, more propaganda tactics, more impact exhibitions and political striptease from this administration's small minds as the days go by, and the nation's fortunes deteriorate.

Right in one of the central seats of government power - in the House of Representatives, the bastion of the

administration -- they grandly announced that they are giving up their pork barrel.

But in a cheap magician's trick, they triangulate and conjure to get it from other items in the budget under different labels.

Mr. President, we all know that pork means pigs. And we know that when pigs eat, they burrow their mouths, including their noses, into their food.

Because of this, pigs are the only creatures on the earth which, when they eat, it is not the food that is placed into their mouth, but the mouth that is buried into their food.

And so even as the pig-mouthed congressmen announced the supposed good deed of abrogating their pork barrel, we know that *ang kanilang pagsasalita ng mabuting hangarin ay naggagaling sa nguso at hindi sa puso.*

Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo and her presidential spokesman have called on the people to make sacrifices and tighten their belts.

But I rise today to say that the people have already been sacrificing; that they have already sacrificed enough; and that they will be sacrificing more than they can bear as the prices of commodities continue to skyrocket to levels unseen in our country's history.

Mr. President, this is an administration of gimmicks, of gambits and tricks, of broken promises and shallow premises, of false platitudes and wrong certitudes, of Pulong- Bayans designed to mesmerize the people into believing that this uncaring government cares.

But the "Strong Republic" is the "Wrong Republic"—wrong in its handling specially of NAPOCOR, where electioneering was placed above common sense finance.

Courting the voters, the Government insisted on low prices for electricity because of the then forthcoming elections, thus causing NAPOCOR enormous losses.

Because of this, NAPOCOR has been forced to borrow more and more money because of these losses, resulting in more and more backbreaking debts, which only the government can pay.

In her three years in power, all that the people experienced under this government is sacrifice and more sacrifice, indigence and more indigence, crucifixion and more crucifixion.

In my whole life, I have never seen a government that has slammed more disappointments, rammed more economic hardships, and damned more people than the present administration.

As we say in the famous novena in Baclaran, when our family and relatives are gathered crying and weeping around us, "when our eyes grow dim and our hearts cease to beat, when the terrible judgment is about to be passed," at least I wish we could hope that we are leaving a better Philippines. But from the signs of the times I believe that this hope will become forlorn.

That the Government has really no grand design to lift up our nation from the dregs can be seen by speeches which are out of touch with reality- because young, inexperienced speechwriters cannot concoct speeches that can hide those realities.

I have risen today conscious that most of our people have no abiding trust in the leaders of our nation, when neither President nor Senators nor Congressman are regarded with the same respect and honor as in the years gone by.

The distrust of the nation for the national government is escalating to unbelievable, but understandable, proportions.

And may the day not come, I say again, when the people themselves, desperate over the failure of leadership in our constitutional democracy, and finding unbearable the debilitations and abominations inflicted by an ineffective administration, willingly choose to place their destiny in the hands of a dictator. NEVER AGAIN!

But let us not give up on our constitutional democracy so easily or so soon. Our Republic has a great heritage of freedom and heroism. We can still rise up from the depths if we only remember that we are the people's servants rather than their masters; that we are guided by the virtues and values of our fathers and by the splendor of their ideals; that we are a nation whose belief in God will never flicker; and that, finally, as General Douglas MacArthur said, the Philippines is a land where Filipinos are destined "to build courage when courage seems to fail, restore faith when there is so little cause for faith, create hope when hope becomes forlorn".

Thank you very much.