

## **Heeding the Signs of the Times**

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3<sup>rd</sup> PHILEXPORT General Membership Meeting  
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Fellow members of the PHILEXPORT Board; PHILEXPORT members; our resource persons and guests who will be introduced properly later; friends and partners from government; ladies and gentlemen:

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> PHILEXPORT General Membership Meeting. Indeed, it is not the best of times, with many of our fellow Filipinos still in trauma and suffering from various types of losses from last weekend's devastation. Yet, we want to move on and move on knowing that we have hard habits to break.

After the unprecedented and massively destructive typhoon Ondoy, I silently wished that this hall would be jampacked with exporters. Our GMM theme had never been more appropriate and timely. However, through PHILEXPORT's years of advocacy for sustainable development and clean, healthy and safe environment, I have come to realize that these subjects do not immediately elicit interest among SMEs, nor to ordinary for that matter. These issues appear to be very remote from the exporters' bottomlines. But I hope that Saturday's catastrophe has served as a wake up call not only for SME exporters but for all of us as well, however bitter it has come.

Driving home this GMM's point, it is obvious that being pro-environment makes perfect business sense. The lives, properties, infrastructure, other resources and opportunities lost because of the crisis that just happened

cannot be quantified nor fully recovered. What a waste, and there could be more, if we do not heed the signs of the times. We could not overemphasize the need for disaster preparedness, especially as this typhoon is not the first calamity that had hit the country. We could not overemphasize the need for all of us to be involved in proper waste management to at least help avoid clogged drainage systems. We could not overemphasize the need for business, including natural resource-based exporters, real estate developers, contractors and those in similar fields, to take care not to disrupt the natural ecosystems as they conduct business as usual.

Unfortunately, our air, soil and water are so polluted with various types of wastes that we so consciously or unconsciously dispose of. While experts affirmed that the largest source of these filth is coming from households, companies are not spared initially from being aware of environment issues and then later effective and consistent implementation of the appropriate measures to assist in addressing these issues.

I believe that we have enough environment laws and policies already, reportedly even harsher than those in developed countries. Highlights of which will be touched on by one of our resource speakers later. Sure, there are flaws in these legislations, something that the Environment Committees of PHILEXPORT, PCCI and the Federation of Philippine Industries had been trying to correct with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Congress. But the core and basic concept of sustainable development must not be lost amidst the technical or legal loopholes.

Just this week, the buzzword has also shifted to the subject of climate change. You must have seen former US Vice President Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth. In a while, a similar abbreviated presentation from another expert will refresh our memories and resolve, even as she situates this to industry and national situations.

I seriously invite all of us to listen intently and learn. As we leave this hall, we hope that we would have made converts from many of us towards the cause of saving our environment and Mother Earth, the only one we got.

With this, I wish everyone a fruitful afternoon ahead. Thank you and good afternoon.