

Speech of
HON. MARCIANO RAMOS DE BORJA
On his being declared ADOPTED SON OF NUEVA VIZCAYA
Grandstand, Clisoc Field
Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya
24 May 2009

Hon. Carlos Padilla, Congressman of Nueva Vizcaya, one of the highly respected and most prominent congressmen in the country.

Hon. Luisa “Banti” Lloren Cuaresma, the charming Governor of Nueva Vizcaya.

Hon. Jose “Jing” Gambito, the dynamic Vice Governor of Nueva Vizcaya.

Hon. Merlie Talingdan, Board Member, and all the members of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan who are present here this morning

Ladies and gentlemen.

Naimbag nga bigat tayo amin kakabsat nga Katribu Biscayano!

First of all, let me congratulate all of you for successfully staging the First Ammungan Festival today. I can see the hard work, patience and enthusiasm that all the participants made to make this celebration a huge success.

Detractors will say that your festival is just a waste of time and money; that it's just done to make your governor, your congressman and the provincial officials look good. I tell you that coming from the city, I'm truly impressed by what I've seen. We no longer see this kind of dances, costumes and art in the city. You still have them and you are preserving them. They are the heritage that defines your identity as a people. Wherever you are, you should be proud of that heritage, first as a Novo Vizcayano and second as a Filipino. You should all work hard and patiently to preserve your wonderful cultural heritage.

Today is very special for all of you and me. I'm both happy and sad. Happy, because your provincial anniversary coincides with my birthday and you are honoring me by declaring me an “Adopted Son” of Nueva Vizcaya. Sad, because I'm already an orphan. How I wish my parents were here with us to see their son being adopted by a whole province. But I know that they are watching me now in heaven.

I'm from Pasig and I don't have a province. As you know, Pasig is now part of Metro Manila and is highly urbanized. But now I can tell everybody who asks me where my province is, that I'm from Nueva Vizcaya.

Thirty or forty years ago, Pasig was a rural town much like many of the municipalities of Nueva Vizcaya. My parents were farmers and they had little education. I grew up in the farm. I helped my parents in planting, harvesting and selling our crops. I took care of our carabao. I was a pastor. But my father kept on telling me that we don't all have to be farmers. Besides, he told me I was too small and frail to get even a factory job when I get older. My father inspired me to study hard in school and to look for opportunities for a better life. So for those of you who are carabao pastors, don't worry. Everything is possible. If you dream and study and work hard, someday you can be a consul or an ambassador!

Three years ago, I didn't know anybody in this province. My interest in Nueva Vizcaya only started when, as a masteral student in the University of Navarra in northern Spain in the early 1990s, I get to know the Basque Country and its people. I belatedly discovered the link between Nueva Vizcaya and the original Vizcaya (Bizkaia) in the Basque Country, sharing with Mr. Jimmy Calata of the Office of the Governor who also saw its strategic importance when we first established contact with each other via e-mail in January 2006. It was a fascinating discovery. More so when years later I discovered that the provincial seal of Nueva Vizcaya has a small tree in it which I thought was a Narra tree. When I showed it to my Basque friends, they were stunned to see that it is the "Gernika (oak) Tree," the symbol of Vizcaya. The Gernika Tree is also the symbol of Basque unity and the Basque people. It's also good that you preserved the name "Vizcaya". It could have been lost just like in other Spanish colonies in Latin America. But fortunately, Nueva Vizcaya persists and it is a crucial factor in your relations with Vizcaya in the Basque Country at present.

Since I was assigned to the Philippine Embassy in Madrid as First Secretary and Consul in September 2005, I actively dealt with the Basque government to explore possible projects between the Philippines and the Basque Country. I identified the links between Nueva Vizcaya and its counterpart, Vizcaya, as a possible starting point. In August 2006, I met Governor Cuaresma in Cubao for the first time. I was impressed by her sincerity and determination. I also noticed that she was perhaps a little surprised to meet a youthful-looking consul. I told her the possible projects that we can carry out in the coming years and the possibility of her visit to the Basque Country in the near future. Governor Cuaresma put her faith and confidence in my ability to deliver on my promise.

First, we started by promoting an Academic Exchange Program between the Nueva Vizcaya schools and the University of the Basque Country. The Rector and two Vice Rectors of the UBC visited Bayombong in May 2007 to sign an academic exchange agreement. Last year, there were six students from the Philippines studying in UBC. Four of them come from Nueva Vizcaya. One of them, Ryan Manuel, is one of the few Filipinos I know who specializes on the study of climate change using satellite imagery and remote sensing. You

should all be proud that a Novo Vizcayano is now among the leading experts in this field.

Second, I was able to get job orders from Vizcayan companies to hire 28 nurses from the Philippines. 16 of these nurses will come from Nueva Vizcaya. In a few days, not months, they will be deployed in Bilbao area in Vizcaya, Basque Country

Third, the Diocese of Nueva Vizcaya requested my assistance in getting financial support for its hospital project in Aritao. I approached my contacts in the Basque government and we identified the Diputación Foral (Government) of Vizcaya as a possible source of funding. Bishop Ramon Villena still needs 31 million pesos to complete the project. When we met with Governor Jose Luis Bilbao of Vizcaya, Bishop Villena started talking about the hospital project but Gov. Bilbao cut him short and said he already approved the funding for the bishop's hospital project.

Lastly, as a proof of the seriousness of the Basque government in promoting its special relations with Nueva Vizcaya, Governor Cuaresma was officially invited to visit the Basque Country on January 21-23, 2009. Among the other members of the Nueva Vizcaya delegation were Vice Governor Jose Gambito, Board Member Merlie Talingdan, Bishop Ramon Villena, Ms. Alejandra Dacumos, and Mr. Jimmy Calata, who is serving as my counterpart coordinator here in the Province of Nueva Vizcaya.

There is a saying in the bible that "a prophet is never recognized in his own country." I think we can also say the same for diplomats. We diplomats represent our country abroad. We promote our country, culture and people but we only get noticed when problems occur and we are hardly recognized for our contribution. Today, the leaders and people Nueva Vizcaya are making an exception by recognizing my contribution and declaring me as an "adopted son". I will never forget this gesture for the rest of my life. From now on, where ever I get assigned in the Foreign Service, I will proudly tell anyone who asks me where my province is that it is Nueva Vizcaya.

Again, thank you very much for honoring me today. Abante Nueva Vizcaya!