

**Suggested Remarks
Joseph Mussomeli
Deputy Chief of Mission
USAID-DENR-DILG MOA Signing/Launching of USAID's
Environment Programs
and EcoGov Project Phase 2
June 9, 2005, 1:30-3:30 p.m.
Marco Polo Hotel, Davao City**

Secretary Defensor, Secretary Reyes, Secretary Dureza, Governor Hussin, Governor Avance-Fuentes, Governor Dominguez, Mayor Duterte, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Afternoon.

The video presentation that we have just seen once again reminds us all of the remarkable beauty of this country. In the words of the video's narrator, the Philippines is, "gifted with the choicest of nature's wonders." For their beauty alone, for their ability to uplift our spirits, the natural resources of these islands, both on land and beneath the seas, are worth preserving for the future -- and for all mankind.

The miracle of nature is, however, not just that its beauty nourishes our souls, but that this same beauty

is what sustains our bodies and our lives – with food, with clothes and shelter, and with the financial resources to better our condition.

Some people argue that the needs of the human population have become too great a burden for the earth and so environmental degradation is now inevitable. I disagree. I think Gandhi was closer to the truth: “There is a sufficiency in the world for man’s need,” he said, “but not for man’s greed.”

As one of the world’s handful of mega-centers of biodiversity, the Philippine forests and seas are home to an incredible number of plants and animals, many of which are found no where else on earth, and many of which still await discovery.

But as you all know, threats to these resources are taking their toll not only on the health of the environment, but also on the health of Filipinos, and on the economic health of the Philippines. So bleak is the situation both here and throughout the world that, as one environmentalist starkly put it, “the bulldozer and not the atomic bomb may turn out to be the most destructive invention” of the modern

age. Despairing, Albert Schweitzer once remarked that, “man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. (So) he will end by destroying the earth.” I like to think that at least this one time Schweitzer was wrong, and that we retain the capacity to see the consequences of our greed, and that we will through our collective efforts foresee and forestall the destruction of the earth.

The U.S. Government is honored to have supported activities to conserve the Philippine environment for two decades now. USAID’s assistance has focused on helping local partners increase forest cover; place coastlines under improved management; and reduce pollution and unmanaged wastes. These areas remain the focus of our assistance, but over the years we have shifted our emphasis towards helping local governments and communities to become more active managers of their environment, now with a particular focus on Mindanao. We understand that to achieve successful management of natural resources in the Philippines, we must recognize the importance of working at the local level. People in the communities closest to the resources are,

generally, the ones most dependent on these resources to sustain their way of life.

There are a dozen projects under USAID's environment program valued at nearly \$8 million per year. The EcoGov2 Project, which we are launching here today, forms the largest part of our environment portfolio. I would like to congratulate the local governments of Davao City, Sarangani and South Cotabato, the Ateneo de Davao University, and their DENR and DILG counterparts for forging partnerships with USAID, under the EcoGov 2 Project, to take the lead on improving governance of forests, coasts, water, and air in key areas of Mindanao.

I hope that these new partnerships will inspire others gathered here today to work together to address other environmental challenges. My government is committed to support you in your efforts.

Finally, let me share with you a quote from one of the most important figures of the 20th century environmental awakening, Rachel Carson. For those of you too young to remember, Rachel Carson was a

marine biologist who, with books like “The Silent Spring,” woke the world to the beauty and value of our natural resources – and, in particular, to the threats posed to these by humankind. She said, shortly before her death in 1964:

"Man's attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself...[We are] challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves."

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not believe there could be a wiser statement about the importance of good governance – the need to master ourselves is what good governance is about. We must master our short-term needs for survival, our ignorance, our lack of organization, our greed – if we are to preserve our environment for the future.

Although it is hard to believe since she was so bright and energetic, amazingly Rachel Carson was for

many years a U.S. Government Civil Servant. Committed government employees can make a difference – good governance can make a difference. But governance is not just the responsibility of those in government – it requires the active participation of ordinary citizens, who, in turn, require information and support from leaders and organizations such as those represented here today, to educate them, to encourage them, and to guide them. We must all be in this together, and stay together.

Thank you.