

**Message of H.E. Ambassador Millicent Cruz – Paredes
to the Filipino Community in Thailand
On the Occasion of the Commemoration of the 124th Anniversary of the Death
of Dr. Jose Rizal
30 December 2020, Bangkok**

*Adiós, Patria adorada, región del sol querida,
Perla del mar de oriente, nuestro perdido Edén!
A darte voy alegre la triste mustia vida,
Y fuera más brillante, más fresca, más florida,
También por ti la diera, la diera por tu bien.*

Farewell, my adored Land, region of the sun caressed,
Pearl of the Orient Sea, our Eden lost,
With gladness I give you my life, sad and repressed;
And were it more brilliant, more fresh and at its best,
I would still give it to you for your welfare at most.

Magandang araw sa lahat ng aking mga kababayan sa Thailand. I enjoin you all to take a brief pause with me and the Philippine Embassy, and remember the 124th death anniversary of our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal.

Those of you who remember your Filipino history lessons, or Rizal 101 courses in college, would be aware that I quoted the first stanza of Rizal's *Mi Ultimo Adios*, or My Last Farewell.

We commemorate the death of Jose Rizal every year exactly because he gladly offered his life in the best interests of his country and his people. We commemorate his death in order to acknowledge his pivotal role in the birth of the Filipino nation.

His death in 1896 was like the spark that kindled the fervor of nationalism in the hearts of Filipinos, mobilizing them to revolution and the declaration of independence from Spain in 1898. In life, Rizal took it upon himself to illuminate the minds of his compatriots through his work, particularly his novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. He challenged his countrymen to dare dream a Filipino identity, a Filipino nation. It was not for nothing that the late diplomat and novelist Leon Maria Guerrero called Rizal "The First Filipino."

As we stand at the crossroads of an unprecedented 2020 and the anticipated challenge of 2021, let us take the opportunity to reflect on Rizal's parting words. If Rizal were alive today, would he see the Filipino nation as sun caressed, a pearl of the orient sea, an eden to be regained? Would he, again, gladly sacrifice his life, at its best, its freshest and most brilliant, for the welfare of the Filipino nation?

I say yes: we owe it to him to see the Filipino nation as sun caressed, a pearl of the orient sea and an eden to be regained. We should therefore strive to be the best Filipino citizens, each and every one of us, in our own ways, and through our own unique gifts and talents. We owe it to Rizal to genuinely pull together and contribute to Philippine nation-building.

It is time to give back. The time to honor Rizal's sacrifice has long been overdue.