

ADDRESS

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First of all, I deem it vital to congratulate in behalf of our President, Hon. Ali Dimaporo and the entire Mindanao State University (MSU) constituents, the sponsoring organizations of this gathering. From the bottom of our hearts we say, "Thank you very much and congratulations for the success of this affair."

This Conference is not only significant because of the number of participants or because of the involvement of the concerned individuals and organizations from the different areas or regions of the country but more so because of the focus on development politics in Mindanao. Thus, the holding of this occasion in this part of the country gave more significance to the theme — "Development Politics: Focus on Mindanao."

Why should the focus be on Mindanao? What is in Mindanao that is not in the other regions of the country?

If we try to refresh our memories and look back to our past, we will better understand why the focus and concern should be in this part of the country.

During the Spanish times, no attention was given to Mindanao except for sending military reinforcements to subjugate its people particularly the Muslims. As you very well know, Mindanao is the site of the fiercest defiance against the Spanish colonizers.

During the American regime, the Government in Manila shifted to a policy of friendship and attraction which, in actuality is virtually the same as in the past. The policy-making body of the country treated the people of Mindanao just like the rest of the populace in the observance and performance of duties and responsibilities without taking into account the diversity of cultures among Filipinos themselves. Hence, because of this political set-up the policy which is suited only to a particular community is enforced to other sectors taking for granted the fact that such policy may be detrimental to the other sectors and inimical to their progress.

But such policy ended after the declaration of Martial Law. Thus, a new situation emerged.

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The government imposed a policy on decentralization and regionalization. The 1973 Constitution also provided for the necessary support in strengthening the local government. Hence, the policies shifted into by President Marcos gave importance to the local government in all levels — barangay, municipal, provincial, and regional.

What must have been the reason behind this?

It is obvious and clear, without any shade of ambiguity and doubt that this was purposely in recognition of the diversified elements and sectors of the nation.

Beginning from the barangay level, every Filipino is given a share in decision-making. This is based upon the philosophy that there can be no real development and progress not unless every citizen is involved in such endeavor. Hence, the trend now is for the total development of each and every Filipino for each of us to be not only a potent citizen of the country but an undeniable contributor to the total development of the nation.

But why is the focus on Mindanao?

Mindanao has been dubbed as the Land of Promise. Yet it has never realized the fulfillment of this promise except within the current thrust on national development.

The Philippine President himself declared in the initiation of the program for the reconstruction and development of Mindanao that if the trend before the Martial Law era was having a ratio of 2:1 in favor of the other parts of the country, the President himself will be putting it the other way around.

Therefore, attention has been finally given to the people of Mindanao especially the Muslim population. Among the projects launched by the government were: infrastructure projects, maximum support to the educational and socio-economic progress of Mindanao, appointment of Muslim officials to key offices in the country (one excellent example of which is the recent appointment of our acting President and Governor of Lanao del Sur, Dr. Ali Dimaporo to the Executive Committee of the Republic of the Philippines), creation of the national autonomous governments for the twin Muslim Regions IX and XII, and establishment of a separate Ministry of Muslim Affairs.

The significant role that the Muslim Filipinos can play in the socio-economic development of the Philippines is recognized. It is no longer denied that they too are Filipinos who had shared all the burdens of sacrifice and martyrdom for the eventual evolution of the Filipino nation into a free, independent and sovereign people. As such, they are part and parcel of the national community and therefore partners of their brother Filipinos in the task of development and nation-building.

Before I close, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify something about the radio commentaries made by some officials or citizens of the area for the past two days. They were very good commentaries on the significance and importance of the Seminar. For this reason, we are very thankful for holding this Conference in Marawi City. However, as one of the officials of the University, I would like to make a personal comment to prevent any misunderstanding. The commentaries over the radio for the past two days were very constructive in the sense that all of us have in mind the national policy and the national objective towards national unity. In the line up, very vital and relevant topics on the present situation in the area are included such as Islam and Development and Church and the Development of the People of Mindanao. In order to provide substantive information on these topics, however, I suggest that we see to it that the right topic is assigned to the right speaker.