

Presidential Awards conferred on 45 individuals and organizations overseas

Continuing the tradition of honoring outstanding overseas-based Filipino individuals and organizations, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo conferred the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas to 45 awardees from 12 countries at Malacañan Palace on 15 December 2004.

Held biennially, the Presidential Awards seeks to recognize the finest manifestations of Filipino generosity and excellence in work. First conferred by President Fidel V. Ramos in December 1993, the Presidential Awards has been conferred to 235 individuals and organizations overseas since its inception. The 2004 Awarding Ceremony marked the second time President Arroyo conferred the Presidential Awards.



A little girl presents President Arroyo with flowers as President Arroyo confers the Presidential Award to Kinderhilfe Philippines. Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto G. Romulo, CFO Chairman Dante A. Ang and CFO Executive Director Jose Z. Molano join the President in conferring the award.

The Presidential Awards is given in different categories. The *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* (LINKAPIL) Award is conferred on Filipino associations or individuals for their significant contributions to Philippine development efforts. The 2004 LINKAPIL awardees are Dr. Sariel G.G. Ablaza, Dr. Guillermo B. de Venecia, Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, Inc., Dr. Benjamin A. Iletto, International Network of Filipinos Overseas, Dr. Arsenio R. Martin, Mari Bernabe Nihei, Alfredo T. Tesalona, University of the Philippines Medical Alumni Society in America, and Visayas-Mindanao Cultural Association e.v.

The *Banaag* Award is accorded to Filipino and foreign individuals or associations for their contributions which have significance. *see Presidential Awards, page 10*

Dante A. Ang appointed CFO Chairman

Following the issuance of Executive Order No. 373 on 18 October 2004, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo swore in Manila Times publisher Dante A. Ang as the first full-time Chairman of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in simple rites on 15 December 2004.

Prior to the issuance of E.O. 373, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs was the Chairman of the CFO Board of Commissioners in an ex-officio capacity. E.O. 373 reorganized the composition of the CFO Board of Commissioners to include a Chairman with Cabinet rank to be appointed by the President. This marks the first time in 24 years that the CFO will be headed by a full-time Chairman.

A renowned entrepreneur, publicist and public relations expert, Chairman Ang's appointment to the CFO is his first stint in public office, though he is by no means a stranger in the workings of the bureaucracy. As a young man, Chairman Ang worked as a surveyor's assistant at the former Department of Public Works. He became closely associated with the late Secretary of Foreign Affairs Blas F.



Ang endeavors to run CFO like a private company by cutting down government expense without sacrificing the quality of public service delivery.

see Dante A. Ang, page 10

CFO gears up for new programs in 2005

In line with the appointment of its new chairman, CFO gears up for new program thrusts in 2005 which aims to be more responsive to the needs and interests of overseas Filipinos. Upon his assumption to office, Chairman Dante A. Ang expressed the need for the Commission to be more proactive in taking up issues of general concern to Filipino emigrants, as well as tapping their resources to fuel sustainable national development.

Chairman Ang also emphasized the need to continuously enhance existing CFO programs to ensure its relevance to the overseas Filipino community. He cited CFO's extensive experience in tapping development assistance from overseas Fili-

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News From Abroad

U.S. Immigration Service retrogresses issuance of immigrant visas

The dawn of 2005 may prove frustrating for thousands of Filipino nurses who dream of working in U.S. shores, as the U.S. State Department curbs the issuance of E-3 or employment-based immigrant visa to the U.S. Starting January 1st, the issuance of E-3 visa will retrogress to year 2002, indicating that the demand for immigrant visas has exceeded the supply. In effect, applications filed after January 1, 2002 will no longer be processed.

Once implemented, the U.S. immigration law stands in the way of those who have applied or are planning to apply for this type of U.S. work permit. The Immigration and Nationality Act numerically limits to 140,000 slots the annual worldwide minimum for employment-based preference immigrants. In 2004, the U.S. Embassy in Manila issued 8,705 E-3 visas, a 33.8% increase from 2003. Moreover, the law restricted the number of immigrant visas available by any individual country. The retrogression does not apply solely to the Philippines but also in other countries with high demand for E-3 visas, particularly China and India. Further, it affects not only health workers, but also other skilled professionals such as teachers, accountants and IT workers.

Despite this restrictive measure, the nursing profession continues to be classified as a shortage occupation by the U.S. Department of Labor, a trend that threatens to undermine quality medical care in communities all across America. Data culled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that growth in the nursing workforce has not kept pace with the country's population growth over the past five years. Likewise, the U.S. Human Resources and Services Administration estimated that the shortage of nurses could go up as high as 400,000 to 700,000 by the year 2020.

Since the 80's, the Philippines has been a major source of nurses in the U.S. According to *New York Times* (2003), 41% of those engaged in the nursing profession are Filipinos whose qualifications are at par with U.S. trained nurses. The exodus of Filipino healthcare professionals can be attributed to the lure of higher compensation and the chance to obtain permanent residence status. Nurses working in Philippine public hospitals earn an average of \$160 a month, a far cry from the \$3,000 - \$4,000 a month they could earn in the U.S. News of these attractive opportunities has catapulted the Philippines as a major origin country of nurses, producing 8,000 - 16,000 nursing graduates annually, which may easily triple in succeeding years. Most, according to reports, are inclined to work abroad, mainly in the U.S. Data from the CFO shows that for the past 10 years, the U.S. remains to be the top destination country of Filipino emigrant nurses.

The new quota limit on E-3 visa is the indirect result of a more efficient immigration process after the September 11 terrorist attack against the U.S. U.S. Embassy officials in Manila are uncertain on how long the retrogression will last.

Japan tightens rules on issuance of visas for performing artists

In an effort to curb incidences of human trafficking, the Japanese immigration authorities issued a new ruling on 2 December 2004, imposing stricter measures against the entry of all foreign entertainers. Over 80,000 dancers, musicians and entertainers are expected to be affected by this new Japanese immigration policy which is expected to cut down the number of overseas Filipino workers in the country by 90 percent beginning January 2005.

Under the new rules, the Japanese government will no longer recognize the Artist Record Book (ARBs), now called the Artist Accreditation Card (AAC), as an essential document when considering a Filipino entertainer's application for a visa. Instead of a certification from the Philippine government, Japanese officials reverted to the old system, which was in place until 1994, requiring Filipino overseas performing artists (OPAs) to have completed at least two years of formal course in music, dancing or singing, or at least two years of experience as entertainers outside Japan.

Records of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) show that Japan is one of the top five destination countries of OFWs. Since 1996, there has been an increasing trend in the deployment of OFWs to Japan reaching 62,539 in 2003. A large percentage of these workers are women OPAs.

In 2003 alone, POEA recorded that out of the 57,607 OPAs deployed to Japan, 55,054 of them were women. Although OPAs have been sent to other countries, the numbers are not as large as those sent to Japan. Out of 57,991 Filipino OPAs deployed in 2003, only 384 went to work in other countries.

The recruitment industry doubts whether entertainers would meet the two



U.S. authorities are compelled to retrogress the issuance of immigrant visas for exceeding the number of visas issued as mandated by U.S. law. Meanwhile, thousands of Filipinos queuing at the U.S. Embassy in Manila (photo above), remain hopeful for U.S. Congressional intervention.

ILO: RP is world's top source of labor migrants

With almost one out of every ten Filipinos currently living or working abroad, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has officially acknowledged the Philippines as the largest source of migrant labor in the world, displacing Mexico from the top spot.

"Unlike Mexico, where the vast majority of departing migrants head for a single country illegally, Filipinos find themselves welcomed around the world as contract employees. They're laying pipelines in Siberia, mining diamonds in Angola and sailing ships in the world's oceans. They clean thousands of homes a day from Hong Kong to Dubai to London," ILO migration specialist Manolo Abella was quoted as saying.

With this news, Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas commented that the government has forged 42 bilateral agreements with 37 countries worldwide for the past three years to ensure the safety and welfare of overseas Filipino workers. "These accords set the models for migrant worker protection and welfare while affirming the high standards, esteem and acceptability of Filipino seafarers and land-based professionals overseas," Sto. Tomas said. DOLE noted that six accords are in force to protect the welfare of land-based OFWs while it has concluded 36 agreements with other countries for the security of seafarers.

Aside from being the top origin country of migrant workers in the world, the Philippines is also the third largest remittance-receiving country after Mexico and India. An Asian Development Bank report noted that the estimated 7.6 million overseas Filipinos remit between \$14 billion and \$21 billion to their families back home. According to the same study however, the billions of dollars that overseas Filipinos send home do little to ease long-term poverty in the country.

The ADB study noted that the money that workers and emigrants send home each year is spent putting sons, daughters, nieces and nephews through school, while the rest is spent on food and village fiestas as well as ill-advised small-business ventures that usually fail. Extensive anecdotal evidence was cited suggesting considerable spending for non-essentials and luxuries by recipient families. "Relatives who neither have the proper business attitude or appreciation for the hard-earned income are asked to manage small enterprises which eventually fail," the study said.

"With formal flows at the level of seven billion dollars yearly, and actual flows estimated at double that figure, there is a tremendous potential for harnessing these remittance flows for more productive use and as a tool for poverty reduction," the study said. It cited the experience of banks in Turkey, Peru, El Salvador and Mexico, which have tapped the investment market for amounts ranging from 100-300 million dollars through securitization of overseas workers' remittances.

The Philippines' challenge, according to the study, "lies in addressing the various regulatory and practical barriers and gaps" to tap these fund flows for development.

Association of Philippine schools in the Middle East established

To uplift the quality of education among Philippine schools in the Middle East, four Philippine schools overseas (PSOs) organized the Association of Philippine Schools in the Middle East (APSME) during the Science and Math Camp held at the Philippine School Bahrain on 29-30 September 2004.

The Philippine School Bahrain; Elite International School, Riyadh; Second Philippine International School, Riyadh; and Philippine School Doha comprise the first members of APSME which held its first basketball tournament on 13-15 November 2004 in Bahrain. Some of the initial programs of APSME include providing assistance for the continuing education and professional development of faculty of member schools, and curricular and co-curricular competition and exchanges among students.

Expressing the need to strengthen linkages and provide a venue for exchange of ideas among PSOs, the Inter-Agency Committee on Philippine Schools Overseas designated Dr. Geronimo R. Salem, Jr., principal of Philippine School Bahrain, to take the lead in organizing inter-school networking activities. The mandate to organize inter-school activities came as a response to the views expressed by the participants of the Third Conference on the Management and Operation of Philippine Schools Overseas which was held at Manama, Bahrain on 15-16 January 2004.

To date, there are 35 PSOs in the Middle East, 22 of which are accredited by the Philippine Department of Education. The Inter-Agency Committee on Philippine Schools Overseas has strongly urged other PSOs to formally join the APSME.

Filipino nurses rally to bring NCLEX-RN to RP

Seeing to make life easier for emigrating Filipino nurses, the Philippine Nurses Association of America (PNAA) held an audience with Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo on 28 September 2004 to ask for Philippine government support in bringing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to the Philippines.

NCLEX-RN is a licensure examination for nurses who wish to practice in the United States. At present, it is administered only within U.S. territories, prompting Filipino nurses to fly to Guam or Saipan in order to take the examination. Two years ago, however, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) approved a recommendation to designate international test centers for NCLEX-RN. In June 2004, NCSBN identified Hong Kong, Seoul and London as the three pilot international testing centers.

According to the PNAA, the Philippines was bypassed as a potential testing center due to its inability to meet some of the criteria set by the Council. Chief among the criteria set by NCSBN in selecting international pilot sites for NCLEX-RN, include national security, including economic climate, and examination security. Romulo pledged DFA representation to iron out said issue.

In 2004, NCSBN reported that 63% of those who passed the NCLEX-RN are Filipino nurses.



FILIPINO TIES

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Quotes from the Quill

"For both the Philippines and your host countries, you are examples of fortitude and sacrifice and love. You carry the Filipino heritage that flows in your veins and made you who you are."

- President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in her speech during the Awarding Ceremony of the Year 2004 Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas.

"Let freedom ring once more from these bells, from the Belfry of Balangiga where they originally belong, to punctuate America's generosity of spirit, and the gallantry of our forebears, and complete the healing."

- Written in a temporary wooden marker placed at the Balangiga Belfry which was constructed in 1998, in anticipation of the return of the Balangiga bells to the Philippines.

perspective The long and winding road to Filipino veterans' full equity

The issue of the Filipino World War II veterans has been regarded as an important emblem for the many Filipino-American community movements in the United States and has been recurrently discussed in several conferences and gatherings of Filipino American organizations. For over half a century, Filipino veterans and their families have been clamoring for the redemption of the promise made by the United States of America through President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to the Filipino fighting men and women who rallied to the defense of America during the Second World War. The pledge was for Filipino soldiers who served and fought with American forces to receive similar benefits and enjoy same rights and privileges as their counterparts from mainland U.S.A.

Side by side, along with the American soldiers from the mainland, the Filipinos fought and offered the ultimate sacrifice in the name and under the flag of America. Then in 1946, after the Philippines gained its independence, the U.S. Congress passed the Rescission Act, a portion of which states that service of the Filipino veterans "shall not be deemed to be or have been service in the military or naval forces of the United States or any component thereof or any law of the United States conferring rights, privileges or benefits."

The passage of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1990, which gave Filipino World War II veterans the right to acquire U.S. citizenship brought about an influx of elderly Filipino migrants into the United States whose numbers had reached 28,000 by 1998.

In spite of being naturalized U.S. citizens, however, Filipino veterans are not eligible for most of the benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, including old age pensions and free medical care in veterans' hospitals, and thus have been given little choice but to live on scanty Supplementary Security Income (SSI) payments. The biggest barrier to full enjoyment of veterans' rights under the U.S. law was the 1946 Rescission Act set forth by President Roosevelt which denied Filipino veterans of eligibility for service-connected disabilities and death compensation that other American soldiers receive. Although there are recently passed bills that seem to reverse the provisions set forth by the Rescission Act, its basic provisions still stand.

The recently passed "Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003, S. 1156," now allows Filipino American veterans access to medical care at VA hospitals and nursing homes. A second bill, the "Veterans Benefit Act," provides full war-related compensation and burial benefits to about 100 soldiers recruited by the U.S. called the New Philippine Scouts – a certain category of Filipino veterans. However, since the Rescission Act distinguishes veterans not by nationality but by specific military career during the War (according to which military organization they belonged to), Filipino veterans would still not be eligible for full benefits, even if they changed their nationality and became U.S. Citizens.

Apart from a few remedial measures and administrative considerations, such as the naturalization of some veterans as U.S. citizens and the more recent healthcare benefits, no Filipino Veterans Equity Bill, which seeks to repeal the restrictive provisions of the 1946 Rescission Act has ever passed the US congress despite being repeatedly introduced in the past congressional terms.

Moreover, Filipino veterans who are still residing in the Philippines are still unable to enjoy most of the benefits being enjoyed by those who are already residing in the United States and have to deal with reduced rates of benefits. While other U.S. war veterans such as the Japanese Nisei in the United States have been successful in their lobbying efforts with the US Congress, being honored with special state resolutions and



Mailbox

Different life for a Filipina in Sweden

I have been staying in Sweden since April 23 (2004) and I could see the difference between Sweden and the Philippines. Swedes are very reserved to newcomers, while Filipinos are always smiling, welcoming, and deeply spirited people. Their language is extremely difficult. Then there is this silent environment. I could not hear people talking loudly in the bus, houses or streets. I miss the karaoke played loudly by a neighbor in my hometown.

Time is money here. In the Philippines, I did not have to run to catch the bus because taxis, motorcycles and trains are running in the streets every second. Here, I admire their very efficient traffic and driving system. Pedestrians are honored here, too.

Another thing is their culture. I can not visit close families or friends without calling them first. Unlike in the Philippines, I could just pop out in my neighbor's house for a quick hello or an extended stop. In answering a call, I have to state my first or last name and not just say hello.

I am happy and lucky to be here but I could not help but cry because I terribly miss my family and friends back in the Philippines. I also miss our big shopping malls there and their low prices. It is not easy to adjust to a new environment for the first few months. Proper or mature adjustment comes in a matter of time and I am sure, it will not stop there. The adjustment process will continue because I interact, socialize and learn from my daily experiences.

SHEILA S. REDIDO

Sarpövågen, Sweden

The FILIPINO TIES welcomes your opinions, comments, and suggestions. You can write to us at the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 1345 Quirino Ave., cor. South Superhighway, Manila, Philippines, send us a fax at (632) 561-8332, or e-mail us at cfodfa@info.com.ph.

Comments on CFO services

I would honestly say that in my case, CFO's service is not satisfactory at all. They are not flexible in giving schedule in claiming the (counseling) certificates. They gave me a date to get my certificate on a holiday in Cebu. It caused me so much trouble because I do not live in Cebu City. CFO's phone service as well is not good. You will have to keep trying, not because the phone is not available but because nobody is answering the phone. I think more manpower would improve the capability of services in CFO Cebu.

I give credit to CFO however, in terms of giving seminars and awareness as to what are the advantages and disadvantages of having multi-cultural marriage. It prepares us for a new and different life abroad.

LINIE P. CRAWFORD

Beach NSW, Australia

A salute to CFO employees

I would like to personally commend the employees of CFO who exemplified the highest moral values and sense of propriety and integrity in their service to the Filipino people. This is what actually happened - I brought four Toblerone chocolates as *pasalubong* and as a gesture of gratitude and goodwill because they are the ones taking our calls, responding to our queries and explaining the procedures (in applying for waiver of the 2-year residency requirement of the Exchange Visitor Program). I emphasized to them that it is not a bribe or *suhol* because they are not the ones who will decide the merit of my terminal report. I insisted but they firmly and graciously refused my *pasalubong*.

I was so impressed by their strong character and values. I was so moved and happy to know that we have such kind of employees in government who wanted to make a huge difference. I AM REALLY VERY PROUD OF THEM! How I wish I could have the means to share this incident to the media to set an example to the thousand employees in the government. Congratulations for a job well done and more power to you and your good office!

JOSE GAVAZAN

Salinas, California

More protection needed in recruiting Filipino teachers

Thank you so much for your positive reaction regarding the shameful situation victimizing our teachers not only in Texas and Los Angeles but also in other parts of the U.S. I know a lot of stories about our *kababayans* who were brought here by recruiters who are mostly Filipinos also, on such promises of employment as teachers. However, the recruiters only secure temporary working permits, which could easily be taken, and did not assist the teachers at all. It boggles me why these people are allowed to operate in the homeland so flagrantly.

As you must know, to be a teacher in California requires one to pass so many stringent requirements. Most recruiters do not have the capability to help the teachers meet such requirements. These recruitment companies are said to be constituted for the purpose of duping our unsuspecting, needy *kababayans*. It looks like it is not a big deal to constitute a recruitment corporation and dissolve it for whatever reason, only to be resurrected under another name. I hope the Philippine government will do something about these heart-wrenching events.

DIONESIO GRAVA

Los Angeles, USA

presidential awards special

The Presidential Awards sought to bring to the awareness of many, the finest representations of Filipino excellence. In this issue of *Filipino Ties*, the Editorial Board is pleased to feature some Presidential awardees who have shared their time and talents for the benefit of the Filipino people.

Dr. Guillermo De Venecia

In 1979, Dr. de Venecia established the Free Rural Eye Clinic (FREC) – a permanent out-patient surgical center located in Bolasi, San Fabian, Pangasinan. The first of its kind in the Philippines, FREC provides free eye care to a region with around 5-7 million potential patients. Since its inception, FREC has benefited indigent patients from Pangasinan, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, La Union, Ilocos Sur and Zambales, and the outlying provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Ifugao and Isabela. Truly one of a kind, FREC even funds travels, meals and lodging of poor cataract patients who visit the clinic from distant provinces. Because of FREC, thousands of sight-impaired Filipinos from the northern and southern part of Luzon who could not afford to pay, were able to see again.



Spanning two decades of providing free sight-saving and sight-restoring operations to the indigent cataract blind patients, Dr. de Venecia has served more than 16,500 indigent patients in the Philippines. Each year, he gives up his one-month vacation from Wisconsin, U.S.A. where he lives as a permanent resident and a well-respected ophthalmologist, to visit his homeland to perform eye surgery. He has also solicited support from various donors in the United States, delivering to the clinic loads of medical equipment, including operating tables, beds and mattresses.

Dr. de Venecia believes that his service to the poor is largely influenced by Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a Nobel Peace Prize winner for decades of medical service in Africa. He realized at an early age that his mission in life was to provide free medical services for the poor. "Anyone who bears the difficulty of going blind in both eyes can only be poor," Dr. de Venecia explains. "If you can help it, you'll certainly do something before you lose your sight."

Filipino Cultural Club in Kuwait

The Filipino Cultural Club (FCC) was established in 1987 through the efforts of 15 talented Filipinos from different professional affiliations bound together by their common passion for the arts, especially music and drama. Aiming to promote the cultural, spiritual, social, and intellectual values of its members, FCC organized successful cultural activities such as the *Fiesta Filipiniana*, a three-hour cultural event featuring Filipino songs and dances. In a country where its people are strictly bound by its close knit cultural and religious beliefs and practices, Kuwait initially opened its doors to diverse Filipino culture and arts.

However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait forced the club to cease its activities, thwarting an admirable start.



A few years thereafter, the new FCC became known for conducting socio-civic programs for distressed Filipino workers in Kuwait. When one of its members was raped and later incarcerated as she was countercharged as a prostitute, FCC organized a three-hour *Zarzuela* presenting Filipino songs and dances to raise funds for her lawyer's fee. It also staged "Beauty from a Culture", a beauty pageant, and "Nena – Sa Kabila ng Istorya", a play depicting the positive aspects of working overseas as a housemaid. Proceeds for these activities went to purchase flight tickets back to the Philippines for Filipino workers who were dismissed by their employers. FCC also assists Filipinos sheltered at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO)'s Filipino Workers Resource Center, and arranges gift-giving and Christmas party for them.

Now approaching its 16th year, FCC continues to expand its noble endeavors by working on a new scholarship program for indigent and deserving students in the Philippines. Laying out the project's initial plans, the group created a special committee that will identify particular areas in the country that will serve as its first recipients.

Hyehwadong Filipino Catholic Community



Founded in 1992 through the assistance of Filipino priests and nuns, HFCC was organized to give comfort, spiritual and financial support, and sense of belongingness among Filipinos working in South Korea. Said to be the largest and most influential Filipino group in South Korea, HFCC is not exclusively Catholic in membership and welcomes people of other faiths. Since its establishment, HFCC has been actively involved in issues concerning Filipino migrants, and reaches out to distressed Filipino nationals who suffer illnesses, work-related problems and domestic violence.

HFCC is often relied upon to assist undocumented or irregular Filipino workers who suffer abuse as a result of their status, help ill, undocumented workers get proper medical attention by shouldering their hospitalization expenses, and handle shipment of the remains of deceased Filipino workers. HFCC established the Pastoral Center for Filipino Migrants, a facility that receives generous support from the Archdiocese of Seoul. Primarily a shelter for runaway trainees and entertainers, as well as for victims of spousal abuse and illegal recruitment, the Pastoral Center also houses other services for Filipino migrants and serves as a gathering place for members of the community.

Extending its mantle of concern for overseas Filipinos in South Korea, HFCC also assists in the settlement of disputes involving

PROGRAM Updates

CFO and Feed the Hungry, Inc. reaches out to typhoon-ravaged Quezon province

On 22 December 2004, the Feed the Hungry, Inc. (FtH) of Washington, DC, in partnership with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, conducted relief operations for the victims of the tropical cyclones "Unding", "Violeta", "Winnie" and "Yoyong" in the municipalities of Real, General Nakar and Infanta in Quezon province.



Above: FtH and CFO volunteers unload truckloads of goods for typhoon victims in Infanta, Quezon; left: volunteers line up relief goods packaged in plastic water pails.

Some five (5) FtH volunteers, including its Executive Director, Ms. Teresita Calderon, and 2004 Presidential Awardee Dr. Wilfrido Buhain, and nine (9) CFO staff traveled to Real, Quezon to distribute relief goods consisting of rice, bread, bottled water, canned goods, plastic plates, water pail and laundry soap intended for 1,000 families residing in the three (3) municipalities. The group was also joined by Hawaii Representative Felipe Abinsay, Jr., who is also a recipient of this year's Presidential Awards, Rev. Mother Espie Orejola of the Franciscans of Our Lady of the Poor (FLP) and Fr. Joseph Rodem, one of the parish priests in Real. About 40 novice FLP nuns and students of the FLP Caregiver Institute also provided assistance during the relief distribution.



Through Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) provided a military truck for the transportation of the relief items from Manila to Quezon province. Mother Espie also provided a truck for the transportation of the donation to Quezon.

The areas that were reached by the group during the relief operations include *Barangays* Tignoan, Capalong, Cauayan and Poblacion I in Real. The FLP organized community and church leaders for the identification and registration of beneficiary families. In *Barangay* Tignoan, the group distributed relief packs to 100 families and turned-over relief packs to Fr. Joseph for 200 families from remote *barrios* who were not able to go to the distribution center. Some 100 families also benefited from the relief operations in *Barangays* Capalong and Cauayan. In *Barangay* Poblacion I, 250 families received donations. The remaining packs of relief goods will be distributed by FLP to General Nakar and Infanta in the following days.

Mother Espie brought to the attention of Ms. Calderon the plight of the victims of the recent typhoons in Quezon when they met during the awarding ceremony of the Presidential Awards in Malacañang on 15 December 2004. Mother Espie was assigned to the FLP prelature in Llavac, Real, Quezon in early December 2004 to extend relief assistance and spiritual support for communities that were affected by the typhoons.

According to the National Disaster Coordinating Council, there were 731,730 families or 3,717,499 individuals affected by the calamity as of 16 December 2004. About P5.73 million worth of properties were damaged, including houses, agricultural lands, fisheries, schools, and health and electrical facilities. In the municipalities of Real, General Nakar and Infanta alone, reports indicated that 893 persons died, 648 were injured, and 443 are still missing as of January 2005.

□□□

An angel calls for help

Jonh Daryl Almanza, 13 years old, is seeking the help of kind benefactors to support his continuous medication and dialysis. In 1996, barely 5 years old, he was diagnosed with recurring symptoms of Nephrotic Syndrome and has been in and out of the hospital since then for various complications. Nephrotic Syndrome is a collection of symptoms which occur when tiny blood vessels (glomeruli) in the kidney become defective allowing large quantities of protein to leave the blood circulation, and pass out of the body in the urine (source: Dr. Joseph E. Smith Medical Library).



"Jonh had always been a cheerful child," his mom Rowena writes to CFO.

Previous diagnoses showed that Jonh Daryl suffers from generalized edema (swelling), decreased urine output, lower back pains, among others. He needs immediate assistance to buy medicines to prevent further deterioration of his kidneys that may lead to renal failure and subsequent dialysis.

Jonh Daryl's mother, Rowena, wrote to CFO appealing for assistance in behalf of his son. As a single unemployed parent, she could barely provide for the needs of her 3 children, more so for the required monthly check-up to monitor Jonh Daryl's health. Any form of assistance would be highly appreciated. Interested donors may contact the CFO (Attn: Projects Management Office) at (632) 561-8327 or 561-8321 (local 604 to 608) for further details.

2004 Presidential awardees share knowledge and blessings

As part of the Year 2004 Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas organized several gift giving activities last December 16, 17 and 20, 2004 around Metro Manila. All the presidential awardees and their families were invited to participate and devote some of their time to bring cheer to school children, orphans and senior citizens. Funds for the purchase of gift packs were donated by the Feed the Hungry, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based Filipino organization. The said packs contain milk, biscuits, noodles, fruits, and school supplies, to name a few.

On 16 December, the gift giving activity coincided with the Christmas parties of the Gawad Kalinga and Asosacion de Damas de Filipinas. The 16 awardees, joined by FTH officers, Ms. Teresita Calderon and Mr. Pablito Alarcon, and CFO representatives, handed the gifts and Jollibee food packs to 115 children. The children in turn, showcased their talents by regaling their benefactors with song and dance numbers.

The following day, the volunteers proceeded to the Luwalhati ng Maynila and the Pilipinong May Kapansanan Foundation. They again gave out gift and food packs to 156 elderly and 50 disabled children. The senior citizens organized a program where they invited people to sing and dance with them.

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate was the last stop for the post-awards gift-giving activities. Ms. Solita Wakefield, another FTH officer, joined this activity and distributed gift packs to 300 children.

Simultaneously, five awardees shared also their time and knowledge by giving out talks, symposia and demonstrations to various educational institutions in Metro Manila. On December 12, 2004, character education expert and *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardee Dr. Rodolfo S. Bernardo conducted a seminar workshop on character education to more than 350 faculty and students of Philippine Normal University's College of Education.

On 16 December 2004, respected pediatric nephrologist and *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardee Dr. Constanca S. Uy, lectured about renal tubular acidosis to approximately 85 faculty and medical interns of the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. During the same day, Architect Dante C. Fuentes and Engr. Rodolfo C. Quiambao gave a joint talk about recent developments in architectural design and engineering services to an audience composed of 90 faculty and students of the Colleges of Engineering and Architecture at the Mapua Institute of Technology. Arch. Fuentes and Engr. Quiambao are also *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardees.

The last leg of the post-awards seminars was conducted by world-renowned wood carver and *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardee Eliodoro C. Cadawas, Jr. A fruit and vegetable carving demonstration was conducted at the De La Salle University-College of St. Benilde before 75 Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management faculty and students on January 12, 2005. Prior to his demonstration in DLSU-College of St. Benilde, CFO also assisted in arranging a meeting with Mr. Cadawas and the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines and the Technical Skills Development Authority for possible joint projects that would benefit hotel and restaurant students.

Several awardees were delighted to have participated in the post-awards events and not a few have pledged to come back and help those in need.

(Editor's note: The Commission on Filipinos Overseas assists overseas-based individuals and groups who wish to offer their service, as well as material and financial donations for the benefit of underprivileged communities or sectors in the Philippines. For those who are interested to help, please contact the Projects Management Office of the CFO at tel. no. (632) 561-8327, fax no. (632) 561-8332 or e-mail at cfodfa@info.com.ph)



Awardees enjoyed the laughter and talents of the children in Asosacion de Damas de Filipinas. Photo shows awardees handing out gift packs which were donated by Feed the Hungry, Inc. Simultaneously held with gift-giving activities are seminars or symposia conducted by *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardees in various educational institutions in Metro Manila.



The young and young at hearts. Awardees distributed packed lunches and gift items to the elderly in the *Luwalhati ng Maynila* home for the elderly. To express their appreciation, the elderly prepared a program which showcased their talents in singing and dancing.

CFO joins the 9th National Seafarers Day Celebration

On September 26, 2004, the Filipino seafaring community led by the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS)-Manila, steered the celebration of the 9th National Seafarers' Day (NSD) with Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and representatives from the government, maritime industry, and NGOs highlighting the event. The initiative, in accordance to then President Fidel V. Ramos' Proclamation No. 1094, was inspired by the prominent status of Filipino seafarers in the international maritime industry and in recognition of their invaluable contribution to national economy and development.

The annual celebration themed, *Filipino Seafarers: Aim High! Reach Higher!*, commenced with a grand parade of participants, bands and spectacular ship floats from T.M. Kalaw St. to Quirino Grandstand, Manila. It was followed by the holy mass officiated by Bishop Precioso Cantillas, entertaining silent drills performed by participating maritime schools, and speeches honoring Filipino seafarers all over the world's high seas by Manila Mayor Lito Atienza, Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas, and officials from International Maritime Organization, Maritime Industry Authority, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, Philippine Ports Authority, and Master and Mates Association of the Philippines.

The highlight of the celebration was the awarding of Outstanding Seafarer of the Year Award (OSYA). The President conferred awards to four Filipino seafarers, namely Capt. Ernesto Menorca and 3/O Lugen Ortilliano for their heroism and valor in rescuing distressed sailors near Adriatic Sea despite inclement weather and in saving the lives of some crew of *Bow Mariner* after its explosion near Virginia coast, respectively. Capt. Gregorio Sialsa also received the award for his outstanding contribution to the maritime industry, while a posthumous award was bestowed to Capt. Wilijado Abuid for his remarkable legacy to maritime education. One of the moving moments of the celebration was the Memorial at Sea, a tribute in remembrance

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Presidential Awards special...

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Filipino nationals which are filed in Korean courts. From 2000 to 2002 alone, HFCC dealt with more than 40 cases, at times involving as many as three complainants per case. Apart from catering to distressed Filipino nationals, HFCC also operates *Bahay Kalingang Pambata* (BAKAP), a day care facility for children of overseas Filipino workers. BAKAP aims to enable parents to engage in productive work during the formative years of their children.

HFCC has indeed made a difference in the lives of Filipinos in South Korea. The Philippine Embassy in Seoul acknowledged the organization as a "conduit of the Philippine Embassy in addressing many cases and as a helpful partner in promoting the welfare of Filipinos in Korea." Serving as the embassy's "critic", HFCC's role is viewed as a healthy means of checks and balance.

Charlotte Godicke



The transformation of Sagay City in Negros Occidental into a bustling and prosperous city can be greatly attributed to the selfless dedication and tireless labor of Ms. Charlotte Gödicke, a German teacher who almost single-handedly brought progress and development to the community. Ms. Gödicke first came to Sagay in 1980 as part of a team working under the Sagay-Osterholz Partnership, a three decade friendship between the Sagaynons and the people of Osterholz District, Germany that fostered a mutual exchange of culture, heritage, and resources. For 25 years, she spent her summer vacations in Sagay, bringing with her resources she gathered.

Ms. Gödicke prioritized the health condition of Sagay children. She facilitated the construction of toilets and sewage pits to secure safe waste disposal, and installation of water tanks, deep well pumps, and water pipelines that supply safe drinking water to homes, health centers, and schools. To reinforce the local government's health programs, she worked for the establishment of health centers, while ensuring the availability of medicines, medical supplies and equipment.

Ms. Gödicke also valued the role that quality education plays in promoting socio-economic development. She initiated projects that eventually led to the construction of 12 classrooms in five elementary schools, day-care centers, a school stage, and a school garden. She even went on to facilitate the conduct of literacy classes for adults, which included sessions on basic leadership skills training, parental education, and dressmaking. At present, Sagay boasts of a 92% literacy rate. She assisted 24 baranggays in establishing their own livelihood projects.

Cited as one of the fastest developing cities in the country, Sagay City is decades away from the sleepy town it once was and now serves as a model for other localities to emulate. Ms. Gödicke, who became Sagay's first adopted daughter, is now retired from her 25 years of work with the Sagaynons. Still, "Lotte" will remain in the heart of each Sagaynon, remembered as the "white woman" who gave them courage to put their destiny in their own hands.

Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba

Born in Sampaloc, Manila in 1950 and migrated to the United States when he was 11 years old, Maj. Gen. Taguba is the son of an army sergeant who served with the Philippine Scouts during World War II, and fought alongside American forces in the Battle

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ificantly benefited a sector or community in the Philippines, or advanced the cause of Filipino communities abroad. The 2004 *Banaag* awardees are Imelda Vollenweider-Berdos, Dr. Wilfrido J. Buhain, Roland C. Casamina, Centre for Filipinos, Virgilio G. Cuizon, Fiesta Filipina Dance Troupe of Canada, Filipino Cultural Club, Charlotte Gödicke, Home-Reach Foundation, Inc., Hyechwadong Filipino Catholic Community, Kinderhilfe Philippinen, Amor I. McGuinness, Atty. Alicia Natividad, Dr. Evelyn D.A. Natividad, Emma B. Nemivant, Panday Tinig Choral Ensemble, Philippine Australian Sports and Culture, Inc., Philippine Cultural Foundation of Hawaii, Dr. Virgilio D.R. Pilapil, Lourdes A. Salazar, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans, and Jean Paul Verstraeten.

The *Pamana ng Pilipino* Award is conferred on Filipinos overseas who have consistently pursued their work or profession with excellence and distinction. The 2004 *Pamana ng Pilipino* awardees are Rep. Felipe P. Abinsay, Jr., Dr. Rodolfo S. Bernardo, Wilfredo R. Buhay, Eliodoro C. Cadawas, Jr., Alejandro A. Esclamado, Dr. Jovelle Laoag-Fernandez, Arch. Dante C. Fuentes, Lenore R.S. Lim, Engr. Rodolfo C. Quiambao, Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, Dr. Constanca S. Uy, Dr. Gundelina A. Velazco, and Deputy Lord Mayor Arturo T. Viola.

The Kaanib ng Bayan Award, which is given to foreign organizations for their contribution to Philippine progress and development, was not conferred in this year's award.

This year's awardees came from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, South Korea, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States of America, and were selected from among 150 nominations from 29 countries through 43 Philippine embassies and consulates.

Dr. Sariel G.G. Ablaza, a renowned cardio-thoracic surgeon from the United States who was awarded for his contribution to the advancement of Filipino surgeons and unwavering support to the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, delivered a response on behalf of his fellow awardees. In his response, Dr.

Ablaza emphasized that their love for the country and fellow Filipinos is their primary motivation for extending assistance to those in need.

Citing the achievements of awardees in promoting social justice, economic opportunity and Filipino culture, President Arroyo implored them to welcome her administration's efforts in improving the image of the Philippines through employment generation, fighting graft and corruption, increasing government revenues and ensuring transparency in government transactions. President Arroyo also instructed the Commission on Filipinos Overseas to help spread the news on the government's firm commitments to improve the lives of the average Filipino. In closing, President Arroyo told the awardees that she not only looks upon them as heroes but also as partners for a secure and prosperous nation.

Apart from the Awarding Ceremony, the awardees also participated in gift-giving activities organized by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas from December 16 to 20, 2004. Several awardees also shared their expertise by giving lectures, symposia and talks in partnership with various educational institutions in Metro Manila. (See related story on page 8)

A long and winding...

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monetary compensation, the Filipino-American veterans have been lagging behind in terms of enjoying just compensation for their heroic deeds.

There is urgency for the present U.S. Congress to restore the rights of the Filipino WWII veterans. The veterans, many of whom are now in their 80's, reportedly pass away at the rate of four to five each day. For more than five decades now, Filipino war veterans have been seeking equal recognition of their military service with that of their U.S. counterparts – to no avail. Today, there are only about 59,000 surviving Filipino veterans both in the U.S. and in the Philippines – still awaiting to see justice in their lifetime.



Dante A. Ang...

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Ople, when the latter was still labor minister during the Marcos administration. This close association continued when Ople was elected at the Philippine Senate and eventually became Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Most notably, Chairman Ang has worked closely with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo since 1993 when she was still a member of the Philippine Senate. To this day, he remains to be the President's regular consultant in the areas of communications and public relations.

He has also held various business interests as chair or head of 13 private corporations, mostly in the field of publishing, media, education and banking.

Chairman Ang brings to the CFO, more than four decades of extensive experience in the media, particularly public relations. Upon assuming office, Chairman Ang hopes to build on earlier successes of the CFO in promoting stronger ties with overseas Filipinos and the Philippine motherland. He intends to accomplish this by enhancing existing programs and developing a new paradigm that is more responsive to the needs and interests of overseas Filipinos.

Japan tightens...

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years' education and two years experience in a recognized entertainment venue. According to Lorenzo J. Langomez, vice president of the Confederated Associations of Licensed Entertainment Agencies (CALEA) and president of the Philippine Association of Recruitment Agencies Deploying Artists (PARADA), the Philippine overseas entertainment industry is very likely to be severely affected by these developments. This could result in decreased deployment by as much as 50 percent a year, and a significant decrease in the government's estimated 7.6 billion dollars in annual foreign exchange earnings.

Japan decided to impose stricter measures against the entry of all foreign entertainers including Filipinos, after the US State Department in June put Japan and the Philippines, among other countries, in the watchlist of countries that allegedly failed to curb human trafficking.

CFO gears up...

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pinos and promoting Filipino education and heritage abroad.

In 2005, the CFO will undertake activities covering three broad categories: projects calling for lobby functions, projects to be initiated or undertaken by the CFO, and projects to be initiated by the CFO for the private sector to undertake.

For projects requiring lobbying functions, CFO endeavors to organize the overseas Filipino community to unite in certain issues affecting them. This includes the campaign for full equity rights of Filipino World War II veterans, portability of U.S. Medicare benefits, permanent residency in the United States for Filipino Amerasians, return of the Balangiga Bells to the Philippines, and the setting up of an international testing center for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) in the Philippines, among others. Of these issues, Chairman Ang considers the equity rights

of Filipino World War II veterans as a top priority, especially with Filipino veterans dying at a faster rate than their American counterparts. Chairman Ang also stressed the importance of attaining recognition and permanent residency status in the United States for Filipino Amerasians fathered and abandoned by American soldiers.

Apart from lobbying functions, Chairman Ang also outlined projects to be undertaken by the CFO, most of which are geared towards increasing cultural visibility of Filipinos in their host country and encouraging them to retire in the Philippines. Towards this end, CFO is developing an Internet-based Filipino language program which seeks to propagate the use of Filipino language among younger overseas Filipinos. CFO will also play a key role in the celebration of the centennial of Filipino migration to Hawaii as well as in the establishment of a permanent Filipiniana exhibit at the Asian

Art Museum in San Francisco.

To encourage overseas Filipinos to return home and retire, CFO seeks to encourage health care institutions in the Philippines to attain international accreditation. In line with President Arroyo's instruction for CFO to create attractive retirement packages for overseas Filipinos, the Commission is also exploring the prospects of encouraging overseas Filipinos to invest in the Philippines through the privatization of government assets.

Chairman Ang also highlighted the need to enlist private sector participation in initiatives that will require significant resources. Some of the initiatives which will be initiated by CFO to be undertaken by the private sector are the setting up of Philippine subsidiaries of health care institutions in the United States and the production of animated films of Filipino epics and legends. The former aims to promote medical tourism in the country, while the latter aims to imbibe national pride among overseas Filipinos.

Presidential Awards special...

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of Bataan during the Japanese occupation. After graduating with a degree in history from Idaho State University, he followed the footsteps of his father by joining the United States Army.

Maj. Gen. Taguba attended prestigious military training schools and completed master's degrees in Public Administration, International Relations, and National Security and Strategic Studies. His career began with troopleading assignments in Korea and steadily rose from the ranks. Apart from his command assignments, he served as commander of the 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas; Material Systems Analyst at the Office of the Chief of Staff, Army, The Pentagon; and Executive Officer and Chief-of-Staff, U.S. Army Reserve Command at Fort McPherson, Georgia, among others.



Taguba: Made headlines for his report on the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

Maj. Gen. Taguba is currently the Deputy Commanding General for Support of the Third U.S. Army, U.S. Army Forces Central Command, Coalition Forces Land Component Command. For his decorated service, he received numerous awards including the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit. To date, he is the second highest ranking Filipino American officer in the U.S. Army.

Amidst his decorated service in the U.S. Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Taguba is known to many as the author of the 53-page report detailing the systemic abuses committed by American soldiers against the prisoners of the Abu Ghraib prison facility in Iraq. Published reports have quoted Maj. Gen. Taguba's colleagues describing him as a man of integrity. Cable News Network (CNN) described Maj. Gen. Taguba as 'fearless'. The San Francisco Chronicle has declared that Maj. Gen. Taguba "represents the image of a professional American soldier that the United States would no doubt like to project to the world in light of the images of the abuse."

CFO joins...

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of Filipino seafarers who tragically lost their lives at sea. Mostly participated by their surviving families and friends, they gathered aboard the ship at dawn at Manila Bay to offer prayer and a wreath for the souls of their departed loved ones.

The CFO, being one of the agency members of the NSD Committee actively participated by chairing the OSYA Committee, as well as in organizing two new competitions (Song Writing Contest and Oratorical Contest) which attracted the participation of Filipino seafarers and maritime students nationwide.

The 9th NSD, which was the culminating activity for the Philippine National Maritime Week, intensified the *bayanihan* spirit in all sectors of the industry as it paid tribute to every Filipino seafarers for the important role they play in global trade and for maintaining the Philippines' stature as the shipping industry's "manning capital of the world."

For whom should the Balangiga Bells toll?

The Philippines has hoped and waited for more than 104 years for the U.S. to free the last prisoners of the 1899-1902 Philippine-American War - the Balangiga Bells. The contested bells, reportedly used to signal a surprise attack by hundreds of local Filipino guerrillas on U.S. war veterans of Company C, 9th U.S. Infantry Regiment on September 28, 1901, were taken as war booties by American soldiers from the church of Balangiga in Eastern Samar. More than a century later, two of three bells remain enshrined at the Trophy Park of the Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, while the third bell is in the possession of a U.S. Army unit in Korea.

The bloody conflict referred to as the "Balangiga Massacre" rooted to the protest of attackers for the forced labor, starvation, detention, and humiliation they suffered from the hands of foreign authority. Described by the U.S. military as its "worst single defeat" in the Philippines, the Americans were initially driven off with 48 casualties but later retaliated, turning Samar into a "howling wilderness," causing the deaths of tens of thousands of Filipino civilians.

Since the 1950s, several groups and individuals based in the Philippines and abroad, have been working assiduously to gain U.S. support for the return of the bells. They say church bells are religious artifacts and are inappropriate trophies of war. British scholar Bob Couttie maintained that even though the bells were used to signal the attack on American soldiers, the Parish of Balangiga generally did not order or approve the use of the bells in the attack. Significantly, experts conclude that based on custom law, military law, and international treaties, the contested bells rightfully belong to Balangiga. In 1994, then U.S. President Bill Clinton offered to return the Bells of Balangiga "in the spirit of fair play." However, the offer was considered "illegal" by some circles within the Department of State. In 1998, hoping for the return of the bells for the centennial commemoration of the Philippine Independence, then President Fidel V. Ramos proposed a "one original, one replica" sharing of the bells for both countries.

Today, strong opposition from members of the Wyoming American Legion and Wyoming legislators continue to block attempts to return the bells, which they consider to be legitimate spoils of war. They believe that returning the bells would desecrate their memorial to U.S. soldiers who died in Balangiga. Despite intermittent objections, the clamor for the return of the bells intensified. In the U.S. Congress, two House Resolutions were introduced (H. Res. 312 and H. Res. 268) in 1997 and 2003, respectively, authorizing the U.S. President for the transfer of ownership of one of the bells. The proposal provided a means for both countries to mutually share in the heritage that the bells of Balangiga represent. Unfortunately, both efforts failed.

Filipino scholar Rolando O. Borrinaga attributes the failure to recover the bells to conflicting views among Filipinos and Americans to what the Balangiga conflict represents. The Americans view it as a "dastardly, cowardly act carried out against naive and kindly Americans" doing pacification work. The Filipinos, on the other hand, regard it as a "courageous uprising against a cruel, foreign oppressor."

In the spirit of more than a hundred years of friendship between the two countries and for all the struggles of Filipino soldiers who fought shoulder to shoulder with American troops in the battlefields of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, the return of the bells should express a final closure to a painful historical episode of war. The U.S. had previously returned war booties rightfully belonging to other countries, including the bells they have taken from Nagasaki, Japan. Now is the time to hand the bells over to its rightful owner – the Philippine nation.

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Thank you.