

# Opening Remarks

## 2017 Commencement Exercises

### of UP Diliman

#### **Michael Lim Tan**

Chancellor, UP Diliman

Ang ating panauhing Pandangal Kalihim Benjamin Diokno; ang dating Pangulo ng UP Dr. Emmanuel Soriano, Pangulo Danilo L. Concepcion, mga opisyal ng administrasyon ng UP, mga kaguruan, mga magulang, lolo at lola, asawa't anak, kabarangay at nag-alay ng dugo at pawis at ang mga inalayan ng dugo at pawis, ang class of 2017, Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat, Maayong buntag sa atong tanan. Assalamo alaikum.

Sa wakas, ang umpisa. Today is the day you and your loved ones have looked forward to, and I am sure you prepared for it. Maaga ang gising ninyo, at sana nagalmusal na kayo, lalo pang mga kapatid nating Muslim, who had to eat before dawn because of Ramadan.

Nagbarbero, nagparlor. O kaya, kasi UP tayo, pinagbarbero, pinagparlor kayo. Kanina nga nakita ko ang isang tatay na sinusuklayan ang kaniyang anak. Lumapit ako at tinanong ko kung ano ang mga pangalan nila, para naman puede kong banggitin bilang example ng mga dakilang mag-ama na team. Pagbati po kay Michaela Tecson ng Institute of Mathematics, at ang kaniyang ama, si Mervin Tecson.

If you prepared hard for today, so too did UP. Hundreds of people are mobilized, from all our academic units and offices, to ensure that our General Commencement exercises will be truly memorable for our iskolar ng bayan and your families. This year's commencement exercises, in particular, the first for UP's new president, Danilo Concepcion, involved the final phases of the makeover of Quezon Hall.

Among our preparations was a dress rehearsal, which we had last Wednesday. It was during that practice, looking out into the amphitheater, that I realized I had been on these very grounds for my graduation in 1977, 40 years ago.

Right after practice I asked our Office of the University Registrar to retrieve the commencement book of 1977, which they quickly found. There it was on the cover: the 66<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises at 3:45 in the afternoon, Sunday, the seventeenth of April, nineteen hundred and seventy seven. University Amphitheater, University Campus, Quezon City.

I thought I'd share some information to compare 1977 and 2017. In 1977, the ceremonies were held during the summer. Today, because of the shift in our academic calendar, we are holding it right at the start of the rainy season, which created many logistical challenges, including worrying about whether the rains would spoil our sunflowers, which we didn't have in 1977. Kahit halos araw araw ang ulan, natuloy ang mga sunflowers, in full splendor,; the sunflowers were as determined as you are to make today special.

In 1977, we still used the toga, which in the summer was like a portable steam bath. Fortunately, we shifted to our national attire, and the sablay, which is so much more elegant, and Filipino.

In 1977, the commencement exercises were for the entire UP – which included Diliman, Manila, Los Banos, Baguio, Cebu, Iloilo and Tacloban, still no Mindanao and the Open University. There were a total of 3536 graduates that year. Today, in 2017, we are graduating students only from UP Diliman, with a total of 4615.

The commencement book at that time gave the addresses of graduates and I could see in 1977, we had students from all over the Philippines, from Uyugan, Batanes to Bongao, Tawi-tawi (four of them in fact, all taking their master's in education), as well as 107 foreign students, the Philippines at that time seen as a regional center for excellence in higher education. Today, we don't put the addresses in the commencement book but I know the students still come from all over the country. The number of international students though has dropped through the years. We trained our international students so well, to become leaders in their own country, that they have now overtaken us.

Looking at my batch of veterinary graduates, and those of my sister, who also got a degree in occupational medicine at that time, I was reminded of the brain drain, brain hemorrhage that characterized the 1970s, especially in the health professions. UP was serving the world, our graduates leaving, and many still living overseas. My sister came from a class of 14 students, all but 2 left to work overseas (but, she qualifies in an email from Canada, some have returned to retire here, and to still find ways to serve).

We still have that brain drain today, less in the health professions but still widespread. Two years ago in Singapore I had dinner with 17 engineering graduates of UP Los Banos all there for overseas employment. At the end of our dinner, one of them told me, in a tone that seemed to console and to assure, that he was there only for the short term, and would return to the Philippines.

Most of the degree programs listed then are still around today, but there are a few that no longer exist, such as a Graduate in Nursing (GN), the Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service, and several certificate courses including one on Governmental Management, probably taken over by the Development Academy of the Philippines.

Over the last 40 years, we have developed many new programs such as archaeology, marine sciences, geography to name a few. There have been name changes as well, the most significant of which was the Bachelor of Laws being replaced by a Juris Doctor, a Doctor of Laws. Pagbati po sa mga maging Doktor Attorney.

In 1977, we awarded a Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, to the governor of Metro Manila, her name listed on page 1 of the program: Dr. Imelda Romualdez Marcos, Governor, Metro Manila. It was an awarding that was not without controversy, before and during the commencement exercises.

This year, without controversy, we award a Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, to the Budget Secretary, Dr. Benjamin Diokno.

A significant difference between 1977 and 2017 is the rise in the number of Latin honors. I do not believe this is inflationary and attribute it to the passing of terror professors, as well as getting students who are able to achieve much more, thanks to improvements in basic education and all the new technologies we have today.

In 1977, we only had four summa cum laude, the previous year only one. Today, we have 36 summa cum laude, including two units having their first summas: the Asian Institute of Tourism's Jennifer

Rucio and the College of Human Kinetics' Kathrine Adriella Bersola, star varsity volleyball player and a testimony to UP's commitment to build a national university that recognizes the importance of minds and bodies.

I notice too the College of Arts and Letters' Jose Monfred Sy, who was very active in the student council. Pinatunayan niya na puedeng maging tibak (aktibista) at summa.

Twelve of those 36 summus competed to deliver the valedictory. The judges chose Arman Ali Ghodsinia, who is graduating with a BS in molecular biology, one of the toughest degree programs in UP.

Arman has become a media celebrity and he deserves it. In so many ways, Arman represents the many changes that have occurred in the Philippines through the years. He is of mixed parentage, his father Behrouz Ghosinia, an Iranian who adopted Filipino citizenship, his mother Mariam Alonto Ali, a Maranao, from Marawi who sought a better future in Manila and, later, overseas work. His family story parallels that of many Filipinos today, Muslim or Christian. As a product of Philippine Science High School and UP, Arman shows what State-supported education can do.

Arman must remind us to go beyond honor and excellence, raising high a standard of compassion particularly in turbulent times like we have today. I will leave it to Arman to speak of that compassion, even as I thank our graduating class for the many times you did with numerous public service projects and, in the largest endeavor, a hosting of the Lakbayan with 3000 members of national minorities coming to Diliman.

Today we present to the nation all our graduates, our iskolar ng bayan. Karamihan ay mga babata ngunit may mga mas may edad din. Among our new PhDs is Marius Hernani Garcia who, at 63, proves that studying can be a lifelong endeavor.

I present our iskolar ng bayan with great pride, and gratitude, UP to the families for entrusting the nation's best minds to us, and to the nation itself, for supporting our scholars.

A last comparison of 1977 and 2017. In 1977, we were four and a half years into martial law. Our commencement exercise today happens a month into martial law in Mindanao, overlapping with Islam's sacred month of fasting and reflection. Today's commencement happens on the eve of Eid al-Fitr, the ending of Ramadan, a time for celebration and hope, and a time to renew our commitment to building peace for our nation.

Welcome to the 106<sup>th</sup> commencement exercise. Ramadan Mubarak, a blessed Ramadan. Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.

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July 1, 2017

*Despite the many trials and tribulations, looking back at the commencement that happened only a week ago, I find myself missing the frenzy. The commencement remains a high point of our academic life, and I want to thank, again and again, the "cast of thousands" who helped, working overtime, worrying about cues and missed cues and the flow of the program.*