

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s  
SPEECH AT THE 20TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF LAWYERS**

Waterfront Cebu City Hotel, Cebu City  
January 30, 2025

[00:00:06]

Thank you very much, Secretary Atty. Christina Garcia-Frasco.

Please be seated.

The Chief Justice, Chief Justice Alex Gesmundo and the honorable justices of the Supreme Court; Cebu Provincial Governor Gwen Garcia; officials and members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines led by our National President Atty. Antonio Pido; fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon.

It is an honor and a pleasure and with a little trepidation that I stand before you today — because you are our agents of justice who, whether by choice and necessity, have dared to be able to go through voluminous tomes, read through hundred-page contracts without falling asleep. And that alone deserves already applause. [applause]

But let me tell you, as President, I am going to give you a run for your money. Just last month, I had to read 4,057 pages of the General Appropriations Act for 2025. [applause]

Because I reviewed it, analyzed it, and yes—in parts vetoed it. And so, for those of you and up to now I cannot find those damned blank items. [laughter] We'll keep looking, we'll keep looking. But I don't – I really am convinced that they simply do not exist because it is not allowed to exist. So for those of you

who think the Presidency is just handshakes, photo ops, I assure you, that fine print is alive in my office as well. [applause]

[00:02:03]

Today, at the 20th National Convention of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines or IBP, you convene to reflect on the critical role that you play in shaping the legal landscape of our nation.

There is no better moment than this: to reaffirm our shared commitment to the rule of law— a commitment to ensuring that justice remains the bedrock upon which our democracy stands strong and unshaken.

This year's theme, "From Milestones to Horizons: Strengthening the Future of the Legal Profession," is both a rallying call and a profound challenge.

I have always held deep respect for your profession, not only because of its role in our society but also because of the example set by the lawyers that have surrounded me all my life. To begin with with my father, all of those who assisted him as – during his time in government. And to the point that I married a lawyer, my wife, Liza. [applause]

I have seen through her how lawyers devote yourselves to mentoring aspiring lawyers. Also championing free legal clinics, providing assistance to the underserved. These actions remind us that beyond the intellect and skill required by law, it is compassion and service that truly defines the essence of this noble profession.

I also learned a valuable lesson very early on— one that I carry with me to this day: Never argue with your wife, especially if she is a lawyer. [laughter] It is not a debate you will ever win because for a layman, we sit there and you begin to feel the application of trial technique, something which we are not too accustomed with.

So, what starts as a simple yes-no question eventually transforms into 'it depends.' [laughter] And before you know it, you are knee-deep in case law, precedent and a cross-examination that you did not sign up for. But on a more serious note, she has shown me the incredible depths and nuance of the law—and the minds that practice it.

In this era of technological advancement, economic transformation, and global interdependence, you stand at the forefront of an unprecedentedly dynamic— and therefore challenging—landscape. The emergence of issues such as cybercrime, data privacy, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence presents not only technical dilemmas but moral ones as well. And therefore,

they demand our continued commitment to protect human dignity in an increasingly digital world.

[00:05:15]

The recent adoption of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability is a significant step forward—a declaration that the highest ethical standards must guide every member of the legal community. The task before us now is to ensure that this Code becomes the very foundation of how our lawyers live and practice.

Equally pressing is the existential challenge of our time: and that is climate crisis. This is no longer an abstract threat that is spoken about at high levels of science. It is a reality that jeopardizes the very survival of future generations.

Your field plays a vital role in this endeavor—crafting and upholding stronger environmental policies that protect our shared home, developing the concept of environmental justice. By doing so, you safeguard the rights of today and preserve the dreams and dignity of those that will follow us.

Strengthening the legal profession, however, demands more than responding to crises. It also requires reinforcing your field's very foundations: education, continuous learning. The next generation of lawyers must be prepared to meet the challenges of this ever-changing world.

And so, the 3,962 new lawyers: Welcome to the frontlines of justice. Your journey begins now, [applause] and that journey with it, a tremendous opportunity is granted you to shape a society that is fairer, more equitable, more inclusive.

As the legal profession evolves, so too must our learning institutions. Law schools must continually adapt to the demands of the times by refining their curricula, integrating emerging fields and ensuring a seamless blend of legal theory and real-world application.

The Revised Model Curriculum of the Basic Law Program already sets the stage by incorporating Human Rights Law and International Law at its core. And yet, our challenge is to ensure that these principles are not confined to the pages of textbooks or the halls of courtrooms, but are lived and breathed—always guided by the Constitution and the values that it upholds.

As members of the legal community, you are in the most fitting position to safeguard that Constitution — that living document that embodies our collective aspirations and that binds us together as a people.

A decade ago, the Philippine Constitution Association awarded me the title of the ‘Great Protector of the Constitution.’ When I accepted the award, I could not help but marvel at the irony: a non-lawyer, entrusted with such a lofty title. But that is the beauty of democracy and the enduring power of our Constitution. It allows even the most unexpected candidates—like a layman myself—to play a role in protecting its principles.

[00:08:38]

And there lies the heart of the matter: Being a vanguard of the Constitution transcends political affiliation, family legacy, profession. At its core, it is about ensuring that justice is more than just an ideal written on paper, it is about ensuring that it exists in the real world, in the lives of every ordinary citizen.

In this light, we must embrace a simple but profound truth: The law must serve all Filipinos—not just a privileged few. Justice must find its way to the margins, where it is most needed—reaching the underserved, the unseen, the unheard. After all, the Constitution is meant to be wielded with purpose and compassion, especially for those who need it the most.

Initiatives such as the Unified Legal Aid Service Rules, which require lawyers to render at least 60 hours of pro bono legal aid every three years for indigent Filipinos, is very commendable. Equally notable are the IBP’s tireless efforts to provide [free] legal assistance [applause] – legal assistance provided both here and abroad, bringing us closer to a justice system that serves everyone.

The launch of additional SecureJustice Hubs in August 2022 and March 2023 has also been pivotal in bridging the gap between marginalized communities and the justice that they deserve but seldom see. By embracing technology and championing alternative dispute resolution, the IBP has ensured that fairness and efficiency in legal remedies are accessible to all Filipinos.

No less significant is the Pro Bono Portal, introduced by the same institution in April of last year. This digital platform has redefined the delivery of legal aid, offering free courtroom representation, legal counseling, document preparation, and developmental legal assistance to the disadvantaged.

Along with these initiatives, the IBP conducts Bench and Bar Dialogues which foster collaboration amongst judges, justices, prosecutors, practicing lawyers, and enhancing in the process the legal processes that we are using.

This administration remains your partner in nurturing the environment where our lawyers excel—where justice is swift, where it is fair, and where it is impartial, and where the rule of law remains the cornerstone of all progress.

Towards this end, we have enacted 14 new laws establishing additional first- and second-level courts across the country, bringing justice closer to our people. [applause]

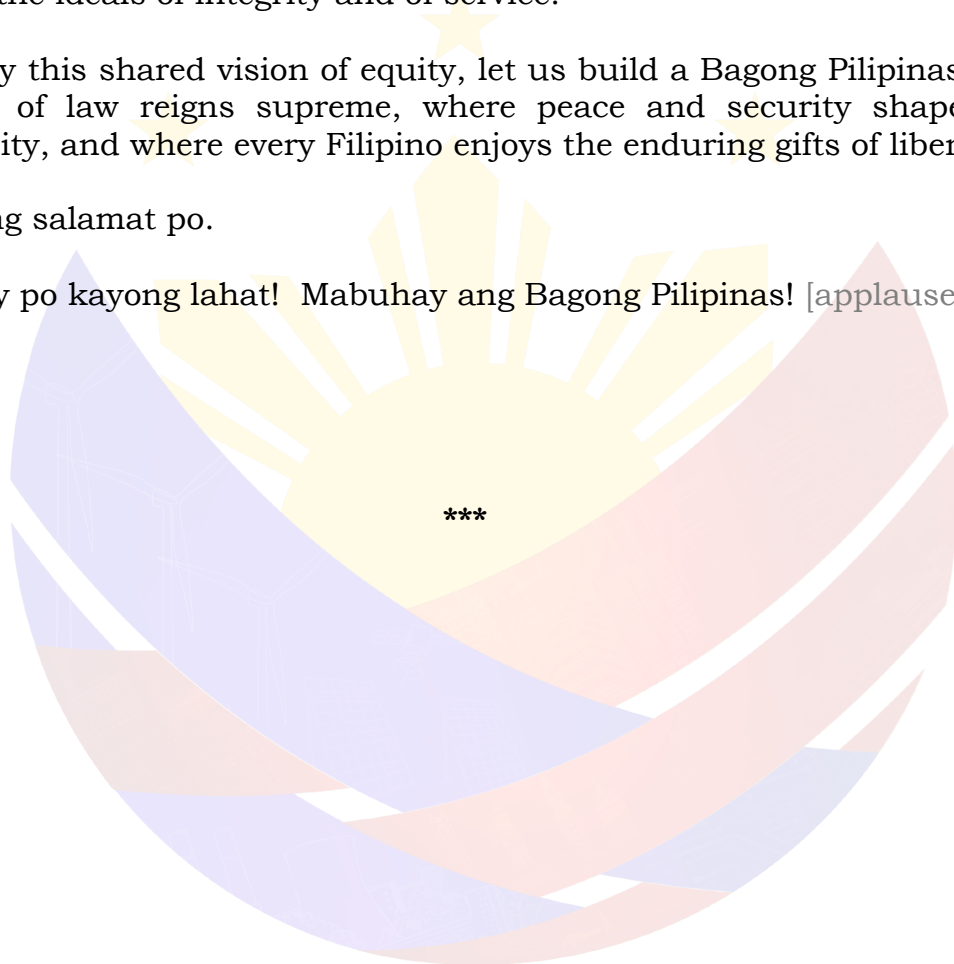
And as we move forward, I encourage everyone to enrich your commitment to truth and to fairness. Embrace the highest standards of professionalism and embody the ideals of integrity and of service.

United by this shared vision of equity, let us build a Bagong Pilipinas where the rule of law reigns supreme, where peace and security shape every community, and where every Filipino enjoys the enduring gifts of liberty.

Maraming salamat po.

Mabuhay po kayong lahat! Mabuhay ang Bagong Pilipinas! [applause]

[00:12:16]



**BAGONG PILIPINAS**