

Keynote Address at the Kabataan (Youth) Jobs and Alternatives to Migration

By His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino III
President of the Philippines

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Magandang umaga po, maupo ho tayong lahat.

Secretary Linda Baldoz; Your Excellency Jorge Domecq; Mr. Lawrence Johnson; Kuya Leon Flores III; Ms. Jacqueline Badcock; Tito Joel Villanueva; Congressman Raymond Palatino; of course, our idol Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel; and Percival Cendaña, Earl Saavedra, and Georgina Nava of the National Youth Commission; country representatives and directors of the United Nations agencies and aid development agencies; friends from the business sector; members of the academe; community leaders, stakeholders, and advocates; fellow workers in government; honored guests; *at mga kapwa ko kabataan*:

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

It has often been said that the youth is the future. All of you gathered here today will one day be captains of industry, champions of your own causes, leaders of men and women. One day, you will have to manage and inspire others into moving toward one direction to achieve a common goal.

Many years from now, when you have grown wrinkles on your faces, perhaps one of you will be on this podium, delivering a speech to the most brilliant minds of the next generation.

By then, the important questions in your lives will no longer be: "Why is my crush taking so long to reply to my text?" or "What do I do when my mother adds me on Facebook?" [*Laughter*] The important questions will carry so much more weight; and they will have a significant impact on the lives of your fellowmen. I am telling you now: it will happen one day, and you must prepare yourselves for the responsibilities that will inevitably rest on your shoulders.

As your government now, we have an important role in preparing you for the challenges you will confront in the future. It is our duty to equip you with the knowledge and the skills you need to succeed; and to give you opportunities to achieve that success here. Here are some of the things we are and have been doing:

The Department of Education has been exploring ways to widen access to schooling and to give our students education that is at par with global standards. Within our term, they have already constructed almost 2,500 classrooms, with around 9,000 more on the way after the proper bidding and procurement processes are observed.

They are also set to begin their phased implementation of the K + 12 program, which will add two more basic years to the basic curriculum. We are doing this not to give students a harder time; we are doing this to equip them with the skills necessary to succeed in a job market that is increasingly becoming more globally competitive.

Moreover, one of the conditions of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's large-scale conditional cash transfer program is that the beneficiaries send their kids to school. So with this, we hope to have even more of our youth graduate with the necessary skills for employment.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) is implementing the 700 million peso Training-for-Work Scholarship program (TWSP) this year. The TWSP is designed to directly intervene in the provision of training programs to supply highly critical skills and competencies needed by the economy, particularly the key employment-generating industries, or the ones directly connected to existing jobs for immediate employment.

The Department of Labor and Employment has also been hard at work to create opportunities for our youth. If you have not heard of it, they are implementing the YE-YE project, which means Youth Education – Youth Employability, where DOLE collaborates with private companies and schools to give our high school graduates tuition fee advances, so that they may take vocational courses or even go to college. Jollibee Foods Corporation, in collaboration with partner schools, has actually already absorbed as regular workers more than a hundred YE-YE participants, and we are hopeful that this number will grow in the future.

I know that many people your age are concerned whether the skills they learned in school will enable them to find well-paying jobs. We are hearing stories of newly graduated nurses who are met with a job market with no place for them. At the same time, we hear about how there are so many unfilled positions in the BPO sector, for example. This is what we call job mismatch; and this is why we are working to give our students the skills they need to find jobs in industries that are actually hiring.

Four months ago, DOLE launched the Online Career Guide, which allows both high school students and jobseekers to see what the labor market is like—specifically, what jobs will be in demand in the next five to 10 years—and this is updated every two years.

CHED has likewise issued a moratorium on the opening of new programs in nursing, business administration, education, hotel and restaurant management, and information technology education for 2011 to 2012. And they have done this for two reasons: so that the quality of existing programs is sustained, and so that we can focus on other courses that can offer the best chances of employment.

There is also Phil-JobNet, which is an initiative of our Labor Department as well. It is an online portal for jobs and skills matching; and we have recently enhanced it through the establishment of a Skills Registry System so that potential employees can better advertise their skills and qualifications. Think of it as a dating site between employers and jobseekers—one that we are constantly upgrading so that more people can find their match.

Why are we doing all of this? Why are we working overtime to address these issues when we can just fulfil the minimum that is required of us? The answer is simple: Because it is worth it. It is worth it if we can give our youth the knowledge, the opportunity, and the quality of life they truly deserve. It is worth it if we can create enough opportunities for success here so that the most brilliant of our people, should they decide to work overseas, do so not out of necessity but rather as a choice. It is worth it if we can build a Philippines we can all be proud of.

So as someone who is slightly older and a bit more experienced, and as President of the Philippines, I am calling on all of you to contribute to this cause—to make the most of your opportunities; to constantly strive for excellence; to go beyond yourselves, to push yourselves, and to always raise the bar. Perhaps, more importantly, I am calling on you not only to harness the positive energy that is prevalent in our country again, but also to contribute to it: by extending to others compassion and gratitude and by always being responsible for the effects your actions have on others.

And while I speak here mostly to the Filipino youth, I am certain that even other countries—the whole of humanity—will be well-served by a generation that is motivated, compassionate, and responsible.

Rest assured, I will follow through on my own commitments as well, so that my generation can bequeath to our young citizens a Philippines whose progress they can build upon. We do our work in different environments and different settings, and carry different responsibilities on our shoulders. But rebuilding our country, after all, is a team effort. Together, as one team, let us do what we can to our individual capacities to bring our beloved country back to its rightful place in the sun.

And in closing, may I just stress: We are confident that when the time comes that you will pass on the mantle of responsibilities to the next generation, you will undoubtedly even build upon the successes we are now achieving.

Thank you. Good day