



Office of the President of the Philippines
COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Philippine Open Source Summit 2008
“*Understanding the Business Value of Open Source*”
23-24 June 2008, Cebu International Convention Center, Mandaue City

Opening Keynote Address
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Commission on Information and Communications Technology

Cebu City Vice Mayor Michael Rama, Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Dr. Edward Gaisano, Cebu Business Month Chairperson Tess Chan, Summit Director and CEDF-IT Executive Director Boni Belen, summit co-organizers and local implementing partners, fellow government workers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is a great pleasure for the Commission on Information and Communications Technology, or CICT, to be one of the co-organizers of this inaugural Philippine Open Source Summit. The conduct of this Summit is also very timely. Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo recently signed Proclamation No. 1521 declaring the month of June of this year and every year thereafter as National ICT Month. In connection with this, the CICT has been tasked to work closely with the private sector, other government agencies, and NGOs in organizing activities that will help promote and strengthen the competitiveness of the Philippine ICT industry.

In the past two weeks alone, we have partnered with several organizations in promoting our vision of empowering the Filipino through the use of ICT. As part of our iSchools Project, we launched computer laboratories in public high schools in support of the President’s agenda of connecting all public high schools to the Internet by 2010. In Baguio, together with the Business Processing Association of the Philippines, or BPAP, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, or TESDA, we awarded vouchers under the PGMA Training for Work Scholarship Program to over 200 potential recruits for the offshoring and outsourcing, or O&O, industry. We also continue to promote the Philippine Cyber Corridor, of which Cebu City is a very prominent player. Just last week, we were in Singapore attending the 19th International Communications and Information Technology Exhibition and Conference, or CommunicAsia, where we invited potential investors to come to the Philippines and explore business opportunities in the O&O sector.

As the CICT's mandate is to push for the development of ICT in the country, we believe that we can more effectively do so if we partner with the private sector. One clear example of this is our collaboration with the private sector in conducting summits like this. The Cebu Chamber of Commerce, and more particularly the Cebu Educational Development Foundation for IT, or CEDF-IT, has been a long-time partner of the CICT in helping promote ICT in Visayas. We recognize that as we continue to promote ICT in other parts of the country, we can learn a lot from how Cebu has made itself a vibrant economy maximizing the potentials of ICT.

Cebu has once again broken ground in hosting this Summit. I am certain that the topics for the Summit—including the mechanisms to integrate open source software into existing ICT strategies, factors that drive the adoption of open source across various sectors, selection criteria in evaluating open source software projects—will be most relevant. I am sure that technopreneurs will be very interested in the showcase of best practices on creating start-ups using open source software. We also look forward to the establishment of the National Open Source Association, whom the CICT hopes to partner with in launching the Philippine Open Source Center, as well as the conduct of the Asian Open Source Conference and Showcase in October.

Within our country however, there is still a lack of awareness and support for open source software, or OSS, and its benefits. With its significant cost advantage, OSS provides users with a compelling alternative to proprietary solutions. Regrettably, however, the more common option for many users is the purchase of pirated copies of proprietary software. There is therefore a need to bring OSS to the awareness of users as a legitimate option and to provide the required support for its implementation.

OSS also gives its users the freedom to explore and modify the software to suit their needs. We have seen this example in some of the projects that we have implemented, such as the e-Governance in Local Government Units, or eLGU, Project, whose components include the establishment of Community eCenters, capacity building and development of e-government applications. All of the e-government applications in the project—including Real Property Tax System, Business Permit Licensing System and the Treasury Operations Management System—are open source-based.

Our policy in the CICT has always been freedom of choice. We believe that the marketplace should decide the use of proprietary software versus open source software. We just need to make sure that there exists a fair marketplace and that the consumer is fully informed of the available choices. Currently, government agencies decide on their own on whether to use proprietary or open source software.

On the part of the CICT, we have several projects currently using open source software. Aside from the eLGU Project, our eGovernance Center of Excellence, located in the CICT building in Diliman, Quezon City, is a showcase of open systems technology and solutions established in partnership with Red Hat, Intel, HP and Oracle. It is envisioned as a catalyst for government-to-government, or G2G, and government to citizen, or G2C, initiatives.

Through our Human Capital Development Group, the CICT is introducing OSS through our iSchools and eSkwela Projects. These projects provide users the opportunity to enhance their learning experience through the use of PCs and the Internet. Our decision to use OSS in the implementation of these projects is driven primarily by its cost effectiveness relative to proprietary solutions. Put simply, cheaper computer labs means more computer labs that we can roll out. The fortunate side effect of this decision is the rapid growth in the installed base of OSS users, particularly in our student population.

Through our eQuality Program, we can potentially increase the pool of OSS experts and professionals in the country. Through this Program, we have partnered with more than 100 state universities and colleges around the country and whose faculty implements teachers training for secondary and primary schools teachers in their respective regions. The eQuality partners will also become training partners for our iSchools project where they will deliver the open source-based ICT Literacy Training for Teachers and Laboratory Management courses.

There are other opportunities as well for open source. Two weeks ago, through our Low Cost Computing Program, we launched Intel's Nettop ng Bayan, which aims to provide low cost PCs to the public. The program offers a full-featured, Internet-centric PC for less than 10,000 pesos, and a key driver for reaching that price point is the use of OSS. We believe that such initiatives would help us achieve our vision of a PC in every home, thereby addressing the country's very low PC and broadband penetration.

Through the examples I have shared with you this morning, you can see that the CICT is already a user and promoter of OSS. By combining our efforts, we will slowly but surely make Filipinos aware of the many benefits that OSS has to offer and that they have a cost effective alternative to proprietary solutions that does not involve software piracy. While we note that there are challenges confronting OSS in the country, such as lack of awareness, low PC penetration, availability of skills, among others, we believe that it is only in jointly addressing these challenges that we can move forward in bringing the benefits of OSS to the Filipino people. With the growing community of active users in the government, academe, and the private sector, I am certain that this will be well within our reach in the near future.

We once again congratulate the organizers of this Philippine Open Source Summit and we wish all of the participants a meaningful two days here in beautiful Cebu City.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay!