

Dinner hosted by the President of the Republic of the Philippines

January 14, 1997
Manila, Philippines

Team Canada is in the Philippines as a friend and a business partner. We have come to celebrate the warm and productive relations we deeply enjoy, and to see those relations reach new heights.

We watched with great emotion as Mrs. Aquino with you at her side, Mr. President led Filipinos to the path of democracy just more than a decade ago. "People Power" was an inspiration not just for the people of your country but for all Canadians. We have watched with great interest as the Philippines have grown and prospered, and taken its rightful place as a leader in the Asian community.

Canada has not been just an observer in this process. Canada was one of the first countries to extend diplomatic recognition to the new government in 1986. And we were the first country to extend export credits to it. Since then, Canada and the Philippines have become partners in development cooperation, in trade and investment and, increasingly, in international affairs, including in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Canadians have followed with great interest the vital economic reform programme being undertaken by President Ramos. These reforms have spurred your growth, brought greater prosperity to your people, and will certainly make of the Philippines one of the dynamos of the international economy. I salute the courage of President Ramos in undertaking this path -- it is always easy to put off the tough decisions. But he did not. And Filipinos are today benefitting from his wisdom and leadership.

I also wish to pay tribute to the outstanding leadership that President Ramos demonstrated throughout 1996 as chair of the APEC process. He guided APEC in a critical year in its development, where he kept APEC focused on the agenda of trade and investment liberalization, and on economic and technical cooperation. He helped make APEC relevant to business, initiating an important dialogue between APEC Leaders and the business community through the APEC Business Forum, which I addressed during my visit to Manila in November for the APEC Leaders' Meeting.

As the ceremonial torch of APEC leadership is passed from the Philippines to Canada this year, I will have very, very big shoes to fill.

Team Canada is in Manila to celebrate the Canada-Philippines connection. We want to expand our growing commercial relationship. We want it to create more jobs and economic prosperity for people in both our countries. There are many sectors, such as telecommunications and transportation infrastructure, where there is a natural fit between the needs of the Philippines and the Canadian know-how.

The new business deals and bilateral agreements that we will sign later during this visit will strengthen our relationship even more.

The Team Canada mission is the first official event in Canada's Year of Asia-Pacific in 1997. Our visit, the third Team Canada mission to Asia in less than three years, reflects the high priority that Canada's political and business leadership gives to building relations with this region. Throughout 1997, Canadians from coast to coast to coast will celebrate our ties with the Asia Pacific, the most dynamic region in the world.

In November 1997, I will host the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Vancouver, Canada's Pacific gateway. I look forward to welcoming President Ramos to Canada at that time.

Ladies and gentlemen, when it comes to Canada-Philippines relations, we enjoy a hidden treasure -- the presence in Canada of over 200,000 Canadians of Filipino origin. Filipino-Canadians, whether they live in Winnipeg, Toronto, Vancouver or Calgary have made an enormous contribution to our country and to the multicultural fabric of Canadian life. I need look no farther than the seat right behind me in the House of Commons to see an outstanding example of the contribution of Filipino-Canadians -- Dr. Rey Pagtakhan, born in Cavite, a respected Member of Parliament and a member of our Team Canada mission and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister of Canada.

That is an example of the important role Canadians of Filipino origin are playing in Canadian society today. And there are thousands of Rey Pagtakhan across Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we celebrate the friendship, harmony and goodwill that characterizes the relations between our countries, please join me in raising your glasses in a toast to the President of the Republic of the Philippines.