



Remarks of Consul General Henry S. Bensurto Jr.

Report to the Community

Kalayaan Hall, 02 February 2018

“Spark*Connect*Empower*: 2017 in Review”

1. Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.
2. On behalf of my wife Mariza, my son Matthew, my new Deputy Consul General Raquel Solano and her husband, Rollie, and the officers and staff of the entire Philippine Consulate General which includes the partner agencies, allow me to greet all of you a Happy New Year!
3. Thank you for coming to tonight’s reception. Apart from the joy of welcoming 2018 amongst the company of our partners and friends, we thought it is an opportune time to continue the tradition we have started last year: To report to you, the Filipino Community, what we – together – have accomplished in 2017, and to highlight successes and challenges in hopes of encouraging all of us to continue the momentum and aim higher in 2018.
4. I’ve said this before, but it bears repeating: **You, the community, are our partners in nation-building.** Your successes are our collective triumphs, and your challenges are also collectively ours to bear and overcome.

5. As we look back on the previous year, allow me to step back and recall the time that the Philippine Consulate General had a vision, long before the vision became a movement.
6. This was a vision born of a deep understanding of the importance of the Filipino Diaspora in their role as the Philippines' partners for development. It was also a recognition of, and a response to, the changing nature of our demographics in the United States.
7. Let me expound on this.
8. The Filipino nation, an entity that thrives beyond the political and territorial borders of the Philippines, is 100 million people strong all over the world. Of that number, 10.2 million Filipinos – the diaspora – live and work abroad. Filipinos in the United States belong to a subset of this group, which is a community of 3.7 million, or 36 percent of the diaspora. Over one million of that is under the jurisdiction and care of this Consulate.
9. Our great numbers have a correspondingly great impact.
10. We call you, the diaspora, as our partners in nation-building because you serve a fundamental role in the socio-economic development of the motherland.
11. Your remittances to family members fuel consumer spending, investment, and entrepreneurial growth, as well as promote economic resilience by buttressing international reserves and the Philippine Peso.
12. The valuable skills and contacts you've gained overseas are transferred back home when you choose to start or seed businesses, or when you mentor fellow Filipinos.
13. Your mere presence in the Bay Area spur trade by introducing local products to areas you choose to settle, as distributors respond by connecting producers to consumers. Something as seemingly simple as "buying Filipino" – such as using *balikbayan* box services, traveling with Philippine Airlines, visiting the Philippines as tourists, or buying your favorite Filipino products from supermarkets and stores – boost the economy back home.
14. Beyond economics, your presence in the United States strengthen the decades-long friendship between the Philippines and the U.S. Despite these two countries being half a world away from each other, the Filipino community in the U.S. effectively promotes strong people-to-people ties and cultural understanding.
15. As a large community, you have the potential to influence the U.S. political and legislative landscape through the exercise of your right to suffrage. By registering as voters, you can select officials who will fight for the kind of life you desire for your

children, friends, and loved ones both here and in the Philippines. By serving in office as public servants, you can become champions of the ordinary Filipino and Filipino-American's aspirations.

16. Your advocacies demonstrate that Filipinos and Filipino-Americans in the United States are positive agents of change that contribute to your respective communities. By being active in your respective organizations and engaging in civic life, you ensure that the Filipino people's sentiments are recognized and understood by the U.S. Government.
17. However, things may not always stay the same.
18. The Filipino-American Community in the U.S. is at a tipping point. The number of first generation Filipino Americans is diminishing, giving way to the second and third generation of Millennials and Generation Z. More than 50% of the population is now composed of Millennials and the youth, many of whom have never been to the Philippines, and whose connection to the Motherland have grown tenuous after years of living overseas.
19. The generation gap is imminent, and must be bridged lest it impacts our Filipino community and erodes the economic, political, and cultural gains of the past years.
20. This gave birth to our battle cry, "**SPARK, CONNECT, and EMPOWER.**"
21. More than ever, we recognized the need to reach out to the Filipino-American community, across all generations. We accomplished this through programs that **spark** interest and pride in our roots and the motherland.
22. Understanding that there is strength in numbers and that "it takes a village", we sought to pursue activities that **connect** Filipinos and Filipino-Americans with each other, with their community, with their country, and with their heritage.
23. We see our elder generations as mentors, a bridge to our past, and a guiding hand for our youth in their future. Meanwhile, we see our youth as the banner men that will lead our diverse community into the future.
24. In all we do, our aspiration is to bolster an **empowered** community that elevates the profile and influence of the Filipino and Filipino-American community in the U.S.; a Filipino American community that, in turn, empowers *Kababayans* back home.
25. At this point, let us look back at the triumphs of the past year.

POLITICAL ADVOCACIES

26. In 2017, we have witnessed drastic **shifts in U.S. immigration policies** that affect our community. Recognizing that lack of information creates uncertainty, which in turn generates fear, the Philippine Consulate General partnered with several organizations to provide avenues for information dissemination and dialogue with affected Filipinos and Filipino Americans.
27. Allow me to thank various individuals, firms, and groups that answered the Consulate's call for consultations and discourse as soon as the Executive Order on Immigration came out: Atty. Lourdes Tancinco of the Veteran's Equity Center; Atty. Robert Yabes and the rest of the Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; and the officers and members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) - California Chapter.
28. When the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA** was rescinded, the Pilipino Bayanihan Resource Center (PBRC), the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) California Chapter, FilAm Star, FilAm Radio, and the Philippine Consulate General banded together to provide a public forum on immigration on 13 September 2017. Together, we provided a background on DACA, discussed the rescission's implications, and dispensed advice for affected Filipinos. We thank FilAm Star for providing media support in order to expand reach; through its streaming platforms, thousands of *Kababayans* were able to virtually attend from the privacy of their homes.
29. The Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco also hosted an immigration forum on DACA on 15 September 2017 at the Philippine Center's Social Hall. Atty. Lourdes Tancinco, alongside myself, served as resource persons. Through social media livestreaming, the Consulate reached nearly four thousand people through shares and views, proving that this is a topic of great interest to the community.
30. Challenges in immigration issues aside, we also had reasons to celebrate.
31. Seventy-five years in the making, the **Congressional Gold Medal** was finally presented to Filipino World War II veterans on 25 October 2017 during a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol. Finally, the ultimate sacrifice of the Filipinos and Filipino Americans who fought in World War II has been honored.
32. We recognize the efforts of the **Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project (FilVetREP)**, an all-volunteer initiative that began in 2014. The group tirelessly lobbied Congress to secure this highest civilian honor for our veterans, and spear-headed a country-wide fund-raising drive to pay for the bronze replicas of the single Congressional Gold Medal. The replicas will be given to veterans and family members who are part of FilVetREP's registry. We also thank the various

Filipino American communities, not only in the Bay Area but across multiple states, which supported this venture through local fund-raising and information dissemination activities.

33. We also celebrated seventeen years of partnership with the **Filipino-American Law Enforcement Officers Association (FALEO)** which spans a variety of joint activities with Philippine law enforcement agencies. This includes, but is not limited to: skills training, sharing of best practices and knowledge in policing, providing supplies and other donations, and engaging Filipino communities at the grassroots level. Last December, **PNP Director General Ronald Dela Rosa** conducted an official visit to San Francisco to personally meet with San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) officials and members of FALEO in order to further this relationship.
34. In the realm of the consular corps, my wife Mariza and I have done our best to represent the Philippines. I am proud to say that Mariza was elected **President of the League of San Francisco Consular Corps**, or LSFCC, on 06 June 2017. LSFCC is a non-profit, apolitical, non-partisan organization founded in 1989 composed of spouses and partners of members of the San Francisco Consular Corps, as well as retired diplomats.
35. Three months later, on 13 September 2017, I was named **Dean of the San Francisco Consular Corps**, a body of 78 Consulates that represents one of the largest diplomatic communities in the United States.
36. Just a few months ago, we also witnessed several **Filipino-American elected officials** rise to the occasion as public servants.
37. We congratulate **Ms. Hydra Mendoza-McDonell**, the first and only Filipina elected to office in San Francisco, in her new role as President of the San Francisco Board of Education for the 2018-19 school year.
38. During Daly City's Council reorganization on 11 December 2017, **Ms. Juslyn Manalo, and Mr. Raymond Buenaventura** were elected as Mayor and Vice Mayor, respectively. We thank Councilmember Glenn Sylvester for his service as previous mayor.
39. On 19 December 2017, **Mr. Gabriel "Gabe" Quinto** was installed Mayor of El Cerrito City. Mr. Quinto is the first Filipino American and LGBT mayor in El Cerrito's one hundred year history. He was sworn into office by Contra Costa's Superior Court Judge Benjamin "Ben" T. Reyes II, the first ever Filipino American judge to serve on the Contra Costa County bench and the second Filipino American judge to serve in the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties.

40. However, there is more work to be done. Filipino-Americans have the numbers to make a difference in selecting leaders and influencing public policy, but this requires them to exercise their right to suffrage. This is why the **National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA)** flagship civic engagement program **FilAmVote** is so important. Voter education, registration, and turnout is key to political empowerment.
41. It is also for this reason that we at the Philippine Consulate General take the time to speak with our consular clients about the importance of exercising their right to vote, both in the United States and in the Philippines. We have also made it easier to register as overseas voters by integrating the process with our consular processing workflow. We are glad to report that in 2017, the Consulate has registered **11,593 new overseas voters** for the 2019 Philippine Senatorial election. We hope that all of you could also encourage your family and friends to register.

TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND TOURISM PROMOTION

42. In the area of economic development, the Philippines has much to be thankful for. The country grew at 6.7%, and remains one of the fastest growing economies in Asia, ranked third after China and Vietnam. Despite being in the United States, we do our part in the national endeavor to pursue sustainable economic development, poverty alleviation, and a more prosperous life for all Filipinos. This is accomplished through trade, investment, and tourism promotion activities hand-in-hand with the Department of Trade and Industry, headed by Commissioner Celynnne Layug, and the Department of Tourism, headed by Director Purificacion Molintas, under the One Country Team Approach.
43. To promote Philippine products, we supported the participation of twenty (20) Filipino companies in the **Winter Fancy Food Show**, held on 21-24 January 2017 at the Moscone Center. This is the West Coast's largest annual trade show devoted exclusively to specialty food and beverages, and featured close to 1,500 exhibitors and showcases more than 80,000 different specialty food and beverages across the globe. The Philippine pavilion and Filipino food exhibitors attracted 463 buyers, or the equivalent of US\$48.73 million in negotiated sales, with the brown sugar and japonica rice as best sellers.
44. Business process outsourcing is one of the key drivers of the Philippine economy and a provider of jobs. We therefore facilitated the conduct of the **Philippine Healthcare Information Management Business Process Offshoring Forum** at the San Francisco Marriott Union Square on 27 February 2017. The forum discussed new developments in the Philippine offshoring industry, and facilitated the exchange of ideas between U.S. and Philippine healthcare industry

stakeholders. A total of fifty-three (53) attendees representing companies and organizations engaged in health and business process management, consulting firms, chambers of commerce, law firms, medical group, associations, home healthcare services, transport services and media (print and TV) attended the event.

45. The agricultural sector is pivotal in generating employment for a third of the Philippine workforce, thereby reducing poverty in rural areas. Because coconut products are key exports of the country, we supported and facilitated the **2017 Philippine Coconut Roadshow** in the Bay Area and Colorado. A delegation composed of Philippine coconut manufacturers and exporters conducted market and product research and promoted coconut-based products in the U.S.
46. The Philippine startup ecosystem is a promising industry as more and more Filipinos, in particular Millennials, opt to start their own companies rather than work in existing corporate establishments. Given these developments, we embarked on activities that promote the Philippines as a potential player in the global startup community.
47. In November of 2017, we launched the first ever **StartUp MeetUp**, a quarterly networking event featuring special guests of interest to Filipino American tech professionals. The first MeetUp featured **QBO** (pronounced “kubo”) Innovation Hub, a Philippine public-private partnership (PPP) whose objective is to spur the development of the Filipino startup companies. The networking event not only gave QBO a platform to present their projects and activities with the Philippine Government, but also created a networking opportunity for disparate Filipino-American IT professionals. Post also believes that by engaging Filipino-American professionals in topics concerning the IT and startup ecosystem in the Philippines, they would become stakeholders in the country’s goal to become a noteworthy IT hub. They may partner with or invest in Philippine startups, or start their own companies in the Philippines someday.
48. Silicon Valley is the world’s innovation hub and the origin of most “disruptive” technologies predicted to upend the status quo of current industries. It is critical for the Philippines to not fall behind in terms of innovation, technology adoption, and skills development especially among the students who will become the country’s future workforce and startup entrepreneurs. As such, we acknowledge the efforts of organizations such as **PhilDev, STAC, Panalo Solutions, FASTER, and Manila Valley**, among others, for their efforts and partnership in invigorating the Filipino-American IT community in the Bay Area and the emerging startup ecosystem in the Philippines.

49. We continue to encourage tourists to “Experience the Philippines” through road shows, product launches, and participation in travel conferences. Two of the highlights was the Ambassadors’ Tour and Bring Home a Friend Campaign.
50. The **10th Ambassadors’ Tour** was a resounding success, with this Consulate able to facilitate the participation of 35 people in the tour. We thank the Philippine Airlines, Pacific Air Leisure and Rajah Tours for helping us ensure that the San Francisco delegation was taken care of. A pre-departure orientation seminar was held prior to the Tour, and travel kits were prepared for each member of the delegation. Many came back to the Consulate with the feedback that they were looking forward to the 2018 Ambassadors’ Tour, having enjoyed the itinerary in 2017. We are happy to report that only San Francisco’s delegation had millennials in attendance of the event, and that its delegation markedly grew from 2016.
51. We also launched the **Bring Home A Friend** campaign with Tourism Undersecretary Katherine de Castro, who informed travel consolidators and agencies of the mechanics of the latest campaign of DOT. The goal was to invite more people, particularly foreigners, to visit the Philippines by providing attractive incentives that would encourage both the sponsor and the invitee to visit. The event featured a performance on Filipino dances and Filipino food, as we seek not only to encourage tourism but also to promote our culture and cuisine.
52. I am glad to note that as of October 2017, total visitor arrivals to the Philippines have reached 5,474,310, which is 11.5 per cent higher than the same period last year. Generated earnings from tourism activities accumulated to Php 274,351.04 billion. These figures translate to livelihood for millions of ordinary Filipinos living and working in areas dependent on tourism.

ADMINISTRATIVE, CONSULAR, AND ASSISTANCE-TO-NATIONALS

53. The Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco is the home of the Filipino in the Bay Area and beyond. Just like in the Philippines, we always strive to ensure that our home is in order and that everyone who enters feels comfortable and safe. In this regard, we continuously improve not only our processes and procedures but also our facilities and physical space. With these improvements, we wish to spark a sense of pride in all those who visit the Consulate and instill a sense of love of country through their home in the Bay Area.
54. Perhaps what we are most proud of among our improvements in physical space is our lobby and the room where we are gathered now, the **Kalayaan Hall**. The renovation of these spaces is a product of collective leadership and team work between the Consulate General and the Philippine Center Management Board.

Serving as a multi-purpose space for various activities of the Consulate and other Filipino community organizations in the Bay Area, the Kalayaan Hall is a beautiful space that incorporates the historical architecture of the building with modern Filipiniana aesthetics.

55. Stepping outside the Hall, the renovated lobby houses the magnificent **Banaue chandelier**, specially commissioned centerpiece which is inspired by the 2,000 year-old Banaue Rice Terraces designed by Dennis Chan and composed of 28,000 pieces of gold capiz shells. It took a total of 14 days with 16 people working diligently to craft the chandelier.
56. During the **Tuloy Po Kayo Open House Event** of the Consulate on 17 November 2017, we were also able to showcase the various renovated halls inside the Consulate which include Tanay Hall featuring the various art work of the Tanay Group of Artists, which serve as the second floor document pre-processing and information section; at the sixth floor, the Rizal Hall housing the Consuls General corner which feature portraits of all Consuls General who have come before us since the establishment of the Consulate General in San Francisco; and the Baxter Hall featuring the copper plate sculptures of Esperanza Baxter adorning the hallways of the offices of the Consulate.
57. We honor the great Statesman, Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo, by aptly naming the sixth floor multi-purpose lounge after the first Filipino United Nations Secretary General. The **Carlos P. Romulo Hall** features an antique wood cabinet previously owned by Ambassador Romulo, which was donated by Mr. Richard Gervais, and a canvass reproduction of National Artist Fernando Amorsolo's portrait of The General. It is but appropriate to dedicate this Hall to one of the greatest statesmen in the 20th century, who has elevated the status of the Philippines in the international community.
58. Aside from these, we have also installed a **new air-conditioning unit** in the 6th floor consular waiting area in preparation for the inclement summer heat. I am also very pleased to report to all of you that the Consulate General has recently concluded its procurement process and will start the full **renovation and modernization of the buildings' three elevators**.
59. We have also utilized technology to provide efficient service to the public which include the installation of an **interactive information kiosk** in the lobby, an upgraded **passport queuing system** that reads out the applicant's queuing number and soon, we will upgrade our ticket dispenser to a computerized kiosk that will dispense queuing tickets on heat sensor paper.
60. We at the Consulate General acknowledge that we have clients that require extra care and attention. These include our senior citizens (60 years old and above),

persons with disabilities, pregnant women and parents with infants. We have dedicated a **courtesy lounge** for these clients and a dedicated **courtesy lane**. We seek to ensure that all clients have a comfortable and pleasant experience transacting with us.

61. Finally, to give dignity and solemnity to the occasion where our *Kababayans* reacquire their Filipino citizenship, Post has **twice-daily oath-taking ceremonies** which are now done in the spacious 5th floor Social Hall which also doubles up as the Filipino Folk Life Museum, Here, they are briefed on their rights and responsibilities after reacquiring Filipino citizenship.
62. We are also happy to report that our partnership with the **Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) California Chapter**, now under the leadership of Atty. Manuel Mallabo, remains enduring. IBP-CAL continues to provide free legal consultations every first Friday of the month as part of its advocacy to give back to the Community.
63. Did you know that the Philippine Consulate General, including its attached agencies, is comprised of a lean team of forty-five (45) people? Our jurisdiction spans ten (10) states, all the way to Alaska in the north and Colorado to the east, with over one million Filipinos under our care. Mindful of the cost and inconvenience of travel, we strived to make it easier for Filipinos and Filipino Americans to access our consular services through the **consular outreach program**.
64. As the saying goes, "If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain." In 2017, we conducted **sixteen (16) consular outreach missions and delivered 6,719 services** to multiple cities and states. This means that sixteen (16) weekends of the fifty-two (52) weekends in a year were spent on the road, working, so that we can meet the consular needs of our *Kababayans* in our jurisdiction. This also means that we have less weekends and holidays than most government employees, but we do this gladly in the name of public service.
65. We thank our outreach partners in Anchorage, Colorado Springs, Denver, Everett, Fresno, Milpitas, Portland, Sacramento, Salinas, Seattle, and Tacoma for providing the Communities a way to avail themselves of consular services without needing to travel all the way to San Francisco. These organizations volunteer their time and efforts without payment to serve their respective Filipino communities, and that, for us, is a true demonstration of *Bayanihan* spirit.
66. We are already known for having the highest number of consular outreach missions among all the Philippine Foreign Service Posts, but we are ramping up to do more in 2018. This year, we have thirty-three (33) consular outreach missions planned. We hope that this program makes a positive impact in the Filipino communities

under our jurisdiction, and that our visits make their lives just a little bit more convenient.

COMMUNITY & CULTURAL

67. The Consulate hit the ground running in 2017 by hosting the very first “**Report to the Community**”, its inaugural event of the year that was held at the Kalayaan Hall of the Philippine Center on 19 January 2017. We provided a report to the Filipino-American Community of its accomplishments, as well as significant Community-led initiatives and projects in 2016. It set the tone for the Consulate’s desire to collaborate with the Community in promoting Philippine heritage in the ten (10) states under its jurisdiction.
68. As a service to the community, the Consulate partnered with organizations such as HiCap, Upwardly Mobile, NAFFAA, Damayan, the University of the Philippines Alumni Association in San Francisco, and the Alliance for Community Empowerment in a series called the **Talakayan sa Konsulado**. Our intent is to provide information to *kababayans* about medical insurance and health, services that are available to Filipino-American seniors and veterans, victims of all forms of abuse, even how to package oneself in the current job market. We held an open forum after every Talakayan session to allow clients to consult and engage with resource speakers.
69. Another unique proposition of the Consulate is the **Bayani 2.0 Speakers’ Forum**, where we invite Filipinos who have positively impacted on their fields and present them as resource speakers before the Community to inspire and help Filipinos who might have specific needs from their field.
70. One of the most notable Bayani 2.0 speakers is Grammy and Emmy award-winning producer, **Jhett Tolentino** who spoke about his documentary, “Life Is What You Make It”. It recounted his youth in the Philippines and experiences as a scholar of a student-led organization in Japan whose fundraising efforts helped him go through high school and college. His goal is to provide more scholarships to indigent Filipino children. Traveling from state to state, he is opening up the opportunity for Filipino Americans to give back to the Philippines.
71. Under the leadership of my wife Mariza, the **League of San Francisco Consular Corps (LSFCC)** promoted Philippine culture through several activities, including an exhibit of piña textiles at the Lacis Museum in Berkeley, and a series of visits to The Hinabi Project’s exhibit of Mindanao textiles at the Mills Building at the Financial District of San Francisco.

72. **The Hinabi Project** is a multi-year undertaking showcasing the textiles of the Philippines. This group of passionate community leaders and artists worked with master weavers from Mindanao for the past two (2) years to come up with a collection of thirty-five antique and new textiles. The textiles were displayed at the lobby of the historic Mills Building. Mr. Anthony Cruz Legarda, the in-house designer of THP, worked with the master weavers to come up with six “peace cloths” that incorporate more modern designs and colors with the traditional weaving styles of the six communities.
73. The Hinabi Project was launched at the Kalayaan Hall, which featured a multimedia exhibit of textiles, a gallery of photographs of indigenous weaving communities, a panel discussion on the weaving industry in the Philippines, which culminated in a docent-led tour of the exhibit at the Mills Building. Through the facilitation of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), representatives from the Maguindanao, T’boli, and Mandaya communities performed before delighted guests and media who came to the launch.
74. As an offshoot of the League of San Francisco Consular Corps, and through the Consulate’s strong ties with the Consulate of Indonesia, the **1st Philippine-Indonesia Culture and Friendship Day** was hosted by the Indonesian Consulate at its Official Residence. Highlighting textiles and indigenous songs and dances, ladies from both countries wore their national dress and were given the opportunity to model the clothes for one another and admire the intricate and colorful textiles that make up the dresses. Filipino and Indonesian dances were performed, and food were shared among the attendees, fostering deeper ties among the women.
75. Besides the standard book launches and film viewings in 2017, we consciously engaged both the youth and the seniors throughout the year.
76. The Consulate welcomed the **UP Summer Campers and Terra Nova High School** students to the Kalayaan Hall. It was an opportunity for the Consulate to introduce itself and remain relevant to the youth and millennials, and show them why it is important to engage with the Consulate. Museo Pambata’s Executive Director, Maricel Montano, flew in from Manila to present to Terra Nova high school students a program including storytelling, teaching the students how to write in *baybayin*, playing games like *sipa*, and teaching them indigenous dances.
77. I also attended the opening of **Eskwela Natin**, a summer camp for elementary school-aged children based in Sacramento, and participated in the General Assembly of the **Filipino American Alliance**, an organization composed of college students at UC Berkeley, and welcomed Filipino scholars of **Project Pearls**. I took the opportunity to assure Filipino-American students and their educators that the

Consulate is there to support them in their quest to promote and preserve Filipino heritage.

78. We ramped up our engagement with the seniors and veterans through engagement with **Damayan**, an organization for senior citizens, and the Consulate's annual **Christmas Party for the seniors**. These events were designed to show respect and care for the elderly of the Community, recognizing that they paved the way for the Filipino-Americans who have migrated to the United States to find better opportunities for their families abroad.
79. In partnership with the **San Francisco Bay Area Ateneans**, a simple program of games, raffle prizes, performances and food was prepared for over 130 seniors. Many of the seniors live on their own, while a handful are war veterans. They enjoyed coming to the Consulate dressed in their formal Filipiniana, and performed songs and dances. At the end of the program, we extended an invitation to attend next Christmas' party.
80. Recognizing that understanding ourselves requires understanding our history and our roots, we continue to support events that commemorate Filipino American history.
81. The Philippine Consulate General was there to support a three-part event celebrating the **75th anniversary of the Bataan Death March**, which consisted of a 7.5K Valor Run, a wreath-laying ceremony at the World War II West Coast Memorial, and a program honoring Bataan Death March survivors and World War II veterans held at the Presidio in San Francisco.
82. I, along with (Ret.) Major General Antonio Taguba and Brig. General Brently White, Deputy Commanding General of the Pacific Division 75th Training Command, laid a wreath in commemoration of the event at the World War II West Coast Memorial which bears the names of 413 members of the armed forces who were lost or buried at sea in U.S. Pacific waters between 1941 and 1945. The Filipino American Law Enforcement Officers Association (FALEO) led the Color Guard, while guests remained while Taps was being played.
83. The program at the Presidio Officers Club was preceded by a 21-gun salute, followed by the singing of the national anthems of the Philippines and the United States. Filipino veterans were honored by over 300 members of the Filipino American Community.
84. San Francisco Mayor Edwin M. Lee proclaimed April 9, 2017 Bataan Death March Day in San Francisco at an event at the Presidio Officers Club, where Bataan Legacy Historical Society, in partnership with the Presidio Trust, The National Park

Service, The American Battle Monuments Commission, and Fil-Am Racing commemorated the 75th Anniversary of the Bataan Death March.

85. Cuisine is an expression of our cultural identity. With the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Consulate promoted Filipino cuisine through ***Hidden Flavors of the Filipino Kitchen*** in Seattle, featuring Amy Besa and Chef Romy Dorotan. The young Filipino chefs in Washington also planned related events to ramp up momentum, inspiring other chefs to work towards mainstreaming Filipino cuisine in Seattle. The cooking demonstration was held at Hot Stove Society in downtown Seattle.
86. A Night Market was held following the event, with the Filipino American chefs showcasing their food at a ticketed event. A DJ added to the festive mood of the Market, which was attended by about 150 guests throughout the night.
87. The Consulate also endeavored to promote Philippine cinema in San Francisco by partnering with ***Facine*** and ***Cinematografo International Film Festival***. Facine is the oldest Filipino film festival in northern California, while Cinematografo launched its first year in November at the AMC Kabuki Theater. The former Festival, held at the Roxy Theater, featured independent films, while the latter was more inclusive, featuring mainstream and independent films alike. The Consulate hosted the screening of short films at the Philippine Center. Many of the entries were directed and produced by millennials, some of whom were Philippines-based. The event allowed Filipinos and Filipino American film makers the opportunity to network with one another.
88. Post's partnership with Cinematografo included the support of "Ang Larawan", which was named Best Picture at the recently concluded 43rd Metro Manila Film Festival. Narratives, documentaries, and short films were shown over the course of the weekend, with mainstream media attending the Festival.
89. The visit of the **Mandaue Children's Choir** was a chance to invite the consular corps to view home-grown talents. Through the Pandoo Foundation, the Consulate hosted a performance at the Kalayaan Hall to showcase the award-winning Children's Choir. Sentimental favorites touched members of the Community, while the consular corps were vocal in their appreciation for the talent and discipline of the young singers, with the youngest member only six years of age.
90. The highlight of the year continues to be our annual **KalayaanSF and Philippine Independence Day Celebrations in Northern California**. In partnership with the KalayaanSF Committee, a Concert featuring Maestro Ryan Cayabyab and the Ryan Cayabyab Singers, followed by a Gala Reception at the Marines' Memorial Club, was held on 16 June 2017, followed by an Outdoor Festival and Community Gathering at San Francisco's Union Square on Sunday, 18 June 2017.

91. Maestro Cayabyab sent 400 guests down memory lane as the group serenaded the Community with songs from the '50, '60s and '70s, which culminated in an excerpt from "Spoliarium", an opera composed by Maestro Cayabyab that retells the life of the brilliant and passionate Juan Luna.
92. The **Gala Reception**, which was attended by members of the consular corps, the San Francisco-Manila Sister City Committee, philanthropic Filipino American organizations such as Lisa Yuchengco's Philippine International Aid and Dado and Maria Banatao's PhilDev, was opened by San Francisco's traditional *rigidon de honor*, choreographed by Mr. Johnny Veloso. Seven couples, headed by Deputy Consul General Jaime Ramon T. Ascalon and Atty. Lou Tancinco, led this year's court.
93. The **Outdoor Festival** was a family event that gave the Filipino Community an opportunity to showcase Filipino talent and cuisine, and also provided Filipino organizations and businesses a platform to advance their respective causes. The Festival, which was attended by 10,000 people throughout the day, culminated in TFC Hour, headlined once again by Maestro Cayabyab and his group of young singers. The group closed the festivities with Original Pilipino Music hits from the past to the present.
94. The Consulate also participated in various Filipino Community events celebrating the 119th Anniversary of the Declaration of Philippine Independence, such as those in **Alameda, Solano County, Sacramento and San Jose**.
95. At these events, the representatives of the Consulate conveyed their appreciation to the Filipino-American Communities for commemorating such an important event in our country's history. We congratulated the Community for keeping alive the values and traditions of the Philippines, and providing venues to share to the larger Community our Filipino culture and heritage.
96. We also took the opportunity to invite them to join in the movement to Spark*Connect*Empower* the Filipinos throughout Northern California and beyond, by providing platforms in which Philippine culture is displayed, sparking curiosity and pride within the Community, especially for the next generation of Filipino-Americans, whose connections to the Philippines grow more fragile as the years pass.
97. Following legislation that carved out a portion of San Francisco as a Filipino cultural district aptly called SOMA (South of Market) Pilipinas, a monthly night market called "**Undiscovered SF**" is held on the third Friday of every month at the Mint Building to showcase artists and vendors that "represent the emerging culture of Filipino-Americans involved in music, visual arts, fashion, design, retail, good, technology,

social activism, and health and wellness.” The first night market in San Francisco’s Old Mint was on 19 August 2017.

98. The organizers surrounding SOMA Pilipinas have the ultimate goal of attracting back Filipino-American entrepreneurs who used to be from the City, but have since moved to other parts of the Bay Area. There are an estimated 43,600 Filipinos residing in San Francisco, 5,100 of which live in the South of Market
99. In support of the Filipino cultural district, the city provided a grant of \$150,000.00, most of which will be used to fund the night market. In response, the economic development working group for SOMA Pilipinas, chaired by Mr. Desi Danganan, has started a crowdfunding effort on Indiegogo that would allow Filipinos to reinvest in the community.
100. The first Night Market featured food booths, Filipino DJs and artists, and local merchants, which attracted upwards of 8,000 people. Filipinos, Americans, young and old alike formed lines around the historic Old Mint went around the entire block, prompting fire marshalls to stop the flow of people into the building, which only has a capacity of 800 pax. The organizers anticipated an attendance of 5,000 people from 6PM to 12 midnight.
101. October is the much-anticipated **Filipino-American History Month**. In the Bay Area, we celebrated as community with the Asian Art Museum, the office of the Mayor of San Francisco, the Autism Hearts Foundation, and the San Francisco-Manila Sister City Committee.
102. On the first Sunday of October, **Asian Art Museum** (AAM) Director Jay Xu welcomed the Filipino-American Community and residents of the Bay Area in what has now become a Museum tradition of opening Filipino-American History Month. He mentioned that “**Philippine Art: Collecting Art, Collecting Memories**”, an exhibit of about 30 pieces of the Filipiniana collection of the Museum, including paintings by Fernando Amorsolo and Anita Magsaysay Ho, are currently on display in the Museum where it will remain until March 2018.
103. Former Deputy Consul General Ascalon recounted his visit to the Filipino American National Historical Society’s National Pinoy Archives, which documents stories of the first generation Filipinos – the *manongs* and *manangs* who became farmers in California, the *alaskeros* who worked in canneries in Alaska, the *sacadas* who worked the pineapple fields in Hawaii, and the Filipino residents of the International Hotel. In his remarks, he said that these stories served as the inspiration for Dr. Fred Cordova and FANHS founder Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova to declare October as Filipino American History Month.

104. He encouraged the youth to “continue to celebrate Filipino American History Month every year, to remind us of our important individual and collective role in this unfolding history.”
105. The late San Francisco **Mayor Edwin M. Lee**, together with the Honorary Host Committee composed of elected and appointed Filipino American officials in California, welcomed an estimated 200 Filipino-Americans at the City Hall’s Rotunda to close Filipino-American History Month, and to honor Alleluia Panis, the first-ever recipient of the Artistic Legacy Grant by the San Francisco Arts Commission, and Filipino World War II veterans, who were recently conferred the Congressional Gold Medal by US Congress.
106. The ceremony was made more meaningful when a number of World War II veterans were called to the stage and were presented a replica of the Congressional Gold Medal, a recognition that took place over 70 years after World War II.
107. I thanked the Honorable Mayor for his support and trust of the Community, which “has given [the Filipino American Community] the means to push for greater representation for Americans of Filipino descent, strengthening our Community and empowering us to live with the confidence that we will not only be welcomed, but supported by the larger Community.” I mentioned the City’s support for SOMA Pilipinas, which has led to Undiscovered SF, a monthly night market at San Francisco’s Old Mint that features Filipino history, food, culture, and artists and entrepreneurs, as well as the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to the more than 250,000 Filipinos who fought alongside American forces during World War II.
108. I also took the opportunity to inform the Mayor of the Consulate’s movement to Spark*Connect*Empower* the Filipino-American Community, paying particular attention to the youth, many of whom have never visited the Philippines, but should be made aware of their heritage and culture. I thanked the Honorary Host Committee for representing Filipino-Americans in various ways and platforms throughout California, allowing greater recognition and visibility of our Community, stating that they pave the way for the next generation of Filipino American leaders who will take the helm in pushing forward the Filipino American agenda.
109. On 23 October 2017, the Philippine Consulate General and the San Francisco-Manila Sister City Committee (SFMSCC) presented “Patterns In Nature”, a solo **exhibition of the paintings of Ms. Janine Barrera Castillo** at the Kalayaan Hall. I welcomed the opportunity to present Ms. Barrera-Castillo to the Filipino-American Community in the Bay Area to highlight the talents of Filipinos, and informed the Community of its commitment to “provide the Philippine Center as a platform by which we can promote our culture and our people.”

110. **“Fashion for Hope”**, fashion show featuring paintings of persons within the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on piña fabric, was featured at the Kalayaan Hall on 20 October 2017.
111. In celebration of Filipino American History Month, and in partnership with Autism Hearts Foundation (AHF), the Kalayaan Hall was transformed into a catwalk where members of the Filipino-American Community, along with professional models, showcased to friends and guests piña shawls and clothes showcasing the paintings of persons with ASD.
112. Through this event, we sought to bring greater awareness about autism, and provide support to persons with ASD and their families. It was also an opportunity to inform the Community about Fashion Arts Autism Benefits (FAAB), a program that provides art therapy for persons with ASD.
113. They say no one celebrates Christmas like the Philippines, and the Filipino community brings this exuberance with us even when living overseas.
114. The Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco held the **4th Annual Paskuhan sa Konsulado**, in partnership with the University of the Philippines Alumni Association in San Francisco on 15 December 2017.
115. A Simbang Gabi was held at the Kalayaan Hall, followed by a procession headed by myself, Mrs. Mariza Bensurto and Matthew Bensurto, and leaders of the Filipino-American Community.
116. The Consulate choir sang Filipino Christmas carols to lend solemnity to the procession, while Consul Carlyn A. Monastrial read The Story of the Nativity to over 150 members of the Community in attendance that evening.
117. The Consulate invited two choirs to sing Christmas carols to foster camaraderie among the attendees, while Mr. Ding Cavestany, a UP alumnus, sang “What a Wonderful World” to encourage the Community to reach out to one another in peace and love during the holiday season.
118. The annual **Simbang Gabi Commissioning** took place on 05 December 2017 at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, with representatives of the participating parishes attending. The mass was presided by William Cardinal Levada, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Archbishop Emeritus of San Francisco.
119. My wife Mariza and my son Matthew joined the offertory procession, representing the Consulate during the mass.

120. Cardinal Levada encouraged the Community to continue its *simbang gabi* traditions, as these prepare the minds and hearts of the congregation for the Christmas season. He added that these traditions are the Filipino Community's gift to its brothers and sisters in the faith, as they contribute to the anticipation of the coming of the Christ Child.
121. Back in 2006, at the inception of the Simbang Gabi, 15 parishes participated in the traditions. Today, 45 of 91 parishes in the San Francisco Bay Area now hold Simbang Gabi in December. Each parish presented its own *parols* at the mass to receive its commissioning from Cardinal Levada.
122. Alongside Filipino organizations and parishes, the Consulate joined the **15th Annual Parol Lantern Festival and Parade** held at the Yerba Buena Gardens on 09 December 2017. The parade took place in Yerba Buena Gardens, ending at Jessie Square, where the contingents presented their *parols* to the Community to be judged for the Tala Awards for best *parol* lanterns.
123. The Festival traditionally begins with parol-making workshops that are open to the public, and held at the Bayanihan Community Center throughout the month of December. With the theme "Let Tradition Be Our Light", around 25 local organizations gathered at St. Patrick's Church Hall for typical Christmas fare like *puto bumbong*, *bibingka* and *tsokolate*.
124. Similar to the Consulate's movement to Spark*Connect*Empower* the Filipino American Community, the *parol* that was made by the Consulate also represents its desire to be one of the beacons that would shine a path for Filipino Americans who wish to connect with their heritage and community. This *parol* is also a symbol of the Consulate's thrust to spark the Filipino spirit in our *kababayans*, to encourage them to connect amongst themselves and family and *kababayans* back home, and to empower them to proudly promote our heritage and culture to the world.

CLOSING

125. If there is one lesson I can derive from this exercise in reminiscing the past year, it is this: **When we come together, we accomplish spectacular things.**
126. None of this would have been possible without you, the organizations and individuals who have generously and selflessly put your time, passions, and skills into uplifting the spirit and stature of the Filipino American community.
127. However, our work is not over. Last year, I challenged all of us "to go out into the deep" – *duc in altum* – and I am proud of us all for having waded this far. However, the ocean is a vast and endless place. Such is the potential of the Filipino

American community – vast and endless – and we only need to push ourselves further, and to reach beyond our grasp.

128. I implore all of us to continue the momentum. Let us work together as a united community towards the goal of sparking, connecting, and empowering the Filipino and Filipino-American community in the U.S., and fostering a Filipino American community that, in turn, empowers our *Kababayans* back home.

129. *Mabuhay ang Filipino-American Community! Pinoy ako! Proud ako!*

END