

2008 PHILIPPINE ENERGY SUMMIT

OPENING REMARKS

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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Fellow stakeholders in energy concerns, good morning. I welcome you to the 2008 Philippine Energy Summit—in behalf of not just the Department of Energy and its attached agencies but also our energetic partner organizations in government, the private sector, civil society, and the international donor community. Without their substantive input and all-out support, we in the DOE would have been hard-pressed to complete preparations for this Summit in the short space of three weeks.

So, before anything else, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partner organizations for standing resolutely by our side in mounting this critical endeavor. Please join me in giving them a warm round of applause.

In the same breath, I wish to commend the officers and technical staff of the DOE family for enduring so many sleepless nights to put together a Summit program that covers the breadth and depth of core issues confronting the energy sector. Believe me, that is no easy task—especially with someone like me breathing down their necks six-and-a-half days a week. Well, they delivered—and I am very proud of them. Team DOE, take a bow!

To be sure, we got a fair share of moaning and groaning in the lead-up to this Summit. Even some of our seasoned partners were asking: why only three weeks to prepare? Couldn't we have been given at least two months? And, or course, my reply was: why not two weeks? I said so, not so much to be facetious, but to drive home the point of this Summit.

If you will recall, it all started when the international price of crude oil breached the 100 US dollar mark in mid-day trading in New York on January 2. Predictably, this drew frantic reactions from various sectors, prompting the President to call for an energy summit to sort out the issues and to map out a strategic response at the soonest possible time.

Inherently, therefore, this Energy Summit bears a strong sense of urgency—and it is vital for us to harness this for constructive ends. Our theme, “\$100 per barrel: Crisis or Opportunity?”, reflects this spirit.

Anticipating a crisis is akin to going on red alert in the military sense. As a former soldier, I can tell you that nothing can keep the troops on their toes more than the danger of a coming attack. In the same vein, athletes are known to be at their sharpest when the stage is set for a big game. Situations like that stimulate the familiar

adrenaline rush and predispose the actors in the impending conflict to take their performance to the next level. In short, there is nothing like a genuine sense of urgency to spur creative juices and to unleash latent talents and energies.

We also need to bear in mind that, regardless of the milieu, no one plans for failure—particularly on the big stage. This is why the Energy Summit is being convened in a positive, inclusive and solutions-oriented spirit. It is not a venue for finger-pointing, but for consensus-building. Responding to the issues and concerns that have surfaced in the wake of high oil prices transcends the domain of any single sector or organization. We want everyone to enter the sessions with an open, collaborative and holistic frame of mind.

As the theme of the Summit suggests, rather than be immobilized by fear that high oil prices might trigger an economic crisis in the short term, we would like to take the issue by the horns. Through the Summit, we would like to seize the opportunity to accelerate initiatives across sectors that would significantly reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels in the medium and long term, while cushioning the immediate impact of high oil prices on vulnerable sectors and the citizenry at large.

This will require a whole slew of strategic interventions in the management of energy supply and demand. Evidently, this is not something that we at the Department of Energy can do alone. We would need the cooperation of all stakeholders in thinking through the issues and in fashioning creative solutions. That is why the Energy Summit has been structured both as a listening post, where vulnerable sectors can air their concerns and suggestions, and as a venue for collaborative action planning.

One unique feature of this Summit is that, aside from intensively deliberating the technical issues, we will devote sessions to discussing social mobilization interventions and mechanisms for monitoring action plans. These are meant to guarantee follow-through of all the action items that we will agree on during the Summit.

It is our hope that the Energy Summit will usher in a new era of constructive engagement among national agencies, the private sector, civil society, local government units and communities in addressing our energy concerns. The issues that confront us are far too big and complex to be addressed solely through a grand gathering of stakeholders. What really matters is our resolve to follow through our agreements and commitments at the end of this Summit. It is in this spirit of commencement that we enjoin all stakeholders to let their voices be heard—not just in airing problems but also in finding solutions.

To be clear, the Energy Summit is not meant to solve the problem of high oil prices, as some quarters have been mistakenly led to believe. That issue, as everyone here well knows, is beyond our control. Neither are we expecting the Energy Summit to solve all the problems of the energy sector in the space of one week.

On the other extreme, we don't want the Summit to produce predictable output that would consist of nothing more than refinements of old programs. We want new ideas, fresh avenues of multi-sectoral collaboration, novel financing schemes, groundbreaking technology access solutions, among others.

What we hope to achieve is a broad consensus on a priority response agenda—in terms of recommended policies, laws and programs in the immediate, short-, medium-, and long-term horizon—that could strategically reduce our vulnerability to the impact of high oil prices.

We have no illusions that we can please everybody with the priority response agenda that will be contained in the final Summit Report. But it is our hope that we can achieve consensus on a fairly wide array of interventions. It is only in these areas of agreement that we will solicit commitments of support from the various stakeholders. In action areas where we fail to achieve consensus, we will respect dissenting positions and note these differences in the Summit Report.

Like I always say, instead of dwelling on issues that divide us, I would rather promote causes that unite us as a people. Energy security and sustainable development for the sake of our children, I believe, is one such worthy cause. That is why I am confident that the crucial first three days of this Summit will pave a concrete path toward consensus on what we need to do together to achieve our common goals.

On that note, may I enjoin everyone to actively participate in the coming discussions so that we can have a richly enlightening and productive Energy Summit for the benefit of the Filipino people.

Maraming, maraming salamat po.