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19th Annual Scientific Meeting KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Chairman
National Centennial Commission

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

SALVADOR LAUREL

Chairman

National Centennial Commission

There is one point I would like to stress at the beginning and that it is natural for our scientists, the best scientific minds, the best academicians to now be involved in the celebration of our centennial. Why? Because our own revolutionary heroes, the finest intellects, or the finest minds of our revolution namely Rizal, an Ateneo product and Mabini, a UST product, wanted to have an industrial revolution during their time. As far back as 1896, 1890's they were already dreaming of being able to duplicate here in our country the industrial revolution that was then taking place in Europe. They wanted an industrial revolution because it was this significant event, which gave rise to democratization movement in France and America reading some of the materials I received you were the founders, the founding fathers of DOST or NAST were similarly inspired by the examples set by the scientific academies in Europe and the US. So there is a close connection between the nationalism of our forebears and your commitment today to make this country abreast to the latest in the global economy now taking place so that we can be more competitive, so that we can sustain our development and maintain our political independence and economic independence. I did not prepare any particular written speech for this morning because I would like to just drive home one point and a keynote should not cover too many things like – who was this who say, it was long enough to cover the important parts but short enough to be interesting, so let this keynote speech be that interesting and that short.

When President Ramos asked me to take over the Chairmanship of the Centennial Commission, I accepted without hesitation but I asked him two conditions. "Mr. President," I said, "may I just ask for two things as a condition?" "What's that?" he said over the phone. "I would like to serve for free. Please do not pay me a single centavo as compensation. I want this centennial celebration of our country to be above politics. And he readily agreed and that's why I believe that the scientists of our country who are above politics will feel at home and comfortable in the celebration of our centennial. I could speak to you freely because I feel comfortable here because I know that some people regard science as something. The group of academicians and scientists are supposed to be an elite group but your response to this appeal to get involved in the club of our centennial shows

that you are not detached from items that really matter like the celebration of our 100 anniversary.

The objective of all these celebrations is to bring about a renaissance of the Filipino spirit. We will have the hoopla, we will have the parades, the speeches, the singing, the dancing, the banquets, the fireworks. Yes, we will have all that and we will try to make it as eventful and as dramatic and as memorable as possible. A song after being sung is nothing. A speech after it has been delivered is nothing. After the parade, the fireworks, it's gone. What we want is to have something that will remain and be passed on to the next generation. And what is that? that is the spirit of our race. The spirit that enabled our forefathers to make that quantum leap and enable them to make this country become the first constitutional democracy in Asia. That is something that they were able to do at a time when no other country in Asia fought for freedom. We fought for freedom. What made our forefathers garner the courage to fight for our freedom. That is what we want to review. And how do we intend to do that? How do we intend to review the Filipino spirit? By the Centennial Movement, by becoming members of the Centennial Movement.

What we want to achieve through the movement is the passing of the torch to the next generation. Every generation has a responsibility to pass on what he knows about the past to the next generation. The collective memory of a people is what keeps us together and strong. The collective memory of the people is what our generation passed on to the next generation. Nowadays, as we celebrate the celebration of our centennial, we ask, "What did our forefathers do in their time? And the answer came, and they're magnificent. They did brilliantly. They contributed so much that made us a nation. But a hundred years from now, another generation will ask the same questions. Yes, they will also ask what Rizal and Mabini and their fathers did for our country during their time. They will ask, "What did the generation of 1998 did in their time? We are in that generation. The answers to the questions that our great grandchildren will ask a 100 years from now is what you are going to do now. And so that we are sure that they know that you participated in the celebration of our centennial, we are going to place a golden roll of honor the names of all those who joined the Centennial Movement today. It will be listed and placed in a time capsule and dropped in the Center of Clark field on June 12, 1998 and it would be vacuum sealed and it will not be opened until June 12, 2098. It would be your grandchildren who will open them and it would be good if they see the list of their grandfathers listed there as having given your share. Let me take advantage of this opportunity to tell you about one particular success that we attained so far. It will give you an idea of the magnitude of what we are trying to do on this first centennial. We're trying to involve in our centennial the countries that influenced us in our ways. Well, one of the first countries I asked to participate in our centennial was Spain. Spain had been with us for 350 years or more and so the first country I approached to participate was Spain. And when I went to the Ambassador of Spain to ask them to participate, to ask them to put up a status of Rizal in Madrid, they were non-committant. They would not respond, they were

polite but they would not say "yes" but they would not also say "no", and so after three months of waiting, I became weary and I told the President "Mr. President, I think we have to go to Spain. Why? Because the ambassador here in the Philippines was not giving any definite commitment. Let's go to Spain and talk to the highest official there and tell that this is very important for us, for our people, and for our relationship – Spain and the Philippines." He agreed and so we went. We arrived there September of 1995 and we met with the Highest officials. And when we were there gathered in a long table with the top officials of Spain, they first gave us brandy and we drunk after the toast. And then they gave us another round of another brandy. And we have to be polite so they poured another half glass and we drank. They asked somebody who's fluent in English to talk to us because they know that President Ramos and I were not proficient anymore in Spanish and they said, "Excellencies, we have a problem. We want to participate in your centennial but we have a big problem. You see what you are celebrating, the centennial of your declaration of independence, was our defeat. Your victory was our disaster. 1898 was the year we lost not only the Philippines but we lost Cuba, we lost Puerto Rico, we lost the Marianas, we lost the Carolines, we lost Guam and the American. So how can we celebrate our disaster? Tell us, help us so we can explain and defend that to our people.

I said, "I agree with you, Excellencies, you are correct and you are very human to be hesitant about celebrating your or your defeat. That's very human." And so they were nodding. "But you forget two things. You forget two very important things. First you are forgetting that Spain produced, Spain educated Rizal. You allowed him to study in the best schools in the Philippines, at the Ateneo de Manila, he was one of our best students there, at the University of Sto. Tomas. You allowed him to study in Madrid and because of that he mastered the Spanish language and wrote the most beautiful novel "Mi Ultimo Adios" which inspired our people to rise for our freedom, so you have to pay credit also for Rizal. You cannot be hands-off on Rizal because you produced our national hero. They were very quiet. And then I said, "The second point you are forgetting – the nobility of the Spanish people. Spain is noble. The Spanish said I saw the Statue of Senor Bolivar at the Heart of Parque dela Huerte. A beautiful monument with Senor Bolivar riding on a horse and a big name there says Senor Bolivar, a grand liberator. You are honoring a man who used the sword to fight against Spain and liberate the South American colonists of Spain to become independent but because of Spanish nobility, you erect a monument to honor Senor Bolivar who used the sword and shed so much blood. On the Spanish people, Rizal did the same thing only he did not use the sword. He used the pluma; he just used a pen. He did not shed a single drop of Spanish blood. Yes, you had him executed, you have him court martialled, you had him shot by firing squad as a traitor to heal to Spain but that was 100 years ago. Time have a tendency to heal all wounds and make the real nature of a people rise above the dim and that is the nobility of Spain. There is a difference between what Rizal and Bolivar did. They both tried to gain the freedom of their

country. And now you are honoring Bolivar but you are not honoring Rizal. I hope it is not because Rizal's skin was darker. After a few seconds, the Prime Minister, the foreign minister, the cultural minister said, "With your permission, may we be allowed to withdraw. We would like to talk among ourselves because this is a very important point." And they withdrew. After 20 minutes, they came out again and made an announcement. "Excellencies, we have reached a decision. We have decided to claim Rizal as our product. We will honor Rizal. We will give him the same honor we gave Bolivar. We are going to give him a better place, a more beautiful park in Parque de San Tander. We will give you 800 sq. m. and we will put up the pedestal, you just take care of the statue." And then I said, "What statue, Excellencies? Rizal was so many things. He was a linguist, a doctor, a novelist, a marksman, a swordsman, a painter, a sculptor. Without hesitation they said, we will put up "the exact replica of the monument of Rizal at the Luneta." And then I looked at the President and he gave the signal. I said, "We will deliver it to you." I shook their hands, and it is agreed, it is going to weigh about 8 tons but we will send it by plane part by part. One thing more beautiful there is, it is located at the corner of the Parque de San Tander and fronting Avenida de las Filipinas – in front of it will be the Avenue of the Philippine Islands and they were planning to name the other street adjoining it as Avenida Rizal and it is close to Canal de Isabelo Catolico. At night if you see it, if you have the chance in going to Spain, don't miss going to Parque de San Tander. You will see the monument of Rizal there, in its full beauty, lighted and at the left side of the statue if you're facing it you will see the Spanish text of "Mi Ultimo Adios" so that those passers by, those who speak Spanish only can read the Spanish and they are now admiring Rizal more for that. And our Filipinos there, our OCWs there are also able to read "Mi Ultimo Adios" which is in Filipino. That gives you an idea of what we are trying to do in our time. Rizal was executed 100 years ago in 1897 and from the time he was executed as a traitor to Spain, his picture, his bust, his statues were all banned for 100 years. But now, even Spain has turned around. No longer it regards Rizal as a traitor, he is now considered a great man, a great champion of democracy and freedom and you can be proud of that.

I extend my warmest congratulations to NAST for successfully holding this 19th ASM a great part of the celebration of the Philippine Centenary. Rizal wrote,

"Genius knows no country; genius sprouts everywhere; genius is like light, air, the patrimony of everybody, cosmopolitan like space, like life, like God."

Those words suit well with our prominent Academicians and beloved National Scientists. You are a few invaluable treasures this country has had today. I hope your scientific legacy will go on as we make our history till the next Centenary.

Thank you and good day.