

# Opening Remarks

ALEJANDRO M. FERNANDEZ

Mr. Essex Gigiento, who this morning represents our host, the reverend Father Ambrosio Galindez, Rector of the University of San Agustin; Atty. Segundina Navarro, coordinator of the Philippine Political Science Association for Western Visayas and conference chairman; Dean Pedro Abelarde; Mr. Bahnarim Guinomla, coordinator of the PPSA for Mindanao and Sulu and conference chairman of the recently concluded Conference in Cotabato City; my colleagues in the profession; fellow students; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen of this lovely city of Iloilo:

Warm greetings and a pleasant good morning to you all!

I wish I could say that it will be a pleasant good morning for me, too. I was down with fever for a week. Still recuperating, I proceeded to Miguindanao Province for the PPSA Regional Conference there. From Cotabato, I rushed to my own station at Clark Air Base to earn my keep and to host a lecture by a distinguished American theologian and Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Zontag, and immediately after hurried back to Diliman to prepare for Iloilo. Like the other paper readers in this conference, I had no sleep last night. I came straight from an all-night stint at the UP Faculty Center in Quezon City with just enough time to catch the plane to be here for the opening ceremonies.

It seems as if everywhere we go these days, we are caught in the vortex of local politics. Governor Norada had to appear early and catch his plane for Bacolod City—I'm sure to fulfill a political engagement. I don't know if Reverend Father Galindez had political business to attend to in Manila (these days the Church has been known to be active!) but he was ably represented in this morning's ceremonies by the affable Mr. Gigiento.

I'm very happy that our destination was Iloilo, which I have frequented often enough, especially in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

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President, Philippine Political Science Association.

I feel at home here. If you can stand a little punning, being the Dean of the UP College at Clark Air Base, right smack in the heart of an American community, I should also feel at home here in the USA (University of San Agustin).

Allow me, Ladies and Gentlemen, to say something about the Philippine Political Science Association. The PPSA is a professional organization which dedicates itself to the encouragement and promotion of the study, teaching, and research, as well as the professional practice, of political science. As an outlet for the creative production of practitioners, teachers, and researchers, the PPSA publishes a learned journal, which last year came out with two issues. The proceedings of the annual conference of the Association also find their way into the *PPSA Journal*.

When I assumed the presidency of this Association last year, I was elected on a slim margin of one vote. I was feeling drowsy in the back rows of the conference hall during the annual business meeting when I heard a booming stentorian voice—Dr. Remy Agpalo's—nominating me for the Presidency. I caught him saying, "I nominate Dr. Fernandez because he also writes books like me." I think the commercial was equally intended for himself, for who can ever be as prolific a writer as Dr. Agpalo. But if only Dr. Agpalo had concentrated on advertising me, I just might have made it on the first ballot. Fortunately, in the room was Undersecretary Valdepeñas of the Department of Trade who had just forked over a check and thus became a life member; he was requested to break the tie. Nobody knew it, but there was an unspoken bond between us; we both hail from Cornell. It was no surprise to me when, without batting an eyelash, Undersecretary Valdepeñas said: "I give my vote to Alex." So, here I am before you as the President of the PPSA. There is an unexpected denouement to this story: just before I came to Iloilo, the Manager of the PNB in Diliman handed me the Undersecretary's stale check, on which had hung my election to the presidency.

You may want to know why we're in town to hold the second in a series of Regional Conferences, preparatory to the National Conference of the PPSA. It's all because when I was elected President, believe it or not, I was sleepy in the back row, as I was in earlier sessions of the national conference, and I resolved then and there that if I could do anything about it, this Association would never have sessions where people feel sleepy or fall asleep. This would be possible only if our activities engage the interest of the general membership; if our sessions were more participative in nature.

The Association last year, and practically every year theretofore, had only one activity—the National Conference. It lasted for two monotonous days. Papers were read and the open forums which followed did not allow for extensive participation on the part of the audience. Moreover, paper readers were asked to write learned dissertations and invariably they would be rushing to write their papers overnight—the night before the conference. It is the rule, not the exception, that participants have no chance to read the papers in advance and have time to reflect on them.

This, I am afraid, is the sad case even with me today, because I did not know that Atty. Navarro would ask me, on short notice, to present a paper at this regional conference. She explained that the people of Iloilo and Western Visayas had expressed keen interest in the discussion of some national problems in this conference. And working on it only last night in Diliman, the most I could do was to assemble materials to bring with me to Iloilo, with the hope that perhaps tonight I will be able to study and begin writing my paper.

I have long entertained the idea that the PPSA should go to the country; it should organize countrywide. And for the first time in the history of the Association, we are holding four regional conferences: The first one just concluded in Maguindanao; this one for Western Visayas; a third one for Eastern Visayas; and a fourth in Luzon. Dean Nemenzo has suggested that we hold the Luzon Conference in the town of Santiago in Isabela. I should have asked him if he was giving us safe conduct passes.

When we went to Cotabato, people were congratulating us and we did not quite understand it. We learned much later, after the fact, what brave souls we were, indeed. We were told that there was bombing of certain rebel positions only twenty kilometers away. But to the people of the area, it was nothing; it was an ordinary happening. It was very safe, really. I'm sure that if we had chosen Marawi as conference site instead of Cotabato, the situation would not have been materially different. I recall that, on my last visit there, people were saying that it was an abnormal day if there was no shooting at night on the campus or on the outskirts of the MSU campus. So, you can imagine what a haven Iloilo City is for us!

Certainly, here you can discuss intelligently, with intense passion, if you wish; but with reasonable assurance of no one being in danger of life or limb. In Cotabato City, as I have just told you, it was different. But at least the Regional Commissioner, the Honorable Simeon Datumanong, told us that Manila is not any safer than

Cotabato. At least in Cotabato City, when you are kidnapped, the record shows that you are likely to return alive. In Manila and Central Luzon, they kidnap people and they don't return. I don't know how it will be in Santiago, Isabela, or in Sorsogon, or in the Camarines provinces.

The results of the Regional Conferences will be published as proceedings in themselves and, at the same time, they will feed into the National Conference. This represents one stream of activities, one major item on the agenda of the National Conference in September. It represents a radical change in the format of the National Conference.

The second major item on the agenda of the National Conference will be a discussion of topics which we will assign to study groups, not to individual paper readers. When we get back to Manila, we will activate six study groups or workshop-seminars. Even from Iloilo, I think, you may enroll in any of these six groups we are organizing.

The National Conference this year will address key policy questions and issues confronting the country, viewed from the perspectives of political science. Among the study groups we are organizing, one, for example, will focus on Philippine Foreign Economic Policy. I have already persuaded Dr. Salvador P. Lopez, former Secretary of Foreign Affairs and former President of the University of the Philippines, to chair this particular study group. Joining him are experienced scholar-administrators like Undersecretary Valdepeñas and maybe a few younger scholars. Every other week or so, roughly between July 15 and September 15, this group will meet and wrap up their work with a report. They will then report their findings and main policy recommendations at the National Conference.

The same will happen with the five other workshop-seminars that will study Constitutional and other legal problems, agrarian reform and rural development, political theory and the quest for social justice, problems of development administration, the national budget and the new national development plan, and "Political Science for What? Problems of Relevance and Responsibility."

At the National Conference, the findings and recommendations of these study groups will be reported out in plenary session. The participants in the National Conference will then be invited to break up and join the original seminar-workshops. The enlarged workshop-seminars will have one afternoon and one morning to do their work.

Then we all get back together in general plenary session for the final discussions.

As usual, the Conference will end up with a business meeting on the afternoon of the second day. Elections will be held for the new set of officers for 1978-79. A traditional dinner to honor the delegates will highlight the evening of the last day, with the outgoing President delivering some kind of an address and the incoming President unfolding the broad outlines of his program for the year to follow. I hope to see you all there.

The theme of your Regional Conference in Iloilo, which is "Development Politics," was the choice of our local PPSA members headed by Atty. Segundina Navarro, who is also a national officer. She is this year's creative and indefatigable legal officer of PPSA. She and her group laboriously wove the fabric of this excellent program which will be the subject of our sessions for two days. We did not bother to look over her shoulders; we did not intend to do so. I would like to believe that the topics chosen for these sessions are your own perception of the major problems of your region.

I hope that you will all actively participate in the proceedings and make the most of our sessions. With these words and in this spirit, I now formally declare the Conference open.