

OPINION & FEATURES



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Beyond foreign aid

DONORLAND is not Disneyland. This is according to Koos Richelle, director general of the EuropeAid Cooperation Office of the European Commission. Richelle addressed the opening of the Asia-Europe Meeting or ASEM conference last April 19 in Makati, which aims to promote better understanding and deeper cooperation between the two regions amid the global economic downturn.

Like other aid donors, the Europeans want to make sure their development aid is properly utilized. EuropeAid, whose assistance is also geared toward the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, is committed to providing bigger aid to countries in need by 2015. But this means that EC members and European taxpayers will increasingly want to see tangible results of their aid, Koos told the ASEM conference. Foreign aid alone has never been enough to lift any country from poverty, he pointed out. For sustainable development, Koos said foreign aid must be backed by “quality leadership” and governance.

Filipinos can only agree. Though the country has been a major recipient of aid from the international donor community for many years, poverty alleviation has progressed at a

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slow pace. Worse, foreign-funded projects and official development assistance have become mired in corruption scandals. The latest involved road projects financed by the World Bank, which debarred seven contractors, three of them Philippine companies, for rigging the bidding for the project. Before this there was the corruption scandal, still unresolved, involving the broadband network deal between the government and China's ZTE Corp., whose funding was supposed to be sourced from Chinese ODA.

The ZTE mess is an example of what happens when foreign aid donors do not seek some form of accountability from aid recipients in the utilization of ODA. Tacking on such rules, and reminding recipient countries of the limits of foreign aid, could help bring about good governance. *(Philstar.com)*

Mischievous Arroyo speechwriter

GLORIA Macapagal Arroyo's speechwriters are either insanely mischievous or they dislike their boss. They're putting words in her mouth that could get her into real trouble.

Consider the Easter Message that they ghost wrote for her:

“Today, Easter Sunday, with the rest of the Church and Christendom, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. Our hearts sing out: ‘Rising, you restored our life; O Jesus, come again in glory!’ This is the central truth of our faith and the subject of every Eucharistic celebration.

“On this day two thousand years ago, our Savior, by His resurrection, proved the truth of His love for us. In our lives as Christians, we too must prove our love for the truth in His life and His teachings. We must love each other and risk our all for the truth, because God commands us so; and Christ did no less for us and expected no less from us.

“We, who were consigned only to death, have now been reborn in the promise of heavenly life. We, who knew only darkness, are now asked to become children of the light because, as St. Paul reminds us, ‘the fruit of the light is

in all goodness and justice and truth.’

“Hallelujah, thanks be to God!”

The first part of the message is okay. They simply lifted most of that from Church liturgy. But check out the second paragraph. Those mischievous speechwriters actually fed her these self-incriminating lines:

“In our lives as Christians, we too must prove our love for the truth in His life and His teachings.. We must love each other and risk our all for the truth, because God commands us so...”

Did you get that?

Those naughty speechwriters would like Arroyo to risk her seat in Malacañang by telling the truth. And they're reminding her that God commands her to do so.

They even had the gall to remind her that, like Saul, who had his encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus and was transformed into St. Paul, Arroyo can “become (one of the) children of the light” after knowing “only darkness”—meaning, the darkness of lies.

Salbahe talaga. Imagine—making their boss like the fish who gets caught in the mouth!

I saw the editorial of a leading daily asking Arroyo if she would do exactly as her Easter message would have other people do. The editorial then enumerated all of the things that have been begging for years for the truth to come out, except that it had consistently been foiled by claims of executive privilege, disappearing witnesses, public officials with amnesia and others faithfully observing the

Code of Omerta.

Come'on guys, that's being naïve. Why would Arroyo make it so easy for you and for the rest of the country by voluntarily telling the truth, just because some malicious speechwriters slipped those incriminating words into her Easter Sunday message?

Do you think she'd actually do that? Not on your life.

But, if I were a member of the presidential security team, I would keep an eye on those speechwriters. You can almost hear them cackling in their cubicles:

“He he he he....Guess what I slipped into her Easter Message today!”

“You didn't, you naughty, naughty saboteur, you!!! You're practically asking her to incriminate herself! He he he he!”

It's deadlier than spiking her drink or lacing her meal with arsenic.

Now, what will those speechwriting saboteurs think of next? Slip words into her speech where she orders the lifting of executive privilege, authorizes Romulo “Never Talk” Neri to confess, and prods Joc-Joc Bolante to spill the beans on the agricultural fund heist?

And then what? Deliver a speech laced with admissions about extra-judicial killings, the Garci conversations and the backroom dealings that led to the expulsion of Erap Estrada?

Presidential speechwriters have been known to get their bosses into trouble. Even in the USA. Many years ago, Pres. George Bush the Elder found himself delivering a speech about

drug pushers plying their trade across the street from the White House. This was in the course of a campaign that he launched against the drug menace.

As it turned out, the speechwriters had arranged to plant drug pushers where the speech had said they were plying their trade—but they did this after they had written the speech. In other words, what was said in the speech was pure fabrication.

Poor George Bush, he didn't know that. But the Washington Post, through private channels, got wind of the truth and exposed it. Boy, was the president's face red!

Because of what happened, I wrote a piece in this corner, twitting the speech writer of then Pres. Cory Aquino who often boasted that he would dash off a speech and then hand it to the president while she was on her way to a speaking engagement.

Now come these speechwriters of Gloria Arroyo, making her say words that she simply can't mean, because that would get her into trouble.

On the other hand, it's also possible that the speechwriters didn't surreptitiously slip in the incriminating language into the Easter Sunday speech but that Arroyo herself had given instructions to use that exact combination of words.

In such a case, Arroyo must have already lost her marbles—or she must think we're a bunch of nincompoops. *(gregmacabenta@hotmail.com)*



STREET TALK
Greg B. Macabenta

Con-asses

SOME friends asked me some days ago to join them in a meeting with Prospero Nograles to persuade him to junk the Right of Reply bill. I normally respond with alacrity to journalist activities, but I was extremely loath to do so this time. The reason was simple. I have no desire to try to persuade the Speaker of the House to not do something he shouldn't be doing in the first place.

Or put more bluntly, I have no desire to persuade anyone to not commit a crime. We normally do not go to a neighbor to plead with him to not allow his bigger and burlier son to terrorize our own. We warn him of the consequences of it. We normally do not go to a judge or priest to plead with him to not sexually harass our daughters. We report them to the authorities, or file a case against them. We normally do not go to a cop or soldier and plead with him not to murder us out of boredom. We have him relieved, or confined either in an asylum or behind bars.

The Right of Reply has no business existing. The congressmen responsible for it are not doing us a favor by altering or amending or cutting here and there like tailors to make the thing fit. The thing will never fit. The Right of

Reply bill is an atrocity. It is a violation of press freedom. I've written about this again and again. Suffice it to say here that the problem is not that it puts the fear of God, or President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, on journalists (the so-called chilling effect), the problem is that it removes control of editorial content from the editors and republishes it elsewhere (the very real choking effect). Or still put more bluntly, it doesn't rob media of their rages, it robs them of their pages (or air time).

Another group of friends asked me to join them in rallying in front of the Batasan to protest the revival of the Charter change specter. The news was already flying thick and fast last weekend that Nograles was intent on smuggling the Cha-cha into the House when no one was looking and slip it inside before anyone knew what was happening. This one I was more inclined to join, except for my schedule, which is a punishing one. At least this one was not premised on begging the congressmen to please do us the favor of not oppressing us.

Nograles would say later on that all the amendment he wanted was economic—a change to allow foreign ownership of property in the Philippines. He would point to a provision in the Constitution that says you can only change one thing at a time, you cannot go the whole hog when proposing an amendment. He would go on to assure that the amendment, a purely economic one, would not go on to extend terms, which is purely political. And he

would go on to assure that elections will take place as scheduled next year.

In fact he would assure only that the Speaker of the House is Mikey Arroyo and not he. The notion that they are somehow deterred by law, or decency, or their word they dispelled long ago. And confirmed today with their determination to commit this crime. For the question remains: Why amend the Constitution in any shape, form or size at this time? Why change the Constitution in any way, manner or nuance at this time?

That evening, I saw in the news one leader of the protesters protesting the idea of allowing foreigners to own property in this country because of its impact on the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and agriculture. What a wrong tack, I thought, allowing oneself to get drawn into a debate on the wisdom of the amendment when the point was the timing of the amendment. First elections; then—and only then—debate amendments till you're blue in the face.

The point is to oppose Cha-cha in, like Satan, whatever name and guise it goes by. There is nothing urgent to justify it, only the urgent needs of a usurper running out of time. Not changing the economic foundations of this country, which are to be found in any case not in this country but elsewhere—in the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Not federalizing this country, the dispersion of power not being a guarantee this country will progress, or even merely improve. Not even rewriting the Constitution to make it more grammatical and literate, which outweighs all other excuses in urgency.

You look at what's preoccupying Congress these days, which are the Right of Reply bill and the Cha-cha, and you have to ask why we do not find ourselves in the middle of a tax revolt. One is tempted to say this is an utter waste of taxpayers' money, but it is more than this. It is frying the taxpayers in their own fat. It is an exercise in masochism for us: We pay taxes so that we may give our lawmakers the infinite honor of screwing us.

I remember again that luminous exchange in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

“Rabbi,” one of the folk of Anatevka asked, “is there a proper blessing for the Czar?” “Of course there is,” said the Rabbi, “May God bless and keep the Czar—far away from us.” That is how you think of Congress too. “May God bless and keep Congress—far away from us.” And that is how you think of the entire government too, of which this Congress is merely an extension. “May God bless and keep Malacañang—far away from us.”

This is a government predicated on making our lives miserable. Our every contact with it entails pain on our part. Our every encounter with it brings the sensation of having our heads held underwater. The time for engaging it even at the margins is long gone. Our entire energies should be devoted simply to getting rid of it. By elections next year as mandated by the Constitution, or by revolution this year if they persist on blocking it as mandated by self-preservation.

Junk the Right of Reply bill? Just junk Congress! Junk Cha-cha? Just junk government!

And don't bother saying please. *(Inquirer.net)*



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