

WHY CHANGE OUR PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT TO A PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT?

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I. The Philippines today. What is the big picture?

1. We are a weak, divided nation.

Most people are preoccupied with their concerns for self and family, private interests and possessions. They do not care about other citizens, the community, the nation, the government, the state, the environment, and the common good.

2. Our Republic is still a "Soft State."

Weak rule of law and governance because of the dominance and power of political families, warlords and rebel groups.

3. Our constitutional democracy cannot deliver on its promise of a peaceful, just and humane society under the rule of law.

4. Our people are increasingly dissatisfied with the way our democracy works, but still believe in democracy as an ideal.

5. In fact, our country is in a deep political and economic crisis. The very survival of our constitutional democracy is gravely threatened.

In our deepening political division and confrontations, some groups are proposing undemocratic and extra-constitutional means of resolving our differences, including rebellion and military intervention.

II. Our democratic political development since independence in 1946

- 1. We had a Presidential and Unitary Government under the 1935 Constitution—until Sept. 1972 (except during the Japanese Military Occupation 1942-1945).**

Legislative power in the unicameral National Assembly, then in Congress (Senate and House of Representatives). Executive power in the President. Judicial power in the Supreme Court and lower courts. Based on the principle of "separation of powers and checks and balance" among the three branches of government.

- 2. The Marcos Authoritarian Government lasted from Sept. 1972 to Feb. 1986. We had a Pseudo-Parliamentary, and actual Dictatorship under the 1973 Constitution.**

President Marcos exercised executive and legislative powers in a pseudo parliamentary government, and controlled the judiciary and the media. He governed with the military and national police. The people lost their political freedom and civil rights. Many were illegally detained, tortured, killed, or simply disappeared.

- 3. The EDSA Revolution ended the Marcos Dictatorship on Feb. 25, 1986. It called for "Justice, Freedom and Democracy."**

The world's freedom-loving nations acclaimed our success in overthrowing a dictator of over 13 years without bloodshed—through "people power."

- 4. President Aquino ruled for one year under a Revolutionary Government—from Feb. 25, 1986 to Feb. 1, 1987, under her so-called "Freedom Constitution."**

- 5. Democracy was restored under the 1987 Constitution prepared by an appointed Constitutional Commission and ratified by the people on Feb. 2, 1987. We also restored a Presidential and Unitary Government.**

We restored the separation of powers and checks and balance among the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary.

The unitary structure concentrated powers and revenues in the national government. Local governments are weak and dependent on the national government but some local autonomy was extended under the Constitution and the Local Autonomy Code.

6. Under President Aquino (1986-1992) we restored our elitist democracy and restarted our economic recovery, but there were nine coup attempts by politicized military rebels supported by some Marcos loyalists.
7. Under President Ramos (1992-1998) our economic recovery made solid progress as he was also able to restrain the military rebels, and successfully end the GRP-MNLF conflict.

But, as before and after Ramos, our chronic social and economic problems and the Communist and Moro insurgencies persisted.

8. In January 2001, President Estrada was the second president removed by "people power," after his failed impeachment trial for plunder and corruption. His removal, trial and detention led to more political instability.

This showed the people's determination to hold their President accountable. This was followed in May by a march on Malacañang by thousands of his urban poor supporters, suggesting a "revolt of the poor constituents" of an ineffective democracy.

9. Vice-President Arroyo succeeded Estrada and was elected in 2004 to a full six-year term until 2010. President Arroyo has worked hard to improve social services, infrastructure, and initiate economic reforms—with some success.

But her term has been marred by sustained opposition by Estrada loyalists and other opposition and NGO leaders and military rebels, and unresolved allegations of cheating in the 2004 presidential elections where she defeated FPJ, "Da king" of Filipino movies. She has survived several "people power" protests, military rebellion, and impeachment attempts but suffers from unending challenges to her legitimacy.

10. After 19 years under our restored elitist democracy and our presidential and unitary government—we have failed to check our problems of mass poverty, unemployment, social injustice, corruption, rebellion, inadequate education, health, housing, rapid population growth, destruction of the environment, and so on.

Every year so many of our people have to go abroad to find jobs and support their families.

11. Largely because our leaders are unwilling and unable to raise taxes, our government has very limited funding. It is now heavily in debt from too much borrowing. Up to 40 % of our national budget goes to debt service, thus reducing funds for social services and development.

However, serious fiscal reforms and new taxes have been initiated by President Arroyo with the support of Congress.

III. Charter change is imperative and urgent!

Fully realizing the serious ineffectiveness of our political institutions and governance, and the failure of our constitutional democracy, many leaders and citizens are proposing their reform by revising our Constitution and other ways.

President Arroyo and many leaders in the House of Representatives and the local governments and civil society are proposing the change of our political system—

1. From a presidential government to a parliamentary government.
2. From a bicameral legislature to a unicameral Parliament.
3. From a centralized unitary system to a decentralized system of autonomous territories and regions leading to a Federal Republic.
4. It is also proposed to reform of our political parties as institutions of representation, and our electoral system, judiciary, and civil service.
5. And it is proposed to liberalize some restrictive economic policies in the Constitution—to attract much more foreign investments and business, as our progressive neighbors in Asia have been doing all along.

IV. What Parliamentary Government is proposed ?

1. A Parliament that combines legislative and executive powers.
2. Unicameral in structure.

3. **The Parliament shall have as many members as may be provided by law. To begin with, the Parliament shall have as many elected members as the present 235 congressional district representatives.**
4. **In addition the members chosen by the political parties shall constitute thirty percent of the total members of Parliament (MPs), including those elected to the Parliament.**

These additional members are chosen by "proportional representation" of the political parties based on their share of the total votes cast nationwide for the individual parties in the previous parliamentary election.

5. **"Checks and balance" are exercised in the relations between the majority party and the opposition parties, including their regular "question hour."**
6. **The opposition is represented in the Commission on Appointments. There are also the others centers of countervailing power: the business groups, the interest groups, the media, and civil society organizations.**
7. **Members of Parliament shall be elected, or chosen by the political parties, for a term of five years, with no term limits. Candidates for MP must have a college degree.**
8. **The Prime Minister is elected by a majority of all the MPs. He exercises the executive power as the Head of Government. He is normally the leader of the majority party in the Parliament.**
9. **As the Head of the Government, the Prime Minister is assisted by the Cabinet of Ministers, at least three-fourths of whom are MPs.**
10. **From among the MPs, the Parliament elects the President who is the Head of State for a term of five years.**

The President shall cease to be an MP and a member of any political party. He has a term of five years.

V. Advantages of Parliamentary Government over our Presidential Government?

1. **Because Parliament exercises both legislative power and executive power, it will ensure the coordinated, efficient and effective making of laws and policies and their implementation. Especially because the Parliament has only one house or chamber.**
2. **The Prime Minister and the Government (the Cabinet and governing party headed by the Prime Minister) assume collective responsibility and collective accountability for governance to the Parliament and the people.**

The people will know whom to reward for good governance and administration, or to punish for failure and corruption.

3. **Parliamentary Government is more likely to ensure the election of the Head of Government—the Prime Minister—for his leadership and experience in the party and in the public service. He is known to party members.**
4. **It will help prevent election of the Head of Government on the basis largely of, personal popularity or “win-ability,” not on proven competence and experience as a political leader.**
5. **It will be easier to change the Head of Government and the ruling party whenever it becomes necessary, by a vote of no confidence in Parliament, and its dissolution, followed by a new election of MPs.**

No need for impeachment, people power revolts, and military intervention that cause political instability, disrupt the economy, discourage foreign investors, and hurt the people, especially the poor.

6. **Unlike in our Presidential Government where the President is both Head of Government and Head of State, the function of Head of State is assigned to a ceremonial President elected by the Parliament. This will lighten the burden on the Prime Minister who can concentrate on governance.**
7. **At the same time the President, who symbolizes the people's sovereignty and national unity, can be a rallying point as a leader who is above partisan politics.**

8. **Parliamentary Government and electoral reform will empower the people to choose not only the candidates for the Parliament but also the political party they want to govern the country and the regional and local governments.**
9. **It will develop a two-party system and political parties that are democratic, disciplined, united, and effective in making and carrying out a program of government that can secure popular support.**

Unlike our present political parties that are undemocratic, opportunistic, oriented to personalities and patronage, and not to policy and program of government.

10. **The people elect the members of Parliament among candidates in parliamentary districts and also by "proportional representation" of the rival political parties in the parliamentary election (a new party list of all political parties).**
11. **Parliamentary elections will cost much less than nationwide presidential and senatorial elections that require billions and corrupt the political system.**
12. **It will be easier and faster and less costly to administer elections and proclaim the winning candidates.**
13. **It will reduce the high cost of electing the Head of Government in a national election by choosing the leader of the majority party (or coalition) in Parliament as Prime Minister.**
14. **The selection of additional members of Parliament through "proportional representation" of the political parties will enable the leading political party to select other competent leaders to serve in Parliament and the Cabinet.**

These are professionals, business leaders, scholars, and representatives of various sectors of society who can serve in Parliament and the Cabinet, although they are not willing to run for member of Parliament.
15. **Parliamentary Government can lead to more continuity in policy and administration if the majority party or coalition governs well and the**

people are satisfied, because the people will learn to reward or punish the ruling party for its success or failure in governance.

The people will know that the ruling party, not just individual leaders, are the ones responsible and accountable for the government's performance.

VI. In Conclusion

Most stable and progressive countries in the world have a parliamentary government. These include Japan, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, and also India, Singapore, and Malaysia in Asia.

- 1. Parliamentary government will help us to have good governance: *ang mabuti at mabisang pamamalakad ng ating gobyerno at bayan.***
- 2. Charter change to a parliamentary government, along with decentralization and devolution of powers to the regional and local governments in a federal structure, will enable us to respond more efficiently and effectively to our problems, meet our challenges and achieve our goals as a nation, and compete in the global economy.**
- 3. Charter change to a parliamentary government and a decentralized structure will help us to mobilize and sustain "people power" in national, regional and local governance to reduce poverty and corruption.**
- 4. It will empower us to achieve the peace, prosperity, justice and security we all want for ourselves and our children.**
- 5. Moreover, with less restrictions on foreign investments and participation, the Government will be better able to help in attracting these investments that will create more jobs, raise incomes, provide better education, health, welfare, and security to our people.**
- 6. And we can build and maintain more schools, hospitals, waterworks, roads, bridges, seaports and airports.**
- 7. With a great deal of political will, hard work and sacrifice we can build a nation worthy of our heroes, a country fit for our children—of which Filipinos can be really proud.**