

PHILIPPINES

CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Geneva, Switzerland

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OPENING STATEMENT

H.E. Ambassador (Mrs.) CECILIA REBONG

Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations and other
International Organizations in Geneva
and Head of the Philippine Delegation

Madam Chairperson Yoko Hayashi;

Vice Chairpersons Barbara Bailey, Naela Gabr, and Dalia Leinarte;

Committee Country Rapporteur Ms Ismat Jahan;

Other members of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All
Forms of Discrimination Against Women;

Representatives from the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines,
the non-government and civil society organizations from the Philippines who are with
us in this chamber today:

Good morning to all of you.

I am Ambassador Cecilia Rebong, the Permanent Representative of the
Philippines to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva,
and I head the Philippine delegation in this constructive dialogue with the Committee.

With me as co-head of this delegation is Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo, our leading expert and champion on women. As you all know, she was just elected as one of the new members of the Committee and is set to join you in January next year.

Also with me are senior officials of the Philippine government agencies who are in the frontlines in the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

These agencies are the Departments of Social Welfare and Development; Labor and Employment; Health; and Justice; the Overseas Employment Administration; the Commission on Higher Education, the Indigenous Peoples' Commission; and our socio-economic planning body--NEDA. And from the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, we have no less than the chair of the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women.

Our delegation is also fortunate to be guided by esteemed women's rights advocates, Prof. Aurora Javate-de Dios, Philippine representative to the ASEAN Commission on Women's and Children's Rights and former CEDAW Member, and Ms. Emmeline Verzosa, Executive Director of the Philippine Commission on Women, the lead agency that ensures the State's effective implementation of the CEDAW.

Madam Chair,

The Philippines welcomes this opportunity to share and discuss with this Committee the status of its compliance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or CEDAW, a treaty that the Philippines has always been fully committed to promote and implement.

We have come prepared to dialogue with this purpose. With openness, we come ready to learn from the expertise of the members of the Committee, trusting that this process shall move our country forward in its sincere effort to promote, protect, and fulfill the rights and freedoms of all Filipino women.

The Philippines is pleased to inform this Committee that in the 2015 Global Gender Gap Index, the World Economic Forum ranked the Philippines in 7th place overall for gender equality out of 145 countries, the highest in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Philippines, in the last ten years, has consistently been in the top 10 of the 2015 Global Gender Gap Index.

In the six years of the Aquino administration, the former president's social contract with the Filipino People facilitated this achievement further, from a lack of concern for gender disparities and shortfalls to the promotion of equal gender opportunity in all spheres of public policies and programs.

But the most significant improvement was in the area of women empowerment, which has become more multi-faceted than ever. Filipino women play a plethora of roles in the Philippine society--both in the government and the

private sectors. Filipino women head the Supreme Court of the Philippines, the Ombudsman, the Peace Process Office, the Labor and Employment, the Department of Justice, the Internal Revenue, the Human Rights Commission, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, the Public Attorney's Office, and the Civil Service Commission. Other offices, such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, the Overseas Employment and Workers Welfare Boards and local legislative bodies require women participation.

Madam Chair,

In 2009, the Philippines achieved a milestone in women's rights advocacy with the enactment of the Magna Carta of Women, which applies the CEDAW in Philippine affairs. This comprehensive piece of legislation specifies, among others, the rights of marginalized women, including a definition of discrimination, direct and indirect. It also establishes institutional mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the Convention.

To ensure that the Magna Carta of Women is mainstreamed in Philippine policies and programs, the State crafted the Women's Empowerment, Development and Gender Equality Plan, or, we call it, the Women's EDGE Plan 2013-2016, which is part of the State's 30-year Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025).

The Women's EDGE Plan covers appropriate programs and projects that address gender equality, women's empowerment and their human rights. It also

addresses concerns of women in vulnerable situations, such as indigenous and Muslim women, women with disabilities, migrant women, rural women, women in detention and LBTs.

In keeping with the Plan's direction to mainstream women concerns in performance targets, both in local and national levels, agencies have designed their respective gender and development plans, allocating at least 5% of their total budget to the implementation of these plans.

The Philippines, through the Education Department, has gradually introduced the integration of gender concepts and application of gender and development (GAD) principles in curriculum development and implementation at various levels. State colleges and universities have also responded to the call for gender sensitivity training in their respective institutions. The State, through a directive from the Commission on Higher Education, has called on all public and private higher educational institutions to implement their gender and development mandates resulting in the incorporation of gender perspective in curricula, research and extension services. All schools have been called upon to comply fully. By setting up Committees on Decorum and Investigation, or we call it CODI, sexual harassment in schools had been curbed.

Violence against women are addressed in a whole-of-government approach through the following mechanisms: The Inter-Agency Council on Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children, the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking, and the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography.

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, designated as Gender Ombud under the Magna Carta of Women, issued guidelines in March of this year that defined its monitoring and evaluation procedures. The expanded guidelines also increased coverage to include not just women, but also persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The Magna Carta of Women has also been made an anchor in the enactment of other pertinent laws that bear on women's rights.

The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law was enacted in December 2012. The law requires that reproductive health care services be provided to all citizens, prioritizing women, the poor, the marginalized and those in vulnerable or crisis situation.

The law ensures the provision of services through improvement of health facilities, capacity building and deployment of human resources, and provision of adequate supplies to facilitate access of rural women, indigenous women, Muslim women and women with disabilities particularly from geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.

The passage of the Domestic Workers' Law, or the so-called Kasambahay Law, and the repeal of night-work prohibition for women have provided better work opportunities and social protection for our women workers. Likewise, as part of our

labor market strategy to reduce the school-to-work transition of our youth, Republic Act 10869 was signed into law institutionalizing the nationwide implementation of the Jobstart Philippines by giving priority to the participation of the disadvantaged youth – persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigents, and young women in said programs.

The Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012 provided stricter penalties for traffickers and more protection for victims. A strengthened Inter Agency Council Against Trafficking, we call it IACAT, has led efforts to improve prevention, law enforcement, prosecution, protection, recovery and reintegration of victims as well as established partnerships at the national, regional and international levels.

The Philippines, through IACAT, has committed to sustain transparent, accountable and responsive anti-trafficking initiatives in the country and overseas. To date, the Philippines has secured 238 convictions involving 263 convicted felons since 2005. All the women victims were given legal and social welfare assistance.

We are pleased to inform this Committee that in the 2016 Global TIP report of the US Department of State, released on 30 June 2016, the Philippines has been upgraded to Tier 1, the highest rank a country may receive under the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. This means that the Philippines has made significant efforts to address the problem and complies with the standards for eliminating human trafficking.

Two weeks earlier, an Australian-based Global Slavery Initiative by Walk Free Foundation also ranked the Philippines as number 1 in Asia, and 3rd in Asia-Pacific,

29th out of 165 countries for its efforts against human trafficking in the 2016 Global Slavery Index.

It is also worth mentioning that in the ASEAN Region, the Philippines acted as the lead shepherd country in the Trafficking in Persons. The ASEAN Ministers signed the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP), Especially Women and Children and the ASEAN Plan of Action (APA) Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children during the 20th ASEAN Summit in Malaysia in November 2015, reaffirming its commitment to a stronger and more effective regional and international cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and for a more effective protection of and assistance to victims.

The Philippines has repealed the provision in the Revised Penal Code that penalizes pre-mature marriage - a widow who marries within 301 days from the death of her husband or before giving birth if she was pregnant at the time of his death, or whose marriage has been annulled or dissolved if she marries before giving birth or before the expiration of 301 days after separation.

We also anticipate the enactment of the following:

- First, anti-mail order spouse law which will provide stiffer penalties against unlawful practices, business, and schemes matching and offering Filipinos to foreign nationals for purposes of marriage or common law partnership.

- Second, anti-age discrimination law which will remove specific age requirements in the hiring of workers, especially women.
- Third, the sign language interpreters law which will ensure the availability of Filipino sign language interpreters in courts and quasi-judicial bodies.

We assure this Committee that the Philippines is not yet through in legislating laws that will further advance the rights and freedoms of women in the Philippine society. Now with a new administration, we will continue to advocate for the protection of women and pursue a women's legislative agenda.

Madam Chair,

On the indigenous peoples' front, the period under review has indeed highlighted the efforts pursued by the Philippines for and with indigenous peoples (IP) and their women focusing on a holistic view and inter-relationship of IP issues on health, human rights, gender, peace, security and development.

On peace and security, Filipino women are performing leadership roles. Notably, the Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process is led by Mme. Teresita "Ging" Deles, a leading women's rights advocate. Seven women were lead negotiator and members of the Government Peace Panel with the communist insurgents from 1986 to 2010. Similarly, the head of the Government Peace Panel dealing with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is also a woman. Two thirds of the 15 member Bangsamoro Transition Team are women.

It is also noteworthy that, pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Philippines prepared its National Action Plan 1325, the first country to do so in our region. This Plan is being implemented by an interagency body supported by adequate human and financial resources in support of the peace building efforts about in the Philippines.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The Philippines takes pride in programs and projects that emphasize women's interests and involvement as part of their measure of success.

The Philippines' conditional cash transfer program identifies women as the main cash holders to ensure that their children remain in school and are healthy. Monthly family development sessions are also conducted to train women and their spouses on family planning, parenting and child-rearing, and leadership and sustainable livelihood skills. The program also ensures that families are educated on violence against women (VAW) related laws. The program currently helps 4.4 million households.

The Philippines has also strengthened its migration strategy to protect the migrant workers, particularly women overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) by: (1) ensuring that domestic workers receive decent wages and that they work in suitable conditions; (2) conducting pre-employment and post-arrival orientation programs to educate OFWs about the host countries; (3) conducting skills training and financial

literacy programs by consular and labor officers abroad to further upgrade OFW skills and income management at work; and (4) actively forging bilateral labor agreements with destination countries that highlight the protection of Filipino migrant workers.

Returning overseas Filipino workers undergo reintegration process under the Assist WELL Program or Welfare, Employment, Legal, and Livelihood of the government. Moreover, new regulations have been promulgated to strengthen protection of domestic workers by requiring foreign placement agencies escrow deposits, and strengthening the monitoring of deployed workers by Philippine recruitment agencies to include the designation of an employee who handles welfare issues.

Finally, in the area of disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures, women have been acknowledged as effective first responders, a role that has been traditionally associated only to men. As such, programs and projects in this regard have given women significant roles.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The promotion, protection, and fulfilment by the Philippines of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of our women are a work in progress. And this is where our information and education campaigns, training, and awareness-raising activities help change patriarchal social norms and attitudes.

We now have a law that declares November 25 of every year as the National Consciousness Day to eliminate violence against women, mandating all government

agencies and schools to organize nationwide awareness campaigns on all forms of violence against women.

Gender sensitivity training and seminars for 791 justices and lawyers of the Supreme Court, the Sandiganbayan which is our anti-graft court, the Court of Appeals and the lower courts have been held. Seminars on women's and children's rights were conducted for 10,443 court interpreters, court social workers, clerks of court, lawyers and aspirants to judicial posts. Close to 4,000 judges, lawyers, prosecutors, court personnel, representatives of government agencies, local government officials, and representatives of civil society groups have undergone seminars on anti-trafficking in persons.

Moreover, information caravans dealing with the Magna Carta on Women and on the issue of violence against women were held in six provinces, reaching over a thousand people. Other regular annual campaigns, like the Women's Month Celebration and the 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women, were also conducted where government agencies, schools and other institutions implement their own activities to raised awareness on CEDAW and other international human rights conventions, and the Magna Carta of Women.

Today, we have reaped the benefits of our information and education campaigns. Increase in the number of cases of violence against women reported to the police and prosecution service has been deemed as a positive development as more women have gained courage to report abuses against them to authorities.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Former President Aquino accepted the invitation to be one of the ten Head of State Champions of the HeForShe Campaign. He committed that the Philippine Government will strengthen support to end violence against women, promote women's economic empowerment by strengthening micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and promote male engagement for gender equality.

The Philippine Commission on Women's (PCW) financial and human resources have been significantly strengthened and increased. The PCW is the lead national entity for women's empowerment and gender equality in the Philippines.

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee,

We are proud that our humble efforts to advance women's rights have been recognized outside of our country. The ASEAN has noted the Philippines' lead role in women's participation in areas such as peace-building, by promoting their role as negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers and relief workers.

In addition, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights mandated our representative, Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo, to undertake the research on the sources of economic growth of Southeast Asia and the sectors responsible for that growth. Ambassador Manalo, in coordination with the Asian Institute of Management, pursued this study which shows that 90% of the economic

growth in the ASEAN Space has been brought about by entrepreneurship and 95% of these enterprises are in the hands of women in the region.

The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Women and Children's Rights through the Philippine Representative is coming out with a Baseline Study on the ASEAN Programs Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, which will contain information on how the ten (10) ASEAN countries are implementing the CEDAW Concluding Comments.

The Philippines adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and affirms its commitment to achieving inclusive growth for all. Recognizing that the 2030 Agenda is more ambitious and comprehensive, this development framework will guide us in the formulation of our national development plan for the next six (6) years.

We appreciate the stand alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and agree with the need to collect and utilize sex-disaggregated data and gender-related information.

The Philippines, through the Philippine Statistical Authority, has been leading the global discussions on indicators for the 2030 Agenda. An Interagency Committee on Gender Statistics, a committee under the Philippine Statistical Authority, has been organized to ensure that data requirements of the SDGs and other gender-related international commitments are collected and to monitor the over-all development of gender statistics in the country.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

All that I have mentioned in this Opening Statement do not give justice to the width and breadth of what the Philippines has done in promoting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights and freedoms of our Filipino women. And we can dwell on the larger expanse as we move to our constructive dialogue today.

But before finally getting to this next phase, allow me to mention some truths that must be fully appreciated by this Committee:

The Philippines sees its role as a human rights duty bearer. The Philippines, through its current mechanisms, is addressing cases of violence against women with seriousness and in coordination with civil society organizations and non government organizations.

The Philippines sees every opportunity to evaluate its human rights record as an opportunity for improvement. This is the reason for its unwavering respect for the work of the United Nations as human rights overseer in such undertakings as the UN treaty body system and its mandate on the consideration of compliance reports.

The Philippines respects inclusivity in human rights promotion and protection, particularly as regards women's rights and freedoms. It may interest this Committee that the Philippines' compliance report on the CEDAW went through validation

process with various stakeholders, including civil society organizations and non government organizations and the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

In closing, Madam Chair,

The Philippines, represented by this delegation, welcomes this opportunity of again engaging with the Committee.

Thank you very much and good morning again.