

Good morning!

Thank you very much for the honor and opportunity to be part of this year's CALD General Assembly. As always, this assembly serves as a relevant learning session for all of us LIBERAL DEMOCRATS who always strive to find new ways and meanings to serve our respective countries and people. I am very thankful for the many valuable insights I am gaining as I listen and network with all of you. For this and many more, thank you so much!

Today's topic about the global rise of illiberalism comes at a most opportune time for all of us especially for us in the Philippines. As you all know, we just concluded our national elections on May 2016, where the Liberal Party of the Philippines presidential candidate, who had the most sterling qualifications and experience among all the other candidates lost to a local government official who had a more popular appeal and ran under a populist campaign slogan "CHANGE FOR ALL" – change that shall benefit and be felt by every Filipino. He offered change that will directly solve the problems of illegal drugs, corruption, insurgency, poverty, peace and order. He tickled and stirred the imagination of the voters that he is one of them and being one of them, he knows how the ordinary Filipinos feels, being one of them he knows their frustrations, their hopes and aspirations by heart. He mesmerized the Filipinos that he is strong-willed, no-nonsense leader, willing to work around the rules, and would even push the limits of the law to deliver the promises he made to the people. He won by a lands slide, the biggest margin in the history of Philippine politics. While our new president has been democratically elected in a peaceful and orderly elections, many political analysts and observers are now identifying "red flags" that point to the current administration's tendency to cross the line in terms of respect for individual rights and civil liberties. The United Nations, the USA, the European Union, human rights organizations to name a few have raised concerns on the number of deaths and victims in the war against illegal drugs being waged by the government. From July 1 – Oct 25, 2016 at least 4,715 have been killed in connection with the campaign against illegal drugs. Of this number, 3,001 were killed by unknown assailants and 1,714 others died in police operations. Just a day ago, a mayor who was in jail for alleged drug dealing and possession of firearms and ammunitions was killed in his jail cell, in the custody of the police. In all these, President enjoys a very high trust and popularity rating.

This situation is very similar to the scenario discussed by FAREED ZAKARIA in his seminal article "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" published in 1997. In his article, he worried about the rise of popular autocrats with little or no regard for the rule of law and civil liberties. Governments may be elected in free and fair election, he wrote, and yet violate their citizens' basic rights. Since 1997, illiberal democracies have been alarmingly become more the norm rather than the exception. A study showed that 60% of the world's countries are electoral democracies, but majority of these democracies fail to provide equal protection under the law for their citizens.

Which begs the question, why is there a rise in illiberal democracy? As I was reflecting for my sharing today, I realized that the observed rise of illiberalism comes at a time when there is a heated discourse on how liberal democratic regimes have become inadequate to take on the very state of politics of our time.

It comes at a time when the populace has begun to feel and believe that liberalism has failed them – which is why populace are inclined to support a government which offers something new, something refreshing in words and actions even at the expense of their noble rights enshrined in their constitution and laws. The irony lies in the fact that the populace has had too much hope in liberalism – that liberalism will address the issues of poverty and social inclusion. A hope that democratic regime will answer the call for a broader based growth and for

the people participation in governance. For some, liberalism is a PANACEA to all their needs and problems. Admittedly, governments around the world – even those that are democratically governed have yet to unlock sustainable solutions to these development dilemmas.

On a personal note, it pains me to see that the same heroic, courageous and patriotic people in my country who thought that the whole world how people power can stage a bloodless revolution to out throw a dictator are now silent in the midst of extra judicial killings happening in our country. It seems that people have agreed to sacrifice some liberties or look beyond respect for civil liberties in exchange for the promise of inclusive growth, peace and development.

As a liberal democrat and as a member of Philippine Parliament, I stand firm in my belief that a meaningful sustainable growth and development can be achieved on the recognition of rights, social inclusion and active people participation. The stark reality however, is that these are the ideals that we still need to work on. These ideals have to be inculcated in the hearts and minds of our people. These ideas of liberty and democracy have to become a way of life for all of us.

I firmly believe that the challenge at this critical point of time is to make democracy work – to deepen democracy. To make them relevant in the daily lives of our people. Democracy is the very essence of being a member of a political society, it is the soul of being a citizen in a free world.

Now the more than ever, as liberal democrats, you and I must demonstrate the respect for individual rights and civil liberties can go hand-in-hand with inclusive growth. Our efforts must continue to strengthen democratic institutions.

More importantly, as our new Chair said last night – let us have a strong faith in our people! As leaders we must continue to enable and empower our citizens and communities to participate in various political platforms – through public consultations and dialogues, through public expression, campaign and advocacies. Encourage active citizenship especially among young people who have the idealism to be vigilant in safeguarding the rights and liberties.

We must reverse the destructive tide which is drowning our people to believe that popular autocracy and illiberalism are the fastest way of bringing about the change that they need. Civil right, life, liberty, respect for the rule of law are NON NEGOTIABLE!

Let us rekindle the hope amongst our people – let us believe that HOPE IS WITHIN ALL OF US and NOT within the ideology prevalent in the society or state.

Let us keep the faith in our people and with each other burning in our hearts and souls!

Thank you.