

Christmas Message: Small Acts, Great Faith

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Fellow members of the PHILEXPORT Board, our special guests, exporters, partners in government and private sector, ladies and gentlemen:

Despite the series of calamities and crises that dragged our collective development efforts several steps back, we remain positive in thought and action. This is why we chose the theme, *Small Acts, Great Faith: Moving on to 2010* to set the tone for next year. In this period of challenges we are all in, to inspire people is indeed a great leap of faith. But move on, we must.

Orders are reportedly still slow but even at this rate, the outlook is starting to show some promise. Newspaper reports quoting figures from the National Statistics Office reveal that as of September this year, merchandise exports contracted anew by 18.3% compared to the same month in 2008 and a hefty 29% compared to the year-on-year performance. The NSO said that the September decline was the slowest since December 2008, although it appears to be moderating as shipments were up by 4.6 percent from the previous month. This prompted us to project better, though still negative results for the last quarter.

Where do we go from here? We at the Export Development Council (EDC) and PHILEXPORT National are focused on pursuing solutions to certain export and competitiveness issues such as trade facilitation and cost of doing business.

Against this backdrop of various interventions, the EDC is preparing for a planning session leading to PEDP 2011 to 2013. We regret that we were not able to release the 2008 to 2010 version simply because the Plan would have been overtaken by too many developments, actually crises, in these past two years. Hopefully, this forthcoming version can anticipate the same incidents happening again. After all, we have had a very good share of these challenges, ranging from the environment to financial problems. The exporters' individual and sectoral marketing plans will be helpful as the EDC will be consulting with you soon on the issues and strategies that will be part of this Plan.

On the whole, the Philippines is far from being the prosperous nation that we dream it to be. The poor are still with us, but I do not think we are a hopeless nation. We have a good chance to possibly find some solutions in the next Presidential elections in May. Meanwhile, at the family and personal level, we still easily find simple joys and little blessings. This is probably the answer to a foreign correspondent's question on why Filipinos managed to laugh even while struggling to pass through the waist-deep waters of typhoon Ondoy.

Manny Pacquiao's unprecedented record in his field is I think another victory of mind over matter, a model all of us Filipinos can look at especially when problems come. His winning formula of hard work, perseverance, focus and humility against formidable odds can help bring us to our goals, if not close to it.

In the same manner, CNN's Hero of the Year, Efren Penaflorida, and the many unsung heroes that rise up to particular challenges likewise provide affirmation that there is always something to be thankful for and celebrate about. And this includes being an entrepreneur, particularly being an exporter, especially in these very challenging times. Efren said it beautifully, with his now very famous line: "There is always a hero within us just waiting to be unleashed."

Before I conclude, allow me to reiterate our Chairman's reminder about your participation in the PHILEXPORT National Board elections this January 19 either by submitting your filled up proxy form on or before December 23 or by attending the election itself. We have requested the Chapters and Industry Associations to help us gather the proxies also to ensure that there is a quorum for our elections.

I guess on this note, I also bring advance yuletide greetings from the PHILEXPORT National Board, even as I wish all of us a really brighter future next year and beyond. Lessons from Ondoy reminded us of the triviality of accumulating material possessions that can easily be taken away from us. In the middle of this massive flood, we found that nurturing relationships has better redemptive value. And this can be a precious Christmas gift we can take home tonight and enjoy the rest of our lives.

Maraming salamat at Maligayang Pasko sa ating lahat!