

**Suggested Remarks**  
**Gerardo Porta, USAID/OEDG**  
**Human Rights Education Training Activity: E-**  
**Lawyering Project**  
**Bayview Hotel, Manila**  
**April 1, 2011, 8:00 a.m.**

My friends and colleagues;

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.

Thank you very much for inviting me to the opening program of this Human Rights Education training event, which is the launching activity of the e-Lawyering Project. The promotion and protection of human rights is important to the U.S. Government and we are very pleased to provide support to this innovative project.

The need to uphold human rights is an important issue in the Philippines. In the last nine years, there has been a resurgence of political killings, assassinations of

journalists and other forms of human rights violations in the country. While there have been ebbs and flows in the frequency of the violations in the last few years, violations of basic human rights continue to occur with alarming regularity.

The e-Lawyering Project, implemented by Libertas and supported by USAID through The Asia Foundation under the Strengthening Human Rights in the Philippines (SHRP) 2 Program, aims to assist human rights defenders on the field by making available legal assistance and counseling at the most critical moments: during and immediately after the commission of human rights violations. Indeed, in documented instances, incidents of human rights violations could have possibly been averted had legal counsel been available onsite at the time of an arrest.

Recognizing that lawyers are not always immediately available at the scene, the e-Lawyering Project is designed to function like a "call center." Libertas will organize a small pool of lawyers who will be "on call" in assigned shifts to provide legal advice 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

Human rights defenders under Philippine Association of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) in Regions 3, 6 and 9 will be equipped with mobile phones and provided with mobile numbers of call dispatchers. The call dispatchers will ensure that lawyers are onboard and prepared to receive calls, and advise the lawyer on duty of any reported incident. The lawyer can in turn immediately call the human rights defender and the authorities involved to represent the human rights victim and ensure proper handling of the case.

By speaking with the human rights defenders, the lawyers can direct them in real-time regarding the protection of the human rights victim and the documentation of the incident, using SMS, MMS, and video calls, as may be available. The lawyers will also speak with the authorities involved in order to generate the understanding that the incident is being monitored by a lawyer and in so doing deter further violations.

This project is innovative in a number of ways. It makes full use of the range of services that mobile technology has to offer. It also complements and builds on another USAID-funded project to mobilize human rights defenders deputized by the Commission on Human Rights and trained by PAHRA to serve in areas where the Commission does not have ample coverage.

This year we commemorate USAID's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the Philippines. Our many

partnerships with the Philippines have evolved over the past five decades, but one feature that has endured is our close collaboration with civil society in advancing mutually shared goals. We at USAID are very excited about the potential of this project and look forward to hearing news about your progress in the months to come. We are particularly interested in hearing instances where the intervention of both the human rights defender on the field and the lawyer on call have made a difference in ensuring that human rights is observed and protected.

In closing, we sincerely hope that you will find this capacity building activity relevant and useful, particularly in preparing all of you to effectively implement the e-Lawyering Project.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay kayong lahat.