

Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats
Opening Ceremonies of the 14th CALD General Assembly
Building a Democratic Coalition against Disinformation
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Speech By John Joseph S. Coronel
President, Center for Liberalism and Democracy

The Center for Liberalism and Democracy is proud to be a partner of CALD's 14th General Assembly, held for the first time in the Visayas, or two hundred and eighty miles away from Imperial Manila.

The impressive urban development we have witnessed epitomizes the sterling achievements of the people of Iloilo. It is a testament of what political will and good governance can achieve.

CLD was founded in 2018 at a time when the Post-Truth Era has firmly and globally taken root, the Philippines being no exception.

Fake news, historical revisionism, and reality distortion are issues that we at CLD tackle and confront. As an independent policy institute committed to the principles of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, justice, human rights, and inclusive development, the defense of facts and truth is a natural course of action.

As the think tank of the Liberal Party whose key figures have been demonized with atrocious lies and abominable malice, it has become a matter of necessity. During the last elections, our greatest opponents were disinformation, historical distortion and the systematic vilification of progressive forces.

Whether by choice or by circumstance, CLD is committed to its campaign against disinformation. And we are one with democratic forces worldwide in this effort.

Beginning in the mid-20th Century, we are still in the Age of Information, a rapid and epochal shift from the Industrial Revolution to an economy based on

information technology with corresponding political, social and cultural ramifications. Sadly, the Age of Information has degenerated into the Age of Disinformation.

And here lies the paradox. Humankind's most seamless and sophisticated technological advancements have unleashed, amongst a significant and expanding segment of the world's population, the most basal instincts, the most insidious mindsets, the most vulgar language, and the most contemptible behavior.

While the Post-Truth Age, in terms of mainstream political discourse, is a recent phenomenon, particularly in 2016 with Brexit and Donald Trump, and of course, Rodrigo Duterte, the uneasiness towards truth, and attempts to deny and distort it are as old as civilization itself.

Plato, the great philosopher of Ancient Greece, once said, "No one is more hated than he who speaks the truth." He was probably speaking from experience. Then there's Plato's contemporary, the dramatist, Aeschylus, who asserted that "In war, truth is the first casualty."

But what if war is waged against truth itself? Does this mean that truth becomes a casualty twice over? The term "doubledead" comes to mind. In the Filipino lexicon, doubledead refers to meat sourced from a livestock that has died of a disease but sold with deliberate deceit as fresh pork or beef.

Doubleddead—such a fitting albeit a very gruesome and tragic metaphor for disinformation and its destructive effects. Lies in social media are like malignant cells that exponentially multiply until the whole macro-organism, including an entire nation, is afflicted with social cancer. Every battle where deception triumphs represents a morsel incised from the carcass of democracy. Doubleddead.

If the war waged by disinformers and trolls succeeds, truth is the first casualty. All resistance and opposition including political parties, civil society, the academe, and media are next. Until, to paraphrase the Washington Post, it is the turn of democracy to die in darkness. Tripledead.

In “Autumn of the Patriarch”, Gabriel Garcia Marquez described the novel’s title character as having “discovered in the course of his uncountable years that a lie is more comfortable than doubt, more useful than love, more lasting than truth.”

Unfortunately, I agree with the view of this fictional patriarch, lies are convenient. And on the flipside, conscience is hard and taxing. Thus, the major challenge of the liberal and democratic parties gathered in this assembly is to remain steadfast to the Politics of Conscience despite the temptations of the Politics of Convenience.

I would like to end by sharing with you excerpts from two editorials that I wrote for Plaza Miranda, CLD’s policy and opinion quarterly, where I serve as Editor.

First: Traditions in various cultures and faiths have affirmed truth as a fundamental tenet. The foundation of Christianity is built on the principle that the truth will set you free. Veritas et libertas. Truth and freedom. One is both the means and the end to the other. Truth leads to freedom and freedom leads to truth. Like the chicken and egg riddle, it doesn’t matter which comes first; what matters is the realization that one cannot exist without the other.

And, second: It is not enough that we speak Truth to power because, often, they refuse to listen. Our task is to make sure that Truth becomes more powerful than those in power.

Have a pleasant day. Thank you.