

## **OPPOSE CON-ASS, DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION AND BUILD GENUINE DEMOCRACY**

*Those who try to hide their plans from the Lord are doomed! They carry out their schemes in secret and think no one will see them or know what they are doing. They turn everything upside down... So now the Lord, the God of Israel...says: 'My people, you will not be disgraced any longer, and your faces will no longer be pale with shame.*

**Isaiah 29, 15 & 22**

*You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. **Matthew 20:25-28***

The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) affirms the call of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) for active non-violent protest against House Resolution 1109 which convenes Congress into a constituent assembly (con-ass) for the purpose of charter change (cha-cha). According to constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J., while the House majority has not yet committed an illegal act with this resolution, they have also “served notice of their intent to commit a crime” by proposing and voting on constitutional amendments that violate the bicameral nature of Congress.

Just as in 2006, despite their disavowals, the advocates of cha-cha via con-ass can barely conceal their real aim of further concentration of power. They cannot disguise that what they are trying to do is open the door to prolonging the stay in power of current officials, particularly President Arroyo, beyond 2010. And all indications point to the present administration as behind this move. The proponents of HR 1109 do not hide their desire to get the Supreme Court to rule quickly on the meaning of a three-fourths majority in Congress which is needed to pass amendments via this mode of charter change. Those who brazenly pushed the resolution believe that if they can get the numbers, both in the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court, they can simply ram cha-cha through.

As Catholic schools, we cannot stand idly by while the common good is sacrificed and our basic political institutions, including popular sovereignty through regular elections, the bicameral nature of Congress, an independent judiciary, and the hard-won 1987 democratic constitution itself, are thoroughly undermined.

**We reiterate our opposition to con-ass and to cha-cha before the 2010 elections.** We want to ensure that the Filipino people are able to exercise their fundamental right to choose their next set of leaders as provided for in the Constitution. We oppose any schemes to cancel, postpone or change the nature of the 2010 national elections. Because the political crisis facing the country is deeply linked to unresolved questions of electoral cheating, it is crucial that the next presidential election proceed as scheduled and is seen as credible and meaningful by our people. The Arroyo administration must step down by June 30, 2010 and give way to a new popularly-elected government.

It is unfortunate that in the present context, charter change which could truly be a genuine instrument of long-term institutional reform, is viewed with deep suspicion and is seen as endangering democracy itself. This is a reflection of the deep crisis of trust in our political leaders and institutions resulting from unresolved questions of corruption and abuse of power in the highest levels of government. That is why we support the CBCP position that **any change in the fundamental law of the land is best undertaken by a popularly elected Constitutional Convention with broad representation and transparent discussion of key issues affecting the Filipino people.**

**We call on our schools to make their voices heard at this time when our democratic institutions and rights continue to be threatened. We support calls for peaceful mobilizations such as “busina/kampana laban sa con-ass” and letter-writing campaigns to congresspersons and Supreme Court justices expressing firm opposition to a violation of the Constitution.** It is important that our educational institutions participate in efforts to make our communities more politically informed and engaged. As Archbishop Jesus Dosado has said recently, “the distinctive feature of the Catholic School is to create for the community an atmosphere enlivened by the Gospel spirit which aims to help the adolescent contribute to the growth of the new creation.”

**We are committed to help our youth exercise their right of suffrage wisely by encouraging first-time voters to register and providing full support to political education for responsible and engaged citizenship.** Beyond the traditional education of voters, we want to facilitate continuing processes for our people, especially poor communities, to be able to articulate their real needs and aspirations. Such mechanisms will help them choose candidates and elect leaders who are committed to sociopolitical reform and can be made accountable for their campaign promises. **We are mobilizing especially our human resources to safeguard the voting process in the context of automated elections.** Automation needs to be fine-tuned and closely monitored to guard against wholesale fraud and disenfranchisement, and to make it more accessible to and protective of vulnerable groups.

But reforming our electoral process to make it truly inclusive of and meaningful to the majority requires further reforms in voters’ registration, the party system, campaign finance and political dynasties. These issues call for serious attention and dedicated work from our legislators and executive officials. We cannot afford to get sidetracked by moves toward self-serving charter change, from the urgent need to prepare for credible elections and truly meaningful citizen participation in 2010.

Both the demands of our faith and of citizenship call on us to be vigilant against the continuing threats to the common good. We are challenged to engage the present situation which puts democracy in grave danger of being usurped by those who want to hold on to power indefinitely and evade accountability to the people. That is why cha-cha before 2010 needs to be stopped. But the call is not just to defend democracy. **We are asked to help deepen democracy to make it truly inclusive and participative through reforms that address poverty and social injustice. It is to the building of such a genuine democracy that we commit ourselves as responsible political stewards of God’s creation.**

**Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines  
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