

Corazon Aquino: Address to Joint Session of US Congress, September 1986

On September 18, 1986, seven months after she was swept to power by a popular revolt against dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Philippines president Corazon C. Aquino addressed the joint session of the United States Congress.

The full transcript can be found on [Wikisource](#). The complete Youtube videos of the speech start [here](#).

Corazon C. Aquino: My predecessor set aside democracy to save it from a communist insurgency that numbered less than five hundred. Unhampered by respect for human rights he went at it with hammer and tongs. By the time he fled, that insurgency had grown to more than sixteen thousand. I think there is a lesson here to be learned about trying to stifle a thing with a means by which it grows. I don't think anybody in or outside our country, concerned for a democratic and open Philippines doubts what must be done.

Through political initiatives and local re-integration programs, we must seek to bring the insurgents down from the hills and by economic progress and justice, show them that which the best-intentioned among them fight. As president among my people, I will not betray the cause of peace by which I came to power. Yet, equally and again, no friend of Filipino democracy will challenge this. I will not stand by and allow an insurgent leadership to spurn our offer of peace and kill our young soldiers and threaten our new freedom.

Yet, I must explore the path of peace to the utmost. For at its end, whatever disappointment I meet there is the moral

basis for laying down the Olive branch of peace and taking up the sword of war.

Still, should it come to that, I will not waiver from the course laid down by your great liberator.

“With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in to bind up the nation’s wounds. To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and for his orphans to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

Like Abraham Lincoln, I understand that force may be necessary before mercy. Like Lincoln, I don’t relish it. Yet, I will do whatever it takes to defend the integrity and freedom of my country.

Finally may I turn to that other slavery: our \$26 billion foreign debt. I have said that we shall honor it. Yet, the means by which we shall be able to do so are kept from us. Many of the conditions imposed on the previous government that stole this debt, continue to be imposed on us who never benefited from it.

And no assistance or liberality commensurate with the calamity that was vested on us have been extended. Yet ours must have been the cheapest revolution ever. With little help from others, we Filipinos fulfilled the first and most difficult condition of the debt negotiation, the full restoration of democracy and responsible government. Elsewhere and in other times, a more stringent world economic conditions, marshal plans and their like were felt to be necessary companions of returning democracy.

When I met with President Reagan, we began an important dialogue about cooperation and the strengthening of friendship between our two countries. That meeting was both a confirmation and a new beginning. I am sure it will lead to

positive results in all areas of common concern. Today, we face the aspiration of a people who have known so much poverty and massive unemployment for the past 14 years. And yet offer their lives for the abstraction of democracy.

Wherever I went in the campaign, slum area or impoverished village. They came to me with one cry, democracy. Not food although they clearly needed it but democracy. Not work, although they surely wanted it but democracy. Not money, for they gave what little they had to my campaign. They didn't expect me to work a miracle that would instantly put food into their mouths, clothes on their back, education in their children and give them work that will put dignity in their lives. But I feel the pressing obligation to respond quickly as the leader of the people so deserving of all these things.

We face a communist insurgency that feeds on economic deterioration even as we carry a great share of the free world defenses in the Pacific. These are only two of the many burdens my people carry even as they try to build a worthy and enduring house for their new democracy. That may serve as well as a redoubt for freedom in Asia. Yet, no sooner as one stone laid than two are taken away. Half our export earnings, \$2 billion dollars out of \$4 billion dollars which is all we can earn in the restrictive market of the world, must go to pay just the interest on a debt whose benefit the Filipino people never received.

Still we fought for honor and if only for honor, we shall pay. And yet, should we have to ring the payments from the sweat of our men's faces and sink all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two-hundred fifty years of unrequited toil. Yet, to all Americans, as the leader to a proud and free people, I address this question, "Has there been a greater test of national commitment to the ideals you hold dear than that my people have gone through? You have spent many lives and much treasure to bring freedom to many lands that were reluctant to receive it. And here, you have a people who want it by

themselves and need only the help to preserve it.”

Three years ago I said, Thank you America for the haven from oppression and the home you gave Ninoy, myself and our children and for the three happiest years of our lives together. Today I say, join us America as we build a new home for democracy; another haven for the oppressed so it may stand as a shining testament of our two nations' commitment to freedom.