



“Pagmamalasakit”

*“Pagmamalasakit ng Isang Iskolar ng Bayan”*

To my fellow graduates and to our esteemed teachers, to our parents, family and dear friends, I would like to begin by greeting all of you with words of peace: **“Assalamu’alaikom”** (OR peace be with you).

With everything that has been going on in the Philippines—with the wars that have been waged both in Mindanao and beyond—the call for **peace** becomes all the more necessary. Before you, I stand not merely as the 1<sup>st</sup> Maranaw to graduate Summa Cum Laude of this University... But before you I stand as an advocate of peace and unity—I stand with you, my fellow Iskolars ng Bayan—as we express our solidarity to the people of Mindanao and beyond. Maranaw or not, Christian, Muslim, Lumad or not—we all, as one collective Filipino youth—and more specifically, as one graduating body of Iskolars ng Bayan—stand together in affirming our promise to the Filipino people—that of being of service to others—most especially in such times of crises.

Indeed, **today**, we gather here to celebrate a significant chapter of our lives: After all the years of hard work, joy and pain, we beam with pride as we finally graduate from the country’s most prestigious state university: our beloved University of the Philippines. Today, we’re all united in celebrating this collective feeling of gratitude and sheer happiness as finally, we’re able to say that “Yes! Through honor and excellence, we indeed finally made it!”

But of course, as UP students, we know quite dearly how none of us operate in an isolated vacuum. Our University and our life as *Iskolars ng Bayan* is heavily interlinked with the beating heart of this nation. We cannot fully revel in joy, when we know that thousands and millions are left behind. Thus, at points of crisis or deep humanitarian suffering, we are among the first to raise our voice against such pain and injustice. Whether or not we suffer the direct and primary injury is of no moment—for our duties and responsibilities, as *Iskolars ng Bayan*, are interconnected with those of our nation's.

In Filipino, this is what we call “**pagmamalakit**”. Napakagandang salita ano? “Pagmamalakit”.

Hindi ka nag-iisa dahil may nagmamalakit sa'yo.

Hindi ka napag-iiwanan dahil may nagaalala para sa'yo.

Kung iisipin, lahat ng ito'y nakaukit sa ating mga karakter bilang mga *Iskolar ng Bayan*. Tayo'y mga kabataan na nagmamalakit para sa bayan. Tayo'y mga kabataan na nagmamalakit para sa mga kapwa natin—lalo na ang mga kapwa natin na nalugmok sa kahirapan o naiipit sa matinding kaguluhan.

Dahil sa pagmamalakit para sa kapwa at bayan, tayo'y mga kabataan na nagsisikap hindi lamang para sa pansariling interes kundi para sa interes ng nakakarami.

As such **today**, we gather here not merely as any graduating batch of youth, but as a graduating batch of *Iskolars ng Bayan... Iskolars ng Bayan* who show solidarity and deep concern for the fate of this nation, and the well-being of our fellow people. Amidst the joy and the revelry that goes with our graduation, we gather here today to **affirm our promise** that we—the young graduates of this university—will not falter in our duty to serve the nation and the people—most especially the most vulnerable and the weak.

And thus, for while today is filled with the joy we experience in the safe confines of our graduation ceremony, we also recognize that today also marks another day of suffering, fear and injustice felt by many of our fellow people throughout the country. Today, for instance, marks another day of hardship and chaos faced by our Filipino brothers and sisters in Mindanao.

As I give this speech now, we witness an ongoing crisis back home. Filipinos, both Muslims and Christians are forced to flee from their homes. Our Muslim brothers and sisters fast not in their homes, but in evacuation centers. This crisis is but just another addition to the long historical narrative of injustice and inequity faced by many minority groups in Mindanao.

Until today, my hometown belongs to one of the top 5 poorest provinces in the country. Access to quality education and healthcare is still low. Although my mother comes from one of the Four Royal Houses in Lanao, she has told me and my siblings the painful paradox of poverty and inequity which lie behind such rich familial heritage. My mother has recounted to me how in her youth, she witnessed the death of her little brother and mother due to sickness that could have been cured if only there was “enough money”. How painful can this

be, right? How unjust and unacceptable it is to live in a society that allows this to happen—where people are left behind and forgotten.

But here I am standing in front of you today as proof that members of minorities (like us Maranaws) can also do well, excel and contribute effectively to societal growth—if given the same opportunities and rights. I am speaking to you as proof that anyone, regardless of religion, socioeconomic status, or ethnic ties, can excel if equal opportunities are available to all.

As a young Filipino Maranao, I am privileged to attain this education as a scholar of the government. However, thousands do not have this opportunity. I speak here before you because I have been granted the unique opportunity of quality education, which I would like to give back to the people.

Bilang mga iskolar ng bayan, responsibilidad natin na magmalasakit sa mga naaapi. Kahit tayo ay magkaka-iba, tayo ay magkakapareho pa rin. As a student of molecular biology, I know that everyone is made of up the same building blocks of DNA – Adenosine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine. Underneath all the external differences, we are all made the same molecules that aggregated to form a human body.

Naniniwala ako na tamang edukasyon ay isang paraan para maipakita natin ang pagmamalaksit sa mga naghihirap. As we gather today in the University of the Philippines—in arguably one of the bastions of education in our country—together we call to have a more inclusive education—one that strengthens the collective ties of our nation. If we want to build

an inclusive society, we should first have a strong national identity wherein no one is left behind – And we need to start early. As much as subjects like science, math, and the languages are important, then so are subjects that build on greater social cohesion among Filipinos of different ethnic groups, regions and religions.

Para sa mga magsisipagtapos na iskolar ng bayan, sana’y huwag natin kalimutang magmalaskit sa mga Pilipinong nag-paaral sa atin. Malayong lupain, ating mang marating, huwag sana magbagao ang ating damdamin. Mabuhay ang pag-asa ng bayan!