

Message on the Commemoration of the 124th Death Anniversary of Dr. Jose Rizal

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On behalf of Ambassador Philippe J. Lhuillier, it is my pleasure that we have today members of the Filipino community present, as we commemorate the 124th death anniversary of Dr. Jose Protocio Rizal. Due to strict social protocols adopted by the Community of Madrid, it would not be feasible to lay a wreath at the monument at the junction of Avenida delas Islas Filipinas and Calle Santander. Maybe in the summer, when the weather is good, and when we commemorate Rizal's birthday, I could see you there.

For now, we would honor Dr. Rizal in other ways, and I am quite happy to be joining you later for a group picture with the bust of Dr. Rizal as our backdrop.

As you may not know, I served as Consul at the Philippine Embassy in Berlin, Germany, and there I had a deeper understanding about Rizal. As I came to Spain, I found that Rizal serves as an important link to connect the Philippines with Spain and Germany. Both countries helped nurture the thirst for knowledge of a young Rizal to make him one of the better known Filipino intellectuals of the country at the turn of the century.

In the late 1880s, Rizal spent a considerable amount of time in Madrid and Barcelona, as well as in Germany's Berlin and Heidelberg to pursue his studies. Rizal began writing his famous novel, Noli Me Tangere while in Madrid, and managed to finish and print the novel during his time in Germany. The monument I mentioned about in Madrid was erected in 1996 to mark Rizal's stay in Madrid. There are fifty-two plazas and streets in Madrid that bear names of illustrious people in history, these are men and women leaders, notable educators, reformers, and literary figures and Rizal was selected to have a plaza and street in his name. The Rizal monument in Madrid continues to be a venue of commemorations by the Filipino community on special occasions.

Quite interestingly, when a Filipino comes to Madrid for the first time, he asks for directions where Rizal lived and studied. The Embassy would offer them a 'Rizal Guide' which is downloadable from the Embassy website. Soon, the Embassy would be upgrading the Rizal Guide to a visual walking tour guide so one can better appreciate Rizal's Madrid.

Rizal probably is the leading authoritative figure who had written significant cultural works in Spanish. Any discussion on furthering cultural relations of the Philippines with either Spain and Germany would inevitably touch on Rizal. And I also would add, Spanish and German diplomatic officials never fail to note that Rizal's advocacy for reforms and economic progress could have only been nurtured by European teachers or peers from Spain and Germany.

Here in Spain, Rizal is looked upon as someone who has shown his patriotism and love for country, and I hope that we are able to inculcate in the minds of the Filipino youth how one should love his country in the manner that Rizal did and showed us. Maraming salamat po sa pagdalo ninyo ngayong hapon na ito.