

Closing Remarks: Ateneo Special Awards

10 February 2010

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The AdZU Board of Trustees led Engr Efren Wee, our Special Awardees today: Lt Gen Mohammad Benjamin Dolorfino AFP, Lt General Raymundo Ferrer AFP, members of the Religious of the Virgin Mary led by Pilar College Director Sr Bernadette Suico, Heads of institutions, Ateneo Alumni led by the Ateneo Alumni Association President Mr Pocholo Soliven, Officers of the AFP, the Ateneo community, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening, *assalamu alaikum waramatulahi wabarakatu*.

I thank you all here present. I thank the Central Services and to the Ateneo Peace and Culture Institute earlier on and all who made this event meaningful and joyous. Special thanks to our awardees who have taken an extra time and effort to be with us this evening. I'm glad that the ceremonies we just had since this morning did not compete with Valentine's Day this coming Sunday. For us here in the Ateneo, 14 February is very significant in another light. Fr Manuel Sauras SJ, founder of *Escuela Catolica* in 1912, died that day in 1949. *Escuela Catolica* in 1916 was renamed Ateneo de Zamboanga Thanks to Father Sauras we have reason to prepare the celebration of our Centennial Jubilee in 2012. Don't ever believe what the Movie 2012 is all about.

Today and especially this evening is just an awesome experience for all of us. We just conferred the Ateneo Peace Award on Gen Dolorfino and Gen Ferrer, the commanding generals of Western Mindanao Command and Eastern Mindanao Command respectively, and the Abp Luis del Rosario SJ DD award on the Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary.

As I said this morning perhaps this is the first time ever that top commanding generals of Mindanao were given Peace Awards. In

this morning's forum titled "Waging Peace in Mindanao" where the contributions to peace by Gen Dolorfino and Gen Ferrer were shared, we realize that these two top military leaders in Mindanao are simply inspiring, simply amazing, and most worthy recipients of the Ateneo Peace Awards. Some were even saying they should be running as Presidents – *pero medyo sobra naman iyon*. In my three years as President in AdZU, all I can say is that forum was the best I have ever witnessed here and anywhere else. They have shown us another side of the military as an institution that not many of our people know. They are in effect reinventing a new image of the military, a new way of implementing the rules of engagement, and a new paradigm of solving the problem of conflict.

Just recently, during the height of the Maguindanao crisis, Gen Ferrer was at the centerstage trying to restore peace and security in that province. Despite difficulties and oppositions encountered, he was able to reinstate some normalcy in Maguindanao. *Sabi pa nga ni Gen Ferrer kanina*, he is the only martial law enforcer who did not get exiled, *nabigyan pa ng award*. Closer to home, Gen Dolorfino, initiated the formation of United Front HOPE 2010 last 04 February. HOPE stands for Honestly, Orderly and Peaceful Elections. It is composed of 34 organizations and institutions based in Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga City. United Front HOPE seeks to be the "eyes and ears" of the citizenry that will ensure that the forthcoming elections will be transparent, peaceful, fair and clean.

The Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVMs), on the other hand, is the recipient of the Abp Luis del Rosario award. This award is given to individuals, groups and institutions who have labored and contributed so much for the spiritual welfare of our people. The RVMs have expanded exponentially here in Mindanao and have established mission areas abroad. Last year, we launched the Sesquicentennial Jubilee of the return of the

Jesuits to the Philippines. The original intent of the mission work was Mindanao. There is no other religious congregation working in Mindanao that has collaborated with the work of the Jesuits as intensely and extensively as the RVMs over the last 150 years of Jesuit presence in Mindanao. Probably the Jesuits can't live without the RVM sisters!

Our awardees certainly do not need more feathers in their caps. Still, it helps now and then to remind ourselves that we have in our midst shining examples, living witnesses and inspiring icons of our desire to promote the integral human development of our people, whether this be in peace building or spiritual development. There is hope as long as we have people like Gen Dolorfino, Gen Ferrer and the RVMs. There is also hope if there are people like you who believe in what our awardees do. There is hope when we bind ourselves together and work for integral human development for our people here in Mindanao.

Congratulations and thank you!