



PIMENTEL CENTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

University of Makati

and

PIMENTEL INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE



DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the
Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by
the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the
Center for Good Governance, University of Makati,
LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements
Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel,
January 12, 2011)

DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the Center for Good Governance, University of Makati, LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel, January 12, 2011)

Dr. Gerald Wahlers, Secretary General of the KAS; Dr. Peter Koeppinger; Prof. Tayao; the Leaders of the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation; Distinguished Governors and Mayors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I add my words of welcome to you who are attending this forum that Konrad Adenauer in partnership with the Center for Good Governance of the University of Makati, the LOGODEF, and the Philippine Federation of Centrist Democratic Movements has sponsored.

Vital importance

This event acquires vital importance because it aims to dissect one of the most pressing problems of the country: the blight of squatter colonies that mars not only the beauty of this country but more importantly demeans the dignity of the squatters who are also human beings like the rest of us. And then surface some relevant solutions.

As early as 25 years ago, the government tried to rationalize the government housing services through the issuance of President Cory Aquino's Executive Order No. 90 dated December 17, 1986.

The executive order aimed to "ensure the accomplishment of the National Shelter Program," and mandated four major housing agencies, namely:

- a) The National Housing Authority to be "the sole government agency engaged in direct shelter production and to provide assistance" to enable the poorest 30% of our people to have access to decent shelters.
- b) The National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation to be "the major government home mortgage institution" and

"operate a viable home mortgage market".

- c) The Human Settlements Regulatory Commission, renamed as the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board, to be "the sole regulatory body for housing and land development" to encourage greater private sector participation in low-cost housing through liberalization of development standards, simplification of regulations and decentralization of approvals for permits and licenses", and
- d) The Home Financing Corporation, renamed as the Home Insurance and Guaranty Corporation, to "assist private developers to undertake low and middle income mass housing production and encourage private institutional funds and commercial lenders to finance such housing development and long-term mortgages through a viable system of guarantees, loan insurance and other incentives."

The Executive Order also sought "to ensure that the funds required for long-term housing loans are available on a continuous and self-sustaining basis" from three funding support agencies, namely:

- a) The Home Development Mutual Fund;
- b) The Social Security System as "the primary provider of funds long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income private sector employees"; and
- c) The Government Service Insurance System as "the primary provider of funds for long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income government employees."

Problem persists

Unfortunately, despite the lofty ideals and the grand designs of the Executive Order, the awful problem of millions of squatters living in hovels and deprived of the basic necessities for human living persists to this very day. To put it more bluntly, the multi-headed hydra masquerading as "key housing agencies" of the government which Executive Order No. 90 tried to rationalize unfortunately has failed to

achieve those worthy objectives through the years.

It is estimated, for instance that some five million squatters live in shanties unfit for human beings all over the land; 3.4 million of whom as of 2002 dotted the landscape of Metro-Manila alone. Recent government statistic challenge the figures I have just quoted. They now say there are only 1.4 million squatters in the nation. I doubt it. They are probably referring to 1.4 million squatter families. If you multiply that by at the very least 4 persons per family, you come still come up to 5.6 million people living like pigs in a piggery.

By the way, I purposely use the brusque word "squatters" and not the euphemized "informal settlers" which some genteel people prefer to describe the homeless, the helpless, and the feckless whose cardboard boxes and lean-tos go for roofs over their heads and those of their families. I do concede that euphemism has its uses. When people are getting used to describing spouses as "partners" instead of husbands or wives and categorizing people by "gender" instead of sex, to call squatters as squatters and not by the proposed current politically correct phrase maybe less grating to the ears of some people. But unless we call a spade for what it is, our people and the government officials concerned may not be bothered, much less shocked, by the dehumanized living conditions of millions of the "last and the least" of our brethren.

My apologies then to those who have sensitive ears to my continued reference to squatters as squatters.

Laudable

It is noteworthy that President Benigno S. Aquino III has authorized Vice President Jejomar Binay to tackle the public housing mess we are faced with. It is a laudable act for instead of trying to do it, himself, the President has seen fit to delegate the matter to his Vice President. If the President were to do the work, himself, the people's housing needs would probably not rank too high in his agenda to make a difference during his six term considering the multifarious matters of State that need his attention every single day of the week.

But by investing his vice president, a public servant who has shown his effectiveness in delivering basic services to his constituents as a long time executive of the City of Makati with the authority to tackle the housing problems of the nation, there is much hope that at long last the

squatter problem would find a palpable, practical and achievable solution during the President's and the Vice President's current term.

This afternoon, we will hear the Vice President's representative, Atty. Antonio Bernardo, discuss the housing problem in more detail and from the perspective of the HUDCC.

It is our hope that through his discussion of the problem with responsible governors and mayors attending this conference, we will get a more definitive count or even the most recent official estimate of the number of squatters nationwide and see a workable government response to the pressing and dehumanizing issue of squatting.

At this point, I would like to advert to the fact that the present government approach where many government agencies – some of which are guided by their own charters and rules – have a hand in the decision-making on and in the funding of the process to solve the squatting problem may not be the best arrangement.

Conflate efforts

Even in military campaigns where contingents coming from several countries are involved, there has to be a unifying commander like Ike Eisenhower in the European theater in World War 2 or a Douglas MacArthur in the Asian theater in the same world war to conflate and consolidate the various efforts at the liberation of the nations then under occupation by their enemies.

Moreover, I suggest that the only coherent way to overcome squatting as an inevitable by-product of poverty is to bring together under clearly defined parameters the powers of the central government and the functions of local governments so that with the combined force of official radiation, as it were, focused on the cancer of squatting, it may finally be licked decisively.

The national official in charge of implementing the national shelter program has to have full jurisdiction over the national agencies dealing our people's homelessness and he has to harness the support of the local executives – the governors, the mayors and even the barangay officials who are the faces of government in their own localities. After all, they, more than any national government official, meet with the squatting problem frontally, directly and on a daily basis. Incidentally, one of the powers of the barangay as a unit of local governments is to ensure that

their area is squatter-free. And needless to say, I do not think that many of our people know that there is such a power that the barangays can exercise to prevent the proliferation of squatters in their areas and cause their humane relocation to proper resettlement places.

In short, while the national government had taken the lead to solve the squatting problem, actually to be successful and effectual the implementation of its plans must to a great extent be placed in the hands of local government officials. Like the desire to achieve ecological balance that must necessarily be global, the first concrete steps must be local.

And for the local governments to be able to discharge their duties along that line, they must be funded accordingly.

Employment

That said, I dare say that whatever the HUDCC and the local governments will do to address the issue of squatting will merely scrape the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, unless we provide employment to enable people to cope with their basic problems including housing. Employment will empower people and make them responsible for many things that at present they believe government should provide for them. And more than anything else, good employment will give our people dignity that will free them from the grip of mendicancy that seems to overwhelm the hearts and minds of many of our countrymen and women today.

The employment that we speak of should, however, not come from government but from businesses that are established by local and foreign investors.

Good business environment

Simply put, the national and local governments should create the proper environment for business – local or foreign - to thrive.

Government, therefore, – especially the local governments – should not make it difficult for business to start operating in their respective areas.

Incidentally, I read a research report that said that '88 signatures' were needed to get a permit to construct a house. The

number was reportedly reduced by order of the previous administration to 45.

By any standards 80 or 45 signatures from government functionaries to get a permit to build a house or construct a building would at best be a sign of inefficiency and at worst a manifestation of a malicious intent to delay the process. And delaying delivery of government services even on the matter of housing permits is one tested way to get the greasy hands of some bureaucrats fertilized with corrupt deals.

Dignity

But to go back to my thesis, with business thriving in our communities, more people will find employment and with employment human dignity would infuse their lives and those of their families.

The whole government structure – national and local - from the barangay to the municipality, to the city and to the province, therefore, has to move as one to address the problem of squatting effectively.

Doable solutions

It is our hope that this conference would help focus the attention of the national and local governments to the problem of squatting in our country and provide doable solutions to it.

Our thanks go to the governors and mayors who took time off from their busy schedules to be with us in discussing this vital issue today.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.



AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.

Tel. No. 882-0678 Loc. 307

E-mail: nenepimenteljr@gmail.com • rcroffice@yahoo.com.ph

Website: <http://www.nenepimentel.org>

* * *

- Distinguished Professor, Pimentel Center for Local Governance, University of Makati (2010)
- Senate Minority Leader (July 24, 2001 – June 30, 2010)
- Elected Senator (2004 - 2010)
- Elected Senate President (November 13, 2000 – July 23, 2001)
- Elected Senator (1998 – 2004)
- Elected Senator (1987 – 1992)
- Appointed Minister of Local Government (1986)
- Imprisoned four (4) times during martial law
- Elected Assemblyman, Batasan Pambansa (1984 – 1986)
- Elected Mayor, Cagayan de Oro City (1980 – 1984)
- Elected Delegate, Constitutional Convention (1971 – 1973)
- Dean, College of Law, Xavier University (1962-1967)
- Practicing Lawyer (1960 – 1970)



PIMENTEL CENTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

University of Makati

and

PIMENTEL INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE



DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the
Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by
the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the
Center for Good Governance, University of Makati,
LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements
Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel,
January 12, 2011)

DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the Center for Good Governance, University of Makati, LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel, January 12, 2011)

Dr. Gerald Wahlers, Secretary General of the KAS; Dr. Peter Koeppinger; Prof. Tayao; the Leaders of the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation; Distinguished Governors and Mayors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I add my words of welcome to you who are attending this forum that Konrad Adenauer in partnership with the Center for Good Governance of the University of Makati, the LOGODEF, and the Philippine Federation of Centrist Democratic Movements has sponsored.

Vital importance

This event acquires vital importance because it aims to dissect one of the most pressing problems of the country: the blight of squatter colonies that mars not only the beauty of this country but more importantly demeans the dignity of the squatters who are also human beings like the rest of us. And then surface some relevant solutions.

As early as 25 years ago, the government tried to rationalize the government housing services through the issuance of President Cory Aquino's Executive Order No. 90 dated December 17, 1986.

The executive order aimed to "ensure the accomplishment of the National Shelter Program," and mandated four major housing agencies, namely:

- a) The National Housing Authority to be "the sole government agency engaged in direct shelter production and to provide assistance" to enable the poorest 30% of our people to have access to decent shelters.
- b) The National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation to be "the major government home mortgage institution" and

"operate a viable home mortgage market".

- c) The Human Settlements Regulatory Commission, renamed as the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board, to be "the sole regulatory body for housing and land development" to encourage greater private sector participation in low-cost housing through liberalization of development standards, simplification of regulations and decentralization of approvals for permits and licenses", and
- d) The Home Financing Corporation, renamed as the Home Insurance and Guaranty Corporation, to "assist private developers to undertake low and middle income mass housing production and encourage private institutional funds and commercial lenders to finance such housing development and long-term mortgages through a viable system of guarantees, loan insurance and other incentives."

The Executive Order also sought "to ensure that the funds required for long-term housing loans are available on a continuous and self-sustaining basis" from three funding support agencies, namely:

- a) The Home Development Mutual Fund;
- b) The Social Security System as "the primary provider of funds long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income private sector employees"; and
- c) The Government Service Insurance System as "the primary provider of funds for long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income government employees."

Problem persists

Unfortunately, despite the lofty ideals and the grand designs of the Executive Order, the awful problem of millions of squatters living in hovels and deprived of the basic necessities for human living persists to this very day. To put it more bluntly, the multi-headed hydra masquerading as "key housing agencies" of the government which Executive Order No. 90 tried to rationalize unfortunately has failed to

achieve those worthy objectives through the years.

It is estimated, for instance that some five million squatters live in shanties unfit for human beings all over the land; 3.4 million of whom as of 2002 dotted the landscape of Metro-Manila alone. Recent government statistic challenge the figures I have just quoted. They now say there are only 1.4 million squatters in the nation. I doubt it. They are probably referring to 1.4 million squatter families. If you multiply that by at the very least 4 persons per family, you come still come up to 5.6 million people living like pigs in a pigger.

By the way, I purposely use the brusque word "squatters" and not the euphemized "informal settlers" which some genteel people prefer to describe the homeless, the helpless, and the feckless whose cardboard boxes and lean-tos go for roofs over their heads and those of their families. I do concede that euphemism has its uses. When people are getting used to describing spouses as "partners" instead of husbands or wives and categorizing people by "gender" instead of sex, to call squatters as squatters and not by the proposed current politically correct phrase maybe less grating to the ears of some people. But unless we call a spade for what it is, our people and the government officials concerned may not be bothered, much less shocked, by the dehumanized living conditions of millions of the "last and the least" of our brethren.

My apologies then to those who have sensitive ears to my continued reference to squatters as squatters.

Laudable

It is noteworthy that President Benigno S. Aquino III has authorized Vice President Jejomar Binay to tackle the public housing mess we are faced with. It is a laudable act for instead of trying to do it, himself, the President has seen fit to delegate the matter to his Vice President. If the President were to do the work, himself, the people's housing needs would probably not rank too high in his agenda to make a difference during his six term considering the multifarious matters of State that need his attention every single day of the week.

But by investing his vice president, a public servant who has shown his effectiveness in delivering basic services to his constituents as a long time executive of the City of Makati with the authority to tackle the housing problems of the nation, there is much hope that at long last the

squatter problem would find a palpable, practical and achievable solution during the President's and the Vice President's current term.

This afternoon, we will hear the Vice President's representative, Atty. Antonio Bernardo, discuss the housing problem in more detail and from the perspective of the HUDCC.

It is our hope that through his discussion of the problem with responsible governors and mayors attending this conference, we will get a more definitive count or even the most recent official estimate of the number of squatters nationwide and see a workable government response to the pressing and dehumanizing issue of squatting.

At this point, I would like to advert to the fact that the present government approach where many government agencies – some of which are guided by their own charters and rules – have a hand in the decision-making on and in the funding of the process to solve the squatting problem may not be the best arrangement.

Conflate efforts

Even in military campaigns where contingents coming from several countries are involved, there has to be a unifying commander like Ike Eisenhower in the European theater in World War 2 or a Douglas MacArthur in the Asian theater in the same world war to conflate and consolidate the various efforts at the liberation of the nations then under occupation by their enemies.

Moreover, I suggest that the only coherent way to overcome squatting as an inevitable by-product of poverty is to bring together under clearly defined parameters the powers of the central government and the functions of local governments so that with the combined force of official radiation, as it were, focused on the cancer of squatting, it may finally be licked decisively.

The national official in charge of implementing the national shelter program has to have full jurisdiction over the national agencies dealing our people's homelessness and he has to harness the support of the local executives – the governors, the mayors and even the barangay officials who are the faces of government in their own localities. After all, they, more than any national government official, meet with the squatting problem frontally, directly and on a daily basis. Incidentally, one of the powers of the barangay as a unit of local governments is to ensure that

their area is squatter-free. And needless to say, I do not think that many of our people know that there is such a power that the barangays can exercise to prevent the proliferation of squatters in their areas and cause their humane relocation to proper resettlement places.

In short, while the national government had taken the lead to solve the squatting problem, actually to be successful and effectual the implementation of its plans must to a great extent be placed in the hands of local government officials. Like the desire to achieve ecological balance that must necessarily be global, the first concrete steps must be local.

And for the local governments to be able to discharge their duties along that line, they must be funded accordingly.

Employment

That said, I dare say that whatever the HUDCC and the local governments will do to address the issue of squatting will merely scrape the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, unless we provide employment to enable people to cope with their basic problems including housing. Employment will empower people and make them responsible for many things that at present they believe government should provide for them. And more than anything else, good employment will give our people dignity that will free them from the grip of mendicancy that seems to overwhelm the hearts and minds of many of our countrymen and women today.

The employment that we speak of should, however, not come from government but from businesses that are established by local and foreign investors.

Good business environment

Simply put, the national and local governments should create the proper environment for business – local or foreign - to thrive.

Government, therefore, – especially the local governments – should not make it difficult for business to start operating in their respective areas.

Incidentally, I read a research report that said that '88 signatures' were needed to get a permit to construct a house. The

number was reportedly reduced by order of the previous administration to 45.

By any standards 80 or 45 signatures from government functionaries to get a permit to build a house or construct a building would at best be a sign of inefficiency and at worst a manifestation of a malicious intent to delay the process. And delaying delivery of government services even on the matter of housing permits is one tested way to get the greasy hands of some bureaucrats fertilized with corrupt deals.

Dignity

But to go back to my thesis, with business thriving in our communities, more people will find employment and with employment human dignity would infuse their lives and those of their families.

The whole government structure – national and local - from the barangay to the municipality, to the city and to the province, therefore, has to move as one to address the problem of squatting effectively.

Doable solutions

It is our hope that this conference would help focus the attention of the national and local governments to the problem of squatting in our country and provide doable solutions to it.

Our thanks go to the governors and mayors who took time off from their busy schedules to be with us in discussing this vital issue today.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.



AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.

Tel. No. 882-0678 Loc. 307

E-mail: nenepimenteljr@gmail.com • rcroffice@yahoo.com.ph

Website: <http://www.nenepimentel.org>

* * *

- Distinguished Professor, Pimentel Center for Local Governance, University of Makati (2010)
- Senate Minority Leader (July 24, 2001 – June 30, 2010)
- Elected Senator (2004 - 2010)
- Elected Senate President (November 13, 2000 – July 23, 2001)
- Elected Senator (1998 – 2004)
- Elected Senator (1987 – 1992)
- Appointed Minister of Local Government (1986)
- Imprisoned four (4) times during martial law
- Elected Assemblyman, Batasan Pambansa (1984 – 1986)
- Elected Mayor, Cagayan de Oro City (1980 – 1984)
- Elected Delegate, Constitutional Convention (1971 – 1973)
- Dean, College of Law, Xavier University (1962-1967)
- Practicing Lawyer (1960 – 1970)



PIMENTEL CENTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

University of Makati

and

PIMENTEL INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE



DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the
Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by
the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the
Center for Good Governance, University of Makati,
LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements
Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel,
January 12, 2011)

DOABLE REMEDIES TO LICK SQUATTING CANCER

(Keynote Speech of Nene Pimentel at the Conference of Governors and mayors sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in partnership with the Center for Good Governance, University of Makati, LOGODEF, and the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation of the Philippines at the Dusit Thani Hotel, January 12, 2011)

Dr. Gerald Wahlers, Secretary General of the KAS; Dr. Peter Koeppinger; Prof. Tayao; the Leaders of the Centrist Democratic Movements Federation; Distinguished Governors and Mayors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I add my words of welcome to you who are attending this forum that Konrad Adenauer in partnership with the Center for Good Governance of the University of Makati, the LOGODEF, and the Philippine Federation of Centrist Democratic Movements has sponsored.

Vital importance

This event acquires vital importance because it aims to dissect one of the most pressing problems of the country: the blight of squatter colonies that mars not only the beauty of this country but more importantly demeans the dignity of the squatters who are also human beings like the rest of us. And then surface some relevant solutions.

As early as 25 years ago, the government tried to rationalize the government housing services through the issuance of President Cory Aquino's Executive Order No. 90 dated December 17, 1986.

The executive order aimed to "ensure the accomplishment of the National Shelter Program," and mandated four major housing agencies, namely:

- a) The National Housing Authority to be "the sole government agency engaged in direct shelter production and to provide assistance" to enable the poorest 30% of our people to have access to decent shelters.
- b) The National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation to be "the major government home mortgage institution" and

"operate a viable home mortgage market".

- c) The Human Settlements Regulatory Commission, renamed as the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board, to be "the sole regulatory body for housing and land development" to encourage greater private sector participation in low-cost housing through liberalization of development standards, simplification of regulations and decentralization of approvals for permits and licenses", and
- d) The Home Financing Corporation, renamed as the Home Insurance and Guaranty Corporation, to "assist private developers to undertake low and middle income mass housing production and encourage private institutional funds and commercial lenders to finance such housing development and long-term mortgages through a viable system of guarantees, loan insurance and other incentives."

The Executive Order also sought "to ensure that the funds required for long-term housing loans are available on a continuous and self-sustaining basis" from three funding support agencies, namely:

- a) The Home Development Mutual Fund;
- b) The Social Security System as "the primary provider of funds long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income private sector employees"; and
- c) The Government Service Insurance System as "the primary provider of funds for long-term housing mortgages for low and middle-income government employees."

Problem persists

Unfortunately, despite the lofty ideals and the grand designs of the Executive Order, the awful problem of millions of squatters living in hovels and deprived of the basic necessities for human living persists to this very day. To put it more bluntly, the multi-headed hydra masquerading as "key housing agencies" of the government which Executive Order No. 90 tried to rationalize unfortunately has failed to

achieve those worthy objectives through the years.

It is estimated, for instance that some five million squatters live in shanties unfit for human beings all over the land; 3.4 million of whom as of 2002 dotted the landscape of Metro-Manila alone. Recent government statistic challenge the figures I have just quoted. They now say there are only 1.4 million squatters in the nation. I doubt it. They are probably referring to 1.4 million squatter families. If you multiply that by at the very least 4 persons per family, you come still come up to 5.6 million people living like pigs in a piggery.

By the way, I purposely use the brusque word "squatters" and not the euphemized "informal settlers" which some genteel people prefer to describe the homeless, the helpless, and the feckless whose cardboard boxes and lean-tos go for roofs over their heads and those of their families. I do concede that euphemism has its uses. When people are getting used to describing spouses as "partners" instead of husbands or wives and categorizing people by "gender" instead of sex, to call squatters as squatters and not by the proposed current politically correct phrase maybe less grating to the ears of some people. But unless we call a spade for what it is, our people and the government officials concerned may not be bothered, much less shocked, by the dehumanized living conditions of millions of the "last and the least" of our brethren.

My apologies then to those who have sensitive ears to my continued reference to squatters as squatters.

Laudable

It is noteworthy that President Benigno S. Aquino III has authorized Vice President Jejomar Binay to tackle the public housing mess we are faced with. It is a laudable act for instead of trying to do it, himself, the President has seen fit to delegate the matter to his Vice President. If the President were to do the work, himself, the people's housing needs would probably not rank too high in his agenda to make a difference during his six term considering the multifarious matters of State that need his attention every single day of the week.

But by investing his vice president, a public servant who has shown his effectiveness in delivering basic services to his constituents as a long time executive of the City of Makati with the authority to tackle the housing problems of the nation, there is much hope that at long last the

squatter problem would find a palpable, practical and achievable solution during the President's and the Vice President's current term.

This afternoon, we will hear the Vice President's representative, Atty. Antonio Bernardo, discuss the housing problem in more detail and from the perspective of the HUDCC.

It is our hope that through his discussion of the problem with responsible governors and mayors attending this conference, we will get a more definitive count or even the most recent official estimate of the number of squatters nationwide and see a workable government response to the pressing and dehumanizing issue of squatting.

At this point, I would like to advert to the fact that the present government approach where many government agencies – some of which are guided by their own charters and rules – have a hand in the decision-making on and in the funding of the process to solve the squatting problem may not be the best arrangement.

Conflate efforts

Even in military campaigns where contingents coming from several countries are involved, there has to be a unifying commander like Ike Eisenhower in the European theater in World War 2 or a Douglas MacArthur in the Asian theater in the same world war to conflate and consolidate the various efforts at the liberation of the nations then under occupation by their enemies.

Moreover, I suggest that the only coherent way to overcome squatting as an inevitable by-product of poverty is to bring together under clearly defined parameters the powers of the central government and the functions of local governments so that with the combined force of official radiation, as it were, focused on the cancer of squatting, it may finally be licked decisively.

The national official in charge of implementing the national shelter program has to have full jurisdiction over the national agencies dealing our people's homelessness and he has to harness the support of the local executives – the governors, the mayors and even the barangay officials who are the faces of government in their own localities. After all, they, more than any national government official, meet with the squatting problem frontally, directly and on a daily basis. Incidentally, one of the powers of the barangay as a unit of local governments is to ensure that

their area is squatter-free. And needless to say, I do not think that many of our people know that there is such a power that the barangays can exercise to prevent the proliferation of squatters in their areas and cause their humane relocation to proper resettlement places.

In short, while the national government had taken the lead to solve the squatting problem, actually to be successful and effectual the implementation of its plans must to a great extent be placed in the hands of local government officials. Like the desire to achieve ecological balance that must necessarily be global, the first concrete steps must be local.

And for the local governments to be able to discharge their duties along that line, they must be funded accordingly.

Employment

That said, I dare say that whatever the HUDCC and the local governments will do to address the issue of squatting will merely scrape the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, unless we provide employment to enable people to cope with their basic problems including housing. Employment will empower people and make them responsible for many things that at present they believe government should provide for them. And more than anything else, good employment will give our people dignity that will free them from the grip of mendicancy that seems to overwhelm the hearts and minds of many of our countrymen and women today.

The employment that we speak of should, however, not come from government but from businesses that are established by local and foreign investors.

Good business environment

Simply put, the national and local governments should create the proper environment for business – local or foreign - to thrive.

Government, therefore, – especially the local governments – should not make it difficult for business to start operating in their respective areas.

Incidentally, I read a research report that said that '88 signatures' were needed to get a permit to construct a house. The

number was reportedly reduced by order of the previous administration to 45.

By any standards 80 or 45 signatures from government functionaries to get a permit to build a house or construct a building would at best be a sign of inefficiency and at worst a manifestation of a malicious intent to delay the process. And delaying delivery of government services even on the matter of housing permits is one tested way to get the greasy hands of some bureaucrats fertilized with corrupt deals.

Dignity

But to go back to my thesis, with business thriving in our communities, more people will find employment and with employment human dignity would infuse their lives and those of their families.

The whole government structure – national and local - from the barangay to the municipality, to the city and to the province, therefore, has to move as one to address the problem of squatting effectively.

Doable solutions

It is our hope that this conference would help focus the attention of the national and local governments to the problem of squatting in our country and provide doable solutions to it.

Our thanks go to the governors and mayors who took time off from their busy schedules to be with us in discussing this vital issue today.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.



AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.

Tel. No. 882-0678 Loc. 307

E-mail: nenepimenteljr@gmail.com • rcroffice@yahoo.com.ph

Website: <http://www.nenepimentel.org>

* * *

- Distinguished Professor, Pimentel Center for Local Governance, University of Makati (2010)
- Senate Minority Leader (July 24, 2001 – June 30, 2010)
- Elected Senator (2004 - 2010)
- Elected Senate President (November 13, 2000 – July 23, 2001)
- Elected Senator (1998 – 2004)
- Elected Senator (1987 – 1992)
- Appointed Minister of Local Government (1986)
- Imprisoned four (4) times during martial law
- Elected Assemblyman, Batasan Pambansa (1984 – 1986)
- Elected Mayor, Cagayan de Oro City (1980 – 1984)
- Elected Delegate, Constitutional Convention (1971 – 1973)
- Dean, College of Law, Xavier University (1962-1967)
- Practicing Lawyer (1960 – 1970)