

**Inaugural Address by Lieutenant Governor Arnold Indalecio Palacios
Northern Mariana Islands Soccer Training Center | Koblerville, Saipan
Monday, January 14, 2019**

Hafa Adai, Tirow, Good Morning, and Welcome to our off-island dignitaries, and of course my fellow citizens of the Marianas.

Today is a beautiful day, and it's made especially beautiful because of all of you allowing us to serve you.

The solemnity of the oath takes on an especially poignant meaning for me, as it should for all of us taking the oath of office today. Our islands have endured much in the past four months. And we are on the road to recovery. While we still have a long way to go, progress is underway. Much is expected of our new administration, and we assure you. Governor Torres and I accept the challenges this extraordinary time presents and vow to lead the Commonwealth to a new future. Make no mistake. The task at hand is monumental. Before October 25, 2018, we had a thriving Commonwealth economy full of opportunities, the promise of more ventures, growth and progress. We paid down our debt, made good on our promise to retirees, gave our education and health care systems record-setting funding, and improved the delivery of utilities to our communities.

Then came the one-two punch of Typhoon Mangkut in September, followed in October by Super Typhoon Yutu, the strongest typhoon/hurricane to hit American soil. Just as we were putting 2015 and Typhoon Soudelor behind us, we are brought back to Square One but in more profoundly difficult circumstances. The Super Typhoon spared no one. Every household has experienced loss of property in one form or another.

For all that we have gone through, we still must count ourselves lucky and in many ways blessed. As a member of the American family, we have received relief supplies and aid from our fellow Americans whose generosity is unmatched in the world.

FEMA, the US Armed Forces, the Army Corp and the government of Guam, especially the Guam Power Authority (GPA), acted swiftly to come to our aid with basic daily necessities distributed to many in need. Then came the helping hands in rebuilding damaged homes and our public infrastructure. Let's give them a round of applause.

We are grateful for the many women and men, from near and far, in uniform and in the private sector, who arrived in less than ideal conditions. They hit the ground running to fulfill their mission. We also thank the generosity of our neighbors in Micronesia, including the FSM Government for its generous financial assistance and to the State of Kosrae and its line crew who helped restore power in the hard-hit communities in southern Saipan.

We will never forget their time and sacrifice in our hour of need. Their presence eased our worries and lifted our spirits as we felt the kind words of comfort and reassurance of help on the way. We promise you that we will do the same for you whenever the need arises. Let's give our Pacific family a round of applause.

As our off-island guests return home, the full measure of rebuilding the Commonwealth will fall squarely on our shoulders. Let me recognize the countless men and women of the Commonwealth so many to mention who gave more than a hundred percent of their time and energy to the recovery effort. They put in long hours knowing that the public's health, safety and welfare are at stake and quick action is critical in natural disasters. They responded magnificently to the recovery effort. Let's give our local heroes a round of applause.

We also commend the business community for working swiftly to resume operations. Some of you opened your doors within hours after the typhoons had passed to meet the demands of people for their everyday needs. The members of our tourism industry took to the streets to help in deliver meals, remove debris, and even pulled sheets of tin from the lagoon. Yes, businesses operate on the principle that time is money, but the enthusiastic and quick action of our tourism partners in the private sector showed how much our collective efforts and cooperation can accomplish.

It inspires hope in our communities and sends a signal that life does go on and that we are all in this together. To our private sector partners, thank you for your generosity and your commitment to our community. Let's give them a round of applause.

As Governor Torres and I lead the task of rebuilding, let's not forget the lessons we have learned about what we need to do to succeed.

First, climate change is our reality. As island communities, we must not only join hands with our Pacific neighbors to influence international policy, we must do our part to protect the fragile island environment in which we live. Laws and regulations that are designed to protect our environment must be respected. Those who violate must face sanctions and punishment.

The typhoons also exposed the vulnerability of our homes, buildings, and infrastructure systems. Rebuilding requires good governance and careful planning and use of our limited resources. We need to structure homestead development to tie-in with affordable mortgage loan programs. Our economic development and housing agencies must take the lead in providing programs to better assist our people.

Access to affordable loans and grant programs to finance safer and typhoon-proof homes should be expanded. The same goes for our public facilities and especially our schools which were ravaged by the typhoons.

By combining their efforts, our agencies responsible for economic development, affordable housing, planning, homesteading and our educational systems can more effectively address the construction of affordable quality housing in the Commonwealth.

The typhoons also taught us a painful lesson about saving for rainy days – no pun intended. Just as we set aside in our personal life a savings account for unexpected emergencies, so too must the Commonwealth. Any spending to be made must be tied to fiscal discipline, spending based on priorities set by data-driven information on community needs. A more strategic approach to government spending is necessary especially when resources are limited.

Much remains to be done as you can see around you. Governor Torres and I pledge our commitment to provide you with effective and exceptional leadership.

I am personally humbled and overwhelmed by the show of support for Governor Torres and myself. The general election is behind us. It is time to put political and personal differences aside. No comparable event in the past 41 years of our history has tested the strength of our character as a community and the ability to rise above adversity than the disasters of the past four months. If we are to do extraordinary things in this extraordinary time, we all must be willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of everyone. This we must do to make our Commonwealth worthy of the legacy entrusted to us by our foremothers and forefathers.

And so I extend my hand out to each and every person who calls the Commonwealth home. Let's work together. The Commonwealth Anthem is a beloved gathering song for us islanders evoking the powerful emotion of deep abiding love for our islands in the Marianas – "Mit beses yan mas. Hu Saluda hao. Gatbo na islas Marianas utuna hao."

Maila ya tafan danña para ta protehi ya tanagatbo-talu i islas Marianas.

Let's get to work Marianas.

God bless us all. God bless the Northern Mariana Islands.