

Dateline: Mongolia - GPFF - Hyun Jin Moon

Representative Josie Josen
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The Mongolian ceremonial guards and Hyun Jiin Moon at a wreath-laying ceremony honoring their founding father, Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan).

MANILA, Philippines -- Mongolia is a land of contrasts. Its pockets of urban centers reek of modernity while the vast grasslands seem suspended in time.

After all, the main economy has traditionally been and still is livestock raising. Only two percent of the country is arable, eight percent is covered with forests, while about 90 percent of the land consists of grassland, semi desert and desert.

The first thing I learned about Mongolia, however, is the proper term for its founding father Chinggis Khaan, who, in history books is referred to as Genghis Khan. I came to know this because we arrived there via the Chinggis Khaan International Airport near Ulaanbaatar, the venue of our conference.

The surprise about Chinggis didn't stop there, for I soon found out that as its founding father, he is revered in Mongolia like a deity to this day.

I also learned that Mongolia is the land of cashmere, and ger—the traditional transportable home of the nomads to help them survive the frigid cold of up to 60°F below zero.

Our trip to Mongolia however wasn't for pleasure. The four of us, all lady legislators, went there to participate in the Global Peace Leadership Conference organized by the government of Mongolia and the Global Peace Festival Foundation. With me were representatives Gina de Venecia, Aliah Dimaporo and Bernadette Herrera-Dy.

The Philippines and Mongolia are two countries in stark contrast with each other in terms of language, culture, population, demography and others. However, despite our countries' differences, we are both burdened by damages caused to our environment by rapid industrialization.

I then enjoined my colleagues to put our heads together, and craft a framework of achieving economic stability that hinges on environmental protection.

After all, as we both strive to increase our economic gains, as our industries continue to be fueled by oil and coal, as we continue to extract minerals and metals from our mines, as we continue to deplete our forest cover, as we continue to use coal and wood for heat and cooking, our air and water had become polluted and our people are prone to property and personal damages due to flooding.

Representative De Venecia of Pangasinan's 4th District complimented Mongolia for its environmental initiatives. "We have only to look at your historic efforts to save the southern grasslands from the encroachment of the Gobi desert, to see how much your government cares for Mongolia's environment.

"That singular action to create a 'Green Wall' of trees in southern Mongolia to combat desertification plays a vital role in Asia and in the world's fight to protect the environment", she said.

Taking a cue from her experience in her congressional district where she is advocating the planting of trees, she proposed massive reforestation as the only practical solution to halt climate change.

"Because trees absorb carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and thereby help to slow or reduce global warming. More trees will also restore the productivity of the soil and water resources, restore lost habitat and preserve biodiversity", she reasoned.

Representative Bernadette Herrera-Dy addressed the issue of peace. She called on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to arduously promote global peace.

"Aside from being a safe harbor for economic prosperity, ASEAN is now engaged in international dispute resolution. I refer in particular to contested portions of the Spratlys, an island group believed to hold rich oil and natural gas reserves. Resources, gas, oil or mineral, should always be used in the name of peace, and not for the sake of war. By engaging ASEAN directly, there will be mutual benefits for Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia", she stated.

Rep. Aliah Dimaporo of the 2nd District of Lanao Del Norte spoke about the benefit of sports as it reaches beyond personal development. She cited the phenomenal effect of our sports stars: the Azkals, the Philippine Dragon Boat Racing Team and our colleague, Manny Pacquiao, in promoting national pride and unity among Filipinos. She said, "Our excellence in sports has opened the world to 'the Filipino.' Our excellence has united us in national pride. Unity is an essential element of peace, and throughout history, sport has proven to be one effective, universal tool for its promotion."

At the conference, it has become more clear to me that my colleagues at the House of Representatives, in concert with the women of Asia and the delegates at the Global Peace Leadership Conference are not only committed to promote peace and gender equality, but also arduous in the fight against corruption and poverty and the struggle to preserve the environment in Asia and throughout the world.

(Rep. Josie Joson is the Representative of the 1st District of Nueva Ecija. She is the author of the Magna Carta for Women.)