

PUBLIC / PRESS STATEMENT

**Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG)
On the State of the Presidency (SOP)
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Change to come must mobilize people's participation

Peace, correcting historical injustice, inclusive governance, genuine agrarian reform, tax reform, simple lifestyle and self-reliance— these and other policy pronouncements of President Duterte in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA, July 25) not only won a million favourable tweets, but for change movers, are definitely worth the people's support. Never have we seen these bold and unprecedented policy commitments in past presidencies than now especially because they resonate from a President who comes from a far-flung locality in war-torn Mindanao but is perceived more as a tough-talking "*probinsyano*" who stands for "clean government," promises to uphold sovereign and national interest, and who has an unequivocal progressive if not Left politics for substantive change deeply etched in his heart.

The Duterte presidency ascends at a time of low public trust in government, high income disparity and joblessness, a derailed peace process, corruption and narco-politics and a region challenged by intense power rivalry. Given that the new chief executive's key policy commitments seek to address deeply-rooted and festering problems, their pursuit depends on using opportunities – such as an initial high trust rating – while correctly dealing with institutional gridlocks and influential anti-change interest groups.

Some of the President's pro-social reform commitments such as agrarian reform, inclusive and more accessible social services, end to labor contractualization, less tax burdens on wage earners, environmental protection, and others can move forward with the presence in the Cabinet of progressive leaders known for their decades-long leading roles in the advancement of reform agenda. Reforms can be further enhanced with the correct handling of the peace negotiations with the Left on major contentious issues as well as with the Moro rebel groups where a roadmap promises an inclusive peace process that will decisively address the historical injustice done on the Moro peoples.

Even as there are great opportunities, there are as well bigger challenges to be hurdled by the Duterte presidency. The proposal to adopt a federal state is a clear admission on the failure of the generational political structure that has been biased for the elite and marginalized the poor majority even more. The plan to build national industries and open economic parks in the countryside interlinked by modern infrastructures will generate more jobs and harness natural and human resources for national productivity. However, the first can be used as well by local oligarchs to amass more political and financial power in their hands while the second will allow widely-discredited neo-liberal policies to command the economy that is largely favourable to foreign investors and the local business elite.

CenPEG, a policy think tank led by its 25 Fellows, academic scholars, and policy reform advocates, extends its hand of support to the Duterte administration's pro-people and pro-national interest policy commitments. In extending this support, we urge the new President to translate his perception-based high trust rating into opening his arms to the collective mass support led by the cause-driven progressive movement and his broader mass constituency. Change from the top cannot, and has never worked. He, aware of the histories of other countries, and he, borne out of the struggles against injustice and oppression including in the anti-dictatorship movement alongside the various sectors of the poor and marginalized, in Davao and Mindanao, should be able to bring this great lesson forward in his job in the next six years.

In his first SONA, the President hit hard and well. There were many major HITS – policy statements that augur well for the country's progress - but there were also a lot of MISSES in other issues that should be addressed in his presidency like industrialization alongside genuine land reform, and the development of Filipino scientists, indigenous inventions and expertise that should drive national development forward toward self-reliance.

The role of every Filipino should be harnessed and developed, his talents made to bloom and nurtured, not stymied and stifled. Respect for every Filipino, his life and labor must be at the center of any program for change. The Duterte presidency – with his cabinet and men in uniform- must march in step toward this goal to help eliminate conditions of social inequity and injustice. This is what people empowerment is all about –inclusive and progressive.

Rodrigo R. Duterte or President Digong, the former Mayor of Davao City now the 16th President of the Republic should remain grounded and inspired by the hopes for change from the same people he promised to love and serve.

For CenPEG, policy studies, engagements in Congress and in the arena of electoral politics and policy reforms must revolve around addressing the roots of poverty and marginalization

No amount of radical policy reforms can be instituted unless it enjoys the support of the people – and such reforms can easily be forestalled by the lack of it. Real change will come from the real drivers of genuine reform who have persevered and been tested by decades of struggle often at the sacrifice of their own lives.

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