

Speech, ESEA Conference

Klaus Preschle, KAS Philippines

Good morning on behalf of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines.

This is the 16th ESEANET International Conference, hosted by the city government of Olongapo and organized by a longstanding partner of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in the Philippines, the Local Government Development Foundation.

Local governments have always been in the focus of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Our name-giver himself used to be a mayor, the mayor of Cologne, before he became the chair of the constitutional commission and later the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1962.

His example shows that LGUs are excellent training grounds for great leaders: Our towns and cities are the places where we live, work, get educated, set up new businesses and raise our children. If we want to be in a good place, we the people have to organize our living together and therefore have to choose the leaders for our government carefully.

We do not have any doubt that success as a mayor or as a governor qualifies one for higher office. Local governments are where the citizens meet their government. It is the place that decides whether governments are seen as successful or not, whether the politicians can be trusted or not and whether or not democracies work.

The theme of this conference is "in search for livable cities". What is meant, I guess, is livable for people.

Manfred Rommel, another famous mayor who used to be the mayor of Stuttgart for more than 20 years and whose father is the famous desert fox, used to complain that the city council would put more emphasis on frogs than on the people. His point was that in the already very green city of Stuttgart where vineyards are only 300 meters away from the main railway station and the main shopping street, the problematic issue of housing has to be addressed and that a government should never ever ignore the urgent needs of the people.

Our town cities can only be livable with the participation and contribution of its people? Local democracy expresses itself in more ways than just in the local elections. It is about an on-going process of the people's active participation. This is why our engagement is important, why NGOs and peoples organizations are important and why political parties are important. Local democracy is about listening carefully to the people, organizing participatory decision making and exercising excellence in leadership.

The Philippine Congress passed the Local Government Code in 1991. The code is a milestone for governance in this country. Since then, numerous mayors and governors, with the support of the boards and councils, civil society and people's organizations, were able to turn their provinces, cities or municipalities around: From dirty to clean, from sleepy to dynamic, from scary to livable, from goons and guns and gold goons to peace and order, from being jobless and hopeless to income generating jobs and better life opportunities for the young. Many LGUs are better organized now and their people are proud to live there. The local governments who are able to achieve this are more effective in fighting poverty. They are more capable than others to promote the welfare of the people.

We are very pleased that Olongapo is hosting this conference because Olongapo is one of them, and today it is Mayor James Gordon who stands for this success.

Marikina City is another example and Mayor Marides Fernando is going to present this afternoon.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is proud to be part of success stories here and there by supporting leadership programs for local executives and capability-building programs for local officials but also think tanks work, especially concerning the future of the Local Government Code, decentralization and the federal option. Most of these programs are organized from our longstanding partner, the Local Government Development Foundation, under the outstanding leadership of its founding chair Dr. Gaudioso Sosmeña and his young and dynamic executive director Prof. Edmund Tayao.

The main mission and vision of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has always been democracy. Thus, we can only achieve with capable hard-working and ethical leaders who base their policies on principles that serve the common good.

We welcome all the participants and are looking forward to fruitful exchange for the benefit of all of us, our nations and our people.

Good morning, welcome and Mabuhay!!