

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF
“LAND OF THE MORNING: THE PHILIPPINES AND ITS PEOPLE”
21 OCTOBER 2009
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM**

Chairman NHB's Address

1 This exhibition kicks off NHB's celebration of the history, heritage and artistic achievements of the Philippines. The celebration, Fiesta Filipinas, will be hosted by the ACM, SPM, NMS and SAM.

2 Fiesta Filipinas also commemorates the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Singapore.

3 In accordance with my wife's standing instruction, I will make three points.

4 First, I want to share with you some little known facts about the connections between two Filipino national heroes and Singapore. The most important national hero of the Philippines is Jose Rizal. Fearing the power of his words and ideas, Spain executed him when he was only 35 years old. Altogether, Jose Rizal had visited Singapore five times. The first foreign country he visited, enroute to Spain, to study medicine, was Singapore, in May 1882. The last country he visited before his execution was also Singapore. In December 1896, the ship which was taking him back to the Philippines to be executed, stopped in Singapore enroute. On 30 December 1896, Spain executed Rizal by firing squad. I am glad that NHB has put up a marker to honour Rizal. The marker was unveiled by President Nathan and the Secretary for Education of the Philippines, and sits in front of this museum, by the bank of the Singapore River.

5 The second Filipino national hero who had a connection with Singapore is General Emilio Aguinaldo. When the revolution against Spain started in 1896, Aguinaldo led a successful assault on the

Spanish garrison in Cavite. He became a national hero. He was subsequently elected President of the Revolutionary Government in March 1897. However, following a military stalemate, a truce was concluded. Aguinaldo and his men were exiled to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, Aguinaldo came to Singapore to seek the support of the United States for his cause. He met with the then US Consul, Spencer Pratt, on 24 April 1898, at a house (The Mansion) on River Valley Road and on 25 April at Raffles Hotel. The US promised to support the revolutionaries against Spain. Aguinaldo returned to Hong Kong and from Hong Kong to the Philippines on a US ship, "McCulloch". On 12 June 1898, Aguinaldo proclaimed the independence of the Philippines from Spain. The date, 12 June, has, ever since, been observed as the "Independence Day" of the Philippines. In the meantime, the US betrayed the revolutionaries. The US President, McKinley, decided to annex the Philippines. The US paid Spain the sum of \$20 million and Spain ceded the territory to the US by the Spanish-American Treaty of Paris of 1898. The Filipino people, however, rejected the US claim of sovereignty and the Filipino-American War started in 1898. Aguinaldo led the nationalists forces against the Americans until his capture in 1901. The Philippines became an American colony. Aguinaldo died in 1964, at the ripe old age of 95. I hope that one day, NHB will put up a marker at an appropriate place to honour Aguinaldo and to record his visit to Singapore in April 1898.

6 Second, since we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries, it is appropriate for me to say a few words about the state of our bilateral relations. I am happy to say that relations between our two countries are good, substantive and multi-faceted. In 2008, Singapore was the fourth largest trading partner of the Philippines (after the US, China and Chile) and the Philippines was Singapore's 14th largest trading partner. Two-way trade was over S\$17 billion in 2008. Singapore is a major investor in the Philippines. In 2008, the approved FDI from Singapore was approximately S\$3.7 billion. There is a large community of Filipinos and Filipinas working in Singapore, in a whole variety of jobs (not just as domestic helpers), such as banking, nursing, teaching, IT, architecture, design, journalism, music, hospitality, etc.

7 Third, I want to conclude with a few words of praise of the Philippines and of the Filipino people. The Philippines suffers from a bad press. President Arroyo has tried to explain the situation by saying that there are two Philippines: the economy which is doing well and the political system which is “broken”. Few Singaporeans know that until the current financial crisis hit all of us, the Philippine economy was doing very well. In 2007, GDP grew by 7.3%, the highest in 31 years. The economy has been successfully diversified, with the US share going down from 28% to 18% and the Chinese share rapidly growing. The country’s infrastructure and business environment have improved. As a result, for example, Texas Instruments (US) is investing US\$1.6 billion to build a wafer fabrication facility in Clark and Hanjin (South Korean) is building its second shipyard in Mindanao (US\$2 billion) which, when completed, will make the Philippines one of the world’s largest shipbuilders. The Philippines is rich in mineral resources, ranking as the world’s no. 3 in gold, no. 4 in copper, no. 5 in nickel and no. 6 in chromite. The country is also very strong in business process outsourcing or BPO. Tourism is another growth sector. Singapore’s Banyan Tree is investing US\$200 million in building a new resort in Dinaran, Palawan.

8 I want to conclude with a few good words about the Filipino people. The Filipinos have an indomitable spirit. In the face of adversity, they can still smile. In fact, on the world’s happiness index, the Filipinos rank higher than the Singaporeans. When a crisis hits them, as happened recently, they rally together to help one another in the Bayanihan spirit. Filipinos excel in music and in other forms of art. They attach great importance to the family. In order to help their families, Filipinos and Filipinas are willing to go out into the world and endure great hardships. It is estimated that they remit over US\$17 billion back to the Philippines annually. Finally, those of us who have Filipino friends will agree that the Filipinos are a warm and hospitable people.

9 Let me conclude with a wish. My wish is that every Filipino and Filipina in Singapore will visit this beautiful exhibition, not alone, but with a friend, colleague or employer.

10 Mahbuhay.