

Philippines-Canada Business Forum luncheon

January 15, 1997
Manila, Philippines

On behalf of Team Canada, let me say what a pleasure it is to be here in your beautiful country. In Canada, Filipinos are well-known for their gracious hospitality and that hospitality has certainly been in evidence on our visit here. I wish to thank you for your warm welcome.

Canadians are excited by the developments here in the Philippines. The People's Power revolution led by Mrs. Corazon Aquino a decade ago was an inspiration to all Canadians. And a lesson about the spirit and courage of the Filipino people. President Ramos has continued that spirit. He has worked to address the social and developmental challenges of your country. And he has achieved historic results in the peace process leading to political reconciliation within your nation.

These reforms have given the Philippines a new sense of hope and optimism. And the economic reforms of President Ramos and his government have set the basis for long term economic growth. And Canada wants to be part of it.

I am told that the growth rate in the Philippines in 1995 was 5.5 per cent and that growth in 1996 was over 7% -- and that you have enjoyed five straight years of accelerating growth. I am in the Philippines to promote Canadian exports, but your growth rate is one import I would like to take back to Canada!

The economic potential of the Philippines is being unleashed and the world is taking notice -- the media are calling the Philippines the 'Newborn Tiger'. And your roar is impressive.

Team Canada is in the Philippines to help ensure that this progress continues. And that the Canada-Philippines partnership continues to grow.

That partnership is built on a strong foundation. Canada was one of the first governments to recognize the Aquino administration in 1986 and our ambassador was the first foreign emissary to present credentials to the new government. We were the first country to extend export credits to the new government.

Since then, bilateral trade has increased six-fold, to reach \$825 million in 1995. In the same period, our exports to the Philippines have grown seven-fold, from \$46 million in 1985 to \$328 million in 1995. Canada has major investments in the Philippines, with companies such as Sun Life, Manulife and Scotiabank enjoying a long-standing presence in your country. More than twenty Canadian companies have offices here.

But even the best partnerships can be improved. And that is what Team Canada is all about. We are more than four-hundred strong - the political leadership of Canada, municipal leaders, educators and hundreds of business representatives - all with one message: we are here to make the Canada-Philippines partnership grow.

Canada is a world leader in the building and design of economic infrastructure. Transportation. Telecommunications. Information technology. Energy. Construction and building materials. In the telecommunications sector, for example, with the deregulation of the Philippine telecommunications industry, Canadian companies have won a substantial number of equipment contracts. Many of these companies are represented on Team Canada.

We offer excellent consumer products as well. Today, grocery stores in the Philippines offer Canadian apples, pork and beef, frozen foods, canola oil, potato chips and pasta, even bubble gum and ice beer!

Canada is also competing in important niche markets in the Philippines. Let me give you two examples. With its talented and skilled labour, the Philippines is a centre for cartoon imaging. In the field of animation, Sheridan College of Toronto is producing graduates with specialized skills in animation, who are working in the Philippines as cartoonists and illustrators. They are producing cartoon imaging for clients such as Disney.

Another example is Sea Form Systems Asia Inc., a commercial dive contracting and construction company that specializes in rehabilitating pier and wharf facilities. With technology developed in Canada, this company has gained a strong presence in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia. The president of this company, Mr. Dan Young, is also the President of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines.

Another important growth area for Canada in the Philippines, and a big priority for Team Canada, is educational services. Canada offers first-rate educational facilities and specialized training, and we would welcome more Filipino students in Canada. Representatives of a number of Canada's leading educational institutions are with us on the Team Canada mission.

Many of the players on Team Canada are small and medium-sized business. That sector is the motor of the Canadian economy. Their presence reflects the desire of smaller Canadian firms to take their entrepreneurial skills and savvy overseas, into the global marketplace.

Team Canada has also welcomed a number of young entrepreneurs to the team this year. Because we place a high priority on creating jobs and opportunities for young people.

Small companies seeking big opportunities. Young men and women putting new ideas to commercial use. Modern schools providing the training for the new information economy. And some of the strongest and most experienced Canadian companies in the resource and manufacturing sectors.

These are what Team Canada is all about. And that's what this trip is all about -- expanding the Canada-Philippines partnership to a new level for a new millennium.

There is one thing that is essential to any real partnership - and that is shared values. And those shared values are clear in the way we approach one of the most difficult and tragic problems of poverty and development -- child labour and exploitation.

I commend the government of President Ramos for undertaking a five-year plan to combat child sexual abuse and other forms of child exploitation. I also welcome the new legislation you have passed against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination, which also deals with child prostitution. The Philippines is one of the countries that will benefit from a program of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to eliminate child labour -- a program in which Canada has been a leader.

In fact, we have worked closely with you in the Philippines in this area. In real, concrete, tangible ways. Like the Canadian-funded program that trains and empowers children and parent leaders of Local Committees for the Protection of Children and trains Street Children Junior Advocates. These children educate other street children and develop a network among them to understand and exercise their rights.

We are trying to make the rights of children a foreign affairs priority. And we have introduced legislation in Parliament that would send a strong signal to Canadians that they will be subject to prosecution if they engage in commercial sexual activities with children while abroad.

Through the Canadian International Development Agency, we are supporting programs in a number of countries that help provide affordable access to primary education, particularly for girls; that improve the status and role of women as equal partners in development; and that support good governance and human rights.

Our shared commitment to development is just one of many in the growing list of values we share. In fact, we are both members of what is fast becoming a community - the Asia Pacific community. And we in Canada plan to be a full and active member.

A few weeks ago in Vancouver, Canada's Pacific gateway, I declared 1997 to be Canada's Year of Asia Pacific. Throughout 1997, Canada will celebrate our country's Pacific dimension and the outstanding contribution made by Canadians of Asian origin.

We want to raise awareness among Canadians of the importance of the Asia-Pacific community to our economy and society.

The highlight of the Year of Asia Pacific will be Canada's chairing of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, an honour we will inherit from the Philippines. President Ramos will not be an easy act to follow. He has shown strong leadership in advancing the APEC agenda of trade and investment liberalization. I plan to build on that success. And carry on that agenda.

By working together, we can create a future in which economic growth leads to the long-term prosperity and well-being of the people of the region. Along with our fellow members in APEC, we must press forward to achieve our goal of free trade and investment by 2010 for developed countries and 2020 for developing countries.

Through these and other initiatives during Canada's Year of Asia Pacific, Canada wants to demonstrate how important the Pacific community is for us, today, and in the future.

In so doing, we will want to highlight the vital role that Filipinos are playing in Canadian society. Canadians of Filipino origin have helped strengthen bilateral trade and investment, through family ties to the Philippines and their close familiarity with business practices in both countries. I call them Canada's hidden advantage in the Philippines. There are more than 250,000 of them. And they add vitality and entrepreneurial spirit to Canadian society.

In fact, a Filipino-Canadian is Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister of Canada. Dr. Rey Pagtakhan was born in Cavite, and is now a respected Member of Parliament in Canada. I am fortunate to rely on his wise counsel in our House of Commons. And all of us in Team Canada are fortunate to have you here with us on this trip.

Rey is from the great Canadian city of Winnipeg -- a twin city of Manila. Filipinos have been contributing to Canadian life in Winnipeg for years -- and also in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Edmonton. And forming a very real, very strong, and very human link to the Philippines.

And that human connection is the basis of any strong relationship. Between people. And between countries. That is the focus of our Year of Asia Pacific. And that is the focus of this Team Canada mission. Bringing people together. To create understanding. To create opportunity and jobs for our people. To form a true community of nations in the Pacific.

That is the spirit of Team Canada. And it is a spirit that will continue growing for many years to come.