

The Hon. Reynato Puno  
Chairman,  
Constitutional Commission

Subject: **Language is important**

While there has been no language violence in the Philippines up to now, problems of an enforced national language and marginalization of our mother tongues need to be addressed.

Other countries have shown how contentious and violent the language issue can be. Bangladesh was born because of Islamabad politicians' Fascist insistence that Urdu will be the sole language of Pakistan. The Sri Lanka civil war was caused by Sinhalese politicians imposing Singala as the sole language of Sri Lanka over the objections of the Tamils. Fortunately, after the civil war, the Sri Lanka Constitution was amended and Tamil and Sinhala were made co-National languages; English was made the link language of communication the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

Spain and Belgium almost broke apart because of language. The countries remained intact by adopting federalist or quasi federalist structures and making the languages spoken by the respective communities Official languages. Belgium went so far as to drop French as a national language.

India has 22 official languages, no national language. South Africa has 11 or 12 official languages, no national language. Canada has 3 official languages, no national language. Switzerland has 4 official languages, no national language. Bolivia became Plurilingual and its Constitution recognized all 87 or so indigenous languages as official languages alongside Spanish.

Let me share with you Gilbert Teodoro's views in his letter to the PhilStar columnist Bobit Avila which, I believe, are helpful.

From: Gilberto C. Teodoro

Subject: **Respecting and accepting our cultural diversity**

*Dear Mr. Avila,*

*I have just read your well written and timely article regarding the issue of the "National Language". I believe that the time is ripe for a debate and perhaps a re-thinking of our fundamental premises on the issue.*

*As far as I know the necessity of a national language, as well as a national ideology, was brought about by pre globalization thinking that a nation-state be built based on the cultural homogeneity of its inhabitants. This homogeneity was thought to be the unifying force which was a necessary element of building up a strong state. I think this premise has been proven to be unworkable in the Philippines.*

*I believe that the Philippines is a multinational, multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural State. In other words, we are a state composed of different types of people, we are not and cannot be made to be the same. A forced linguistic and cultural integration will only breed resentment and frustration because then the majority who can conform would then proceed to categorize the minority who are unable to conform as backward, laggard, or worse, as secessionists. My point here is that instead of subjugating the different components of our society through enforced homogeneity, we should encourage and strengthen this diversity and EDUCATE our citizens about these differences so that an atmosphere of respect and tolerance is developed.*

*I believe that the message in your article is that we must redefine our concept of what the Philippines is and what being a "Filipino" means.*

*If being a Filipino means being subsumed under a cultural or linguistic regime which one feels is alien to what he really is then*

*the natural instinct would be to reject being Filipino. I would therefore propose that the Philippines be thought of as a legal and political concept: as a STATE composed of many cultures, perhaps nations; rather than as a NATION. Collorarily being Filipino should be thought of as being united with others of different cultural persuasions for political, economic, and other similar common purposes.*

*The adoption of this mindset will go a long way toward building up a strong and globally competitive state. We will lose our hang-ups over strengthening our proficiency in English, we will genuinely accept the idea of the autonomy of component political units such as regions and provinces, and because each unit will be busy with it's own development giving less time to squabbling with the central super body: we MAY have peace.*

*As I said, the value of your article is to point out that debate and serious thinking must be given this issue now. It is a fundamental problem with serious and far reaching consequences on our present condition and on our future development. Hopefully with opinion makers, such as yourself, who will continually remind the people about the importance of this issue, an educated national policy may evolve.*

*Very Truly Yours,*

*Gilberto C. Teodoro, Jr.  
Representative  
First District, Tarlac*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Manuel Lino G. Faelnar  
March 3, 2018*