

**MESSAGE OF
HIS EXCELLENCY ENRIQUE A. MANALO
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES TO THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE TIMICHEGTUNNEL
GENT, BELGIUM, 5 MAY 2011, 15H00**

The Honourable Mayor of Ghent, Mr. Daniel Termont

Mr. Jannie Haeck, Managing Director NMBS-Holding

Mr. Roger Kesteloot, Director General, VVM De Lijn

Mr. Eddy Clement, General Director, Infrabel Network

Officials and staff of the Project Gent St. Peters

Distinguished guests and dear friends

I would first like to thank the City Government of Gent for organizing this event and the invitation to participate in the inauguration of this tunnel, named after Timicheg, a Filipino from Bontoc, Mountain Province, who participated in Gent's World Exhibition of April 1913. My thanks also to the City Council of Gent, for passing the resolution in November 2007 to give this tunnel its name.

I can understand the significance that the City of Gent has placed on the World Exhibition of 1913. It was then that Gent's first train station was constructed to serve as the "engine for the development" of the new city. Almost 100 years after, and you now have the Project Gent St. Pieters, a development initiative that serves the same purpose but for the 21st century.

I have been informed that Timicheg shares the honor of having a specific place named after him with prominent Belgian personalities of that time, such as Mr. Oscar de Voorde and Mr. Valentin Verwyck, well-renowned architects of Old Flanders.

It is commendable that the City of Gent has not only chosen to celebrate the achievements relating to the 1913 expo, but has been able to balance this by commemorating those who experienced difficulties to participate in this event.

The story of Timicheg, unfortunately, is a sad one. Only after four months after arriving from Belgium and participating in the exhibition's "Filipino Village", Timicheg succumbed to tuberculosis at 28 years old. It was reported that he could not adapt to the cold climate, suffered from homesickness, became despondent and then eventually died. After the expo in Ghent, the rest of his companions had just lingered on in Gent until December 1913, apparently because no funds could be raised to bring them back home (until the US government provided the support). After that experience, such kind of "exotic peoples' display" had started to be banned from World Fairs.

Fast-forwarding to the present, it is comforting to know that we all recognize the rights of our indigenous peoples and their significant role in preserving one's cultural heritage. Let the naming of this tunnel be a positive symbol of the recognition of human-centered development and celebration of cultural diversity through non-exploitative means by the international community.

A pleasant afternoon to all of you.

H.E. ENRIQUE A. MANALO
PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR