

Welcome Address

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Bicutan, Taguig, Metro Manila

On behalf of my fellow Academicians, I would like to extend to all of you my most cordial welcome to the 13th Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) of the Philippines. You have given importance to this scientific meeting whose theme is "Managing Ecosystems for Long-Term Human Survival."

Secretary Follosco, I take pride in letting you know that the participants are scientists of research institutions from all corners of our country.

We invited them to this occasion not only to listen to and learn from one another, but also to get acquainted with one another and collectively assess our ecosystem, as well as chart the common strands of action in managing it for long-term human survival.

Human efforts to secure sufficient food, shelter, fuel and income for our people have destroyed most of our vast forest, degraded the land and contaminated the air and water resources.

The livelihood security of our rural population is especially affected by the deterioration of basic life support systems. There is a direct and compelling linkage between environmental deterioration and long-term human welfare, especially as they relate to the increase and perpetuation of human poverty.

From history we know that population can balloon to a point where demands begin to exceed sustainable yield. When that point is reached, needs begin to consume the very resource base itself.

Population growth worsens poverty. The impoverished have few options. One of them is to exploit whatever resources they can reach. In so doing, they can inflict damage on the very system that could unshackle them from life sentences of deprivation. They are thus both victims and perpetrators of environmental deterioration. This phenomenon is aptly called "environmentally destructive poverty."

Therefore in dealing with conservation of our ecosystem, it is apparent that it cannot be done in isolation from its sister problems of population explosion and poverty. I discussed quite substantively these three issues in my keynote address last April at the International Conference on Environment in New York City.

One hopeful sign is the growing realization that building a just and humane society is the only solution in achieving ecological recovery and development. Responding to this call is not only the obligation of the government but also a collective task for all of us.

But lately we have been confronted with an environmental catastrophe. Mt. Pinatubo, after centuries of slumber, went raging mad. Its volcanic debris made a wasteland of thousands of hectares of farms. With Pinatubo's fury, more than 300 people died. It deprived thousands of people of their livelihood, jobs, farm lot, farm animals and houses, without which life is not worth living.

But the disaster victims and areas are not beyond salvation. Right now scientists have many bright ideas and findings providing light at the end of the tunnel. Secretary Follusco just released a Flash Bulletin enumerating the uses of volcanic debris. Our people have enough resiliency, versatility and dynamism in coping with the catastrophe that devastated the physical environment. I am sure we will overcome this havoc wrecked by nature with the force of the people -- and that is People Power -- as we did before.

What gives significance to this occasion is the fact that we have with us this morning two great exponents of environmental component in all its major thrusts. In implementing DOST's action programs at the countryside, Secretary Follusco was able to rally more than 40 universities, colleges and research institutions. Before, these institutions competed with one another or duplicated one another's activities, but now they also work together like a good orchestra with Secretary

Follosco conducting. We are indeed grateful to Secretary Follosco. You found the time to be with us in spite of your very heavy involvement during this science week.

We have with us also Secretary Factoran -- I refer to him as one of the animated green patriots of this planet. You read everyday in our newspapers his agenda for action being implemented. I am sure the participants are quite pleased to see you and be able to talk to you and ask you some questions.

We would like to acknowledge with gratitude the financial contribution of various institutions and persons who made possible the holding of this annual meeting.

I bid welcome with open arms the participants to this meeting and I formally declare this annual scientific meeting of NAST open.

Thank you.

