

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Congress is uniquely positioned among legislative bodies in Asia and probably the world: it was padlocked for some time and when it reopened, its chambers are located more than 35 kilometers apart.

The Philippine Congress was padlocked in 1972 when then resident Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law and remained locked until the assumption of President Corazon C. Aquino in 1987 -- that was a total of 15 years. Although an *Interim Batasang Pambansa* (IBP) and a Regular *Batasang Pambansa* (BP) were established in between, the growth of a professional corps of congressional staff suffered. Most of those who lost their jobs with the closure of Congress sought employment in the IBP, then later in the BP.

When Congress resumed in 1987, the former core of officials in the pre-Martial Law Senate decided to go back to the institution and assist in its re-establishment. This served well for the new institution because experts were in place to train the new breed of congressional as well as secretariat staff.

The Philippine Congress is the only Congress where the House of Representatives and the Senate are physically separated by more than 35 kilometers. The Senate is in the southern part of Metro Manila (Pasay City), while the House of Representatives is in the northern part (Quezon City). They operate independently of each other and only collaborate when a measure is pending the Bicameral Conference Committee or during the State of the Nation Address, which is a constitutional mandate. Thus, both institutions have developed their own set of nuances unique to their institutional roles.

Legislative bodies in order to be responsive to the calls of the time need to continually evolve as an organization and must seek reforms in its processes and procedures. The Secretariat has to be composed of permanent career professionals who are competent efficient effective neutral and are the institutional memories

Congress comes and goes but, nothing much happens with the Secretariat. The quality of technical services that any Legislative Secretariat renders have to grow with the change of congressional members. As the institutional memory, the Secretariat should be professional in dispensing its work. It should evolve into a team of experts in very important fields of policy studies as well as congressional affairs.

The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) 2nd Country Cooperation Framework under the Portfolio of Good Governance through Legislative Reform identified priority areas of assistance that could respond to the Congress's capacity building needs, particularly in policy analysis, oversight, legislative services and knowledge management systems.

This initiative, along with other similar future endeavors, seeks to strengthen the capability of the institution is envisions this to be part of a blueprint for a "Legislative Modernization Program".

The Senate is vital in national politics. This activity is but a first step towards building an institution that will serve as a training ground for future Philippine Presidents. It is only when this institution is able to respond to its role in law-making can Congress elevate the kind of debates and discourses it accords to make marked improvements in the kind of legislation it formulates. Only then can one say that Congress has truly become more responsive to the needs of the country.