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THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRATIC DEFICITS

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The new Aquino Administration hopes to promote change and fosters the hope of ordinary people to dream again. The Aquino government's renewed emphasis on upholding human rights, decency, transparency and honesty points ineluctably in a single direction – that of fostering democracy.

However, there are a myriad of challenges the country needs to hurdle in order to achieve a democratic surplus. Many political scientists would surmise that the Philippines continue to remain as a political pygmy in Southeast Asia for as long as there are democratic deficits at the heart of Philippine governance and administration. This argument suggests that until the Philippine civil society, business and government can be inspired and directed by country's political, social and business leaders, the Philippines will continue to be weak, mediocre, fragile and incoherent.

In a truly democratic setting, the plurality of voices is not necessarily a bad thing. The bad thing is that one soon realizes that the voices, even when they say the same things, does not constitute a coordinated whole. These voices are not driven by policies and ideas behind which exists a determination of political and social action. There is no weight or importance behind them. What is said cannot be delivered. There is no unity, no commitment to anything but the minimum of social and political obligations.

Dr. Clarita Carlos, a renowned political scientist and scholar wrote a book entitled, "Democratic Deficits in the Philippines: What is to be Done? Dr. Carlos cited the widening democratic deficits that the country faces and raises the urgency of addressing these specific concerns. She did this landmark work together with Dennis Lalata, Dianne Despi and Portia Carlos. The book was published in August 2010 by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

The book argues peace is a pre-requisite to development. It explains that the peace-building processes in Mindanao will further ensure food security, not only in that particular region, but also for the entire Philippines. This is because Mindanao is home to a large agricultural base and has rich natural resources. In addition, it asserts that the public sector partnerships with the private sector and NGOs in research will definitely help in the promotion of agricultural development.

The book also highlights the fact that achieving respect for the rule of law and undertaking reforms in the justice system are very much closely related to eradicating corruption and inefficiency in the three branches of government. It also cites the importance of public-private sector partnership. Development can only be pursued if there is a sound working relationship between the government and the private sector. It stresses that local-national government relations must be carried out consistently at various levels of governance down to the smallest political unit which is the barangay. Finally, regarding political parties and electoral reform, it suggests that the new leadership must ensure that a reconfiguration of the political party system as well as the pursuit of electoral reform will be carried out to pave the way for principled and party-based leadership, in contrast to purely personality-based leadership that we have now. The book gives a hopeful yet cautious perspective on the country.

Our country has come to an opportune time when it needs to strengthen its democratic character in order to go on further. While trying to find ways of making the rather complex, muddled and obscure institutional bureaucratic system become more transparent, efficient and democratic; the new political leadership and the country's citizens need to employ its plethora of social capital in order to bring about a stronger and well-functioning state. The main aim is the enhancement of Philippine democracy for the benefit of the future generations.

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