

**Speech of His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino III
President of the Philippines
During his visit to Cebu on Labor day**

[Translation of the speech delivered in Cebu City on May 1, 2015]

Your plant is our last stop for this trip. Yesterday, I visited Negros Occidental to inaugurate a rice-processing center for farmers, and a cyber center to boost job creation in the IT-BPM sector. Here, meanwhile, in the beautiful city of Cebu, we joined a conference of the Jobstart Program on job generation for the youth; and inspected the University of Cebu Medical Center's new facilities. And now, before heading back to Manila, I am given the opportunity to tour CEMEX's new mill facility. All this is truly time well spent, because we got to see the fruits of our efforts to better the lives of our Bosses. It is my privilege to be witness to the results of the Straight and Righteous Path, especially on this day, Labor Day.

I've been told that CEMEX invested 3 billion pesos into this facility. 800 individuals have been given work to construct it. Currently, 950 people work in this facility. What's more, it is set to ramp up its operations by 1.5 million metric tons annually, for a plant output of 4 million metric tons of cement.

Why is this rise in production important? Because the cement industry is such a large contributor to the current and successive rise of infrastructure all over the Philippines. Earlier I mentioned the new facilities in Negros Occidental; last week I also went to Isabela to inaugurate the Lullutan Bridge—a project that our countrymen there have been waiting on for 20 years, which, upon completion, has cut down to 5 minutes a trip that has previously taken 2 hours. I also visited Tarlac and Bulacan to inaugurate new school buildings and classrooms. In the Quezon Province, I looked into the SLEX Toll Road 4 project, which was planned during the years of the dictatorship, and which we are set to finish as well.

I am already looking forward to returning to Cebu to inaugurate the improvements on the Cebu Mactan Airport. We're expanding the terminals; of course, we're going to need a lot of cement.

Indeed: It wasn't through chance that these roads, bridges, classrooms, and other infrastructure projects were built in many areas of the Philippines. They were truly accelerated and focused on, because they form part of our comprehensive strategy toward widespread progress.

It is our economic growth that gives us the capability to pursue these initiatives. As NEDA Secretary Arsi Balisacan reports, we've recorded a 6.3% average GDP growth for every year since we came into office in 2010—the fastest improvement of our economy in the past forty years. Our goal now is for a seven to eight percent GDP growth for this year. According to our economic managers: If we achieve this, the

resulting 6-year average will be the fastest Philippine economic growth since 1955—a sixty-year record.

This means that when my mother and father married in 1954, it would be just one more year to the time we would last experience this kind of economic expansion.

But what does this mean for Juan and Juana dela Cruz? Economic growth increases investor confidence in the country, which gives rise to new businesses—which, in turn, creates more jobs. The Filipino people's opportunities for progress will further broaden. The government, too, will be able to collect more taxes, which will fund infrastructure and improve social services. This is what we call a virtuous cycle. I repeat: The Filipino people gave rise to this virtuous cycle, and it is the Filipino people that will continue it.

We are aware that we can take advantage of these opportunities only if Filipinos are equipped with sufficient knowledge to fill the positions created. This is why part of our strategy is the development of our Bosses' capacities. Aside from our continuing effort to improve the education sector, we also give special mention to TESDA—headed by Joel Villanueva—which is truly focused on making sure that Filipinos who are ready to work hard are provided with the right skill sets to obtain in-demand jobs.

Just think: from the start of this administration until the most recent tally in December 2014, TESDA's Technical Vocational Education and Training program was able to produce more than 7.15 million graduates. According to a study they conducted, 65.3% of these were able to secure employment within six months. TESDA also has the STAR program, wherein local governments and the private sector partner to provide training for owners of small business, like sari-sari stores and carinderia, to improve their trade. Secretary Joel Villanueva recalls that one sari-sari store owner who once earned 800 pesos a day now earns 4,000 daily. Because of the STAR program, her profit multiplied, by five times. Beneficiaries are also advised on how to wisely handle their additional profit, so it will not go to waste. Just imagine, even concepts such as inventory control and product mix—often taught only in established business schools—were also included in the training for sari-sari store owners.

Now, 34,252 citizens have already benefited from this initiative. We are in fact being challenged to further increase this number; we will look into this and see what we can do, because of course there is also a limit to the budget of our agencies.

As you can see: We are fully committed on every aspect to ensure that the benefits of our ongoing transformation will be maximized. In a system where the effort is collective, the yields are likewise collective. This is also our bedrock principle in empowering the labor sector. We can see how Secretary Linda Baldoz is leading the way by focusing not on pointing fingers, but on communal responsibility; not on imposition, but on decent and fair dialogue; not on the sources of tension, but on what we can agree on to achieve the common good. Under Sec. Linda, the SEnA or Single Entry Approach, and the SPeED or Speedy and Efficient Delivery of Labor Justice were

institutionalized. Whereas before, it would take up to a year to resolve conflicts, now, we are able to address them immediately. In the period between October 2010 to December 2014, at least 77 percent or 80,830 of 104,698 requests for assistance were resolved within an average of 17 days. And I am certain that Secretary Linda and DOLE will continue their efforts to further raise this number and improve the relationship between employees and employers. It would therefore come as no surprise that, in 2013, only a single strike occurred in the entire nation; this is the lowest yearly sum in the history of DOLE. The comparison should also be noted: In the previous administration, 259 strikes took place. Since our current administration took office in 2010, a mere 12 strikes have taken place. I should think that this is testament to Secretary Linda Baldoz' efficiency.

I am hopeful that the positive engagement between workers and management, due in large part to the active involvement of DOLE, will continue. If we sustain the current setup wherein every stakeholder's concerns are responded to as quickly as possible, I am certain that strikes will remain in the low-single digits every year, or are even eliminated altogether.

This is the stability we are striving to establish, to sustain the cycle of economic growth and inclusiveness in our country. One by one, we are now beholding the positive results of our effort; it is now up to us to maximize the opportunities that are opening up; it is now up to us to further expand it; it is now up to us to nourish the change we have sowed, so that its fruits might benefit the coming generations. If we continue treading the straight path, if we choose the right leader during the next elections, no doubt we will be able to continue and even exceed what we have already achieved. May we all take hold of every opportunity, so that we may uplift not only ourselves and our families, but also our fellowmen and the entire nation. This is the time we have been waiting for; this is our chance: Together let us strive to reach our aspirations. So we say: Dungan ta sa pagkab-ot sa atong mga pangandoy.

I can easily admit to all of you that there are just days where I'm exhausted. We just came from the ASEAN Summit, and next week we are going to Canada to express our thanks to all the assistance they have extended to us. Canada was among the first that gave us aid when Yolanda hit.

At the JobStart program earlier, they were advising high school students on how to get good jobs. When I was a kid, we'd often see signs that said, "No vacancy." Right? It seems no one wants to admit they're as old as I am. [Laughter.] Now, I often get reports—and just yesterday, we got news that refrigeration and airconditioning engineers and electricians cannot get jobs there. It dismayed me, too, when I looked into state universities, and learned that it's become difficult to take on Accounting graduates, since they're already being hired by companies like SGV. At their third year of the four-year course—and they would have a review as their fifth year, right? So, really, we've come a long way. Perhaps what we need to work on now is developing the skillset of our countymen, so that they can maximize the opportunities of this sector.

The cement industry, I must say, is booming, with government and the private sector being very active in it. One of our desires is to accomplish what we call the nautical highway. At present, if you were coming from Luzon to head to Mindanao, it would take you two and a half days to three, traveling. Now, a new route was shown to us, and what is needed are new roads and new ports for the roll-on, roll-off operations for the midway portion of the route. If we realize this goal, what used to be a two to three day trip, travel time would be reduced to 15 hours. And if traveling becomes that efficient, we can expect businesses to grow. [Applause]

Now, with the confidence that comes with companies like CEMEX investing in us, we are assured of enough cement for all of these infrastructure projects. I must admit—shouldn't we be able to say that all of this is certain? One of our problems, I hear, was often with what they call aggregates. I once called Babes Singson and asked: "What are aggregates?" He said, basically, sand and gravel. I replied: "How can we lack for sand and gravel in the Philippines?" My point though, is that there used to be those who once refrained from investing here because they didn't believe the economy would catch up and become so bullish.

The bottom line? This is what we've been chasing after: a situation in which we are all pitching in, and in which everyone is given an opportunity. A while ago, a proud member of our program, a young lady who only finished high school, and who is a single mother, said she was thankful for—with the assistance of DOLE and TESDA—having been given a good job. In the past it seemed as if she could wake up to nothing but problems. Now as she faces me with optimism, because she is certain the future will be bright.

I'll say it again: You made this happen; you will carry it through.

Good afternoon, and thank you.