



The Philippine National Situationer

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The situation of the Philippines today is critical as poverty incidence rose from 36.8 percent in 1997 to 39.4 percent in 2000 which means that 4.3 million Filipino families today are living below the poverty threshold pegged at P11,605 pesos per person or its equivalent P32 per day.¹ According to the National Statistical Coordination Board, two out of five Filipino families today are living in poverty unable to meet the 2,000 calories daily requirement and other basic needs. But using a poverty threshold that corresponds with more decent living conditions, the IBON Facts and Figures reported that 88% of Filipinos are considered poor. IBON estimates that for a family of six to survive a decent living, the breadwinners of the family should earn at least P 545.73 daily (May 2003).

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported that the living conditions of Filipinos have deteriorated over the years. Based on the Human Development Index Report, the Philippines is among the 54 countries that are poorer today than they were in 1990. In fact, the Philippines slid from a ranking of 85th to 77th in the quality of life measuring quality of income, health, education and political participation.

The Philippine economy has been relatively unstable from 2002 to 2003 as reflected in the rise and fall of our Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the declining performance of the Philippine agriculture, industry and the service sectors (see Table 1).²

Table 1. The Philippine Economy Growth Figures

	Year 2002	First Quarter 2003	2 nd Quarter 2003
GNP	4.5	5.6	4.5
GDP	4.4	4.5	3.2
Agriculture	3.3	2.9	1.6
Industry	3.7	4.1	1.7
Service	5.4	5.5	5.0

Source: National Economic Development Authority (NEDA)

Considering the unstable Philippine economy, low investments rate (i.e. 20% of GDP or less) along with the continuing devaluation of pesos (US \$ 1 = Php 56.01 as of January 30, 2004), it is no wonder why many are poor and unemployed today. In fact, unemployment and underemployment continue to worsen from 11% (1995) to 12.7% (2003) as more factories and small business establishments closed down unable to cope with the current economic crisis given free-market ideology where the dominance of multinational and transnational corporations prevail within the context of elite globalization.

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"Human dignity itself is compromised wherever a narrow pragmatism detached from the objective demands of the moral law leads to decisions which benefit a fortunate few while ignoring the sufferings of large segments of the human family."

*Pope John Paul II
December 5, 2003*

Editorial

Any discussion of the Philippine national situation cannot avoid citing the May 10, 2004 national election as one of the significant events that will determine the fate of our nation. Once again, the Filipinos are given the opportunity to improve the present government by reviewing the performance of incumbent officials and choosing alternative political candidates who can be trustworthy to run our government. This is the fundamental value of the May 2004 election, which is founded on the sovereign will of the people.



National election is basically a power play between those political candidates who have and those who have not. A political candidate in order to win the national and local elections would require lots of money, access to media and public relations, a strong party and well oiled political machinery to launch effective and efficient campaign plans and strategies. Many people will be needed to join the bandwagon during the campaign period composed of technical staff, friends and allies. Again, political candidates will present to the people their various platforms of government reflective of their visions of an ideal Philippine society. National debates will focus on social issues and their analysis on how to redress the nation's problems, issues and concerns on poverty and unemployment, graft and corruption, growing insurgency and war in Mindanao, ecological crisis, and so on and so forth. As usual, traditional politicians will end their speech delivering motherhood statements to the general public on how they will improve the plight of the poor. We will be hearing presidential wannabes harping promises to bring about positive change to our ailing economy, only to be betrayed by their false promises.

In the light of the upcoming national election, are we going to vote traditional politicians whose interests are to preserve a status quo Philippine society where the rich become richer, the poor poorer? Or are we going to choose candidates with alternative platforms of government that will truly liberate us from abject poverty and powerlessness? Perhaps, the answers to these questions lie in what kind of President, national and local leaders we want to run our country. What are our criteria in choosing candidates?

On the basis of meritocracy and not popularity, let's consider 5 P's as guide in our Voter's Education campaign by assessing the candidate's profile based on **P**ersonality, **P**erformance and work ethics, **P**olitical ideology and development orientation, **P**eace and national reconciliation agenda and **P**latform of government responsive to the needs of the nation.

Based on the principle of the common good, the Lasallian Family along with other multi-sectoral groups are encouraged to consider all these criteria in exercising their rights of suffrage. Responsible and wise voters are challenged to heed the '*signs of the time*' and after careful discernment, commit themselves to the task of nation building towards social and structural transformation of the Philippine Society.

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The survey of the New York-based Roper Asia ASW Asia Pacific in September 2003 revealed that the prevailing uncertainties were making businessmen more cautious in hiring and investing. The survey showed that nearly 21% of businessmen (an increase of 5% from the last survey) said they would hire fewer people over the next 6 months.³

Too much politics has triggered a drop in investments and stifled projected economic growth and targeted investments for the remaining 3rd quarter of 2003 and part of 2004. This was according to Mr. Astro del Castillo, a stock analyst who also said that, *"It is too much politics that is really the factor that weakened our economy and the confidence of investors in the country's business climate. In fact, the level of investments in the country has dropped to 20%, though portfolio investments are trying to recover from a recent drop."* He cited the United States-Iraq war, the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the failed mutiny last July 27 as some of the causes for the drop in investor confidence for the past 27 months, but pointed politics as the major factor. (The Philippine Star News, Sept 18, 2003)

Figures from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) revealed that 4.35 million are unemployed. It also reported that 2,694 out of 6,603 commercial establishments inspected from the period January and March 2003 have not given their workers the legal minimum wages, 13th month pay, overtime compensation and other benefits specified under the labor law. There has been an increase in labor strikes from 26 in 2002 to 30 in 2003 (DOLE, As of June 7, 2003)

The lack of meaningful job opportunities in the country has forced many Filipinos to leave the country in search for greener pasture. In 2002 alone, 2,444 Filipinos daily or an average of 73,000 per month left the country as overseas contract workers. Unmindful of racial discrimination and exposure to the dreadful Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which claimed the lives of 8,000 victims worldwide, these OFWs saved our battered economy to weather the financial crisis through their regular dollar remittances. Needless to say, the massive exodus of professional doctors, engineers, teachers, computer experts nurses, caregivers, and domestic helpers has been depriving the country of the much needed human resource for national development.

To date, close to 10 million overseas Filipino workers, mostly college graduates are employed as domestic helpers and health care givers mainly due to the aging population of the developed countries. And because of the increasing demand of health care givers, this prompted the Philippine government to manage around 200 registered and unregistered caregiver schools in Metro Manila alone. The Alliance of Health Workers revealed that 17% of nurses in 11 government hospitals go abroad.

Migration and other forms of displacement result in social crisis due to the forced break-up of families, the wrenching of women from their children, the increasing phenomenon and acceptability of adultery and the expansion of criminality and its social effects as a consequence of broken families (Tujan, July 2003). And who can forget the case of *balikbayan* Ms. Adela Catalan? She is a Filipina caregiver who died last year after acquiring severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in Canada.

Meanwhile, the controversial sidewalk clearing operations conducted by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) have constantly threatened the livelihood of urban poor not to mention the rampant and on-going demolitions and relocations of their families (see Table 2).⁴

By and large, abject poverty, unemployment, lack of income and savings as well as tenurial insecurity have always been the perennial problems of the urban poor as well as the lowland and upland farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous people and women in the rural areas. Like previous government administrations, the supposed economic growth of the Arroyo administration has failed to trickle down to the countryside. A majority of the Filipino poor found in the rural areas are often voiceless and the most severely affected especially women, children and elderly.

According to Mr. Antonio Tujan, IBON Executive Director, *"Political instability is not the root or the cause of the crisis as is commonly perceived, but such instability and political infighting among the elite is how the social crisis runs its course and replicates crisis in the political life of the nation – leaving social and economic concerns unattended, preventing a proper delivery of services (or what is left to deliver), preventing the normal course and growth of business and economy, incapacity to deal with social ills & criminality, cooptation of public power by the underworld, and so forth"*⁵

Table 2. Demolition of Urban Poor (January 9 – June 5, 2003)

Date	Place	Reason	Families / Individuals Affected	Government Unit Responsible
Jan. 9-10	Taytay, Rizal	Kalayaan Park Development	Undetermined number of vendors	PNP – Taytay
Jan 22	Araneta Avenue, Q.C.	"Sidewalk Clearing Operations"	30-40 families	PNP-Q.C. MMDA Task Force
Jan 23	Sta. Cruz, Sta. Rosa, Laguna	Forced eviction	400 families	PNP – Sta. Rosa, SAF
Feb 9	Tondo, Manila	Road Widening	300 households	DPWH
March	Galas Public Market, Galas, Q.C	Sidewalk Clearing	20 stalls	MMDA
March 5	Holy Spirit, Q.C.	Forced eviction	70-100 families	
March 6	Commonwealth Avenue Q.C.	Road Widening	50 families	DPWH
March 7	Veterans Village, Holy Spirit, Q.C.		300 families	Q.C. Sheriff
March 14	Per 2, North Harbor	North Harbor Modernization	30-50 vendors	ICTSI
March 20	Commonwealth Avenue, Q.C.	Summary Eviction	10 families	MMDA
March 31-April 1	Sangandaan, Caloocan City	Forced eviction	30-50 households	MMDA, NHA, HUDCC, PNP
April	J.P. Laurel	Sidewalk Clearing	10 household	MMDA
April 1	Balara, Q.C.	Road Widening Program	1,000 families	MMDA
April 2	Sangandaan, Caloocan City	North Rail Project	500 families	HUDCC
April 17	Guadalupe, Makati	Sidewalk Clearing Operations	Undetermined number of vendors	MMDA
May 20	Culiat, Q.C.	Forced Eviction	20 households	Q.C. Sheriff's Office, PNP-QC
May 28	Sta. Cruz, Quezon Bridge	Forced Eviction	100 families	MMDA
May 29	Talayan River, Quezon Avenue	Sidewalk Clearing	30 households	SWAT, MMDA
June 4-5	Roxas Boulevard	Forced Eviction	150 families	PNP

Sources: IBON, KADAMAY, various newspapers

According to the Institute on Church and Social Issues (ICSI), the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas may be attributed to the structural weakness in the economy which harbors policies that, *"discriminated against labor, subsidized capital-intensive methods of production and gave low priority to agriculture and exports"* (WB1996). It is commonly observed that government labor policies and incentives are biased towards industries in urban areas instead of being channeled to off-farm activities, which in turn, can create rural jobs. Ideally, the government should provide incentives to encourage small, labor-intensive industries by investing in the rural areas that will absorb the labor surplus.

The struggle continues for the small farmers and landless workers who will be affected by the country's commitment to the World Trade Organization-General Agreement of Tariff and Trade (WTO-GATT). This year 2004, full compliance to a more reduced import tariffs for agricultural products is expected to exact a toll on local farmers. Given the snail-paced agrarian reform implementation in the country, particularly problems related to land distribution and the lack of social and physical infrastructure facilities, credit, production, technology and marketing support from the government, it will be difficult for the farmers cooperatives to boost farm productivity to compete in the international market. Together with other basic sectors, the peasants will suffer the brunt of underdevelopment.⁶

In her article, "The 'Strong Republic' Falls in Deeper Crisis," Ms. Rosario Bella Guzman shared that there are more hardships for the Filipino people today owing to Arroyo's government economic growth that is sustained by foreign debt, war loot and the mega sale of natural resources. Hence economic growth in the country is statistics that only shows how far the economy is growing for the landlords, compradors and transnational corporations. In reality, how far the

marginalized and oppressed sectors are coping with the crisis is the real state of the nation. She concluded that stability has always been a myth in the Philippine economic life because of the prevailing crisis characterized by backwardness, control by few families and foreign domination. Yet there is still hope for the Filipino people whose strength lies in their long and colorful militant struggle and resistance. Small victories have been won and big ones are still being fought for, as collective action of the Filipino masses will serve as the edifice of a truly strong republic.⁷

Meanwhile, the global events such as the 1997 financial crisis in Asia and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack bombing the twin tower in New York have resulted in global recession. This poses a grave threat to developing countries like the Philippines whose national economy has been mainstreamed and linked into the global economy. Considering a Philippine government relying on foreign debts and economic aid that is subject to the terms and conditions of the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), this has far reaching implications in so far as economic policies and political diplomacy is concerned.

Economically, the government has been suffering from financial crisis because national expenditures and foreign debts are increasing while tax collection is decreasing from 17% to 12%. The figure of the country's total debt has doubled from Php 21.6 billion (20% of the national government budget in 1986) to Php 425 billion (42% of the total national government budget in 2003). This year, our government has proposed and allocated Php 542 billion which is equivalent to 47% increase in our national government budget (see Table 3)

Table 3. National Government Debt Payment

Year	Amount	As Percentage of Total National Budget
1986	Php 21.6 billion	20%
1991	Php 74.9 billion	30%
2002	Php 358 billion	31%
2003	Php 425 billion	42%
2004	Php 542 billion proposed	47%

Source: Various DBM

Because of debt servicing, the national budget allocated for the social services to benefit the Filipino poor was reduced to only Php 31.4 billions or 31.4% (see Table 4).

Table 4. National Budget Allocation by Sector, F/Y 2004

Particulars	Level (In Billions)	Share (%)
Economic Services	Php 155.92	18.03
Social Services	Php 248.25	28.73
Defense	Php 43.19	4.99
General Services	Php 140.37	16.21
Not Lending	Php 5.5	0.64
Interest Payments	Php 271.53	31.4
Total Expenditures	Php 864.76	100

Source: BESF and NEP 204, DBM

According to Ms. Ana Marie Nemenzo, President of Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), there are pressures from the creditor's cartel (International Monetary Fund-World Bank (IMF-WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to push through for privatization and deregulation policies along with the efforts of the World Trade Organization (WTO) promoting trade liberalization. These are the three pillars of what the author referred to as neo-liberal globalization.⁸

After privatizing the oil and power industries, water, capital accounts and easing restrictions in trade, the next in line is the privatization of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Social Security System (SSS) and Health Services. Worst still, the Arroyo administration allowed the existence of the AGILE or the American experts and technocrats sitting practically all branches of the government and influencing the implementation of key policies and the passage of important bills.



Ms. Nemenzo enjoined everyone to defend and assert our national patrimony and social justice by opposing any attempt to remove economic provisions that will do grave injustice to the present and next generations of Filipinos.

In the light of the Charter Change, the advocates of neo-liberal capitalism has already found champions in Philippine government and the Congress with a silent agenda to remove the remaining barriers to trade liberalization and foreign investments. Under Article XII of the Philippine Constitution, it states that the national economy shall be "effectively controlled by Filipinos" who shall have inclusive right to acquire private lands or lands of the public domain. It ensures that ownership of public and educational institutions shall be no less than 60% reserved for Filipinos. Exclusive rights shall be granted to Filipinos over foreigners for the judicious utilization of natural resources such as land, minerals, forests, water, air and among others found within the natural territory. Consequently, this provision safeguards the economic security and social progress of Filipinos against foreign imperialism.

The Price of War

In the era of globalization, the Philippines has become one of the U.S. allies on its global war on terrorism. Soon after the U.S. started attacks on Afghanistan in October 2001, the Philippine government volunteered the use of former U.S. bases Clark and Subic for its attacks on Afghanistan. The Arroyo administration even offered to send a contingent of soldiers and other personnel at the Philippine government's expense to shore up the occupation force in Iraq (Tujan, 2003).

As one of the active members of the 'coalition of the willing', the Arroyo government allowed U.S. the use of the Philippines to secure U.S. position and control of economic and natural resources in the region. In this sense, it allowed the U.S. to secure corporate control over trade routes, land, markets and natural resources in Southeast Asia.

According to Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, the U.S. Pacific Command is working on "critical tactical mobility platforms" in the Philippines, which is useful in case of major U.S. military operations in the region. The Philippines plays a crucial role in the general repositioning and redeployment of the U.S. troops in Asia. The US will capitalize on its strategic presence in the Philippine soil as a deterrent and launching pad against regional powers like China Indonesia and Malaysia (PIF, 2003).



During her state visit to the US last November 17, 2003, President Macapagal-Arroyo signed agreements with the U.S. which include the conduct of another Balikatan or joint military exercises between the US-Philippine troops; immunity of American soldiers especially those deployed in Mindanao from prosecution in the International Criminal Court; financing of the sale and export of U.S. agricultural products to the Philippines; and capturing the flow of remittances of the overseas Filipino workers.

In return for the loyalty of the Philippine government, the Arroyo government has gained billions of dollars from its active support to the U.S. war against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction of Saddam Hussein (see Table 5)

Table 5. U.S. Economic and Military Aid Package

Items	Amount
Training and excess defense articles (EDA) such as 30 Huey helicopters and a number of C-130 cargo planes	\$ 126 million
Filipino war veterans	\$ 75 million
Government and Business Agreements	\$ 3.2 billion
Economic Projects	\$ 686 million
Reintegration of the MILF	\$ 32.8 million
Enhancing the Skills of the PNP in narcotics control	\$ 1 million
Military aid Package	\$ 357 million

Sources: IBON Economic and Political Briefing, 15 July 2003

In addition, U.S. President Bush has offered \$74 million in USAID, 50% of which will be spent for Mindanao development through the Mindanao National Initiative (Mindanao Natin) program aimed at rehabilitating and developing Muslim communities in Mindanao. "Mindanao Natin" refers to the active defense of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the formation of Sala'am soldiers to assist in community monitoring and socio-civic services. Studying closely, Mr. Tujan of IBON Foundation noted that the "Mindanao Natin" which is mainly funded by the World Bank, USAID, Japan and Korea is not an economic justice component for a peace program but part of the overall pacification campaign against Moro rebels. He cited that the program strategy is similar to "Plan Colombia" hatched by the US to mobilize resources and focus on fighting the Columbian drug cartel.

The U.S. also gave another \$30 million to support the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and another \$20 million once the final peace agreement has been resolved and officially signed by both parties. The U.S. rewarded the Arroyo administration with the permission to float bonds and borrow more money from international banks and financial institutions without difficulty as compared to other developing countries. Hence the Philippines is considered the second best user of World Bank loans next to China.

Because of its strong allegiance with the U.S., the Philippines became the second front of the U.S. global "war on terror" against the Abu Sayyaf Group, a militant Islamist kidnapping gang operating in Mindanao which was allegedly linked with the Al-Qaeda network. In the context of global "war on terror", the Arroyo administration took the militarist agenda blaming the country's continuing political instability to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Even the criminals, drug lords and the Magdalo Group, which led the Oakwood Mutiny on July 29, 2003 in Makati were all branded as the enemies of the state. To achieve a Philippine Strong Republic, the solution therefore is to get rid of "bad elements" that threaten the existence of democratic government.

The government continues to expand its political repression through the Anti-Terrorism Bill, a legislation patterned after the USA Patriot Act which was passed shortly after the September 11, 2001. Rep. Imee Marcos proposed the Anti-terrorism Bill which will allow law enforcers to spy on suspected terrorists and gather information from telephone conversations, e-mail and text messages. Legal detention of suspects will be extended from 36-72 hours without access to lawyers, or notification of relatives.

Meanwhile, human rights violations intensified in areas where there are military operations especially in Southern Mindanao and Oriental Mindoro. Primarily, the pursuit of war rather than peace is the reason for the escalating human rights violations in the country from 966 (2002) to 2,010 cases (2003). But data culled by KARAPATAN and the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace (EMJP) show an upsurge of human rights violations and military abuses as a result of military operations against suspected mass bases of the NPA and MILF. A total of 163,023 victims, 16,348 families and 70 communities were affected nationwide (as of 15 May 2003, IBON Foundation).

As usual, it is the civilians and victim's families who are the most severely affected from the harassment, illegal searches, flood blockades, illegal detention, torture, killings, forced disappearance, forced evacuation, destruction of property, desecration of the remains and place of worship, denial of medical attention, violation of domicile, among others. A common occurrence is forced surrender where the civilians are classified as rebel returnees. Even the civil rights of foreigners are also being curtailed because their rights to peacefully express their solidarity with the Filipino poor in protest rallies are denied in the interest of national security.



The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that the cumulative number of villagers displaced by the war has reached 393,039 individuals from the period January 21 to June 12, 2003. Of this number, 203,214 were evacuees in 11 provinces and three cities have yet to return home. There were also 180 civilians injured in cross fires between the Philippine military and the combined forces of MILF and NPA rebels as reported in leading national newspapers.



The Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) and KARAPATAN revealed that a majority of the human rights violations are being committed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). They also identified the government sponsored paramilitary troops such as the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) and the Civilian Volunteer Organization (CVO) as human rights violators.

Surprisingly, the methods of torture since the Marcos dictatorship up to the present government did not change. In January 2003, the Amnesty International reported that the methods of torture used in the 70s and 80's were basically the same today. The methods of torture ranges from electroshocks, the use of plastic bags to suffocate detainees, burning detainees with cigarettes, beating with fists, metal pipes or gun barrels and placing chili peppers on the victim's eyes or genitals. Likewise, the World Trade Organization Against Torture affirmed the same findings that the use of torture continues unabated in the Philippines especially to journalists and human rights defenders (PIF, 2003)

Peace advocates composed of individuals, religious groups, human rights organizations and international agencies have strongly argued that the terrorist rhetoric is seriously jeopardizing the peace process. Unless the government realizes that the military conflict is not simply a matter of "peace and order" problem but a confluence of economic, political and socio-cultural crises, the peace process remains to be elusive.

Quite often, the national newspapers are reporting the atrocities and human rights abuses committed by rebel soldiers such as the beheading of the victims of the Abu Sayyaf Group or the bombing of a market place in Mindanao claiming the lives of victims including innocent children.⁹

In January 2003, the Arroyo government proposed a 'new approach' to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines deviating from the original four-phase peace process and agenda agreed in 1992, to wit: Phase 1 – Respect for human rights and international humanitarian laws; Phase 2 – Implement socio-economic reforms; Phase 3 – Uphold political and constitutional reforms; and Phase 4 – End the hostilities and disposition of forces upon implementing the first 3 successive phases. The government called a recess and until now, the government has been using back channels in negotiating with the NDFP.



THIS PHOTO, taken on May 13, 1989, shows soldiers digging at a suspected mass grave of CPP purge victims in a village in Cavinti, Laguna (*INQUIRER*, 29 December 2003, front page)

At present, the Communist Party of the Philippines leads the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. Mr. Armando Liwanag of the New People's Army in celebration of their 33rd Anniversary last March 2003 unveiled that the NPA has been growing in numbers everyday and it is operating in 128 guerilla fronts that cover 823 municipalities and 8,500 barrios nationwide (PIF, 2003)

According to Fr. Romeo Intengan, Father Provincial of the Society of Jesus, the CPP (1968) – NPA – NDF envision seizure of state power within 10 years of protracted people's war. In the meantime, they are launching armed attacks against overextended AFP and PNP, raising money through imposing revolutionary taxes on businesses on pain of destruction in case of refusal to pay. Through legal front organizations, they are planning to gain more seats in the House of Representatives by fielding more party list groups in the May 2004 national election such as the Gabriela Women's Party, Migrante, Anak Pawis, Anak ng Bayan aside from Bayan Muna. More seats in the House of Representatives means access to big pork barrel funds of Congressperson, which can be used for hiring comrades or NDF oriented personnel as paid Congress staff and gaining greater media mileage. There are also efforts to recruit Church personnel through the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR), *Kairos* and Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace (EMJP).¹⁰

The government peace negotiators conduct parallel efforts to resolve the peace process with the MILF, a secessionist movement fighting for 25 years to establish an independent Islamic State in Southern Philippines. The 12,500-strong MILF is operating in areas in Mindanao where a majority of the Moro people can be found. It can be recalled that the MILF signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2001, but the pact was shattered when the Philippine military attacked a key MILF enclave to flush out alleged kidnappers, terrorist and other lawless elements sheltered by the rebel group.

Nevertheless, the Philippine government is now ready to start the peace process to avoid fighting on three fronts and be able to concentrate on the CPP/NPA and the Abu Sayyaf. Like foreign funding agencies, the Arroyo administration believes that if the Mindanao conflict can be resolved, national economic development can be achieved. Based on statistics, more than 50% of the country's rice, corn, coconut and banana originated from the provinces of Mindanao. With investment opportunities, there will be better livelihood for all including the delivery of basic social services such as food, water, electricity, housing, education, healthcare and other infrastructure projects.

"Peace is radically rooted in justice. Peace is the flower of justice. Unless the government sees to it that justice is given to everyone it is very hard to talk about lasting peace. Let's look at some of our real problems. The land belongs to a few, health services in the hinterlands are poor, there is graft and corruption in offices. The solution to these should not be momentary or plastic."

Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich

In this regard, the Arroyo administration has made conciliatory statements indicating preference for the U.N. mediation at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur last March 2003 in order to avoid antagonizing Muslim countries. This yielded positive result because Malaysia signified willingness to act as observers monitoring the final peace agreement between the MILF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

On March 26, 2003, MILF rebels warn against hopes for early peace. Their spokesman EID Kabalu said, *"It is a long way to go for peace. We are willing to revive the peace talks despite the fighting."* He expected the MILF and government to discuss issues related to the implementation of ceasefire agreement, economic and human rehabilitation programs and cooperation in fighting crime.¹¹

In handling the Oakwood Mutiny, the Macapagal-Arroyo Administration has regained firm control of the AFP and the PNP. The Hardline core conspirators involved in the 26-27 July Mutiny has been identified and isolated. The government has conducted an in-depth study of the Magdalo group. It has initiated dialogue with concerned individuals and groups. It created a five-man fact-finding Commission headed by Supreme Court Justice Florentino to investigate the grievances raised by the mutineers. It turned out in the investigations that some of the grievances were valid especially the prevailing graft and corruption under the Retirement Separate Benefit System of the AFP. As a consequence, lifestyle checks were conducted and projected in the media involving not only the AFP and PNP officers but also, government officials under the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Department of Public Work and Highways (DPWH) and other government agencies. Such lifestyle checks have caused some restiveness within the government bureaucracy.



It is noteworthy that the Oakwood Mutiny is the 14th *coup d'etat* attempt since the 1986 EDSA Revolution. Many feared that if the grievances raised by the Magdalo group such as the rampant graft and corruption in the AFP and the government bureaucracy are not properly addressed, there will be another *coup d'etat* attempts to seize state power in the near future. The political uncertainty it creates can contribute to the worsening economic crisis because foreign investors are having second thought to invest in our country. In retrospect, graft and corruption and military *coup d'etat* are legacies of the Marcos dictatorship during the martial law period.

Corruption refers to the abuse of official power mostly ascribed but not limited to public office for material reward and private gains. It is a serious age-old malady in Philippine society that plays a vital role in the vicious cycle of massive poverty and powerlessness along with other heinous crimes such as drug addiction and trafficking, money laundering and other illegal activities.

The case of the Oakwood Mutiny is a concrete manifestation that corruption has been institutionalized in the Philippines involving top military officers and government officials. In fact, we could cite the pending cases of former President Ejercito Estrada and the Marcoses as well as the public controversies such as the case of Justice Secretary 'Nani' Perez on IMSA involving US \$40 million, and Mr. Jose Pidal entailing PhP 100 million laundered money. Even Honorable Chief Justice Davide was falsely accused concerning the Judicial Development Fund that nearly led to his impeachment in November. Destroying one's political career is part of dirty politics.



*Honorable Chief Justice
Hilario Davide*

In 1999, Transparency International rated the Philippines as the 54th among the most corrupt countries in the world where it scored 3.6 based on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scale of 1 (high perception) to 10 (negligible perception). While the World Bank and the Ombudsman (1997) reported that the *"Philippine government was losing \$2 billion a year or a whooping \$ 48 billion in the last 20 years due to corruption exceeding its entire foreign debt of US \$ 40.6 billion."*¹²

On December 21, 2003, Jesuit Father Albert Alejo, director of the Mindanawon Initiatives for Cultural Dialogue sought the cooperation of the different religions and multi-sectoral groups to support the campaign for clean and honest national election. As one of the guest speakers in the seminar attended by 30 Filipinos and Indonesian journalists at the Waterfront Insular Hotel, Fr. Alejo said that the public could minimize corruption in the government by *"not abusing the candidates gunning for public office"*. In a one-page *"Walang hihingi!"* battle cry, Fr. Alejo stressed in Filipino, *"Huwang natin abusuhin ang mga kandidato upang di tayo kurakutin ng mananalo"*¹³

The priest said the Filipinos should reclaim their dignity by voting the right candidate with integrity. He reminded the religious groups to refrain from asking money for altar repairs or candles; the youth groups should stop their solicitations asking for balls or uniforms for sports tournament; the schools should not ask for new gates or fences; and neighborhood associations should stop complaining for new roads (Today, 21 December 2003).

May 2004 National Election

Any discussion of the Philippine national situation cannot avoid citing the May 10, 2004 national election as one of the significant events that will determine the fate of our nation. Once again, we will be hearing presidential wannabes harping promises to bring about positive change to our ailing economy. But to the traditional politicians and ruling elite, it's *'business as usual'* as political patronage remains the dominant force in elite politics. In the final analysis, it is the power of an entrenched ruling elite that strongly influences the economic and political development of our country including its governance. And in spite of our much celebrated People Power I and II, it is the traditional politicians along with neo-liberal capitalists that twisted every situation to their own advantage at the expense of the Filipino poor who were repeatedly betrayed by their false promises.

National election is basically a power play between those political candidates who have and those who have not. In reality, a political candidate in order to win in the national and local election would require lots of money, access to media and public relations, a strong political party and organization with technical staff that will coordinate and implement an effective and efficient campaign plans and strategies. Many volunteers, friends and allies will be needed to run effective and efficient political machinery from the national level down to the grassroots communities. One has to be popular with charismatic personality to appeal the masses. Or better yet, political candidates must be a movie star or accompanied by popular movie stars joining the bandwagon during the campaign period. Again, public fora and symposia will focus on the social analysis by various political candidates and parties whose platforms of government will address the nation's problems, issues and concerns on poverty and unemployment, graft and corruption, growing insurgency and war in Mindanao, environmental crisis, and so on and so forth.

According to the Commission on Election (COMELEC), around 12,500 national and local positions will be open for political candidates coming from 1,614 cities and 79 provinces. Ballot printing alone will cost PhP 350– 400 million, which implies more time for voters to choose from an estimated 450,000 political candidates.¹⁴ Many feared that the national election maybe problematic because of the slowness of the COMELEC in preparing for computer automation either to be implemented nationwide or selective automation of vote counting and canvassing (Inquirer LIBRE, December 9, 2003)

In the light of the upcoming national election, are Filipinos going to vote for traditional politicians whose interests are to preserve a status quo Philippine society where the rich become richer, the poor poorer? Or are they going to choose candidates with alternative platforms of government that will truly liberate the people from abject poverty and powerlessness? Perhaps, the answers to these questions lie in what kind of President, national and local leaders the Filipinos want to run our country. What are the criteria in choosing candidates?

On the basis of meritocracy and not popularity, let's consider 5 P's as guide in conducting the Voter's Education campaign by assessing the candidate's Personality, Performance and work ethics, Political ideology and development orientation, Peace and national reconciliation agenda and Platform of government responsive to the needs of the nation.



Personality refers to the candidate's family background, religion, civil status, nationality and personality traits regardless of class such as being friendly, approachable and down-to-earth, religious, simple lifestyle, kind-hearted, and so on and so forth. An ideal candidate must have a preferential but not exclusive, option to the Filipino poor.

Performance and work ethics will determine the aspiring candidate's ability to work effectively and efficiently as a public servant given his/her educational background, work experience and professional ethics. An ideal candidate should know how to listen and work harmoniously with other people aside from acquiring the basic knowledge, attitude and skills in running public office and governance. He/she must not have a criminal record or involved in public scandals such as graft and corruption, immorality and gambling. Hence the candidate will serve as a role model for the Filipinos especially the youth of today.

Political ideology refers to the candidate's political beliefs and affiliations whether he/she favors the current administration or supporting the cause of the opposition; a member of the liberal or nationalista party; a communist or a democrat; a chauvinist or a feminist; a consumerist or environmentalist. Development orientation, on the other hand, pertains to the candidate's development perspective which served as his/her lens in reading social realities and developing strategies to effect social change towards a vision of Philippine society. Ideally, a candidate development orientation must be embodied in 5 M's – *makatao, makabayan, makabuhay, maka-Diyos* at *maka-kalikasan*.



The Peace and national reconciliation agenda of a political candidate must be very clear to the Filipino people, particularly economic and political policies concerning the Mindanao war, the growing insurgency in the countryside including the imminent threat caused by the disgruntled military officials. Although the peace agenda and process can be incorporated in the platform of government, it is best to treat it as one important criterion to give emphasis on its importance in the light of national development. Needless to say, a political candidate should make a stand whether he/she is in favor for the U.S. "all out war" policy against the Moro rebels and communist branded as terrorists or better yet, choose the narrow path of peace and national reconciliation agenda.

Platform of government deals with the candidate's concrete programs and projects for the development of the nation, especially for the benefit of the poor and the marginalized sectors composed of urban poor, upland and lowland farmers, women, youth, persons with disabilities, children in need of special protection, among others. It concretizes the vision of a candidate and translating this vision into a social reality and conditions that will address the country's massive poverty and unemployment, growing insurgency as a direct result of agrarian problems, environmental crisis, among others.

While it is true that there are six presidential candidates composed of 3 government officials (*President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Senator Panfilo Lacson and former Undersecretary of Education Raul Roco*), 1 movie actor (*Fernando Poe Jr.*), 1 evangelist (*Mr. Eduardo Villanueva*) and 1 businessman (*Mr. Ed Gil*), this paper will focus on the first five candidates excluding Mr. Ed Gil given the lack of data of the latter candidate. Matrix 1 below shows the personal data of the five presidential candidates given their family background, age, birth place, sex, nationality, civil status, spouse and number of children

Matrix 1

BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA) ¹⁶	RAUL ROCO ¹⁷	PANFILO M. LACSON ¹⁸	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE ¹⁹ (FPJ)
A. PERSONAL	Daughter of former Pres. Diosdado Macapagal and Dr. Evangeline Macaraeg	Son of a farmer Mr. Sulpicio Azuela Roco and public school teacher Mrs. Rosario Orlanda Sagarbarria	Adopted son of Cebu	Son of former Olympic sprinter Joaquin and Maria Cruz Villanueva	Son of actor producer Fernando Poe, Sr. and Elizabeth Kelly Poe.
• Age	56	62	55	57	64
• Birthday	April 5, 1947	October 26, 1941	June 1, 1948	October 6, 1946	August 20, 1939
• Birth Place	Lubao, Pampanga	Naga City, Camarines Sur	Imus, Cavite	Bunlo, Bocaue, Bulacan	
• Sex	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male
• Nationality	Filipino	Filipino	Filipino	Filipino	Filipino
• Religion	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	Protestant - Jesus Is Lord	Roman Catholic
• Civil Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
• Spouse	Jose Miguel T. Arroyo	Sonia Cubillo-Malasarte	Alice de Perio Lacson	Adoracion Jose Villanueva	Maria Jesusa Purificacion Levy Sonora (Susan Rocas)
• 10. No. of Children	2 sons – Juan Miguel (Mikey) and Diosdado Ignacio (Dato) 1 daughter – Evangelina Lourdes (Luli)	3 sons – Rabble Pierre, Raul Jr and Rex and 3 daughters – Sophia, Sareena & Synara	3 sons – Ronald Jay, Panfilo Jr and Jeric	2 sons - Eduardo Jr., Emmanuel Joel 2 daughter Edelisha and Eleanor V. Tugna	1 daughter – Mary Grace

The personal profile of presidential candidates reveal we have 4 males and 1 female by the person of PGMA, the daughter of former Pres. Diosdado Macapagal and Dr. Evangeline Macaraeg. All of them are married with children ranging from 1-6. Mr. Roco has the biggest number of children (6), followed by Bro. Ed Villanueva (4), PGMA and Ping Lacson have 3 children and FPJ has only 1 daughter. Roco is married to Sonia Cubillo Malasarte of Bohol, the Most Outstanding Student of the Philippines in 1964. GMA is married to Jose Miguel Arroyo; Ping is married to Alice de Perio Lacson; Villanueva is married to Adoracion Jose Villanueva; and FPJ to his beautiful wife Maria Jesusa Purificacion Levy Sonora (or Susan Rocas).

In terms of age, the youngest of them all is Senator 'Ping' Lacson (55), followed by PGMA (56) and Ed Villanueva (57), while Raul Roco (62) and FPJ (64) have reached their senior years. All the candidates are Filipinos and a Roman Catholic except for Bro. Ed Villanueva who is a well-known evangelist.

Except for FPJ who is a 2nd year high school dropout at the University of the East, all candidates finished their college education and even managed to attend their graduate studies. PGMA earned a PhD degree in Economics at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City. PGMA and Roco are both magna cum laude in college. Roco however, specialized in comparative law at the prestigious University of Pennsylvania where he was conferred seven PH.Ds.

Lacson, on the other hand, has earned his M.A. of government management at the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila in 1996. He was a *Mistah* belonging to PMA Class 1971. Bro. Ed Villanueva has a double major in Economics and Finance at the Philippine College of Commerce (now known as the Polytechnic University of the Philippines) aside from attending a manager's course under UP's small scale industries in 1977 (see Matrix 2).

Matrix 2

BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA)	RAUL ROCO	PANFILO M. LACSON	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE (FPJ)
B. EDUCATION					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduate Studies 	PhD in Economics, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City M.A. of Economics, Ateneo de Manila University Quezon City	M.A. Comparative Law University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.	Master in Government Management, Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila BS PMA 1967-1971	Manager's Course under UP's Institute for Small Scale Industries (1977)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College 	International Trade, Georgetown University Washington, D.C. Bachelor of Science in Commerce, magna cum laude, Assumption College	Bachelor of Law, San Beda College Bachelor of Arts in English, magna cum laude, San Beda College	BS Engineering, Lyceum of the Philippines (1964-67)	College of Law (under bar) U.P. Diliman, Q.C. Bachelor of Science in Commerce, Major in Economics and Minor in Finance, 1969 Philippine College of Commerce (Polytechnic University of the Philippines)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High School 	Assumption Convent Valedictorian	Ateneo de Naga	Imus Institute Imus, Cavite	Maycauayan Institute (now Meycauayan College), Meycauayan, Bulacan	2 nd Year High School when his father died H/S Drop out at the University of the East (UE)

It is noteworthy that most of the presidential aspirants have excelled in their respective field of expertise. PGMA was an economics professor at UP, Maryknoll, St. Scholastica's Academy and Ateneo de Manila before she became a DTI Secretary, Senator, Vice-president and President of the Philippines replacing former President Joseph Estrada (see Matrix 3).

Roco was an outstanding student leader and a brilliant corporate lawyer before being elected as Congressman in Camarines Sur and a Senator before he was appointed as the Secretary of Education where he implemented for the first time, free public primary and high school education. He protected teachers welfare, ensured prompt payments of their salaries, prohibited illegal deductions and campaigned against 2% service fee deducted by the payroll group from teachers pay. He also implemented the long delayed Basic Education Curriculum (BEC0 which focused the child on 3 R's (reading, riting, rithmetic) aside from science and makabayan (Philippine Free Press, February 15, 2003) ²⁰

Lacson was a member of the Metrocom Intelligence and Security Group from 1971– 1986. He rose from the ranks until he became the Chief of the Philippine National Police during the time of former President ERAP. He was also the chief of the defunct Presidential Anti-organized Task Force until January 2001. He imposed the "No Take" policy among police officers and waged a war against "*Kotong*" cops. No wonder Lacson is popular to taxi and jeepney drivers. As one of the country's top police, he hopes to put his crime-fighting crusade to greater heights by aspiring for the presidency. He became Senator together with Senator "*Loi*" Estrada in 2001 senatorial race.

Matrix 3



BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA)	RAUL ROCO	PANFILO M. LACSON	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE (FPJ)
C. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND & WORK ETHICS	President, VP, Senator, DTI Secretary and Economics Professor	Education Secretary, Senator, Congressman, Corporate Lawyer and a student leader	Senator, former Chief of the Philippine National Police and a businessman	Spiritual Leader of JIL, Faculty member of PUP and militant activist during the Marcos era	Movie Actor, former stuntman and a messenger in a film exchange office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philippine President in 2001 VP of the Phils. in 1998 Senator (2x in 1992 and 1995) Former Assistant Secretary of DTI and Professor at the U.P. School of Economics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Secretary Senator Congressman Youngest delegate to the 1971 Constitutional Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Became a Senator together with Senator "Loi" Ejercito Estrada Former Chief of the Philippine National Police during Estrada administration Former Chief of the Presidential Anti-Crime Commission (PACC) during Ramos administration Former Officer under the Metropolitan Intelligence and Security group (Metrocom) during Martial Law Years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member, Polytechnic of the Phils Board of Regents (1992-2002) Faculty Member, PUP (1978-79; 1969-72) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No experience in government service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former College Economics Assistant Professor in Ateneo de Manila Univ Economics Professor at St. Scholastica's College and Maryknoll (now Miriam College) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Lawyer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businessman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Manager, Agape Trading Co. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Famous action star and director A millionaire involved in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real estate with 77 M Asset Film production business (FPJ Production with estimated 20M and D "Tanor" Prod Incorporator of ERAP Fdn, Inc. (19M)

Brother Ed Villanueva was a militant student activist during the Marcos dictatorship before he became a full-time faculty member in the Economics and Finance Department of Philippine College of Commerce until 1972. He also worked in the Maran Export Industries in 1973 as export manager. Bro. Ed was the general manager of the Agape Trading Company from 1976 to 1977. The following year, he returned as part-time professor at the PUP and founded the Jesus Is Lord (JIL) Movement, which has now grown into 5 million members nationwide and 35 centers in key cities worldwide with big Filipino populations.²¹ Bro. Ed received many citations and awards such as the *Gintong Ama* Award for socio-civic groups and the EDSA People Power Freedom Awards for ZOE TV 11 for its fair coverage of the People Power II movement. He was ordained Pastor and Minister of various Protestant Church.

FPJ started his career as a messenger in a film exchange office before he became a stuntman for Everlasting Pictures. It was Director Mario Barri who gave him a break in his first acting role in "*Anak ni Palaris*", a role earlier played by his own father. Poe shared top billing with Rosita Noble and Mario Escudero. But the biggest break of Poe's career was in "*Lo Waist Gaing*" in 1956 which marked the advent of real action movies. After producing 5 films, FPJ used his earnings to start his own film productions – the FPJ Productions and D'tanor productions. He has produced and directed many Filipino films, all box office hits such as "*Tatak ng Tondo*" (1978), "*Ang Padrino*" (1984) and who can forget the series of "*Panday*" 1 to 4. Poe is now a millionaire involved in real estate business with an estimated 77 million assets other than his film production with 20 million assets. He is also an incorporator of the Erap Foundation, Inc.

The political ideology of candidates may be reflected in their current political parties and membership affiliations, friends, supporters and allies. Matrix 4 shows the five political parties of the presidentiables, to wit:

1. **LAKAS-NUCD** with Arroyo-De Castro tandem and empowered by the *Koalisyon ng Karanasan at Katapatan para sa Kaunlaran* (K4). PGMA will be projected as a "risk-free" candidate. She will focus on her strength as an economic manager, business excellence, good education and the respect of world leaders according to her. Like her father, she is the tireless campaigner.¹⁶
2. **AKSYON DEMOKRATIKO** with Roco-Aquino tandem. Roco will trounce them all in presidential debate. He is popular among the youth who are fed up with the traditional politicians and wary of showbiz personalities. He carries a good track record in government service.¹⁷
3. **Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP)** spearheaded by Lacson will project that he can restore law and order in the Philippines. His battle cry "*Wag Matakot, Stop Kurakot*" appeals to the masses especially to the taxi and jeepney drivers including the Chinese Business communities who are constantly threatened by unabated crimes such as robbery, kidnapping, drugs and among others.¹⁸
4. **Bangon Pilipinas National renewal Movement** with Bro. Eddie Villanueva of JIL as independent candidate will strongly advocate for Moral rebirth, the country's hope. Like John the Baptist, his voice will be heard in the wilderness: "*Pagbabago Ngayon!*" It's time to repent and change our ways. No to graft and corruption! No to social sins! etc.
5. **Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP)** led by FPJ-Legarda Team as standard-bearer. His political platform will be the story of his life from reel to real. Like Erap, attacks on his intelligence and poor qualification will only generate more sympathy for him. He will work on the *masa* voters belonging to class D and E aside from a big margin of votes from his home province in Pangasinan. His wife Susan Rocas, a native of Negros Occidental, will help him in drawing his power in Western Visayas. Poe's campaign slogan is "Freedom from want and hunger" and "*Justice for All, both rich and poor*"

Matrix 4



BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA)	RAUL ROCO	PANFILO M. LACSON	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE (FPJ)
D. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY & MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATIONS					
Political Party	LAKAS-NUCD	AKSYON Demokratiko	Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP)	Bangon Pilipinas National Renewal Movement	Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP)
Battle Cry	Banking on "experience and integrity" towards a Strong Republic of the Philippines	Counting on the youth and women	Law and order count: <i>"Wag Matakot, Stop Kurakot"</i>	Moral rebirth, the country's hope: <i>"Pagbabago Ngayon!"</i>	From reel to real: "Freedom from want and hunger" and "Justice for All, both rich and poor"
Political Allies and Supporters	<p>Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo Diosdado "Buboy" Macapagal Jr Chief Presidential Counsel Avelino Cruz, Jr. Presidential Adviser on Overseas Development Assistance Marita Jimenez Tomas Alcantara, Presidential Adviser on Foreign and Local Business Trips Roberto Romulo, Presidential Adviser on International Competitiveness Presidential Political Adviser Hernani Braganza Media Man Antonio Abaya Presidential Adviser for Ecclesiastical and Media Affairs Conrado Limcauco Marita Jimenez, presidential adviser for official dev't. assistance <p>Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Koalisyon ng Karanasan at Katapatan para sa Kaunlaran (K4) 	<p>Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sonia Roco Former Nueva Ecija Rep. Edno Joson Former Finance Secretary Roberto de Ocampo Lawyer Lorna Kapunan Former Health Undersecretary Jaime Galvez Tan Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo Former Tarlac Rep. Hermie Aquino <p>Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleagues in the 8th Congress AKSYON KABATAAN Alyansa ng Pag-Asa/ Alliance of Hope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Osmena's PROMDI DeVillla's REPORMA Party 	<p>Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angelito Banayo Former Economic Development Secretary Felipe Madalla Former Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno Makati rep Agapito "Butz" Aquino San Juan Rep. Ronny Zamora Former Public Works and Highways Secretary Gregorio Villar Nueva Vizcaya Rep. Carlos Padilla Former Energy Secretary Mario Tiaoqui PMA classmates in the Philippine National Police <p>Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen's Movement for Order (CMO) 	<p>Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishop Fred Magbanua, President of Task Force Pagbabago Bishop Leo Alconga, Vice President of the Phil for Jesus Movement Dave Sobrepena, president of the Assemblies of God Gary Valenciano, Donita Rose, Connie Reyes and other actors/actresses belonging to JIL <p>Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus Is Lord Church Worldwide (JIL) Zoe Broadcasting, Inc, Operator of Channel 11 Jesus Is Lord Fdn, Inc. Philippines for Jesus Movement (PJM) God's People Coalition for Righteousness (GPCR), a multi-sectarian coalition of Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, Evangelicals and Born Again Christians Council of the Christ for Asia, formerly Charismatic Fellowship of Asia International Bible Society Philippines 	<p>Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deposed President Joseph Estrada Jose "Peping" Cojuangco A small group of family members, relatives and business supporters Senators Tito Sotto and Edgardo Angara Former Senator Ernesto Maceda Former Senator Juan Ponce Enrile Partido ng Masang Pilipino officials led by Horacio "Boy" Morales <p>Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "FPJ for President" Movement Filipinos for Peace, Justice and Progress Movement (FPJPM) Freedom, Peace, Justice for the Philippine Movement (FPJPM) Partido ng Masang Pilipino Angara Faction PDP-Laban of Makakti Mayor Binay Partido ng Masang Pilipino of Boy Morales Network support, political machinery and organization of ERAP and Danding Cojuangco

Matrix 5 identifies the strong and weak points of the presidential candidates based on the political analysts of Newsbreak (January 2004)

Matrix 5



BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA)	RAUL ROCO	PANFILO M. LACSON	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE (FPJ)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong Points (PLUS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spirituality, a devout Catholic Hardworking and determined Reads policy documents, understands numbers Low-key children Luli and Dato Competent Cabinet Can be charming during visits to communities Network and free exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intelligent Articulate Outstanding track record in government service Survey leader Charismatic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angelito Banayo as his tactician Only candidate with a definite platform of government so far No-sing-and-dance numbers in the campaign Support of the Filipino –Chinese Community Well-groomed Non-trapo image Can command blind loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spirituality, a devout Protestant Charismatic leader with 5 million JIL supporters Personal network Good academic background Hardworking and honest Political activist with wide exposure to the plight of the Filipino poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charisma to lower income classes who make up 80% of voters High EQ / Street smart Erap-FPJ jokes (generates sympathy) Close personal ties with influential political families like the Marcoses, Cojuangco, and Aquino families, the Estradas Movie actor Arnold Schwarenegger's victory in California Non-trapo image and clean image Opponents don't know where he is strong or weak Strong appeal to voters (which brings in money and political support) Susan Roces; movie industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak Points (Negative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion-dictated population policy Perceived as perpetually campaigning Flip-flops on key issues / "Laban-Bawi" syndrome Micromanager Acts on raw information Controversial husband Mike and son Mikey Grouchy to the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in fielding local candidates Weak organization Limited election funds Temperamental Tends to do things all by himself – "Lone Ranger" tendency Accused as wife beater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aloof, detached, unpredictable Kuratong Balelelng rub-out case Close association with fugitives from justice such as Senior Supt. Cesar Mancao, Supt. Michael Ray Aquino, both charged with murder for the death of publicist Bubby Dacer and driver Emmanuel Corbito Reports on alleged ill-gotten wealth stashed in the US Takes media criticism badly Ronny Zamora connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Messianic Complex" tendency Lacks experience in government service and public administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No political experience, poor qualifications Lacks experience in consensus-building Heavy beer drinker; history into getting into fights The Joseph Estrada "trauma" Perception that he will be a puppet of traditional politicians Poor organization and electoral network No experience in managing campaign Susceptible to being overthrown if he wins and turns out to be a political disaster

Matrix 6 enumerates the success formula of the presidentiables according to some of their political tacticians.²²

Matrix 6



BIO-DATA	GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO (PGMA)	RAUL ROCO	PANFILO M. LACSON	EDUARDO VILLANUEVA, SR.	RONALD ALLAN KELLEY POE (FPJ)
Success Formula according to some political tacticians	Ronaldo Puno <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ POSITIVE NAME RECALL ▪ PERSONAL ORGANIZATION ▪ MEDIA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Printing Office ▪ Public Service Agencies ▪ Government Resources ▪ MONEY ▪ DATA MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 400,000 contacts ▪ 42,000 Barangay Captains and Councilors ▪ 1,565 Mayors' cell phone nos. ▪ 200 plus Congressmen ▪ Survey of Allies/Opposition ▪ 10-12 M estimated voters 	Ernie Pangan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOOD TRACK RECORD • SINCERITY • REMINDING PEOPLE OF THE EVILS OF CHEATING • HARDWORK • ORGANIZATION (getting like-minded people) 	Angelito Banayao <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PERSONAL EMPATHY • PROVEN TRACK RECORD • MEDIA EXPOSURE • QUALITY OF MEDIA PLACEMENTS • RESOURCES • PERSONAL SUPPORT MACHINERY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POSITIVE NAME RECALL • JIL ORGANIZATION AND NETWORK AFFILIATES WITH 5M SUPPORTERS • MEDIA EXPOSURE • MONEY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ POPULAR/ POSITIVE NAME RECALL ▪ MEDIA EXPOSURE ▪ 40% ERAP SUPPORTERS WHO WILL SUPPORT "DA KING" ▪ SUPPORT FROM THE LOCAL ARTISTS IN THE MOVIE INDUSTRY ▪ SUSAN ROCES ▪ MONEY ▪ ORGANIZATION

To some extent, all the presidentiables are popular to the general public since most of them are sharing the media limelight from time to time although they vary in degrees. Except for Roco and Lacson, the three candidates – PGMA, Bro. Ed and FPJ have positive name recall. That's why if the tempo of the national election is media-driven then, PGMA and Brother Ed have comparative advantage over the other political candidates since both of them have access to mass media. PGMA will definitely utilize the National Printing Office and Public Service Agencies as well as mobilize the government resources at her disposal. Bro. Ed Villanueva, on the other hand, can capitalize on his connection with the Zoe Broadcasting, Inc. (Channel 11).

However, if the thesis of national election is the same in 1998 when ERAP won through class divide unmindful of his performance and work ethics then, FPJ has an advantage over the rest of them since he has been topping the survey belonging to class C, D and E in November-December 2003 survey administered by the IBON Foundation, Pulse Asia and even, the Social Weather Station (SWS) headed by FPJ's cousin, Mr. Mahar Mangahas.

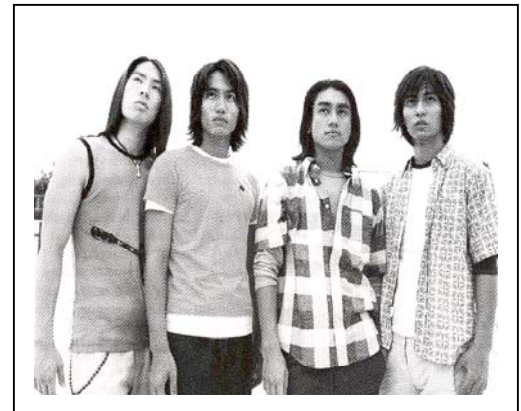
Conversely, if national election will focus on the issues of professional competence, public accountability and proven track record in government service then, the fight is between and among PGMA, Roco and Lacson – all known public officials.

The Philippine Culture In Transition



The impact of elite globalization on developing countries like the Philippines has both positive and negative effects to the Philippine economy and culture. The world is becoming smaller due to fast-paced technological progress in telecommunication, computer technology and electronics industry. Communication is faster and made convenient via computer internet, e-mail, fax machines, cell phone and text messaging. Imported products from different countries can be ordered through internet surfing. Business transaction is now made possible through on-line banking. Money can be transmitted from one country to another in just a few minutes using electronic credit cards and automated teller machines. The western culture of hyper-consumerism and materialism has permeated the social fabrics and cultural consciousness of the Filipinos, especially the youth now comprising 63% of the voting population.

After Mexican tele-novelas, Chinese tele-novela and Pinoy teleserye have become the national pastime of Filipino viewers aside from watching sports such as the National Basketball Association (NBA) and Philippine Basketball Associations (PBA). International boxing bouts featuring Manny Paquiao are Pinoy's favorite. Youngsters love to watch billiard tournaments where idol Efren "Bata" Reyes beats his opponent. The Filipinos are fond with watching game shows too such as "Game Ka Na Ba?" hosted by Ms. Kris Aquino, "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire" hosted by Mr. Christopher de Leon, and MTB's popular game show, "Urong-Sulong" emceed by comedian Bayani Agbayani and singer Randy Santiago. Dance contest like "Otso-Otso" and singing contest "Star In A Million" are also gaining wider acceptance and popularity not only to the poor and the powerless, but even to the educated upper-middle-class families.

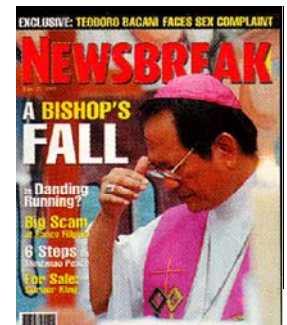


Studying closely, telenovelas, sports, entertainment and game shows, dance and singing contests served as coping mechanisms of many Filipinos in the midst of economic crisis with the hope of at least, getting extra-income if not, becoming a lucky millionaire and/or a newly discovered singer or aspiring actor/actress. The Filipinos belief in luck served as his motivation to actively participate in gambling activities such as 'jueteng', Lotto and cock fighting. Sadly, even the national election is considered by many Filipinos as a game like cockfighting where one has to choose a political candidate to put his bet, his life, career and fortune. Patron-client relationship is as old as our traditional beliefs that should be rectified to be able to choose the righteous and deserving leaders of the nation. The gambling culture of Filipinos along with other vices such as drinking, drug addiction and immorality are some of the values that need to be changed by many Filipinos, both rich and poor.



Everyday, the headlines of national and local newspapers feature the increasing incidence of juvenile delinquency due to family problems and crisis of moral values. The lover's quarrel of Ms. Kris Aquino with Paranaque Mayor Joey Marquez became a national issue reflecting women's problems concerning their reproductive rights, domestic violence, and the healthcare issue of acquiring the dreadful Sexually Transmitted Disease.

Even the Church did not escape from the public controversy involving Bishop Crisostomo Yalung of Antipolo and Bishop Teodoro Bacani and other religious priests who committed immoral acts. That is why the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is not incline to be actively involved in societal issues because it is preoccupied by issues internal to the Church such as financial difficulties, shortage of clergy and religious, sexual misconduct among Church personnel. Many religious and laypersons believe that fundamental reforms within the Church must be done. After all, the religious priests are human beings that deserve emotional love and care. Development interventions must be done to strengthen the formation and recruitment of the religious and to ensure that they are given spiritual and community support. Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales of Lipa, Batangas, replaced Cardinal Jaime Sin of Archdiocese of Manila.



According to Fr. Intengan, there is still a ray of hope to the Catholic Church because of the presence of Catholic Christians committed to the task of nation building. The Couples for Christ and some transparochial organizations are linking faith and value formation in their socio-economic activities to improve the plight of the Filipino poor.

Radio and television news flash on screens the continuing prevalence of crimes in the country both petty and grand. The Mindanao conflict and the growing insurgency in the countryside are some of the pressing issues that need urgent attention. The successive bank robberies and kidnappings of Chinese businessmen and their families are linked with the upcoming national election, which is most probably involving top ranking officials in the military and traditional politicians. Political analyst says that running for national public office under the law entails at least PhP 189.5 million (\$ 3.4 million, independent) or PhP 303.2 million (\$5.5 million with political party). In order to win, the candidates and their allies must be able to raise funds in whatever means (www.bulatlat.com)²³

The Philippine culture and arts has become one of the venues where local artists freely express their opposition on war and social conflict as reflected in their music, poem, photo-exhibit, stage plays, concerts and other creative means calling for peace and national reconciliation. There is no peace if there is no justice. Peace means food on the table, education to all, affordable housing, land to the tiller, job security and livelihood projects for the urban poor and other basic sectors.

Despite severe housing shortages needed for urban poor, demolition of houses are on-going along with the clearing of sidewalks and road widening by the MMDA which constantly threaten the livelihood of the informal sector.

IBON studies further revealed that the fees for social services are too much for the poor. Because of high cost of medicine and hospitalization, more Filipinos are now resorting to self-medication and herbal medicines. Tuition fees in 317 private universities and colleges have increased dramatically from PhP 22-PhP 62 per unit or PhP 330- PhP 930 for a 15-unit load. Migration from private to public schools continue as even middle-income families could no longer afford to pay for high tuition fees. It is estimated that 3.5 million children (39%) failed to enroll in 2002 alone (IBON, 15 July 2003).

Poverty itself creates pressure for poor families that need more than one or two breadwinners in order to survive. That's why child labor in the country today has reached to almost 5 million. Child labor is defined as *"any work performed by a child that subjects the child to economic exploitation, or that is likely to be hazardous for the child or that interferes with the child's education, or that is harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."*

According to Ms. Teresita del Rosario, there are five major causes of child labor in the Philippines such as poverty, the lack of public awareness, false value system and attitude of parents and communities, tolerance and indifference. To date, there are 4 million (16.2%) of 2.4 million (ranging 5-17 years old) were economically active. Of which, the highest percentage of working children came from Southern Tagalog (11.5%), followed by Central Visayas (9.7%) and Eastern Visayas (8.7%).

The DOLE data further revealed that 2.4 million working children are exposed to hazardous environment. Of those exposed, 7 out of 10 are males. It is estimated that 62% of rural working children are exposed to physical, chemical and biological hazards than their urban counterparts which comprise 52%.

Considering that children are the future of our nation, it is imperative to protect their rights to ensure the development of our nation. Children's rights can be categorized into four: survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights.

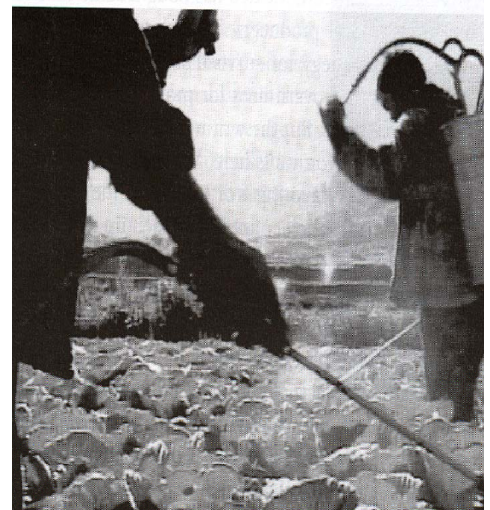
To survive the economic crisis, millions of Filipinos work abroad in search for greener pasture. But according to Atikha-Balikbayani survey, there are migrant workers unable to save. Some of the reasons cited were the growing needs of their immediate and extended families, the increasing cost of living in the home country, the extravagant lifestyle that most migrant families are leading, families dependency on migrant earnings and the debt trap that many of them are coping with. (Philippine Star News, September 18, 2003).

The State of the Philippine Environment

The economic and socio-political crisis extends to the natural bounty of the archipelago, which is rapidly being devastated. Human greed, abuse and misuse of the country's forest resources have resulted in the sad state of our forests. The country's 16 million hectares of forests are reduced to 700,000 hectares which is now at risk due to indiscriminate mining activities, geothermal exploration, dam construction and land conversion projects (ENS, October 1999)²⁴ With deforestation rate of 1,900 hectares a day, it is expected that the Philippine forests will be completely denuded by 2025. In fact, the IBON Foundation reported that the Philippine forests have been steadily shrinking at an average rate of 2% per year and now cover a mere 18.6% of the country's total land area (2000)²⁵

The situation of the country's marine resources is reaching unsustainable level. Mangrove areas, the breeding ground for fishes and other marine species have significantly reduced from 418,990 hectares to 139,735 hectares as a result of land conversion ranging from commercial fishponds, beach resorts, residential to industrial estates. Mangrove forests are cut for firewood and construction purposes. Farther out in the oceans, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) reported 70% of the 34,000 square kilometers of Philippine coral reef systems that serve as crucial habitats for marine species are already dead (as of 1998). They are destroyed by the use of cyanide, dynamite fishing, industrial pollution, dumping of domestic wastes and accumulation of silts coming from denuded watershed areas. These significantly reduced municipal fish production which serve as the main source of livelihood for many poor coastal dwellers.²⁶ Likewise, inland lakes and rivers throughout the country are not spared from environmental destruction. Freshwater resources are degraded by over fishing, extensive fish pen operations and unregulated discharge of urban and industrial wastes. No wonder that out of the country's 421 rivers, 50 of them were already declared biologically dead in 1994 (CEC:1994).

In lowland areas, destructive chemical-dependent monoculture farming techniques, imposed by foreign transnational corporations have fostered soil erosion and toxic contamination of soil, water and air. To date, the Filipino population now numbering more than 78 million has already exceeded the carrying capacity of their natural environment. We all know that the more people there are, the smaller each Filipino's share of the benefits from the environment since there are fewer resources with which to go around. More people means more infrastructure, more roads, more energy plants, more wastes, more food and water for a growing population that needs to be done in the most efficient manner and in a larger scale. This means more pesticides and fertilizers, as well as more forests cut down for fuel wood, settlements and agriculture. More and more people will be pushed farther into remote upland areas to find a place they can subsist. They will be forced to thrive on marginal areas such as upland where soil quality is poor and easily eroded. They may also be forced to live on critical areas such as riverbanks and sea walls, which threaten both human life and ecology.²⁷



On December 19, 2003, massive landslides buried hundred homes and killed 118 people in eight barangays in the four towns of Liloan, San Francisco, Maasin and San Ricardo in Southern Leyte. In like manner, flashfloods and landslides due to the continuous heavy rains affected 3,158 families in 173 barangays of Region X, XI and CARAGA. According to the survivors, the avalanche of water and mud happened too fast. An explosion from a cracked ground was heard and then, water heavily mixed with mud came rampaging down tearing, sweeping and burying homes and persons. *"It was like a mountain thundering down and the ground moving fast to the sea."* This was the narration of one of the victims. This is the sad state of the Philippine environment today, which only reflects the gravity of poverty and affront to human dignity that the Filipino poor are suffering.²⁸

On January 1, 1990, Pope John Paul II acknowledged the ecological crisis as a consequence of social inequality and a cause of social conflict around the globe. The Pope cited humanity's lack of respect and irreverence for life, above all, for the dignity of the human person which is, the ultimate guide for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress (The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility).

By and large, there is now a growing recognition that we are living in one planet and it is imperative to work towards sustainable development regardless of nationalities, class, religions and political ideologies. Environmental groups and concerned individuals have been working together in an effort to protect the environment and the people against harmful effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides as well as other unsustainable technologies and practices espoused by transnational and multinational corporations. There are advocacy efforts promoting simple lifestyles as opposed to hyper-consumerism and materialism permeating our Filipino culture in the light of neoliberal globalization.

Several bills and laws are already passed in the Congress and Senate related to environmental protection such as The Philippine Clean Air Act, The Water Pollution Control and Management Bills, The Solid Waste Management Act, The National Land and Water Use Act, etc. Like our Philippine Constitution, these environmental bills and laws are inutile without effective law enforcement and community participation. That is why the Philippine government has been working with the civil society groups and other sectors of society to develop a holistic, integrated and multi-sectoral programs and projects that will address the interrelated problems of poverty and unemployment, environmental problems and poor governance.

Conclusion

In spite of increasing foreign debts and war rewards, the economic bases of the Philippine agriculture and industry remain underdeveloped. Genuine agrarian reform is not fully implemented due to the government's lack of political will, budget constraint, legal bottlenecks and landlord resistance. It seems that the perceived economic solutions of attracting foreign capital and investments, privatization, liberalizing imports and waging war against insurgency and terrorism has only widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In the final analysis, neoliberal globalization has increased poverty and marginalization of domestic industry and agriculture, which resulted in the displacement of the workforce. It is still the traditional politicians along with neo-liberal capitalists that twisted every situation to their own advantage at the expense of the Filipino poor who were repeatedly betrayed by their false promises. Unless we change or ways of doing things, we will remain poor and underdeveloped as a nation.

It is still the traditional politicians along with neo-liberal capitalists that twisted every situation to their own advantage at the expense of the Filipino poor who were repeatedly betrayed by their false promises. Unless we change or ways of doing things, we will remain poor and underdeveloped as a nation.

The challenge is how to unify the country and heal the wounds of a greatly divided nation. Perhaps, we Filipinos should stop looking for a national leader as a great Messiah that will unify the nation but rather, we should learn to work collectively like what we did in Edsa 1 and 2. Our religious faith gives us hope that in the midst of economic, political, socio-cultural and ecological crises we are experiencing at this point, we can still be united as a nation with a common vision. Good governance must emanate from the people, by the people and for the people. We are the people that constitute a good government. We are the PEOPLE POWER.



On May 10, 2004, we Filipinos are given another opportunity to rise on the occasion and make our nation great again. The fate of our future lies in our hands especially the youth, which comprise 63% of the voting population. In our voter's education campaign, political candidates must be chosen on the basis of meritocracy and not on popularity or name recall. Let us consider 5 P's in choosing political candidates as our guide. These are the candidate's **P**ersonality, **P**erformance and work ethics, **P**olitical ideology and development orientation, **P**eace and national reconciliation agenda and **P**latform of government responsive to the needs of the Filipino poor. As responsible and wise voters, the Filipinos are challenged to heed the '*signs of the time*' and after careful discernment, commit themselves to the task of nation building towards social and structural transformation of the Philippine Society.

Call to Action

A) Economic

1. Debunk the myth that there is only one path to national development and that is, the market and its elite globalization as espoused by neoliberal capitalist. As an alternative, we should commit ourselves to work towards building self-sufficient and self-reliant communities along with industrial development and the implementation of genuine agrarian reform program in the Philippines.
2. Lobby for a nationalist economy ²⁹
 - Reversal of economic policies (i.e. protection of sectors of the domestic economy as opposed to present “free trade” and reliance on foreign direct investment
 - Lobby for independent foreign policy as opposed to the privatization/deregulation policies dictated by the GATT-WTO, WB and ADB.

B) Political

1. Prepare for May 10, 2004 Election through Voter’s education campaign and poll watching. Be vigilant and work towards a peaceful and orderly national election. Concretely, we can also lobby for the restoration of money cut from COMELEC budget from the proposed PhP 11 billion to PhP 4 billion. Aside from providing personnel, logistics and technical support, we can also lobby for transparency through manual counting and consolidation of votes.
2. Support civil society and its social development programs aimed at promoting broad-based political awareness and organization among the masses that will put pressure to the Philippine government to use its resources wisely aimed at eradicating poverty and the improvement of quality of life of the Filipino poor.
3. Support and strengthen our democratic institution that guarantees separation of powers and a formal system of checks and balances. We have a peaceful means of selecting our national leaders through national and local elections, which goes without saying, we don’t need other elements to seize state power either through military authoritarian rule or communist take-over.
4. Oppose military rule and advocate for the respect for people’s civil liberties and political rights.
5. Investigation and quick resolution of graft and corruption cases.
6. Protect, respect and monitor human rights violation in the Philippines and demand that human rights victims be given social justice.
7. Support all peace efforts that will put an end in Mindanao war. Let us remember that the resources used for war can be reallocated for economic recovery.

C) Socio-Cultural and Religious

1. Lobby for increasing the budget of education and social services to benefit the Filipino poor instead of debt servicing. We should invest more in good quality education and human resource development.
2. Advocate the protection of children in need of special protection composed of children on the streets, victims of abuse and commercial sexual exploitation especially those affected by HIV/AIDS, children suffering from various forms of disability, children in conflict with the law and those situations of

armed conflict, children in ethnic communities where they may suffer from both neglect and discrimination.

3. Lobby for amending Republic Act 8042 or the Magna Carta of OFWs to promote their welfare and protection against exploitation and racial discrimination.
4. Lobby with the bishops to make catechesis and religious formation, especially children one of the top priorities of the Catholic Church.
5. Promote inter-religious dialogue between and among the Catholic Church, Protestants, Muslims, Lumads and other Religious Sects wherever and whenever possible.

D) Environment

1. Support all efforts towards environmental protection in line with sustainable development principles and practices.
2. Intensify networking and linkages with international agencies that promote sustainable human development paradigm, strategies and approaches

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Elections and the Common Good

Fr. Dan Kroger *



As the nation approaches the 2004 elections, one encounters various reactions to the political scene. Some people say they simply don't vote, as a matter of principle. They regard our present system as hopelessly corrupt. Many want to emigrate to greener pastures. On the other hand, traditional Filipino politicians, or *trapos*, love the present system; they are eager to help themselves to whatever they can from the public coffers.

Others firmly believe that the present political system is corrupt; yet they hope to reform it or at least minimize the damage caused by *trapo* politics. One common way toward reform is to promote social responsibility by engaging in voter education. The De La Salle System developed an effective CD-ROM entitled *Halahan: Edukasyon sa Pagboto Patungo sa Pagbabago* and here at the DLSU Taft campus the COSCA and the Theology and Religious Education Department have tried to convince voting age students that they really ought to vote and work for social reform. Soon, NAMFREL will issue guidelines for the 2004 elections and augment its volunteers to watch the polls. A statement from the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines on the "qualities of good candidates" or something of that sort will surely appear.

Voter education programs like those of the DLSU System warn voters not to vote for candidates making unrealistic promises. At the same time they warn against candidates whose chief appeal is personal media exposure and notoriety. Another element appearing in voter education programs is the general principle that voters should select candidates based on their careful judgment about who will best serve the "common good." This term "the common good" has a long history, is vague and subject to a variety of interpretations. Surprisingly, the idea of a "common good" is thrown around in Catholic ethics and Christian education classes as if everyone has a clear understanding of what the "common good" entails. The reality is that many Catholics cannot explain the moral jargon found in the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Rarely does a university student ask, "What is the common good?" Few Filipinos ever wonder, "What do Catholics mean by the common good?"

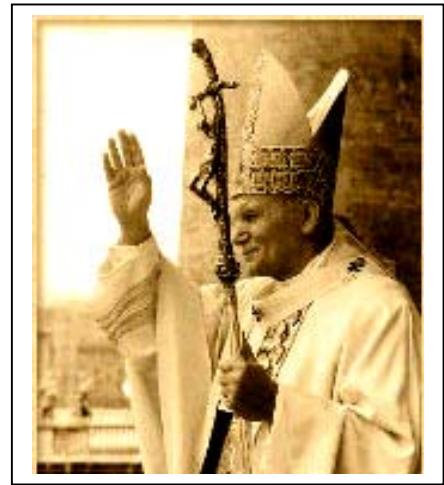
The fact is that for centuries Christian theology followed Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle who connected justice with a pursuit of the common welfare, or common good, in their respective Greek city-state or *polis*. Their notion of justice was linked to their context. Only free, male Greeks were included as equals in the *polis*. That meant that women were second-class citizens, slaves were to be treated as slaves, and so forth. The truth is that the major Greek philosophers forgot what some of their lesser counter parts, the Sophists, pointed out: What is just is only just in reference to a particular place and time. In Aristotle's context for example, it was proper for Aristotle to treat a slave like a slave and to consider every female his inferior. That was the limitation of his understanding of justice. No Filipino today would likely accept that notion, after the hell of the colonial era; yet, generations of Catholics did. In Europe generations of Catholics and Protestants fought religious wars and persecuted each other mercilessly in the name of the "common good." Christians started the Crusades in order to protect Christianity and the Holy Land from infidels.

Any "common good" principle employed in voter education programs ought to include the poor and the marginalized masses. Filipinos today are in a different place and time. If the idea of the "common good" found in Catholic teaching is to be meaningful it must be made relevant to Filipinos today...

The Spanish and Italian Inquisitions were deadly exercises in inhumanity masquerading as "justice." While ecclesiastical and secular authorities who pursued such actions believed in the "common good," the problem was that they placed heretics and Jews out of the sphere of their *polis*. Adolph Hitler believed that the extermination of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the mentally disturbed was in the interest of the "common good" of the German *Volk*. His reasoning was not unlike that of Catholics and Protestants who burned heretics at the stake because they felt obliged to protect the "common good" from the error of heretics. Historically, the "common good" meant the prosperity and privileges of those in power.

Any "common good" principle employed in voter education programs ought to include the poor and the marginalized masses. Filipinos today are in a different place and time. If the idea of the "common good" found in Catholic teaching is to be meaningful it must be made relevant to Filipinos today. Catholic philosophers and moral theologians are still arguing about how to interpret the principle of the "common good" in a way that makes sense for today. The Aristotelian categories of medieval European theology do not fit the contemporary Philippine context, though many church officials seem to think that they can still make norms binding on all people, of all places and all times.

If willingness to work for the common good is to be used today as one of the criteria for choosing good candidates then it appears then the term "common good" must be used in a more inclusive sense than that found in traditional Catholic moral teaching. A good place to start is a careful study of more recent official teachings of the church. For example, Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* explicitly stated its intent "to develop the doctrine of the popes" in Article 1, but it did not stop there. It also admitted, in Article 12 that there are times when the church acted in opposition to the Gospel in imposing its religious and political beliefs upon people. This admission of failure in its mission was also one of the themes in John Paul II's preparation for the Jubilee Year. Therefore, the official teaching of the Catholic Church and Catholic moral theologians, while still employing the concept of the "common good" are to reinterpret the idea in a way that includes all peoples and avoids the mistakes committed by the Church in the past.



In the encyclical he intended as his legacy to the world, *Pacem in Terris* (1963), John XXIII offered the strongest endorsement of human rights found in Catholic thought up to his time. His understanding of the "common good" shows his concern that religious imperialism and the "error has no rights" application of "common good" theory would finally be put to rest. Paul VI also contributed to the social teachings of the church when in *Octogesima adveniens* (1981) he proposed a theology of the human person which highlights the dignity and freedom of the human person. He was stressing the two common aspirations of the late 20th Century: the desire for equality and for meaningful participation in political and social affairs (*Octogesima Adveniens* #22).

In *Centessimus Annus* (May 1, 1991) John Paul II stresses that it is the duty of the state to promote the common good (CA 11 and CA 52) but he also observes that it appears that democracies have lost the ability to make decisions for the common good (CA 47). It is in that context that John Paul II emphasized the linkage between rights, the common good and the human person. The paragraph is worth citing:

Even in countries with democratic forms of government, these [human] rights are not always fully respected. Here we are referring not only to the scandal of abortion, but also to different aspects of a crisis within democracies themselves, which seem at times to have lost the ability to make decisions aimed at the common good. Certain demands that arise within society are not examined in accordance with criteria of justice and morality, but rather on the basis of the electoral or financial power of the groups promoting them. With time, such distortions of political conduct create distrust and apathy, with a subsequent decline in the political participation and civic spirit of the general population, which feels abused and disillusioned. As a result, there is a growing inability to situate particular interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good. The latter is not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person. (CA 47)

What Pope John Paul II observed is characteristic of the Philippines. In *trapo* politics, money is power and money can buy votes and influence, to the detriment of the common good. Officially, the common good was defined in a dynamic and inclusive way by the Second Vatican Council in its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (#74): "The common good embraces the sum of those conditions of social life where human beings, families and associations may readily attain their own perfection." The "common good" is a term to be examined critically and it must be interpreted in such a way as to include those normally excluded in Philippine society—the poor masses. Too often politicians seem to confuse personal good with the common good. What is even more oppressive in traditional politics is that the "common good" only includes the millionaires and the powerful of this land. Whatever Lasallians can do to overcome these tendencies through education and voters' empowerment offers the best hope for a day when Filipinos will recognize every person as their *kabayan*—regardless of class, wealth, religion or power. Everyone has a right to live a decent human life. That is what Lasallian political action must never forget.

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VOTER'S PRAYER*

(For the 2004 National and Local Elections)

*Lord, make me an instrument of your presence in the Polls,
Where there is coercion and violence,*

Let me sow seeds of love;

Where there is bribery and vote buying,

Let me sow seeds of integrity;

Where there is discord,

Let me sow seeds of union;

Where there is electoral fraud,

Let me sow seeds of honesty;

Where there is publicity and propaganda,

Let me sow seeds of truth;

Where there is indifference,

Let me sow seeds of care and concern;

And, where there is despair in the Electoral Process,

Let me sow seeds of hope.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much think of my selfish motives when I vote. Instill in me a deep sense of communal solidarity in my critical choice of candidates that would rise above the traditional politics of PAY-OFF, PERSONALITY and PATRONAGE. Enlighten me to elect worthy men and women that embody the true spirit of public service in their moral consciousness.

Mary, our dear mother, embrace us with your maternal care. We pray, through your intercession, for a **Clean, Honest, Accurate, Meaningful and Peaceful** Elections. For it is in voting responsibly that we receive the fruits of true democracy, and it is in dying as a seed to our selfishness that are born to eternal life. AMEN

* Adapted from the Prayer of St. Francis Assisi

Source: "*Pilipinas: Saan Ka Pupunta?*" Movement, Lay Force
San Carlos Seminary Compound, Guadalupe, Makati



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