

**Keynote Speech of
Hon. Enrique A. Manalo
Secretary for Foreign Affairs
at the
2023 New Year Reception
of the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations
Turf's Room, Manila Polo Club
26 January 2023, 1930H**

Good evening.

The Philippine Council for Foreign Relations Board of Trustees and Officers, led by their Chairperson, Ambassador Jaime S. Bautista, and their President, Col. Alejandro T. Flores, Jr.;

Distinguished members and awardees;

Ladies and gentlemen;

I am deeply honored with the invitation to address the Council on this auspicious occasion. Amongst you are longtime observers of, and distinguished figures in the national security, foreign policy and business community, who have now and then, over the years, interfaced with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Department appreciates the Council's important role in facilitating thoughtful conversation on foreign policy. In the information age, it has never been so important that foreign policy discourse is public and open,

truthful, and balanced, and shepherded by institutions such as the Council. And I do wish the Council more power and continued success.

Since assuming the presidency nearly seven months ago, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr has articulated on numerous occasions, both to domestic and international audiences, his vision for the country and a forward-looking agenda of transformation that will bring the Philippines fully into the 21st century: firstly, by strengthening the foundations for sustainable and inclusive development, and secondly, by creating an environment conducive to this aspired transformative growth.

We advance a foreign policy seeking a regional and global environment that propels our efforts to fulfill the highest potentials of our nation and each and every Filipino.

The President has enunciated clearly and consistently, the broad strokes of an independent foreign policy that navigates the critical challenges of the 21st century as it charts the course for a forward-looking, innovative and resilient Filipino nation.

His resounding message has been that the Philippines will continue to be a friend to all and enemy to none, as we advance our national aspirations.

At the World Economic Forum last week in Davos, the President and his economic team engaged with the world's top business executives, highlighting our country's fundamentally-sound economy that is buttressed by political stability and a dynamic and pulsating private sector.

The projections are indeed very encouraging – the Philippine economy is expected to grow around 7% in 2023 – and international investors certainly share this optimism. But while the Philippines remains on track to be one of the best performing economies in the world and reach upper middle-income status soon, the prospects of recession in many parts of the globe, unstable supply chains, and rising inflation might still slacken our momentum in the meantime.

Amidst such headwinds, the President is driving a diplomatic agenda that leverages international partnerships to sustain our economic momentum and secure inclusive development, through expansion in key areas such as agriculture, energy, and infrastructure.

The President has set out food and energy security as the first order of business for this Administration, and a main objective of our bilateral and multilateral engagements.

In this line, the President has issued marching orders for optimizing partnerships to boost agricultural productivity, such as agreements on agricultural trade, agri-mechanization, and biotech research, and to modernize our agricultural infrastructure.

He has directed efforts toward supporting the national energy plan that prioritizes sustainable and low transmission development for generating renewable energy and biofuels.

President Marcos has also given new impetus for agreements accelerating infrastructure development oriented to building both roads and bridges, and the nation's digital infrastructure. This is about fostering greater connectivity and synergistic growth across the archipelago, modernizing the delivery of social services such as health and education, and positioning the Philippine economy in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Our current diplomatic thrusts also recognize the role of new technologies, including space-based technologies and services, as amplifiers of opportunities for innovation and inclusion.

While there is a spirited refocusing of our agenda to achieve meaningful and enabling prosperity for our people, the President has identified the biggest and most immediate challenge not only to our economic growth but to our very existence – climate change. In his speech before the UN General Assembly last September, the President called climate change as the “true test of our time”.

For the Philippines, which is the fourth most vulnerable country to the effects of climate change and one of the more disaster-prone countries in the world, the time has come for bold collective action for climate justice, adaptation, and mitigation. This sense of urgency frames our engagement as a leading advocate in all arenas of climate change discussions, such as on climate financing, climate adaptation technologies, and disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Ladies and gentlemen, and colleagues,

During the same address before the United Nations General Assembly, the President issued a Call for Global Unity for collective action, not only for climate change, but also in configuring a resilient, reinvigorated and united post-pandemic world that successfully navigates the following realities:

Firstly: the emergence of advanced technologies and their double-edge impact of presenting solutions to many problems but also disrupting political and social orders, and need for governance structures to keep up with them;

Secondly: widening geopolitical polarities and sharpening strategic competition, and the need to uphold internationally-recognized rules and principles, underpinning hard-won peace and stability, including in Asia; and,

Thirdly: persistent inequalities and inequities within and among countries, and the need for urgent action to address them.

The Philippines' diplomatic agenda is mindful that amidst shifts at a global scale arising from these variables, as well as the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, it is important to uphold an open, inclusive and rules-based international order that is governed by international law and which operates on the principles of equity and justice.

There are conditions that must be present for nations to flourish in peace and for collective action to thrive amidst change.

Foremost of these conditions is the existence of a rules-based international order, which is premised on the sovereign equality of all states and the primacy of international law in inter-state relations, and promotes the values of peace, equity, justice and freedom.

Multilateralism needs to adapt to present-day realities, taking into account the revival of nationalism, the manifold landscape of nations and hubs of new interplays and influence, new challenges demanding effective international cooperation to address, and the lessons of globalization and the Covid19 pandemic. But at the same time, the United Nations Charter and established principles and norms must be upheld, as nations ride the tides of change and transformation.

The Philippines has a long tradition of actively contributing to rule- and norm-making, championing issues such as human rights and respect for the sovereignty of nations, and preserving peace among them, in the United Nations and other multilateral platforms.

We are determined to carry on this tradition.

We exercise leadership in fields such as human rights, environmental protection, international trade, migration, disarmament, humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

As the nation embarks deeper into digitalization, and in applications of space science and new technologies, we also take an active part in shaping the rules to guide and govern these new frontiers of human activity, and in ensuring that these rules place primacy on people and human dignity.

As a maritime archipelago, the Philippines is proud of its contributions to the drafting of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We have reinforced this legacy for a rules-based global maritime order and international law with the 2016 Arbitral Award on the West Philippine Sea. As the President said in the UN General Assembly, by providing the predictability and stability of international law, we have provided an example of how states should resolve differences: through reason and through right.

The President has firmly said that we will continue to uphold our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea, and will continue to do so through peaceful and legal means.

In his meetings with President Xi Jinping earlier this month in Beijing, the President stressed the Philippines' desire for the South China Sea to be a sea of peace, stability, and security. He urged China to abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is the constitution of the seas as well as the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. The President also signified the Philippines' keen interest in the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. That being said, Manila and Beijing

agree that the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea China issue is not the sum total of our relationship. Our economic and people-to-people ties also play a critical role in our pursuit of economic development and a peaceful and stable region.

The Philippines continues to attach great importance to its relationship with the United States, our only treaty ally. For more than seven and a half decades, the Philippines and the United States have been engaged in meaningful and impactful cooperation in many areas. Our deep and comprehensive ties stand on shared values. We profess a shared interest in upholding the primacy of the rule of law in international relations. We share the U.S. vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific and we believe in its potential to further empower the peoples and communities in the region.

Our independent foreign policy prospers on partnerships that acknowledge the rich, substantive and multifaceted interests that the Philippines shares with countries in the region and the world.

The Philippines is deeply committed to further strengthening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN, as well as the ASEAN Community. Upholding ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture in the 21st century entails our sustained investments in making ASEAN more politically cohesive, strategically coherent and economically prosperous.

Beyond the ASEAN region, we are deepening and broadening our bilateral relations with neighbors such as Japan, Australia, the Republic

of Korea and India. We are advancing our ties with the European Union and its individual members, across political, economic and security areas. These relationships are energized by mutual interests in upholding democracy and freedom, rule of law, peace and stability and human rights.

We are building on existing relationships, forging new areas for cooperation and increasing dialogue with neighbors in South Asia and the Pacific, as well as in Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, in bilateral, regional and international fora.

The Philippines' abiding interests in the regional and international arena are also grounded on the global presence of Filipinos, who make vital contributions as health and medical professionals, domestic workers, seafarers, personnel in humanitarian operations, IT engineers, and lawyers, among others.

We actively use our voice in various multilateral settings as an advocate for fairness, equity, good governance, accountability and transparency in the UN system and international organizations, for we see strong international institutions as a *sine qua non* for credible and effective multilateralism in the 21st century. We aim for a more fair, responsive, and constructive multilateralism.

There is no option B for the UN and multilateralism: they must continue for the global community to prevail in providing solutions for problems

beyond national borders, such as climate change, humanitarian crises, inter-state conflicts, and energy and food insecurity.

Multilateralism serves as an important space for the Philippines as a foremost vanguard of the rights of migrants in all corners of the world. The global community recognizes that the Philippines has established best practices, peerless anywhere in the world, to put in place a coherent, coordinated and well-resourced national legal and institutional framework to protect our nationals abroad and promote their welfare. The Department of Foreign Affairs' commitment to protect overseas Filipinos is entrenched in our organizational DNA. In this vein, the DFA will work closely with the newly-established Department of Migrant Workers as that Department assumes its mandate under Republic Act 11641.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world is changing and it behooves us to move along with these waves of change. The Administration's transformative agenda lays the groundwork for a resilient Philippine economy, innovative solutions to uplift the dignity and welfare of every Filipino, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged, as well as an agile and active diplomacy.

In fact, last year, the Asia Power Index of Lowy Institute, an Australian political think-tank, recognized the Philippines as one of Asia's five middle powers, together with Indonesia, Japan, Australia and India. The Index measures the ability of states to shape and respond to their external environment, across 8 measures and 114 indicators. A substantive index

used was the Philippines' diplomatic influence, diplomatic network, multilateral power, and foreign policy. There are other global indices that have acknowledged our country's soft power assets and our place in the world.

There are tailwinds that boost the Philippines' confidence and capacity to engage with the world, not least of which are our human assets, the Filipino people, who have always been the core of our soft power.

Let me conclude my remarks this evening by assuring you that the women and men of the Department of Foreign Affairs endeavor, on a day-to-day basis, here in the Philippines and in the 94 foreign service posts, to give full meaning and flesh to the direction that this administration has set for our independent foreign policy.

Every day, we pursue the Philippines' role as a responsible global citizen, one that looks after its people at home and abroad, and one well-attuned to, and fully-prepared to engage boldly in this unfolding era of change.

Thank you for your kind attention and good evening to you all.