

MINDANAO

Sen. Domocao Alonto

Mindanao is nearest my heart not only because it is the land of my birth but also because that region in our country has a rich and colorful history.

If the complete history of our country were to be written, and I hope that time will come when historians will do justice to our history, it will be known that Mindanao and its people have contributed in no small measure to the realization of the Filipino state and the Filipino nation.

My forbears were fighting and dying for the cause of Philippine independence and Filipino nationalism long before the turn of the last century, and their epic struggle against foreign domination has been recorded, although somewhat grudgingly, in the history books of the former colonizing powers, Spain and the United States.

Today, Mindanao is justifying its great tradition. As it has proved to be a bulwark

of native nationalism during the Spanish era, it is today emerging as a major factor in the economic life of the nation. It is perhaps no understatement to say that Mindanao represents the greatest hope for the solution of our economic ills.

For in that rich land mass second only in size to the island of Luzon lie dormant, undreamed of riches—the unlimited natural wealth of the region waiting to be tapped and wisely utilized by man.

To many of our countrymen, Mindanao is still a dark and mysterious land far away. It is only now that Mindanao is emerging from the unknown to the known as far as many of our countrymen from the Visayas and Luzon are concerned.

But the truth is Mindanao and its people have made tremendous strides in the economic, social and political spheres during the last decade.

Mindanao is the most beautiful land that God created. Here is a land lush with vegetation. The climate is salubrious. No typhoons cross the island. Blessed rain descends on the land the whole year round, not in uncontrollable torrents but in gentle cascades to keep the land ever fresh and green.

To the north are Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, the land of the Maranaws. Here lies scenic Lake Lanao 3,000 ft. above sea level. The climate is cooler than in Tagaytay but not as extremely cold as Baguio. Lake Lanao represents the biggest natural dam in the Philippines and the second largest lake in the country. It is in fact the source of the greatest and cheapest electric-power development in the country. It is the source of the Maria Cristina Falls which powers the Maria Cristina Hydro-Electric Project.

To the northeast lies Misamis Occidental, noted for copra and Del Monte Pineapples.

Farther east is the province of Agusan, premier province in the country in the logging industry. From here comes peeler logs that command the highest price in the world market.

To the northeast is Surigao province, rich in mineral re-

sources. Iron is found here in great quantities. Its Nonoc islands contain the greatest nickel deposits in the world worth billions of pesos.

To the west is Misamis Oriental, another copra producing province. Farther west is Zamboanga del Norte. It has also a bustling logging industry but it is more famous for historic Dapitan where Jose Rizal was exiled and where he spent the few happy moments of his adult life in his own native land.

In the southwest lies Zamboanga del Sur, a very underdeveloped province. It has also the greatest area of mangrove swamps for fishpond development, some 80,000 hectares.

Zamboanga City, the city of flowers and beautiful Zamboanguenas, sits proudly at the tip of the Zamboanga peninsula.

Then we have the chain of islands, Basilan Island and the Sulu Archipelago.

At the heart of Mindanao perches the province of Bukidnon on a beautiful plateau, with its great cattle industry and cool climate.

To the southwest we have the growing economic colossus—Davao province. And sitting astride this province and the neighboring giant province of Cotabato rises the mighty Mt.

Apo, second highest mountain in the Philippines.

South center is the empire province of Cotabato, the biggest province in the entire country.

Cotabato alone has a land area of 2,296,791 hectares and a population of only 1,200,000. It is bigger than the combined areas of Pangasinan, Tarlac, Pampanga, Bulacan Nueva Ecija, Bataan and Rizal. These aforementioned provinces have a total population of more than 4,000,000.

Superimposed on Central Luzon, Cotabato's northern boundary will traverse through La Union, Benguet and Nueva Ecija; its coastal plain would be where the sea kisses the sand of Zambales seashores; its southern tip would reach as far as the interior regions of Rizal after following the fringes of Manila Bay, and on the east, Cotabato's Mt. Butig would be overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

This then is the size of Cotabato province which constitutes only 1/5 of the entire Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan region.

The timber and lumber industries of the Philippines depend very heavily on Mindanao as the source of its raw materials. This industry is the third biggest dollar — earning

industry of the country after copra and sugar. Forty-two per cent of the country's entire commercial timber resources are in Mindanao, worth billions of pesos of potential wealth.

I have yet to mention the millions of hectares of agricultural lands, pasture lands, and mangrove swamps for fishpond development. The seas of Mindanao teem with fishes of numberless varieties. And I have not also mentioned to you the tremendous mineral wealth hidden in Mindanao.

All these figures by themselves alone do not spell prosperity for the country but coupled with the fact that Mindanao today is settled by Filipinos coming from all regions and sections of the country, the Ilocanos of the north, the Tagalogs of Central and Southern Luzon, the Bicolanos and the Visayans, we have already the man-power capable of extracting wealth from the land. There is a continuous flow of settlers to the more unsettled and underdeveloped portions of Mindanao as Cotabato, Davao and Zamboanga del Sur.

Today, Mindanao truly represents the entire Philippines. It has become the real democratic melting pot of the diverse elements of our people.

We have succeeded to an appreciable degree in erasing the barriers and sectionalism prevailing in the older regions of the country.

The problem of integrating our cultural minorities, especially the Filipino Muslims who comprise the largest cultural minority in the Philippines today, still remains. But we have taken concrete steps toward the complete integration of the Filipino Muslims. Congress created the Commission on National Integration whose prime function is to bring about the speedy integration of the cultural minorities into the body politic. I sponsored the creation of this commission because I believe that Mindanao will not be able to progress as fast as it should unless we succeed in eliminating the mutual distrust and suspicion between the Muslim minorities and the Christians in Mindanao caused by the disparity in their educational, social and economic status.

It is in Mindanao where the cheapest potential source of electricity is located. I refer to the Maria Cristina Hydro-Electric Project. We are at present utilizing only 50,000 kilowatts or 1/16 of the potential capacity of the Maria Cristina Falls which according to experts is capable of generating 800,000 kilowatts. And of

the 50,000 kilowatts being generated, only 38,000 kilowatts are utilized. That is why the Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan Association is working hard for the immediate establishment of the integrated steel mill industry in Iligan City in order that the tremendous power available will not go to waste.

I am convinced that our region has already outstripped the Visayas and that we are fast catching up with Luzon in economic development.

I have watched towns and cities in Mindanao grow overnight where before there were nothing more than small settlements and frontier towns.

The story of a tenant-farmer who ten years ago came to Mindanao with nothing more than the clothes on his back and today is a prosperous land-owning farmer who sends his children to the best colleges in Manila, is common to hundreds of settlers.

Today you can fly by plane to all the cities and capitals of the provinces of Mindanao. And in almost all cities and in most provincial capitals you can get good hotel accommodations, air-conditioned suites, air-conditioned cocktail lounges and restaurants.

The tremendous upsurge in the economy of Mindanao is reflected in the rising incomes of its provinces and cities and

in the growing demand of Mindanao residents for culture. Fashion on Wings staged by the Woman's Weekly Magazine drew more paying crowd in Mindanao than anywhere else.

Today, Davao City has an annual income of over P4,000,000, just a few thousand pesos below the income of Cebu City, second biggest city of the Philippines and oldest trading port in the country. The island city of Basilan with an area as big as many a province in Luzon and with a population of only

150,000, has an annual income of one million and a half pesos.

Inspite of these, the resources of Mindanao have hardly been developed.

I have endeavored to convey to you what Mindanao is today and its economic potential. In closing, I shall paraphrase that famous poem written by an American poet and say, "Give us your wretched and your poor. We will welcome them all at Mindanao's door, and we will make them all rich and happy."

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DELAY

A woman in the mountains of Tennessee was seated in the doorway of the cabin, busily eating some pig's feet. A neighbor hurried up to tell of how her husband had become engaged in a saloon brawl and had been shot to death. The widow continued munching on a pig's foot in silence while she listened to the harrowing news. As the narrator paused, she spoke thickly from her crowded mouth:

"Jest wait till I finish this-here pig's trotter, an' ye'll hear some hollerin' as is hollerin'."