

Speech by Ambassador Manuel M. Lopez

Diplomatic Reception on the Occasion of the 117th Anniversary of the
Proclamation of Philippine Independence

12 June 2015, Fuji Ballroom, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo

The Honorable **Kenji Kosaka**, Chairman of the Japan-Philippines
Parliamentarians Friendship League
Chairman **Teruo Asada** of the Philippine Society of Japan,
Hon. **Yasuhisa Shiozaki**, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare
Mr. **Toshiyuki Shiga**, Chairman of the Japan-Philippines Economic
Cooperation Committee (JPECC)
Honorable Members of the National Diet,
Honorable Officials of the Government of Japan,
Your **Excellencies**, the **Ambassadors and members** of the vibrant
diplomatic corps and **Heads of International Organizations** in Japan
Fellow Filipinos,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

I am delighted to welcome all of you this evening as we celebrate 117
years of Filipino nationhood.

On 12 June 1898, the Philippine flag was unfurled before the Filipino
nation and the world, marking the beginning of our people's journey to
self-determination. That path has proven to be an arduous one, and yet
the Filipino's strength of spirit and kind heart have always shone through
and conquered all odds.

The Philippines is now at an important point in its journey as nation. His
Excellency President Benigno S. Aquino III has resolutely steered the
nation onto the "straight path" which brought to bear the Philippines'
democratic heritage and an unrelenting commitment to good governance
on the drive towards national development and inclusive growth.

The results have been outstanding. The Philippines has been riding high
on a sustained wave of unsurpassed economic growth, stability and
international confidence. Over the last five years, growth has averaged
6.3 percent, making the Philippines one of the fastest growing nations in
the world. A great sense of optimism pervades the nation, which is duly
matched and validated by the international community.

Our strong economic fundamentals and robust fiscal position have been
confirmed by investment-grade ratings and steady upgrades from

Standard & Poor's, Fitch Ratings, Moody's Investor Service, and the Japan Credit Rating Agency. This vote of confidence is likewise clear in the steady stream of foreign direct investments into the Philippines, which in 2014 reached a new high of US\$ 6.2 billion.

Japan, our only formal Strategic Partner in Asia, has done much to fuel the Philippines' rise and will without doubt be our most important regional partner in the years to come. Japan was the largest source of approved foreign investments into the Philippines in 2014 (PHP 35.66 billion) and also our largest trading partner, with total trade amounting to US\$19.1 billion. Japan is also our largest source of total active bilateral ODA last year, with US\$3.58 billion in active loans and grants.

Japan's special position in the Philippines' success was evident last 2 to 5 June, when President Aquino was received as State Guest by the Government of Japan, in a State Visit that can only be called a resounding triumph.

President Aquino was touched by the warm welcome extended by Their Majesties, who graciously tendered a State Banquet in his honour. The President delivered a much-lauded, highly-applauded address before the Joint Session of the National Diet. Last June 4, the President held a Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which outlined the path to more robust bilateral cooperation in the security arena, to complement the dynamic exchanges that we have always fostered in the economic field. The two leaders charted for our two countries a course that promises to inaugurate a new era in Philippine-Japan relations.

President Aquino's State Visit was an occasion for the Philippines to thank Japan for its full and sustained support for Philippine development. Just as importantly, it was an occasion to renew the long-standing friendship between our peoples. We are proud of the more than 222,000 Filipinos who live in Japan and in the process contribute to both their Philippine motherland and Japanese society. We are pleased to see the steadily growing number of Filipino tourists to Japan, which posted the highest growth rate inbound tourism to Japan from ASEAN at 70%. It pleases us as well to see more and more Japanese tourists enjoying the delights of our beautiful Philippines, your closest neighbor in Southeast Asia. Close to half a million Japanese (463,744) experienced for themselves how it is "more fun in the Philippines" in 2014. With "Visit Philippines Year 2015" in full swing, record-breaking arrivals are on the horizon.

As the Philippines celebrates 117 years of its foundation, and as the Philippines and Japan approach the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2016, we avail ourselves of this occasion to thank Japan, for building with us one of the strongest relations and most dynamic and mutually-beneficial economic partnership Asia has seen.

We also convey our gratitude to all of you who have come to celebrate this milestone with us tonight, on behalf of your respective governments and organizations, who have been true friends and partners of the Philippines.

On behalf of a rising and grateful Philippines, *domo arigatou gozaimasu*, thank you and *mabuhay!*