

**PRESIDENT GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO'S SPEECH  
DURING AN OFFICIAL BANQUET IN HONOR OF  
H.E. PRIME MINISTER SIR MICHAEL SOMARE  
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa  
Boracay Island, Malay, Aklan  
March 29, 2009  
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His Excellency The Right Honorable Grand Chief Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare.

Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is our honor and pleasure to welcome to the Philippines, The Right Honorable Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. Sir Michael is my seatmate in APEC, but of course more than that he is the founding father of the Independent Papua New Guinea, the Commonwealth's longest surviving politician with 40 years of service and Papua New Guinea's longest serving prime minister.

He is a valuable friend of the Philippines, and a good brother of ours in the Pacific. We invited His Excellency -- even if he has been here before, two times -- to express our gratitude for Papua New Guinea's unwavering support to our initiatives and our aspirations in the United Nations.

Papua New Guinea has not only been consistent and constant, often it has also influenced the other Pacific islands to support us.

The relations between the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, go back to the 1800s when 14 Filipino missionaries accompanied European priests to Papua New Guinea to teach catechism. I understand there is a monument at the Holy Rosary Parish Church in Port Moresby with an inscription that reads and I quote: "In remembrance of the first group of Filipino Lay Missionaries in Papua New Guinea who arrived on Yule Island during the 1880's and other whose names are known only to God."

This is followed by the names of the 14 missionaries who set foot on Papua New Guinea and by coincidence the parish church of Boracay is also called the Holy Rosary Parish Church.

In any case, these missionaries started the wave of cultural, intellectual and technical exchanges between our peoples that 120 or so years later still continues to this day.

I am pleased to note the presence of Filipino workers, Filipino technicians and Filipino firms in Papua New Guinea. For instance, the Kenmore Group which was founded over 30 years ago who hosted Sir Michael at lunch today. And we have Rodrigo Rivera's RD Tuna Canning based in General Santos but with a very big investment in Papua Guinea whom we would have wanted to visit for tomorrow but the schedule of Sir Michael is so full of many other activities so he will postpone that for some other visit.

And another big investor is the Fravel Fishing Corporation of Francis Tiu Laurel. And I'm very happy that we have Mr. and Mrs. Tiu Laurel here with us tonight.

And with these big investments in fishing in Papua New Guinea, it is significant that the Memorandum of Understanding on Fisheries Operation will be signed during his visit containing especially our common commitment to sustainable development.

This commitment to sustainable development is made doubly significant by Papua New Guinea's being a partner of the Philippines and four other countries in the Coral Triangle Initiative. The other four countries being Malaysia, Indonesia, East Timor and Solomon Islands. Papua New Guinea not only has that great jungle under the water in the Coral Triangle, it is also home to the third largest jungle in the world, next only to the Amazon Jungle and the Great African Jungle.

Another important area in which Papua New Guinea has an influence in the world, in the region and on the Philippines is in the Pacific Islands Forum and the Southwest Dialogue. Papua New Guinea is a leading member and the Philippines is a dialogue partner.

And this I believe, is another significance of our relationship because the Pacific Islands Forum and the Southwest Dialogue can be part of the solution to the current global slowdown. It should be part of a larger Pan Asia body in Asia that should include East, South and Central Asia, the Middle East, Russia and Oceania to which Papua New Guinea belongs.

If we have this, Asia will be stronger with the more united region. This large Asian community can strengthen our economy, security and prosperity. It can help us maximize growth, trade, investment and financial stability in our great

region and continent which is best suited to weather the global crisis and come up the strongest compared with other regions.

So, on this note, for all these reasons which make Papua New Guinea such an important country to us. I invite you all to join me in a toast to Her Majesty The Queen, who is the Head of State of Papua New Guinea; to Sir Michael, the Prime Minister, Prime Minister Somare of Papua New Guinea; and to the people of Papua New Guinea.

Mabuhay!

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