

SHARING HISTORY

**Remarks of H. E. Albert Del Rosario
Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines
On the Occasion of the Unveiling of the New Plaque
On the Philippine-American War
St. Paul-Minneapolis, Minnesota
4 February, 2002**

Lieutenant Governor Mae Schunk

Honorable Members of the Minnesota Senate and House of Representatives, especially Senators Pappas and Chaudhary, and Representative Krinke

Major General Eugene R. Andreotti

Mr. Ian Stuart and Members of the Minnesota Historical Society

Ms. Lita Malicsi

Ms. Milegua Layese and Members of the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to tell you how happy I am to be here with all of you and to take part in this landmark event that you have organized. I congratulate the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota and the Filipino community of St. Paul-Minneapolis and the State of Minnesota for successfully promoting a better appreciation of Philippine-American history. Yours was a labor of love and dedication that should motivate Filipinos everywhere.

A special thanks is owed to the government and people of Minnesota for your understanding and sympathy on this issue of historical accuracy. Open-mindedness, decency and fairness are qualities for which you in Minnesota are very well known. These qualities informed your decision to support an important change in the recorded past of your home State. In doing so, you have helped make the history of Minnesota the legacy of all Minnesotans.

As I stand here in the Minnesota State Capitol, I am awed by your history. Your State has given its sons and daughters to the cause of liberty, democracy and human happiness through the decades. Many have shed their blood for freedom, on both American and foreign soil.

Filipinos, too, have been valiant in the defense of their native land and of the free world. In World War Two, Filipinos and Americans stood shoulder to shoulder against the rising tide of militarism and fascism. Our boys fought together in the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor. Our peoples kept their faith in freedom through the long years of resistance and during the Philippine Liberation Campaign.

Since then, our countries have been on the same side in virtually every conflict and in many international humanitarian operations, including the Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf, Haiti, Cambodia and East Timor. We have forged a common bond of sacrifice in the name of freedom that inspires our democratic alliance today in its campaign against the new threat of global terrorism.

But it was not always so. A hundred and three years ago, on February 4, 1899, hostilities broke out between the First Philippine Republic and the United States. That conflict, which began in the trenches around Manila, and then spread to the rest of the country, is known in the Philippines as the Philippine-American War. America lost more than four thousand in the fighting. The Philippines lost as many as two hundred thousand.

In the United States, most refer to this era of violence as the Philippine Insurrection, except here. Minnesota stands out as a happy and hopeful exception, for you have looked with clarity at the past.

I admit that describing a long ago conflict either as a war or as an insurrection may seem obscure. It is the nature of that conflict, however, that is at question here. We Filipinos claim that early struggle as part of our heritage as a people and of our quest for national independence. I am related to General Gregorio del Pilar, who fell at Tirad Pass defending Aguinaldo from the Americans, so such sentiments seem quite natural to me.

But it is not really the past that concerns us. After all, the present should not be held hostage to the past forever. A person who is always looking backward will have great difficulty moving forward. The real issue is how we understand the past and how we pass that understanding on to the future.

This is why today's event is so significant and why I hope Minnesota can have a message for many others in this great country. The decision of this State to correct its historical record is just. It was long awaited by both Filipinos and Americans of Filipino descent. It acknowledges what actually happened between our two countries. It honors the losses on both sides in a costly and brutal war. It restores to Filipinos and Americans their true history.

Objectivity, however, must dictate that we also remember how our two peoples repaired the wounds of war. In truth, neither side had to feel like victor or vanquished for long.

The bitter experience of the Philippine-American War ensured that the American people would not embrace imperialism as a pillar of their national policy. The volunteer soldiers of this State expressed strong views on this subject. Though they were American patriots who fought for their country, their testimonial letters home revealed profound doubts about their nation's conquest of the Philippines. Thanks to them and to many other Americans of conscience, the United States remained faithful to its democratic roots in its rise as a great world power. The Philippines was to be the first and the last major overseas U.S. colony.

American rule in the Philippines was far more enlightened than that of any other colonial power of the day. The United States had a genuine regard for the welfare of the Filipino people and early on, gave a commitment to eventually free the Philippines.

On their part, Filipinos eagerly accepted American sponsorship of their nation-building efforts through increasing measures of self-government. Filipinos pursued and regained their independence not only through peaceful means, but with the active American encouragement and cooperation.

Through the years since those days long ago, many Filipinos have also come to this great nation. They have made a new home for themselves in the United States. They are part of the immigrant tradition that has helped to build this country. They contribute to the diversity that makes this nation strong. Filipino-Americans are loyal and hard working citizens of the United States, their adopted homeland. Yet they have not forgotten the Filipino heritage they brought with them from across the sea.

In this Capitol, the seat of government of the State of Minnesota that they now call home, Filipino-Americans can now be as proud of their old mother country as they are of their new nation. As those from many other lands have done, Filipino-Americans will contribute to the life and vitality of the United States. They will do so in the secure knowledge that they enjoy the respect, affection and support of their fellow Minnesotans. This plaque is a testament to that commitment to community and country. For this I thank and congratulate you all.

God Bless you. Mabuhay!