

SPEECH OF SENATE PRESIDENT JUAN PONCE ENRILE
Opening of the Second Regular Session, Fifteenth Congress
25 July 2011, Monday, 10:00 a.m.

Distinguished colleagues, members of the diplomatic corps, associates in government, guest, ladies and gentlemen:

Today, the Senate begins sessions anew. We officially open, on the part of this Chamber, the Second Regular Session of the Fifteenth Congress of the Philippines.

More than six weeks ago, Congress ended its first regular session in high spirits, having passed several vital pieces of legislation that aim to address important economic, social, and political issues our nation faces.

Between then and now, however, we witnessed the unfolding of events that only seem to magnify our vulnerability as a people and as a nation.

The rains of June and July which inundated towns and cities in the Visayas and in Mindanao again caused the loss of lives and the destruction of properties and sources of livelihood in those parts of the archipelago. Congress already passed the Climate Change Act and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act previously and while we are waiting for the full and effective implementation of these two laws to take place, we hope that the People's Survival Fund Bill, already sponsored by the Committee on Climate Change, will soon be passed to help protect our local communities from the worst impacts of climate change.

The rift with China over our territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea is a wake-up call. While the issue must be settled diplomatically, the incident showed us how lacking our armed forces are in terms of military materiel and equipage. We have no decent military might to speak of, not even to defend our own territory. This sad state of affairs must also be addressed immediately.

As you very well know, the legislative inquiry of the Blue Ribbon Committee has unearthed serious multibillion-peso anomalies in the financial transactions of certain government institutions. Also, the Government Corporations and Public Enterprises Committee initiated an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the usage of the Coconut Industry Investment Fund, based on reports that said government corporation has been experiencing huge amount of losses.

There may be more of these irregularities and the Senate will not back down from unveiling them. The human propensity to abuse power and, to some extent, acquire illegal wealth, remains a challenge for us lawmakers. Thus, we shall endeavour to craft legislations that will address and correct what is wrong in the bureaucracy.

My distinguished colleagues, our people expect us to make tough decisions. We were elected to be their voice in their hope of finally seeing significant reforms in our society. They chose us to help the national government govern rightly and justly.

Our people expect us to address their economic needs. Our country abounds with idle human potential and untapped natural resources. It is time that both Houses of Congress crank the gears of the engine of sustainable development and use these available resources for the common good.

Perhaps, now is the time to explore the possibility of introducing amendments to the economic provisions of the 1987 Constitution. This very important issue must be debated on openly and intelligently as we try to help infuse the economy with sufficient stimuli that will spur growth in our industries and businesses and create more jobs for our people.

Congressional action on this proposition may not come soon enough but now is the appropriate time to lay it down on the table. As elected officials, we should be bold enough to finally discuss the need to initiate this.

Debates on the Reproductive Health bill are also expected to be calendared in this Second Regular Session. We also look forward to an enlightening discussion on the pros and cons of this proposed law.

In due time, the proposed national budget for 2012 will also be submitted to this chamber. I hope we can pass it promptly as we did the General Appropriations Act of 2011. This will be an opportune time to assess the various programs of this administration under what they called a 'reform budget'.

There are other equally important bills for our consideration contained in the legislative priorities that you, my distinguished colleagues, outlined during the First Regular session. We need to craft a National Land Use Policy, Anti-Trust Bill, a Bill Rationalizing Fiscal Incentives, among others.

Let us work on them until they become laws of the land. I know how hard of you work in the service of our people. In this Second Regular Session the people expect us to perform our mandated duties with determination, dedication and without fear or favor.

As we proceed in carrying out our role in nation-building, as we continue to make tough decisions for the sake of national interest, let me remind you, my distinguished colleagues, of the words of St. Paul the Apostle: "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." May all of us be inspired by these words.

Thank you very much.

Mabuhay ang Senado ng Pilipinas!