

Presidential inauguration

Title I had a ticket for a seat across the grandstand. It was either going to be very hot or very wet. I thought hard whether to go or not. The temptation to watch the inaugural comfortably at home on the television was so inviting. And then late at night, on the eve of the inaugural, I got a text saying I have a ticket at the grandstand. But how to go there clad in the required Filipiniana attire before ten o'clock was the challenge. Early morning of inaugural day I frantically searched for a driver who appeared at our gate a little before nine. We rushed to pick up Dr. Angelina Galang of the Environmental Science Institute of Miriam College and were finally on our way to the Quirino Grandstand. Our attire was our ticket to the nearest drop off point to the grandstand. We wore comfortable shoes, as we knew the walk would be long. In my hand-made water lily bag were my camera, my phones and my embroidered fan. I carried an umbrella as earlier advised. We were showed to our seats located on the left side of the grandstand at ground level. It was hot. It was humid. Luckily, we selected a couple of seats under the tent where the police and PSG were stationed and where we joined Philip Camara, a Haribon trustee and a hardworking volunteer of P-Noy's campaign. I captured as many images as I could while waiting for the ceremony to start. I saw celebrities, ordinary people, government officials, old friends and colleagues. Everyone was excited; everyone was smiling; everyone was hopeful. At last, the time for P-Noy's inauguration came. "Paki baba ang mga payong!" was blurted out. And yes, the umbrellas were folded and everyone focused on the video wall. Yellow rose petals were showered by a couple of helicopters. Dr. Galang ran to pick up some souvenirs of this historic day. We listened intently to the inaugural speech—we clapped, we laughed and we prayed that the next six years will indeed bring the change that the Filipino people clamored for and deserve. I had hoped that there would be something about the environment but there was not. Nevertheless, transparency and feedback were emphasized and through those ways, the environmental NGOs will make their voices heard. We had a glimpse of P-Noy's car as he went off to Malacañang. In fact the car carried more than our new president, it carried all the hopes and dreams of the Filipinos.

Another sort of inaugural took place last July 1. It was the investiture of Dr. Macapado Abaton Muslim, the new president of the 11-campus Mindanao State University System. The main and another satellite campus are located in Marawi City while the other campuses are found in Iligan City; Maigo, Lanao del Norte; Buug, Zamboanga-Sibugay; Jolo, Sulu; Tawi-Tawi; Sultan Naga, Dimaporo; Dinaig, Maguindanao; General Santos City and Naawan, Misamis Oriental. Dr. Muslim rose from the ranks starting as an instructor in 1980. Now as president, his vision for MSU is academic excellence coupled with societal relevance and affirmative actions for the Muslims and other ethnic minorities. He also seeks to strengthen its research and community/extension services to enable communities to benefit from the university. Dr. Muslim recognizes the need for the university to be sustainable, thus, efficiencies in governance including inter-campus complementation and diversifying external linkages will be a major thrust. Recognizing the challenge of peace-building in the region, the university hopes to contribute to this process through its experience in dealing with a diverse student body and a variety of ideas spawned by this diversity. Specifically, Dr. Muslim's knowledge about this

issue is embodied in his publication *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Non-Violent Autonomy Alternative* provides an incisive analysis of the Moro problem. I know of several hardworking and sincere people in the conservation arena who are graduates of the different MSU campuses. In fact one of Haribon's academic centers of excellence for biodiversity conservation is the MSU Iligan campus. I hope that the new leadership gives importance to nurturing and inspiring young minds to look at conservation as a means to build peace in the region. by Anabelle Plantilla