

**UP Manila - College of Arts and Sciences
Recognition Day Exercises, 22 April 2014**

**Naderev Yeb M. Saño
Guest of Honor and Speaker**

Sa mga opisyal ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, sa mga namumuno at nangangasiwa sa UP Manila, sa pangunguna ni Chancellor Manuel Agulto, at sa mga opisyal ng College of Arts and Sciences sa pangunguna ni Dean Alex Gonzaga, magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

My dear friends, the Class of 2014, I am honored to be with you today as you celebrate this very important milestone in your lives.

I graduated from college myself almost two decades ago. Time seems to have flown so fast, but in fact, two decades is a lot of time for many things to change. For someone like me, more than two decades is more than enough time for me to prove that (and I am not saying this because I am a Filipino) the Philippines is the most beautiful country in the world, Filipinos are the most beautiful people, that the Filipino Spirit is incredibly inspiring, and that this nation is worth fighting and dying for and more importantly, worth living for.

Kanina po at tuwing inaawit natin ang Pambansang Awit, Lupang Hinirang. Ang mamatay nang dahil sa iyo.

As my own journey brought me to five continents, and practically to every region of the Philippines, from Aparri to Tawi-Tawi, from the West Philippine Sea to the Philippine Deep, I have also realized that the path to discovering the Filipino Spirit is not a clear path. On many occasions, I had to struggle to understand whether this Republic even had hope of being a country with a clear national identity. It was on this same journey that made me realize that success in life means more than what many of us perceive it to be.

At the onset, let me reflect on why I stand before you today. I am not a wealthy businessman. I am not a talk show host. I am not a rock star. I did not invent a really cool cellphone. I am not a famous politician. And no, I am not Iron Man.

It is my belief that my passion to defend Mother Earth and fight for our country is the main reason why I was given this honor to address you today. And what a perfect day for us to be together as we celebrate and commemorate the Earth Day on its 44th year. Happy Earth Day po sa inyong lahat.

Certainly, nobody will ever forget November 8, 2013, as it is forever etched in our hearts, even painfully, when the strongest storm in the history of humanity made landfall in the Philippines. And three days after Super Typhoon Yolanda hit the

Philippines, I was given the honor of standing on behalf of the Philippines at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Warsaw, and appealed to the whole world to take urgent action to address the planetary crisis. We all know how Yolanda devastated communities and claimed thousands of lives.

It will also be recalled that while I was in Warsaw, I underwent 14 days of fasting in solidarity with Typhoon Yolanda victims and all victims of climate injustice and exploitation all over the world. After those two weeks without food, I had lost more than 26 pounds. Every 1st of the month, hundreds of thousands of people around the world are joining me as I fast for the planet. On May 1st, millions around the world will be joining. Today, Earth Day, I again stand with many people around the world who are embarking on a 10-day Fasting for the Earth. #nasisiraankanabangbait #malalanasiguroangproblema

When we talk about saving the planet, it must mean the planet needs saving.

But let me summarize the planetary problem in three words. All these three words start with the letter A. Avarice – extreme greed, which has driven the gap between the rich and the poor wider. Arrogance – the belief that we have absolute dominion over nature. Apathy – which I would explain by borrowing the words of Robert Swan: *“The greatest threat to this planet is the belief that someone else will save it.”*

Because of Avarice, Arrogance, and Apathy, we find ourselves in a deadly mix of problems that is devastating the environment, driving more people into poverty, and destroying the moral fabric of our society.

Indeed, Mother Earth is asking for help. The kind of environment we see today is even much different from the environment we saw when I graduated from college. The water, air, and land have become very polluted. All over the world, garbage, especially the accumulation of non-biodegradable waste, has become a very serious problem. Many species of plants and animals have gone extinct, some of them even before they are even discovered by science. Every year, up to 300 species of plants and animals go extinct, forever. Today, 5,000 species of animals are officially on the endangered or threatened list.

A lot of things can happen in 20 years. A lot of heartbreaking things have happened to the environment between my graduation and yours.

Today, every living natural system in the world is in serious decline. Every living natural system. Rivers, lakes, oceans, forests, coral reefs, watersheds, fish, wildlife, birds, mammals, reptiles, tropical countries, temperate regions, even polar regions – everything is in bad shape.

Here in the Philippines, more than 90% of our fish stocks have been decimated. You also know that fish spawn and breed in coral reefs. Today, less than 1% of

our coral reefs are in excellent condition. As for our forests, from as much as 30 million hectares of virgin forests 100 years ago, we are now down to only less than 1 million hectares of virgin forests or about 3% remaining. Many of our rivers have been rendered biologically dead and are among the dirtiest rivers in the world. The mountains are denuded and our sources of water are also becoming compromised with the continued abuse of the environment all in the name of economic progress. As a result of human neglect, we suffer from massive floods, disease epidemics, and a host of other environmental problems. The Philippine Eagle, supposedly a proud symbol of our country, stands in a precarious situation as possibly as few as 180 eagles remain.

And then, we have climate change – the most serious problem that humanity has ever faced. Now, I invite you to take a very deep breath. We are the first generation of human beings to inhale air with more than 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide. The increasing concentration levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are driving the climate into chaos.

Climate change is happening here and now, and things will get worse before we see anything better. There is no doubt that climate change would deepen poverty thereby posing a tremendous challenge to social and human development.

If climate change is not addressed urgently and adequately, it could seriously hinder our aspirations, not just as a country, but also for each one of you personally, for a brighter future. As such, we do not have the luxury of time.

I don't think I have to elaborate on the profound impacts of climate change. Super Typhoon Yolanda has done that already.

I wish to emphasize that your generation and the generations to come will bear a lot of the impacts of environmental degradation. BUT ALSO your generation is the generation that is in the perfect position to **make a difference** and turn things around.

As you culminate your student life in UP, I wish to send your way some reminders that UP does not merely stand for University of the Philippines.

In the context of the upheavals, trials, triumphs, and evolving story of your lives and the unfolding history of the University, the two letters UP stand for a lot more.

UP means UNDERSTAND (YOUR) PURPOSE

Let me tell you a story about a man who found his purpose.

This is a love story. There was a man who fell in love with a woman. Itago na lang natin sa pangalan na Victor. The man fell in love with a woman, but even

before they became a couple (bago naging “sila”), the woman was diagnosed with cancer of the thyroid. According to the doctors, it was not the harshest prognosis and many have gone to live normal lives after surviving thyroid cancer. But then again, her mother succumbed at the age of 53 to cancer as well. So the news came really as a chilling shock to both of them. At that point, the woman told man, “Hey let’s just try to think through this carefully. I’m sick. You’ve got to let me go.” “Let’s just be friends.” #friendzone. Ouch. It never really occurred to Victor that the situation could lead to that. He told her “we’ll get through this together and let’s take it one day at a time.” A month later, she was in the hospital for a major surgery and her entire thyroid gland was excised so as to remove the disease. It was followed by a series of radioactive treatments that saw them waving at each other from behind a wall of glass because she can’t be in contact with anyone during those sessions. Then fast forward to two years after. Victor had come back from the US after studying and the couple had started to plan their wedding. About a week before their wedding, they found themselves having the almost the same exact conversation 24 months before. The woman said, “Hey, do you really want to do this? Let’s just call it off. Let’s just be friends. [friendzone] If you’re worried about what other people might think if you leave me, I will do all the explaining to the whole world. You’ve got to think about this very seriously. I’m not well,” she said half-joking. But in a more serious tone, she said, “You will have to take care of me for the rest of your life.” At that moment, Victor told her, “That is exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life.”

You see, this was my own love story. Now, this is not Ted Mosby relating “How I Met Your Mother.” You see, before my wife and I had a family of our own, we had to go through this difficult time. You know, my young friends, my wife usually would not want me to talk about this in public and I apologize to her for spilling out the beans, but for today, as I stand before you, and as I look at your faces and into your eyes, I truly know this is a special day for you so I have decided to let you in on this very personal story. Because I want you to know that since that moment, I knew what I was on Earth for. I realized my purpose. Everything else was a bonus. And that is why it is easy for me to stand for what I believe in. Because I have nothing to lose.

For me as a husband and father, life is about loving, marveling about nature, being a supportive husband to my wife, celebrating with my wife as she brings that life out into this world, embracing our new born baby, helping breastfeed the baby, finding delight in my baby’s first words or first steps, watching them grow, going on vacations with my family, and guiding my children so they will have a sense of purpose. I am constantly on a journey with my family.

And then one day I found myself having a conversation with Mother Earth. She said, “I am not well. You might as well pursue another career that will get you a fancy car, a nice house, a lot of fame and fortune.” “If you are going to be an environmentalist, that means you’ll have to take care of me for the rest of your life.” I told Mother Earth, “That is exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life.”

And that is why I stand before you today.

UP stands for UPHOLD THE PRESENT.

I am also a SCUBA diver and an avid wildlife photographer. Just last week I went diving in Tubbataha Reefs and it truly was amazing. I love nature - I love the smell of the ocean breeze. I love looking at the stars on a lovely clear evening. I love to travel and I enjoy the sound of waves on the beach or the symphony of birds and the chirping of crickets.

These are important because excellence would mean nothing if you cannot appreciate the beauty of life. Success means nothing if you missed out on the beauty of God's creation and the simple sources of happiness in life, if your family is not happy, or if you have no friends.

Have a life that allows you to smell the flowers. A life that allows you to ENJOY THE VIEW. A life that allows you to serve people who are in need. A life in which you are loved and you love others. A life in which you are interdependent and CONNECTED with others. A life which allows you to be UPHOLD THE PRESENT.

The pursuit of excellence is usually a road filled with good intentions but riddled with temptations to be selfish. Excellence is not so much about material wealth or fame. It is about being here – it is about being a real GIFT to others – about being PRESENT. I am sure you saw the movie, “Kung Fu Panda”, one of my kids' favorite movies. In one of the scenes, it was said - “Yesterday is history. Tomorrow, a mystery. But today is a GIFT. That is why it is called the PRESENT.”

To the parents present here today, thank you for being PRESENT. Not just today for this Recognition Day or on April 25 on your child's graduation but for being present day in and day out. You have done your job and now your sons and daughters graduate from UP. As a father, that is something even I dream of. You have every reason to be proud.

UP demands us to UPLIFT THE PEOPLE and UPLIFT THE POOR

True to the bold tradition of UP, what truly sets us apart is we are molded into women and men who strive to serve the people. Not merely to repay our dues as iskolar ng bayan, but because in UP, we learn to put ourselves in the context of the people. We continually ask ourselves, for whom are we here for? It has always been clear to us that as long as there are people who are exploited and abused and as long as there are people who have to suffer indignity and as long

as there is injustice in this society, our task is to be the voice for the inarticulate, to be instruments of justice and peace.

We must build a better nation

If we are to confront our problems as a country effectively and pursue that bright future we all want, we must build a better nation – uplift the people, eradicate poverty, get rid of corruption, build resilient and sustainable communities, promote honor and excellence, integrity, and foster a culture of caring. We must uplift the people, and in this context, our people deserve better leaders.

Despite the gargantuan challenge that the environmental crisis is, it offers the Filipino nation the rare but golden opportunity to achieve transformative change. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE WILL MAKE THE PHILIPPINES A BETTER NATION. Simply because it is our only option. For us to weather the storm and survive, our society needs to embrace positive change. And this means the emergence of leaders who truly are committed to uplifting people's lives, and who deeply care about our country's and the planet's future.

In all these, it is a great time to be a Filipino – for our generation will be the generation that will find the political will and the courage to come together as a nation and confront the challenges we face.

It is a great time to be alive. It is a great time to be part of your generation. Why? Because someday, 50, 100 years from now, people will look up to your generation and say “those guys made it happen. They found the courage to solve the Earth crisis.” Your generation will have to make it happen. Otherwise, it might be too late. So while a lot of the weight is on our shoulders, it is an excellent opportunity for us.

While diving in Tubbataha, I was reminded of the great explorer, Jacques Cousteau, and of his words: “Unless we do something radical today, we will be unable to do anything tomorrow.”

You might ask yourself, “How do I really make a difference in this world?”

Make a difference

Let me tell you another story.

“Once upon a time, there was an old man who was walking along the beach and as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and from a distance he saw someone who seemed to be dancing. When he came closer, hindi pala sumasayaw (it wasn't a dancer). When he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young girl, and that what she was doing was not dancing

at all. The little girl was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean.

Nilapitan nya ang bata at tinanong niya, "Anong ginagawa mo?" (He came closer yet and asked the girl, "May I ask what it is that you are doing?")

The young girl paused, looked up, and replied "I am picking up the starfish and throwing them back into the ocean."

"I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled old man.

To this, the young girl replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they will all die."

The man then realized there were so many starfish on the beach, literally thousands, and so he told the girl, "But, young girl, do you not realize that there are thousands and thousands of starfish and it would be impossible to save all of them? Surely, many of them will die. You just cannot make a difference!"

*At this, the young girl bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, she said, **"I made a difference for that one!"***

This is how we can make a difference. Every small step. Every small act. Every single thing we do, when gather together, collectively we make a difference. From the Lord of the Rings, I quote Gandalf: "Some believe it is only GREAT POWER that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I have found that it is the small every day deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."

This, my friends, is how you can make a difference.

Change the World

A few months ago, on December 5, 2013, the great Nelson Mandela passed on. And I borrow his words today. Mandela proclaimed, "Education is the most powerful [weapon] instrument which you can use to change the world." Indeed it is. So, go out there, stand proud of your UP education and change the world! This is why I am truly impressed and inspired by your perseverance and pursuing this path of excellence – to our dear parents for sending your children to UP; and to the teachers and university staff for your dedication to upholding the values of honor and excellence and service to the people.

Wisdom from my father

I end with a piece of wisdom that I learned from my father. He has taught us, his four sons, many times, both out loud and silently: "Don't worry about success, don't worry about making a name for yourself. Worry about making a difference, and everything else follows."

To the Class of 2014, University of the Philippines Manila CAS, to your parents, grandparents, guardians, brothers and sisters, friends, lovers, teachers, school staff, your yayas, you all deserve a glorious day.

Go forth, stand steadfast, understand your purpose, uphold the present, uplift the poor, loyal daughters and sons to UP you'll ever be, sing forth the message, ring out with courage, hail to the hope of our dear land, go out there and make a difference. Isang makabuluhang Araw ng Daigdig. Happy Earth Day po sa inyong lahat. **Mabuhay ang pag-asa ng bayan! Congratulations! Maraming salamat po.**