

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

Seventeenth Congress

First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **2745**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

RECEIVED

09 AUG 2016

DATE:

TIME:

BY:

REGISTRATION UNIT

BILLS AND INDEX SERVICE

Introduced by HONORABLE PEDRO B. ACHARON, JR.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to establish a special economic zone and free port in General Santos City and providing for the creation of General Santos Economic Zone and Free Port Authority to manage and operate the economic zone and free port.

General Santos City, a largely Christian port city, with a population of Five hundred twenty nine thousand five hundred forty two (529,542) is located at the Southern part of the Philippines. It is surrounded by the municipalities of Polomolok on the north, Maasim and Celebes Sea on the South, Alabel on the east, and T'boli on the west. Because of its proximity to some of the most productive fishing grounds in the country, General Santos City boast of vast fishing resources- Moro Gulf, Davao Gulf and Sulu Sea and the fishing grounds frequented by local fishermen for tuna and tuna-like species. Besides being the fishing center of the South, General Santos City is also an important producer of livestock, particularly cattle and hog. In terms of mineral resources, the City has abundant mineral deposits of uncertain quantities of limestones, magnetite iron stand, sulfur, copper nitrate luminate, rutile and guano. Aside from these, sand and gravel are also abundant in the city.

With the present government thrust of industrial dispersal, the region has identified General Santos City as one of the sites for the Regional Industrial Center. This port is gearing up in the hopes of becoming Asia's next boomtown. Nearby, a Japanese-funded fishing port is in place and a major wharf, is being expanded. General Santos City is also home to a modern and sprawling airport that can accommodate second-generation aircraft. Communication and telecommunication systems are also being developed and widened in scope.

General Santos is laying the groundwork for its emergence as the hub of the East ASEAN Growth Area (EAGA). Businessmen and investors from Japan, Taiwan, Korea and ASEAN member countries have indicated their keen interest to invest in the area. The establishment of a special economic zone and freeport in General Santos City is ideal and very timely for it corresponds with the national government's development efforts to develop the area to become the prime industrial and trading center of EAGA.

As visualized in the proposed measure, the General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port will be developed as a self-sustaining industrial, commercial, financial and investment center and free port for three (3) primary reasons: (1) to explore, develop and utilize the natural resources of the area; (2) to create more employment opportunities, especially in and around the zone; and (3) to attract and encourage legitimate and productive foreign investments in one of the most promising parts of the country. The area shall be free from customs duty or tariff fee. Furthermore, certain tax regulations will be relaxed and other forms of incentives will be made available to enterprises located therein. The General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port shall be administered, managed and operated by a public corporation to be known as the General Santos Economic Zone Authority (GSEZA) whose board shall be composed of the chairman who shall serve as administrator, one (1) vice chairman, and six (6) members: one (1) representing the domestic investors, one (1) representing the foreign investors, two (2), representing the workers in General Santos City and the mayor of General Santos City and the congressional representative of the District as *ex-officio* members.

It is believed that with the establishment of the ECOZONE, tremendous economic progress would be realized not only for the island of Mindanao but equally and perhaps more so, for the entire country.

In view of the foregoing considerations, approval of this bill is earnestly sought and recommended.


PEDRO B. ACHARON, JR.

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3 **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

4 Quezon City

5 **Seventeenth Congress**

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7 **House Bill No. 2745**

8 Introduced by HONORABLE PEDRO B. ACHARON, JR.

9 AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE GENERAL SANTOS CITY SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE
10 AND FREE PORT IN THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH COTABATO, CREATING FOR THIS
11 PURPOSE THE GENERAL SANTOS CITY SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE AND FREE
12 PORT AUTHORITY, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER
13 PURPOSES

14 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:*

15
16 SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “General Santos City
17 Special Economic Zone Act of 2017.”

18 SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
19 actively encourage, promote, induce and accelerate a sound and balanced industrial,
20 economic and social development of the country in order to provide jobs to the people
21 especially those in the rural areas, increase productivity and individual and family income,
22 and thereby improve the level and quality of living condition through the establishment,
23 among others, of special economic zones in suitable and strategic locations in the country
24 and through measures that will attract legitimate and productive foreign investments.

25 SEC. 3. *Creation of the General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port.* –
26 In pursuit of the foregoing declared policy and subject to the concurrence of the concerned
27 local government unit of General Santos City affected by the zone, there is hereby
28 established a special economic zone and free port in General Santos City, Province of South
29 Cotabato to be known as the General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port,

hereinafter referred to as the GenSan ECOZONE. The GenSan ECOZONE shall cover portions of the following barangays: San Jose, Fatima, Tambler, Bawing, Calumpang, Sinawal and Apopong in the City of General Santos. The specific metes and bounds of the GenSan ECOZONE shall be more particularly defined in a presidential proclamation that shall be issued for this purpose.

SEC. 4. *Governing Principles.* – The GenSan ECOZONE shall be managed and operated by the General Santos City Special Economic Zone Authority, herein referred to as GSEZA, to be created under Section 6 of this Act, under the following principles:

(a) Within the framework and limitations of the Constitution and applicable provisions of the Local Government Code, the GenSan ECOZONE shall be developed into and operated as a decentralized, self-reliant and self-sustaining industrial, commercial/trading, agro-industrial, tourist, banking, financial and investment center with suitable residential areas.

(b) The GenSan ECOZONE shall be provided with transportation, telecommunications and other facilities needed to attract legitimate and productive investments, generate linkage industries and employment opportunities for the people of the Province of South Cotabato and its neighboring towns and cities.

(c) The GenSan ECOZONE may establish mutually beneficial economic relations with other entities or enterprises within the country or, subject to the administrative guidance of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) and/or the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), with foreign entities or enterprises.

(d) Foreign citizens and companies owned by non-Filipinos in whatever proportion may set up enterprises in the GenSan ECOZONE, either by themselves or in joint venture with Filipinos in any sector of industry, international trade and commerce within the GenSan ECOZONE.

(e) The GenSan ECOZONE shall be managed and operated as a separate customs territory ensuring free flow or movement of goods and capital within, into and exported out of the GenSan ECOZONE, as well as provide incentives such as tax and duty-free importations of raw materials, capital and equipment. However, exportation or removal of goods from the territory of the GenSan ECOZONE to the other parts of the Philippine territory shall be subject to customs duties and taxes under the Tariff and Customs Code of the Philippines, as amended, and the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended.

(f) The areas comprising the GenSan ECOZONE may be expanded or reduced when necessary. For this purpose, the GSEZA, in consultation with the local government units, shall have the power to acquire either by purchase, negotiation or condemnation proceedings, any private lands within or adjacent to the GenSan ECOZONE for the following purposes: (1) consolidation of lands for GenSan ECOZONE development; (2) acquisition of right of way to the GenSan ECOZONE; and (3) the protection of watershed areas and natural assets valuable to the prosperity of the GenSan ECOZONE.

(g) Goods manufactured by a GenSan ECOZONE enterprise shall be made available for immediate retail sale in the domestic market, subject to the payment of corresponding taxes on raw materials and other regulations that may be formulated by the GSEZA, together with the PEZA, the Bureau of Customs and the DTI. However, in order to protect the domestic industry, there shall be a negative list of industries that will be drawn up and regularly updated by PEZA. Enterprises engaged in industries included in such negative list shall not be allowed to sell their products locally.

(h) The defense of the GenSan ECOZONE and the security of its perimeter fence shall be the responsibility of the national government in coordination with the GenSan ECOZONE and the local government units.

SEC. 5. *Incentives.* – Investors and business enterprises within the GenSan ECOZONE shall be entitled to the following incentives:

(a) Resident Status and Visa. Any foreign investor who establishes a business enterprise within the GenSan ECOZONE and who maintains capital investment of not less than One hundred fifty thousand United States dollars (US\$150,000.00) shall be granted, along with his or her spouse, dependents and unmarried children below twenty-one (21) years of age, permanent resident status within the GenSan ECOZONE and freedom of ingress and egress to and from the GenSan ECOZONE without any need of any special authorization from the Bureau of Immigration. Working visas renewable every two (2) years shall be issued to foreign executives and foreign technicians with highly specialized skills, which no Filipino possesses, as certified by the Department of Labor and Employment.

The foregoing is without prejudice to a foreigner acquiring permanent resident status in the Philippines in accordance with applicable immigration, retirement and other related laws.

(b) Fiscal Incentives. Business establishments within the GenSan ECOZONE shall be entitled to the existing fiscal incentives as provided for under Republic Act No. 7916, otherwise known as the "Special Economic Zone Act of 1995," as amended by Republic Act No. 8748.

(c) Taxation. Except for real property taxes on land owned by developers, no taxes, local and national, shall be imposed on business establishments operating within the GenSan ECOZONE. In lieu thereof, five percent (5%) of the gross income earned by all business enterprises within the GenSan ECOZONE shall be paid and remitted as follows:

(i) Three percent (3%) to the national government;

(ii) Two percent (2%) which shall be directly remitted by the business establishments to the treasurer's office of the municipality or city where the enterprise is located.

All persons and service establishments in the GenSan ECOZONE shall be subject to national and local taxes under the National Internal Revenue Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 8424, and the Local Government Code.

(d) Banking Rules and Regulations. Existing banking laws and rules/regulations of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) shall apply to banks and financial institutions to be established in the GenSan ECOZONE. Among other pertinent regulations, these include those governing foreign exchange and other current account transactions (trade and non-trade), local and foreign borrowings, foreign investments, establishment and operation of local and foreign banks, foreign currency deposit units, offshore banking units and other financial institutions under the supervision of the BSP.

(e) Profit Remittance. Without prior BSP approval, after tax profits and other earnings of foreign investments in enterprises in the GenSan ECOZONE may be remitted outward in the equivalent foreign exchange through any of the banks licensed by the BSP in the GenSan ECOZONE: *Provided, however,* That such foreign investments in said enterprises have been previously registered with the BSP.

SEC. 6. *Creation of the General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port Authority.* – There is hereby created a body corporate to be known as the General Santos City Special Economic Zone and Free Port Authority, herein referred to as the GSEZA which shall manage and operate the GenSan ECOZONE, in accordance with the provisions of this Act. This corporate franchise shall expire in fifty (50) years counted from the first year after the effectivity of this Act, unless otherwise extended by Congress. It shall be organized within one hundred eighty (180) days after the effectivity of this Act.

1 SEC. 7. *Principal Office.* – The GSEZA shall maintain its principal office in General
2 Santos City but it may establish branches within the Philippines and abroad as may be
3 necessary for the proper conduct of its business.

4 SEC. 8. *Powers and Functions of the GSEZA.* – The GSEZA shall have the following
5 functions:

6 (a) To operate, administer, manage and develop the GenSan ECOZONE according to
7 the principles and provisions set forth in this Act;

8 (b) To recommend to the President the issuance of a proclamation to fix and delimit
9 the site of the GenSan ECOZONE;

10 (c) To register, regulate and supervise the enterprises in the GenSan ECOZONE in an
11 efficient and decentralized manner, subject to existing laws;

12 (d) To coordinate with local government units and exercise general supervision over
13 the development plans, activities and operations of the GenSan ECOZONE;

14 (e) To regulate and undertake the establishment, operation and maintenance of
15 utilities, other services and infrastructure in the GenSan ECOZONE such as but not limited
16 to heat, light and power, water supply, telecommunications, transport, toll roads and bridges,
17 port services, etc. and to fix just, reasonable and competitive rates, fares, charges and prices
18 thereof;

19 (f) To construct, acquire, own, lease, operate and maintain on its own or through
20 contracts, franchises, licenses, bulk purchase from the private sector or permits under any of
21 the schemes allowed in Republic Act No. 6957 (the Build-Operate-Transfer Law, as
22 amended by Republic Act No. 7718), or joint venture, adequate facilities and infrastructure
23 required or needed for the operation and development of the GenSan ECOZONE, in
24 coordination with appropriate national and local government authorities and in conformity
25 with applicable laws thereon;

26 (g) To operate on its own, either directly or through a license, tourism-related
27 activities, including games, amusements, recreational and sports facilities;

28 (h) Subject to the approval of the President and the Monetary Board of the Bangko
29 Sentral ng Pilipinas upon the recommendation of the Department of Finance, to raise or
30 borrow adequate and necessary funds from local or foreign sources to finance its projects
31 and programs under this Act, and for that purpose, to issue bonds, promissory notes, and
32 other forms of securities, and to secure the same by a guarantee, pledge, mortgage, deed of
33 trust, or an assignment of all or part of its property or assets;

(i) To provide security for the GenSan ECOZONE in coordination with the national and local governments. Military forces sent by the national government for the purpose of defense shall not interfere in the internal affairs of the GenSan ECOZONE and expenditures for these military forces shall be borne by the national government. For this purpose, the GSEZA may establish and maintain its security forces and firefighting capability or hire others to provide the same;

(j) To protect, preserve, maintain and develop the virgin forests, beaches, coral and coral reefs, and maintain ecological balance within the GenSan ECOZONE;

(k) To create, operate and/or contract to operate such functional units or offices of the GSEZA as it may deem necessary;

(l) To adopt, alter and use a corporate seal; make contracts, leases, own, or otherwise dispose of personal or real property; sue and be sued; and otherwise carry out its functions and duties as provided for in this Act;

(m) To issue certificates of origin for products manufactured or processed in the GenSan ECOZONE in accordance with prevailing rules of origin, and the pertinent regulations of the PEZA, DTI and/or the Department of Finance (DoF);

(n) To issue working visas renewable every two (2) years to foreign executives and foreign technicians with highly specialized skills which no Filipino possesses, as certified by the Department of Labor and Employment;

(o) To report to the Bureau of Immigration the names of the foreigners who have been granted permanent resident status and working visas within thirty (30) days after issuance of such grant;

(p) To exercise such powers as may be essential, necessary or incidental to the powers granted to it hereunder as well as those that shall enable it to carry out, implement and accomplish the purposes, objectives and policies of this Act; and

(q) To issue rules and regulations consistent with the provisions of this Act as may be necessary to accomplish and implement the purposes, objectives and policies provided herein.

SEC. 9. *Exemptions from Taxes, Duties and Other Fees.* – The GSEZA is hereby declared exempt from the payment of all taxes, duties, fees, imposts, charges, costs and service fees in any court or administrative proceedings in which it may be a party.

The foregoing exemptions may, however, be entirely or partially lifted by the President of the Philippines upon the recommendation of the Secretary of Finance, not earlier than

1 five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act, if the President shall find the GSEZA to be
 2 self-sustaining and financially capable by then to pay such taxes, customs duties, fees and
 3 other charges after providing for debt service requirements of the GSEZA and of its
 4 projected capital and operating expenditures.

5 SEC. 10. *Board of Directors of the GSEZA.* – The powers of the GSEZA shall be
 6 vested in and exercised by a Board of Directors, hereinafter referred to as the Board, which
 7 shall be composed of the following:

8 (a) The chairman who shall, at the same time be the administrator of the GSEZA;

9 (b) A vice chairman who shall come from among the members of the Board;

10 (c) Members consisting of:

11 (1) The Congressional Representative of the district covering the site of the GenSan
 12 ECOZONE;

13 (2) The mayor of the City of General Santos;

14 (3) One (1) representative from the domestic investors;

15 (4) One (1) representative from the foreign investors; and

16 (5) Two (2) representatives from the workers working in GenSan ECOZONE.

17 The Congressional representative and the mayor of the City of General Santos shall
 18 serve as *ex officio* members of the Board, whose term in the Board corresponds to their
 19 terms as elected officials.

20 The Chairman and the members of the Board, except the *ex officio* members, shall be
 21 appointed by the President of the Philippines to serve for a term of six (6) years, unless
 22 sooner removed for cause or dies or resigns voluntarily. In case of death, resignation or
 23 removal for cause, the replacement shall serve only the unused portion of the term.

24 Except for the representatives of the business and labor sectors, no person shall be
 25 appointed by the President of the Philippines as a member of the Board unless he is a
 26 Filipino citizen, of good moral character, of proven probity and integrity, and a degree-
 27 holder in any of the following fields: economics, business, public administration, law,
 28 management or their equivalent, and with at least ten (10) years relevant working
 29 experience preferably in the field of management or public administration.

30 The members of the Board shall each receive *per diem* at rates to be determined by the
 31 Department of Budget and Management in accordance with existing rules and regulations:
 32 *Provided, however,* That the total *per diem* collected each month shall not exceed the
 33 equivalent *per diem* for four (4) meetings. Unless and until the President of the Philippines

has fixed a higher *per diem* for the members of the board, such *per diem* shall not be more than Ten thousand pesos (P10,000.00) for every board meeting.

SEC. 11. *Powers and Duties of the Chairman-Administrator.* – The chairman-administrator shall have the following powers and duties:

(a) To direct and manage the affairs of the GSEZA in accordance with the policies of the Board;

(b) To establish the internal organization of the GSEZA under the conditions that the Board may prescribe;

(c) To submit an annual budget and necessary supplemental budget to the Board for its approval;

(d) To submit within thirty (30) days after the close of each fiscal year an annual report to the Board and such other reports as may be required;

(e) To submit to the Board for its approval policies, systems, procedures, rules and regulations that are essential to the operation of the GenSan ECOZONE;

(f) To create a mechanism in coordination with relevant agencies for the promotion of industrial peace, the protection of the environment, and the advancement of the quality of life in the GenSan ECOZONE; and

(g) To perform such other duties as may be assigned to him by the Board or which are necessary or incidental to his office.

SEC. 12. *Personnel.* – The Board of Directors of the GSEZA shall provide for an organization and staff of its officers and employees. Upon recommendation of the chairman-administrator and with the approval of the Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Board shall appoint and fix the remuneration and other emoluments of its officers and employees in accordance with existing laws on compensation and position classification: *Provided*, That the Board shall have exclusive and final authority to promote, transfer, assign or reassign officers of the GSEZA, any provision of existing law to the contrary notwithstanding: *Provided, further*, That the chairman-administrator may carry out removal of such officers and employees.

The officers and employees of the GSEZA, including all members of the Board, shall not engage directly or indirectly in partisan activities, nor take part in any election, except to vote.

No officer or employee of the GSEZA, subject to Civil Service laws and regulations, shall be removed or suspended except for cause, as provided by law.

SEC. 13. *Applicability Clause.* – The provisions of Sections 30-42 of Republic Act No. 7916, as amended, shall apply to the GenSan ECOZONE.

SEC. 14. *Capitalization.* – The GSEZA shall have an authorized capital stock of two billion (2,000,000,000) no par-shares with a minimum issue of Ten pesos (P10.00) each, the majority shares of which shall be subscribed and paid for by the national government and the local government units (LGUs) embracing the GenSan ECOZONE. The Board of Directors of the GSEZA with the written concurrence of the Secretary of Finance may sell shares, representing not more than forty *per centum* (40%) of the capital stock of the GSEZA to the general public under such policy as the Board and the Secretary of Finance may determine. The national government and the LGUs shall in no case own less than sixty *per centum* (60%) of the total issued and outstanding capital of the GSEZA.

The amount necessary to subscribe and pay for the shares of the national government to the capital stock of the GSEZA shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. For LGUs, the funds shall be taken from their internal revenue allotment and other local funds.

SEC. 15. *Supervision and Coordination of Development Plans.* – For purposes of policy direction and coordination, the GenSan ECOZONE shall be under the direct control and supervision of the Office of the President.

SEC. 16. *Relationship with the Regional Development Council.* – The GSEZA shall determine the development goals for the GenSan ECOZONE within the framework of national development plans, policies and goals. The Administrator shall, upon approval by the Board, submit the GenSan ECOZONE plans, programs and projects to the Regional Development Council for inclusion and inputs to the overall regional development plan.

SEC. 17. *Relationship with Local Government Units.* – Except as herein provided, the LGUs comprising the GenSan ECOZONE shall retain their basic autonomy and identity. The City of General Santos shall operate and function in accordance with the Local Government Code of 1991. In case of any conflict between the GSEZA and the City of General Santos on matters affecting the GenSan ECOZONE other than defense and security matters, the decision of the GSEZA shall prevail.

SEC. 18. *Interpretation/Construction.* – The powers, authorities and functions that are vested in the GSEZA are intended to establish decentralization of governmental functions and authority and promote an efficient and effective working relationship between the GenSan ECOZONE, the central government and the LGUs.

1 SEC. 19. *Auditing.* – The Commission on Audit shall appoint a representative who
2 shall be a full time auditor of the GSEZA and assign such number of personnel as may be
3 necessary to assist said representative in the performance of his/her duties. The salaries and
4 emoluments of the assigned auditor and personnel shall be in accordance with pertinent
5 laws, rules and regulations.

6 SEC. 20. *Separability Clause.* – If any provisions of this Act shall be held
7 unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not otherwise affected shall remain in full
8 force and effect.

9 SEC. 21. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders or issuances, or any parts
10 thereof, which are inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

11 SEC. 22. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect upon its publication in at least
12 one (1) newspaper of general circulation.

13
14 Approved