

**REMARKS**

by

The Honorable Robert J. Torres

Chief Justice

on

Grand Opening of Northern Court Satellite

Monday, August 31, 2009

Dededo, Guam

Hafa Adai yan Buenas Todos Hamyo:

On behalf of the Judiciary of Guam, I want to welcome each and every one of you and thank you all for being here for this great milestone in our island's history. If you believe I look particularly happy today ... I am.

Exactly 17 months ago to the day in my first state of the judiciary address I invited the other branches of government and our island community to get behind the Judiciary's plan for the opening of a satellite court in Northern Guam, to be known as the Northern Court Satellite, or NCS. I emphasized NCS was an integral part of making it easier for the people of Guam to obtain the justice they need and deserve.

With the overwhelming support of our community and the media behind NCS, our then legislative committee chairman, Senator Jim Espaldon together with former Chief justice Benjamin Cruz and Dr. David Shimizu introduced Bill 288 which passed with a unanimous vote. Governor Camacho promptly signed the measure as Public Law 29-109. And while well-publicized fiscal constraints delayed our planned opening, the Judiciary was still able to make this facility a reality within a year and a half after I first proposed the creation of NCS.

More than sixty percent of the island's population reside in the Northern villages of Yigo, Dededo, Tamuning, Tumon, Harmon and Mangilao. The NCS facility will provide a broad complement of court functions and services which will undoubtedly improve judicial access for these residents as well as others. These

citizens will have easier access to court services, such as obtaining court clearances, appearing in traffic court, paying traffic fines, resolving small claims matters, dealing with juvenile matters, and attending initial appearances. Superior Court Judges will rotate their assignments so NCS will have a court of general jurisdiction available every week.

This multipurpose facility will also support criminal and civil jury trials and it is expected that at least one appellate oral argument before the Supreme Court will be held here every quarter.

NCS will also have a positive domino effect as the opening of the facility today will ease the overcrowded conditions at the Hagatna courthouse and users at that location including those from the Central and Southern villages, should find shorter lines, more convenient parking, and easier access to justice. The people deserve

this kind of local access to the courts that NCS will provide.

And although there remain some detractors who continue to question the wisdom of establishing NCS, we applaud Senators Frank Aguon and Ben Pangelinan for their tireless efforts to ensure NCS is appropriately funded in the future.

Through the collective support of the Legislature, the Governor, and Mayors Savares, Lizama, and the brother Blases, Nito and Frank and many others we have been able to move swiftly in completing NCS. Our Procurement and Facilities team spearheaded by division Administrator, Ray Taimanglo and his division, competently planned and supervised the completion of this facility in just a few short months. Employees from Our Clerks Office, and our Management Information Services Division spent many hours in the last couple of weeks ensuring that all systems were ready to go I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of our

landlord - EC Development, our Architect - Albert Tsutsui, Design Partners, Group Engineering Inc., Engineering Partners Inc., and Baluyut Construction. The completion of this facility is a credit to the terrific cooperation and mutual respect that exists between those involved in this venture and to the perseverance, talent and commitment demonstrated by all.

It really is endearing to know that when we collectively work together, when leaders put political differences aside and focus on the challenges confronting our island with our hearts and minds as a cohesive community, we can accomplish great things in a very short time. NCS is a glowing example of the three branches of Legislative Executive Branches and village and community leaders cooperating in developing solutions to better serve the needs of our citizens

There is one other component of the law that established NCS which remains to be fulfilled, that is the

confirmation of full-time Magistrate. Ensuring access to justice at NCS also requires that we have a sufficient number of Judicial officers. Judiciary Committee Chairman, Senator Aguon recently informed me that his committee is awaiting the completion of the background investigation on the magistrate appointee, Alberto Tolentino, and once the investigation is complete Chairman Aguon assures me there will be a prompt confirmation hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for your continued attention to this matter.

Courthouses have a special significance in our communities. They are public facilities created for the administration of justice. As such, their design, operation and function must provide tangible expression of the fairness and impartiality which our justice system seeks to embody. They are built not only for judges but also for citizens. They are places for dispute resolution. I am

satisfied that the design and construction of this new facility embodies in an appropriately functional way the values of fairness and impartiality.

However, in addition to their functional value, courthouses also have great symbolic value. This goes to the heart of the significant role justice plays in the constitution and stability. As people enter through these doors today and in the years to come, they will immediately know that this is a courthouse where laws are applied and upheld.

We should also not forget that this building marks the progress of the Guam judiciary. What has been achieved did not come to pass easily. It was wrought out of the vision, will and commitment of all involved. The judiciary plays an important role in our island. It administers the rule of law from which flows order and stability for our people. Whenever there are disputes, the courts serve as the forum where people are heard and

receive justice. Commerce carries on smoothly because of the consistency and clarity of law that our courts provide. It is one of the pillars of our growth and success as an island community. These are important roles for the court, and increasingly difficult ones to play as Guam continues to mature and our society changes with the impending military buildup.

I am honored that you have all come out today to join the Judiciary in celebrating the official opening of this new Courthouse. While there can be no doubt that the administration of justice raises special challenges, it also holds great potential and great hope. This "new place" is an integral part of our justice system - and a just, justice system is an essential tool in building a meaningful and prosperous future for ourselves and for our children. For the people of Guam - this is your new northern courthouse  
Welcome!

Si Yu'os Ma'ase.