



## We need genuine social and political reform for the many; Not self-serving charter change for a few.

**Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come...May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!' (Mark 13:33-37)**

As we begin the season of Advent, we are called to prepare ourselves for the Lord's coming – to be ready to welcome Him into our hearts and our communities not only at Christmas, but at every moment in our lives as individuals and as a people, in faithful and hopeful vigilance.

Sadly, in our country, the common good is often subordinated to narrow private interests. The needs of the majority who are poor are often sacrificed for the self-serving ends of a few. Many unresolved questions of corruption and abuse of power are fostering a culture of impunity and a political climate of deep distrust and powerlessness. Thus the call to watchfulness beckons Christians to become engaged citizens in a perilous time when democracy and social justice are under serious threat.

It is unfortunate that in the present context, charter change (cha-cha) 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 so because just as in 2006, its advocates can barely conceal that their real aim is not reform but further concentration of power. Even as they pay lip service to economic and political development, cha-cha proponents cannot disguise their overriding objective of prolonging the stay in power of current officials, particularly the President. One draft resolution (HR 550) even blatantly extends the terms of officials for one year without elections. The hasty efforts to collect 197 signatures in the House of Representatives calling for a constituent assembly (con-ass) or directly amending the economic provisions of the constitution are being pursued in order 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 are brazenly pushing these resolutions believe that if they can get the numbers, both in Congress 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.

What we need from our leaders is truth, accountability and genuine social and political reform for the majority. We certainly do not need any charter change that will only serve the narrow interests of the few who are currently in power. Thus we emphatically say: "No to any cha-cha before 2010"!

But more than just rejecting charter change now, we highlight two issues which Catholic schools are already engaged in and which demonstrate that there are more urgent questions that deserve the attention of Congress and other political leaders than self-serving cha-cha.

### 1) CARP extension with reforms and the issues of land, food and equitable development

We call for the immediate passage of HB 4077/SB 2666 which seeks to extend the agrarian reform program to cover over 1.8 million more hectares affecting almost 1.5 million farmers. It also aims to strengthen CARP by increasing its resources and strengthening the institutional infrastructure for support services to agrarian reform beneficiaries and compensation to landowners. It also calls for the stricter enforcement of rules banning the conversion of irrigated and irrigable lands.

Agrarian reform is about creating a socio-economic system which seeks the inclusion of the majority of the rural population, and focuses on the imperative of food production, agricultural productivity and equitable development which in the end serves the needs of all, whether in the urban or rural areas.

Thus rather than pushing for the term extension of the few who are in power, we call on Congress to legislate the CARP extension with reforms that address the needs of the many who are poor. This is consistent with the social teachings of the Church which we uphold. Instead of amending the constitution to extend land ownership rights to foreigners, Congress should work for social and economic development by expanding and completing CARP.

### 2) Electoral reform, voters' education and credible and meaningful elections in 2010

In rejecting cha-cha before 2010, 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. Thus 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 proceeds as scheduled and is seen as credible and meaningful by our people.

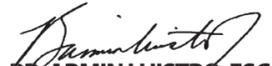
Our work in the educational apostolate puts us in close touch with the youth who comprise at least half of our potential voters. We are committed to help them exercise their right of suffrage wisely by encouraging first-time voters' registration and providing full support to political education for responsible and engaged citizenship. Beyond traditional voters' education, we want to facilitate continuing processes for our people, especially poor communities, to be able to articulate their real needs and aspirations. We will also work to develop mechanisms that challenge politicians to make concrete commitments of genuine and effective response and monitoring systems to make them accountable for their promises. We are mobilizing especially our human resources to safeguard the process in the context of automated elections. Automation needs to be enhanced and fine-tuned to guard against disenfranchisement and to make it more accessible to and protective of vulnerable groups. But reforming our electoral process to make it truly inclusive 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 keep vigil against the continuing threats to the common good. We are challenged to engage the present situation wherein democracy is in grave danger of being usurped by those who want to hold on to power indefinitely and evade accountability to the people.

But the call is not just to defend democracy. We are asked to help deepen democracy to make it truly inclusive, participative and socially just. It is this kind of democratic system that truly befits the name. Thus we commit ourselves to building a genuine democracy which enshrines our core belief in the dignity of every human being, that God Himself shared by becoming one like us in Jesus.

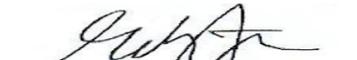
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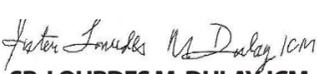
  
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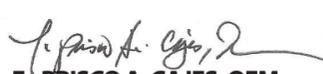
  
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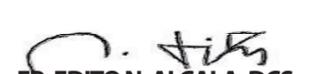
  
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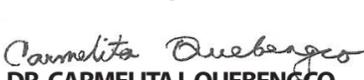
  
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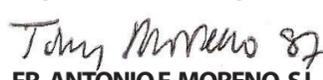
  
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