



CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS
Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala
2009 Ramon Magsaysay Award
Presentation Ceremonies
31 August 2009
Cultural Center of the Philippines

Honorable Chief Justice Reynato Puno, President Fidel Ramos, Senator Magsaysay and family, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

This afternoon, we welcome you all to a celebration of heroes—Asia's heroes. On this day, every year for the past five decades, the Foundation has held up individuals and organizations who, like President Ramon Magsaysay, courageously and selflessly contributed to making Asia a better place. Today, we are doing it for the fifty-first time.

These days, there is much ambivalence about heroes.

On the one hand, it seems that the magnitude and intractability of the challenges confronting Asian societies demand nothing less than solutions of heroic proportions, and abilities that one associates only with mythical, larger-than-life heroes. New frontiers in technology, emerging opportunities to create and distribute wealth, complex and knotted issues of social conflict—all these require actions both daring and altruistic. Now, more than ever, we need our heroes, we need their bold and heroic deeds.

On the other hand, there is also a deepening doubt, among many around us, about whether this world can ever be 'fixed', whether there are still enough people around who are willing to put in the energy and pay the price for making the needed, difficult, yet fundamental changes. This doubt is fed by these disturbing observations: Despite valiant efforts to promote the common good, evil continues to prevail—and often, with increasing impunity! Despite the amazing advances of science and technology, the growing sophistication of institutions, the proliferation of competent people, still age-old inequities persist, and social strife continues to take its heavy human toll. Brave, altruistic, heroic acts are like straws in the wind. Many are tempted to agree cynically with the French saying, "*The more things change, the more they remain the same.*"

In the midst of this ambivalence, we in the Foundation assert our faith that the world *can* be fixed, and wrongs *are* being righted—one hero at a time. The inspiring accomplishments and expanding influence of the Magsaysay laureates—now numbering 277 individuals and organizations spread over twenty-two countries across Asia—are the basis of our faith. The support you and others give to their work and their noble crusades reinforces this faith. And your presence in this afternoon's celebration is testament to your own belief that there is both a need for heroes, and value in celebrating the good that they do.

This year, our heroes signal two themes that we believe are crucial to Asia's brighter future: *placing science at the service of humanity*, and *treating the environment as our urgent and collective responsibility*. The work of our 2009 awardees demonstrates how advanced knowledge and expertise—in medicine, engineering, law, natural resource management, social science—can be used boldly and compassionately to *actually* change the lives of many, for the better. Four of this year's laureates are also working on issues related to the social impact of environmental destruction and climate change, and how our peoples in Asia are both victims and saviors of their degraded natural environments.

Starting this year, the Magsaysay Awards are no longer given in fixed categories, to acknowledge the increasingly intersectoral and multidimensional nature of the Awardees' work in recent years. Only the category Emergent Leadership remains as such, principally because it carries an age-limit restriction.

The heroes we honor this afternoon are among Asia's new transformative leaders for the 21st century –

Thailand's **Krisana Kraisintu** is making possible, through fearless production of generic drugs, universal access to life-saving medicines for millions of Asia's and Africa's poor.

Yu Xiaogang and **Ma Jun** are changing the development equation in China, through the informed participation of the people in reversing pollution and in the planning of dams.

Deep Joshi is transforming how development work in rural India is being carried out by professionals whose practical expertise is wedded to genuine compassion for the poor.

In the Philippines, **Antonio Oposa** is shaping a new mindset that places the environment at the center of enlightened and urgent citizen action, supported by the law.

Ka Hsaw Wa is creating hope in Burma and neighboring countries that human rights abuses and environmental destruction can be brought to light, and their redress successfully pursued, always in nonviolent ways.

Each of these awardees has embarked on a unique personal journey to address a seemingly insurmountable challenge, in the face of the overwhelming needs of their people. Each one has built a unique organization of like-spirited colleagues, working with them to craft collective strategies and to expand the reach of their work.

But these awardees also share much in common: they have all faced opposition, harassment, and real personal risk in the course of their crusades; in fact, they continue to work in difficult and threatening environments. Despite their present successes, they all are focused on the future – how much more needs to be done, how to sustain the momentum of the changes they feel they have just begun. And they are all consumed with the same passionate conviction and goal – *that true human, sustainable development can happen only by giving people control over their lives and their environment.*

Today, as we listen to the stories of our 2009 Magsaysay awardees and participate in honoring them, we know that this is also good for all of us. Because invariably, honoring them affirms the deeper truths we believe in, challenges our self-imposed limits on what is good enough and what is possible. Most importantly, I believe, honoring our heroes renews our faith in tomorrow.

Arthur Ashe, one of the first professionals who broke the racial barriers in sports, was once asked to describe his idea of a true hero. He said, "True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to *serve* others at whatever cost."

Friends, this afternoon we are privileged to salute true heroism. We salute Asia's heroes, our 2009 Ramon Magsaysay awardees.

Welcome, everyone, to this celebration!