Beyond Data Gathering: The Vital Role of the
Philippine Statistics Authority

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Philippine Statistics Authority’s
9th Convention for Solemnizing Officers
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SMX Convention Center, SM Mall of Asia, Pasay City

Hon. Dr. Lisa Grace S. Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General; Hon. Estela T. De Guzman, Deputy National Statistician; Honorables Editha R. Orcilla and Ariel E. Florendo of the Philippine Statistics Authority; my good friend, Director Lourdes J. Hufana; regional directors; respected solemnizing officers who are participating in this convention (honorable judges, governors, mayors, bishops, pastors, ministers, imams, tribal chieftains); civil registrars; esteemed guests; my fellow public servants; ladies and gentlemen, good morning….

This is my first time to be a part of an activity of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), since its creation on September 12, 2013. However, this is my fourth if we would count the previous opportunities which you had given me as a resource person and even as keynote speaker too, during the old but golden days of the National Statistics Office (NSO).

I learned from the website of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) that by virtue of Republic Act (R.A.) No. 10625:

1. The PSA was created;
2. R.A. No. 10625 consolidated the various statistical offices and bureaus of the different national government agencies under one authority, and;
3. The PSA is now comprised of the former National Statistics Office (NSO), the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS), and the Department of Labor and Employment’s Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES).

Hence, the National Statistics Office or NSO which our good friend, former Civil Registrar General and Administrator Carmelita N. Ericita had also ably and faithfully served is now known as the Philippine Statistics Authority or PSA. With this change in the name of your office, I am reminded by what Shakespeare had said: “A rose by any name smells as sweet.” Kaya po, magkaroon man ng bagong katawagan o pangalan, ang halimuyak sa paglilingkod bayan ay hindi mababawasan, bagkus ay lalo pang madadagdagan.
The PAO had undergone a similar experience. It was known then as the Citizen’s Legal Assistance Office or CLAO. The CLAO itself was preceded by the Office of the Agrarian Counsel or OTAC, which in turn had a predecessor, the Tenancy Mediation Commission or TMC, which was initially called as the Agricultural Tenancy Commission or ATC. So you see, the PAO had a number of predecessor-offices which served as its mothers that nurtured it through the years. From its humble beginnings – focusing on agrarian and agricultural concerns – pursuant to Republic Act No. 9406 of 2007 (PAO Law), the PAO grew into a robust principal law office of the Philippine Government in extending free legal assistance to indigent persons and other mandated clients in criminal, civil, labor, administrative and other quasi-judicial cases.

There was a time when the PAO was known as the lawyer of the accused. Today, our Office can render legal assistance to victims as well. Hence, we have a Victims Assistance Unit and PAO Forensic Laboratory. For those who have doubts on the first finding as to the cause of death, whether it’s suicide, homicide or murder, you can consult us; then, we will refer you to the director of our Forensic Laboratory, Atty. Erwin P. Erfe, M.D.

Marami po tayong nababalitaang mga kaso na kung saan natutuklasan ang sanhi ng kamatayan sa bisa ng Forensic evidence. Sa PAO, kabalikat natin ang PSA at civil registrars, sapagkat mayroon po kaming usapan ng dating NSO noon at hanggang ngayon. Maaring mag-MOA po tayo, upang sa pamamagitan nito ang mga biktimang kapus na kapus ay huwag nang pagbayarin ng death certificate o certificate of live birth. At sana po libre ang kanilang registration.

At the PAO, our indigent clients are not required to pay for docket fees. However, we are being ordered by the courts to prove that they are really indigent. It is fine with me. I just advise our public attorneys to file a Motion to Litigate as Pauper. We have to do this, so that the law which exempts the PAO clients from the payment of docket fees and other expenses during the course of litigation won’t be rendered worthless.

Going back to the PSA... The PSA, even now in its infancy, is beginning to live up to its name as the central statistical authority of the Philippine Government on primary data collection.

Ang dami rin pong trabaho ng PSA, parang PAO. Bahagi ng inyong trabaho ang pagbabahay-bahay. Inaalam ninyo kung ilan ang nakatira, at sinasaliksik ang mga datos na may kinalaman sa pamumuhay nila. You collate qualitative data, and also translate them into quantitative data to arrive at unassailable and reliable empirical data.

The PSA’s authority is coupled with the twin qualities of capability and integrity, especially because it is under the able stewardship of a scholar and leader par excellence. We are referring to none other than Dr. Lisa Grace S. Bersales, former vice-president for planning and finance of the University of the Philippines (UP) System and former dean of the UP-Diliman School of Statistics.

Your theme this year, “Get Every Solemnizing Officer in the Picture,” is a reflection of what Ma’am Bersales believes in, which is inclusivity. Bilang isang Iskolar ng Bayan, mula po sa Bachelor’s degree ninyo kung saan kayo po ay nagtapos ng cum laude, hanggang sa Masters at PhD ninyo sa Statistics sa UP, alam kong nananalaytay sa inyong dugo ang “inclusivity”. Ang paniniwala at pagsasagawa ng paniniwalang ito na sa ating mundong ginagalawan ay walang dapat na napababayaan; bagkus, ang lahat ay napahahalagahan.

As a Doctor of Social Development graduate from UP-Diliman, the Alma Mater which Dr. Bersales and I share, I can say that social inclusion is indeed ingrained in us.

There is social inclusion in your theme, “Get Every Solemnizing Officer in the Picture.” As I browse the programme for today, I learned that there is a session this afternoon dubbed as “Talakayan sa Pagkakasal”. The participants in the said session that will be facilitated by my good friend, Dean Danny Concepcion, are various solemnizing officers: mayor, judge, pastor, imam, consul, and tribal chieftain. As
they all take part in the said “talakayan”, they take with them the concerns of their respective constituents or the very people they serve as they officiate or solemnize marriages. Hence, this convention will again provide an opportunity for the participants and stakeholders to exchange their ideas and share their experiences. When we truly get everybody into the picture, each one is not just seen in photo opportunities, but is actually heard and given the chance to take part in decision-making.

This convention will also serve as a reminder to all solemnizing officers of the very important information relative to the issuance of Certificate for Registration of the Authority to Solemnize Marriage (CRASM). These are the requirements in applying for CRASM, as provided in the website of the PSA, to wit:

1) Accomplished application form (OCRG-SO Form No. 1) in triplicate copies, subscribed and sworn to a person authorized to administer oath with affixed documentary stamp;

(“Sa ating mga solemnizing officers, maaari po kayong pumunta sa PAO para sa libreng panunumpa. Hindi na kayo magbabayad sa pagpapanotaryo, pero ang documentary stamps kailangan ninyo pong bayaran.”)

2) Three copies of colored ID pictures (2x2) with white background taken not more than a month ago from the date of application. Pictures should not be computer generated to preserve its quality. In cases the person is using glasses, it should be removed to have a clear image of the person. The back of the ID picture should contain the signature of the applicant;

3) A machine copy of appointment as priest, head, founder, bishop, pastor and minister of the religion or religious sect;

4) Proper endorsement/designation/recommendation from the head of religion or religious sect to mention: the full name, nationality, complete address, location of the church, temple or mosque where the applicant regularly perform rites and indicate the extent of his territorial jurisdiction;

5) Certified True Copy of Certificate of Live Birth;

6) Alien Certificate of Registration (ACR) or Immigration Certificate of Registration (ICR) issued by the Commission on Immigration and Deportation (CID), in case the applicant is a citizen of a foreign country;

7) Certified True Copy of Certificate of Ordination issued by his/her respective church; and

8) Certificate of Registration, Articles of Incorporations and by-laws, and updated General Information Sheet (G.I.S.) certified by the Head of the religion or religious sect. (Administrative Order No. 1, Series of 2007)."

The legal anchor for the authority of solemnizing officers is Article 7 of the Family Code. It is the same provision of law (specifically Article 7, Section 2) which gives the civil registrar general the power to issue certificates of registration of authority to solemnize marriage to solemnizing officers. I am sure that you all know this by heart, but please allow me to state it just the same. Article 7 of the Family Code provides:

“Art. 7. Marriage may be solemnized by:
(1) Any incumbent member of the judiciary within the court’s jurisdiction;
(2) Any priest, rabbi, imam, or minister of any church or religious sect duly authorized by his church or religious sect and registered with the civil registrar general, acting within the limits of the written authority granted by his church or religious sect and provided that at least one of the contracting parties belongs to the solemnizing officer’s church or religious sect;

(3) Any ship captain or airplane chief only in the case mentioned in Article 31;

(4) Any military commander of a unit to which a chaplain is assigned, in the absence of the latter, during a military operation, likewise only in the cases mentioned in Article 32;

(5) Any consul-general, consul or vice-consul in the case provided in Article 10.” (56a) (Emphasis supplied)
Some of the solemnizing officers mentioned in this provision are oftentimes the subject or part of the concerns of letter writers to my four (4) pro bono newspaper columns. These are: Dear PAO (published daily by The Manila Times); Magtanong kay Attorney (published daily by Bulgar); Say Mo Attorney? (published every Monday, Wednesday & Friday by People’s Tonight); and Attorney First published every Monday & Friday by Pinoy Parazzi).

I will share with you portions of two (2) of the letters that were sent to my column, Dear PAO of the Manila Times. The first letter goes:

“I found out recently that the minister who married us forgot to register our marriage certificate to the NSO. Does this mean that my husband and I are not married?”

A part of my answer to this question is:

“ XXX a marriage contract is not enumerated as a requisite of a valid marriage. However, a marriage contract being a public document is a prima facie proof of marriage (Alcantara vs. Alcantara, G.R. No. 167746, August 28, 2007).

“If there is no marriage contract but all the formal and essential requisites are present, the parties may still prove the fact of marriage by other pieces of evidence.

“With regard to the non-registration of your marriage by a certain minister, this error may still be corrected, as the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has also provided a procedure for late registration of marriage. According to the PSA, the solemnizing officer or person reporting or presenting the marriage certificate for registration shall execute and file an affidavit in support of registration, stating the exact place and date of marriage, facts and circumstances surrounding the marriage, and the reason or cause of the delay. The application for marriage license bearing the date when the license was issued shall also be submitted. If the original or duplicate copy of the marriage certificate could not be presented because it was burned, lost, or destroyed, a certification by the church or solemnizing officer indicating the said marriage based on their record or logbook shall be sufficient proof of marriage”.

Now, the second and last letter which I will share with you, goes:

My wife and I separated because of religious differences. Nine years after our separation, she married a foreigner in Cavite. We were both Catholics, but she converted to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In fact, her second marriage was solemnized in their church.

I just want to know whether a marriage solemnized in the church of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is valid and legal. Is my wife’s second marriage also valid? Can she be held liable for bigamy?

A part of my answer to this query is:

“We want to emphasize that marriages may not only be solemnized by Catholic priests. It may be solemnized by a rabbi, an imam, or a minister of any church or religious sect as long as he or she is duly authorized by his or her church or religious sect, registered with the civil registrar general, and is acting within the limits of the written authority granted by his or her church or religious sect and provided that at least one of the contracting parties belongs to the solemnizing officer’s church or religious sect (Article 7, Family Code of the Philippines).

“While our laws do not provide for a specific form or religious rite for the solemnization of the contract of marriage, it is, however, necessary that the contracting parties secure a valid marriage license prior to the solemnization of their marriage, except in the cases allowed by law. They must likewise personally appear before the solemnizing officer and declare in the presence of not less than two witnesses of legal age that they take
each other as husband and wife. This declaration shall be contained in the marriage certificate that shall be signed by the contracting parties and their witnesses and attested by the solemnizing officer (Article 6 in relation to Article 3, *Ibid.*).

“Accordingly, a marriage solemnized in the church of Jehovah’s Witnesses may be considered valid and legally binding as long as it has complied with the abovementioned requisites. However, a person who is already married may not legally contract a subsequent marriage without securing a declaration of nullity of marriage or annulment of his or her first marriage from the proper court, otherwise he or she may be held liable for the crime of bigamy. As provided for under Article 349 of the *Revised Penal Code (RPC):*

‘The penalty of prision mayor shall be imposed upon any person who shall contract a second or subsequent marriage before the former marriage has been legally dissolved, or before the absent spouse has been declared presumptively dead by means of a judgment rendered in the proper proceedings.’

“Hence, your wife may be held criminally liable for bigamy if you can concretely establish that she contracted her second marriage without having your first marriage annulled or declared as null and void.”

The said letters have proven how sensitive and significant are the role and responsibilities of the solemnizing officers. Evidently, the PSA is very much aware of this that is why we are all here. We join hands in helping to ensure that even as we embrace inclusivity, responsibility and accountability must also reign even more in the ranks of solemnizing officers in our country.

Accountability is something which all of us must take seriously. Sadly though, there are people who forget that there is an all-seeing and all-knowing Supreme Being who sees and knows everything that we do. Many of them even think that they could get away from the long arm of the law. Indeed, they ignore the fact that everyone will be accountable to our Lord Almighty when the days of our lives on Earth are through.

*Balikan po natin ang ating mga solemnizing officers. Nasa inyo po ang awtoridad na mapagbuklod ang isang babae at lalaki sa ligaya at tuwa...sa sakit at pighati. Kaakibat po ng kapangyarihang ito ang responsibilidad na siguraduhing ang inyong pinagsasama sa lupa ay kaya ninyong panagutan hanggang langit ang kapasidad at karapatan magpakasal.*

*Pangaralan inyong ang inyong mga ikinakasal.* To the males, tell them not to beat their wives. Warn them about Republic Act No. 9262, which is protective of the rights of women and their children. To the females, counsel them that as wives, they must serve as their families’ inspiration. In times of trials, they are the light which dispels darkness as they brighten and lighten the load of their collective domestic problems. Instill in them the truism that they are now one body and one soul. And as such they must be together in ensuring the unity of their families.

*Ating mga solemnizing officers, may matindi kayong partisipasyon sa pagpapanatiling matibay at buo ng pamilyang Filipino. Ang bigat naman ng sinabi ko po, ano? Ganoon po talaga... Ang katungkulan ay may katambal na pananagutan. Nanniniwala naman po ako na ang lahat ng solemnizing officers na nandito ngayon ay may kapasidad at integridad na itaguyod ang daniang at importansiya ng pamilya. Mabuhay po kayo!*


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