

Remarks of Ambassador ENDO Kazuya at the Commendation

Ceremony for Senator Juan Miguel “Migz” Zubiri

26 January 2026, Ambassador’s Residence

Magandang gabi po sa inyong lahat!

It is my great honor to join you this evening as we celebrate the conferment of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun on Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri. This distinction recognizes his outstanding contributions to the promotion and advancement of Japan–Philippines relations, especially during his tenure as the Senate President of the Philippines.

In recent years, as our region has faced evolving economic, security, and humanitarian challenges, the importance of strong and reliable partnerships has become increasingly clear. Through his steady leadership and genuine commitment to cooperation, Senator Zubiri played a decisive role in strengthening the bonds of trust, collaboration, and shared values that define the friendship between our two nations.

As Senate President from 2022 to 2024, and as President of the Philippine–Japan Parliamentarians Association, Senator Zubiri led with

consistency in fostering closer ties between our legislatures. He actively encouraged exchanges and dialogue among Japanese and Philippine lawmakers by hosting the 31st Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum and promoting parliamentary exchanges in 2023 between the Senate and the National Diet. These efforts helped deepen mutual understanding and reinforce inter-parliamentary cooperation.

One particularly memorable moment was the historic joint session of Congress to hear the policy address of former Prime Minister Kishida. Before I became Ambassador of Japan to the Philippines, I had the privilege of joining Prime Minister Kishida's delegation as Assistant Minister and Director General of the International Cooperation Bureau. During that session, I learned something new about the Philippines—the famous selfie culture. I was surprised to see many Filipino legislators lining up to take selfies with the Prime Minister. And now that I am here, I must confess that no event goes by without me taking at least one selfie!

Supporting these initiatives was the invaluable work of the Senate Secretariat, whose indispensable efforts helped turn dialogue into

meaningful cooperation. In particular, I wish to recognize Senate Secretary Atty. Renato N. Bantug Jr. and Director General Antonio G. de Guzman Jr., whose dedication and commitment to public service greatly contributed to strengthening ties between our two countries.

Building on his parliamentary leadership, Senator Zubiri also played a key role in advancing economic cooperation between Japan and the Philippines. He consistently expressed strong support for the **Japan–Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA)** and worked to promote a favorable and vibrant investment environment.

His strong advocacy for the **CREATE MORE Act** has delivered tangible benefits for export-oriented enterprises operating in the Philippines. I am certain that Japanese companies present here and those that will invest in the Philippines in the years ahead will continue to feel the positive impact of Senator Zubiri’s commitment to economic cooperation.

Recognizing the centrality of peace and stability in the region, he diligently supported the timely consideration and early approval of the **Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA)** between Japan and the Philippines.

His stewardship, strengthened by the support of his fellow Senators—some of whom are with us this evening — paved the way for deeper defense cooperation and practical collaboration between our forces.

This year holds special meaning for both our countries as **Japan and the Philippines commemorate the 70th anniversary of the normalization of our diplomatic relations.** Over seven decades, our two nations have forged a partnership spanning political, economic, security, and people-to-people ties.

I have heard that Senator Zubiri along with his family often travel to Japan. By now, I am sure he knows all the best places to eat, drink and visit. When I return to Japan, I should ask him for his advice instead...he might be the real expert!

Moments like these reflect the genuine warmth and closeness between our peoples. It is in this spirit, and in recognition of his indelible contributions to the advancement of our partnership, that the Government of Japan has conferred upon Senator Zubiri the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun, one of Japan's highest honors.

Senator Zubiri, on behalf of the Government and people of Japan, I extend our sincere gratitude for your dedication, your service, and your friendship.

As we look ahead, Japan remains deeply committed to strengthening its close cooperation with the Philippines in advancing peace, stability, and prosperity in our region. Inspired by leaders who act with foresight, integrity, and a strong sense of shared responsibility, we remain ever confident that Japan–Philippines relations will continue to grow in depth, purpose, and impact for generations to come.

Mabuhay si Senator Zubiri, at mabuhay ang matibay na pagkakaibigan ng Japan at Pilipinas. (Long live Senator Zubiri, and long live the strong friendship between Japan and the Philippines)

Maraming salamat po!