

## **Speech of John Ferris, Honorary Consul of the Philippine Embassy in the Republic of Ireland**

*Yvonne Belen*

John Ferris, Honorary Consul of the Philippine Embassy in the Republic of Ireland, mentioned that he has been aware of the mountain provinces ever since he went to the Philippines in the early '70s. And every time he went to the Philippines, he headed straight to Baguio and further north to Banaue.

"It's one of the great places of the Philippines, I believe. I spent lots of time in the rice terraces," he stated.

Ten years after his visit to the Philippines, he never realized that he'll come across BIBAKs, in Ireland, of all places. The first time he met people from the Mountain Province was in 2001, which was about a year after Filipinos started coming to Ireland in large numbers.

John Ferris praised BIBAK Ireland for having stood the test of time; while other Filipino organizations were falling off, BIBAK Ireland was gaining strength.

According to him, immigration of Filipinos to Ireland is a new phenomenon, which started five years ago. He conveyed that while Filipinos in other countries in Europe are quite settled, they are not - in Ireland.

A problem he cited was that of Filipino migrant's children, who have to pay international student rates when they go to 3<sup>rd</sup> level education. There are already quite a number of Filipino migrants whose children are reaching 17 and 18 years of age. And one of the big battles is to stop the Irish government from charging international student rates to children of Filipino migrants. He added that their efforts are now to try to get the government to treat Filipino children on an equal basis as Irish children.

The Honorary Consul kept his talk short and wished everyone a pleasant evening.