

**WELCOME REMARKS OF
OAA DIV. III DIRECTOR MARCIANO R. DE BORJA
DURING THE PACLAS LATIN AMERICAN WEEK
(SEMANA LATINOAMERICANA)
UST Main Building, 04 March 2004, 10:00 AM**

Rev. Fr. Tamerlane Lana, Rector of the University of Santo Tomas, Excellencies Ambassadors and officials of the Latin American Embassies, Dean Belen Lorezca-Tangco, members of the PACLAS, students, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning, Buenos Dias!

On behalf of Secretary Delia Domingo Albert, Assistant Secretary Ariel Y. Abadilla and the Department of Foreign Affairs, I would like to congratulate and thank the Philippine Academic Consortium for Latin American Studies (PACLAS) for holding the Latin American Week or Semana Latinoamérica.

The PACLAS, the national project of the Philippines for FEALAC, is born out of the need for us to create a network of academic and research institutions focused on Latin America. It counts among its members some of the leading universities and research institutes of the country, namely the University of Santo Tomas, the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, the University of Asia and the Pacific, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies and the Foreign Service Institute.

Through the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs through the Office of American Affairs, PACLAS was formally established on 20 November 2002. This is in line with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's directive of revitalizing and intensifying Philippine-Latin American relations.

Since its inception PACLAS has been relentless in promoting greater awareness and appreciation of Latin American studies. It has initiated various creative activities which include the Copa America Football Championship, the PACLAS website and academic conferences such as the "Philippines-Latin America Trade Relations" sponsored by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

On 22 January 2004, as a side event to FEALAC Sixth Senior Officials' Meeting Meetings and the Second Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 28-31 January 2004, PACLAS held the forum on "Revitalizing Philippines-Latin America Relations" which contributed to the overall success of our hosting.

I therefore wish to congratulate PACLAS for successfully undertaking these activities. And now we are again treated to another important project – that is the Latin American Week or "Semana Latinoamericana". I therefore commend Rector Tamerlane Lana of UST as chairman of PACLAS, Dean Belen Tangco as working group coordinator and the other members of PACLAS for their hardwork and and wish them more power and success as they conceive other meaningful projects in the coming months.

I also wish to thank the Latin American embassies represented here today for their strong commitment and support to the initiatives of the DFA and PACLAS. Without their continued support and cooperation, we cannot move forward.

The Philippines and Latin America share a common Iberian cultural heritage and many similar historical experiences. Once upon a time the Philippines played a pivotal role in the trade among Asia, the Americas and Western Europe. As a transshipment hub, Manila was closely linked to Acapulco and indirectly to the major port cities of Latin America. It was through the Philippines that exotic goods from the Orient passed through the Americas before reaching their final destination in the Old World. In turn, European goods and customs were brought to East Asia through the Philippines. It was also through these exchanges that Latin American influences slowly filtered into the country. Different variety of plants and animals were introduced in this country before the advent of Latin American independence in the early part of the nineteenth century. Many Latin American soldiers, merchants and bureaucrats, majority of whom were Mexicans, were dispatched to the Philippines who eventually intermarried with native Filipinos. Despite being an Asian country, our character shows strong Latin features because of these factors,. We Filipinos are, therefore, considered the "Latinos of Asia."

Unfortunately the Philippines' affinities with Latin America are not fully harnessed to improve our political, cultural and commercial

ties with the region. We have to change this situation. We have to take a proactive stance in our relations with that vast developing continent. We need to take a hard look at the latest trends in Latin America to take advantage of the windows of opportunities that it can offer us. We have to search for opportunities for commercial ventures and potential markets for Filipino goods and services in Latin America and vice-versa. We also need to adopt the “best practices” from the region.

Given the challenges we face in forging stronger relations, I still look at the future with optimism. With the creation of the Forum for East Asia – Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC), which to date is composed of 15 countries from East Asia and 17 countries from Latin America, the Philippines has another chance to “rediscover” Latin America. We hope that FEALAC will indeed serve as an effective mechanism to revitalize Philippine bilateral and multilateral relations with Latin America, particularly commercial ties.

The Philippines remains committed to its policy of intensifying and deepening ties with Latin America. We in the DFA wish to capitalize on the significant gains from our hosting of the FEALAC Meetings which have exceeded our expectations.

This year we are also shifting gears to complement our efforts in strengthening bilateral ties with Latin American countries by enhancing the Philippines’ participation in regional fora, including as a permanent observer in the Organization of American States (OAS) as well as pursuing possible participation as an observer at the next Iberoamerican Summit. For your information, the Philippines intends to make a token contribution to OAS soon to demonstrate our serious commitment as a permanent observer.

Secretary Albert also intends to lead a business delegation to Latin America sometime in June. The Office of American Affairs and our diplomatic posts in Latin America are making preparations and identifying as well as analyzing business prospects for the Philippines in the region. Secretary Albert has also issued a directive to us to prepare a publication detailing Philippine relations with Latin America.

As far as PACLAS is concerned, we will ask the assistance of the Philippine Embassy in Washington to make representation with the

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in order to acquire books and information materials on Latin America and solicit scholarships for qualified Filipinos to pursue graduate studies in Latin America. We will also request IDB to send Latin American experts to the Philippines to conduct lectures and seminars in PACLAS and other interested universities and institutes.

But in order to achieve our goals in Latin America, we will need the support and cooperation of the different sectors of Philippine society, particularly the business and academic sectors. The government, in this case the DFA, can only do so much. Private initiatives and participation are crucial ingredients in the success of our endeavors. This may take time. But the DFA is taking the right steps to forge stronger links with Latin America and I am convinced that PACLAS will be instrumental in attaining this goal.

Thank you for your kind attention. Muchas gracias.