

## MESSAGE

At the outset, allow me to thank you for this honor in inviting me to represent my beloved grandfather on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conversion of Himatagon into the municipality of St. Bernard on December 9, 1954. Our family takes pride that thru the representation of our beloved Grandfather, Governor Bernardo E. Torres, Sr., then Governor of the Province of Leyte, and with the concerted efforts of the people of Barangay Himatagon, the late President Ramon Magsaysay issued Executive Order No. 84 which converted the barangay into a municipality.

Fifty-five years is more than a half century ago since that historic event. When we were invited to your Golden Anniversary, five years ago, our family was overwhelmed by your hospitality and recognition of our late grandfather for which we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We also noted that during its fifty years' of existence, the appointed and later, elected municipal officials had focused on the basic development of the municipality. Thus, the people already enjoyed needed facilities and services, among them a good wharf and seawall, river controls, potable water supply and sound irrigation system, feeder roads, health centers, as well as provision for basic education. For a population of only 23,089 inhabitants, these may well be considered sufficient accomplishments of the different administrations from 1954 to 2001; however, it is apparent that very little effort was exerted towards the social and economic development of St. Bernard, such as in commerce and trade, its culture, and access to higher education, although some progress was seen in the area of communication.

In 2006, this state of complacency was dramatically changed by the tragedy in the barangay of Guinsaugon. The magnitude of the landslide disaster which resulted in the loss of so many lives and destruction in the community appalled the whole world. Donations and disaster assistance came from other countries and various sectors. Such response from everywhere moved everybody to action. The accomplishment report in 2007-2008 of Mayor Rico Rentuza cited various exemplary activities and projects to strengthen the Municipal Coordinating Council. The municipality was awarded the Gawad Kalasag Award by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for its contingency plan and disaster risk/reduction management program. Other proactive NGOs also deserve our congratulations for their support. Indeed with this story of survival, the leaders and people of St. Bernard are to be commended for being achievers in whatever programs/projects they have set their energies on. Nevertheless, I believe that Lolo Nanding would be more pleased and proud if St. Bernard will progress even further.

For a start, I suggest that all of us, led by the powers-that-be, take a closer look at recent developments worldwide to identify what needs to be done here in St. Bernard. For instance, we have become aware of global warming and climate change, devastating floods, earthquakes, along with pollution, poverty and disease due to human abuse or negligence. This should then be followed by prioritizing what action is to be taken. St. Bernard already has its program for coping with disasters and calamities, so probably, reduction of poverty to improve the quality of life of the people should be given priority. In this regard, our government leaders can plan strategies for economic expansion, capacity building and training of the unemployed, and employment opportunities for urban development or sustainable agricultural practices and land degradation for rural development.

In behalf of the heirs of the Late Governor Bernardo E. Torres, Sr., allow me to convey our gratitude for the honor you have bestowed on our grandfather, and to extend our sincerest wishes and congratulations to the People and Public Officials of this Municipality. Be assured of our continued interest in the progress of St. Bernard and its people which we will remember in our prayers.

THE HEIRS  
GOVERNOR BERNARDO E. TORRES SR.

BERNARDO A. TORRES, III MD  
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