

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**UNCRC Constructive Dialogue/ Revalida**

**HON. ANGELO TAPALES**

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Head of the Philippine Delegation

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**Madame Chair and members** of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, observers from civil society and non-government organizations, ladies and gentlemen: ***“Isang Makabatang Pagbati”*** - Greetings on behalf of the **44 million** Filipino children.

I am Vice Minister Angelo Tapales, Executive Director of the Philippine Council for the Welfare of Children, an office under our Executive department that is mandated to lead the State’s promotion, protection, and fulfillment of the rights of its children. I head this Philippine delegation that is pleased to engage this committee in a constructive dialogue to reinforce the performance of that mandate.

With me are Ambassador Evan P. Garcia, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the UN, and Vice Minister Severo S. Catura, Executive Director of the Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat.

Also joining us are senior officials from our Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Health, Department of Justice, Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council, Philippine Commission on Women, Philippine National Police, and from the Philippine Judiciary. The mandates of their offices bear heavily on child-rights protection.

**Madame Chair,**

The Philippines' combined fifth and sixth reports for the period of 2009 to 2017 affirm our State's strong adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This commitment was sustained beyond the reporting period, especially over the last two years where enabling innovative mechanisms were established to mitigate the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. These include the activated hotline numbers and online complaint desks for reporting and responding to incidents of violence against children and the first long-term Basic Education Development Plan 2030, which includes the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan.

The pandemic did not deter the State from working on the immediate passage of laws relating to children. Enacted at the height of the pandemic were the following:

- The law prohibiting online sexual abuse or exploitation of children, and proliferation of exploitation materials, and strengthening the Philippine Government's efforts to address the rising concerns on the online vulnerability and victimization of Filipino children;
- The Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which further strengthened the 2003 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act by, among others, including trafficking in persons committed through the use of information and communication technologies, giving additional investigative tool to our law enforcers in investigating trafficking cases committed online, and penalizing accomplices and accessories in the commission of the prohibited acts;
- The Foundling Recognition and Protection Act, which ensures the rights and protection of children with unknown facts of birth and parentage.
- The law instituting a policy of inclusion for learners with disabilities in support of the Inclusive Education Act, which seeks, among others, to eliminate barriers that prevent learners with special needs from accessing free and quality education. The law directs all of our public schools to identify children with special needs for the provision of appropriate educational services, and our cities and municipalities to have an Inclusive Learner and Resource Center to provide a physical or virtual teaching and learning support;

- The law mandating stronger protection against rape and sexual exploitation and abuse and increasing the age for determining the commission of statutory rape from 12 years old to 16 years of age. Under the new law, rape is committed against a person under 16 years of age, regardless of consent, calling for the imposition of higher penalty of life imprisonment.
- The Domestic Administrative Adoption and Alternative Child Care Act, which provides a simple, inexpensive, and expeditious administrative process of domestic adoption, and strengthens alternative child care in the Philippines;
- The law prohibiting child marriage in the Philippines, which considers child marriage as a practice constituting child abuse, and prohibits and penalizes the same, including informal unions and cohabitations outside wedlock between an adult and a child, or between children;
- The Alternative Learning System Act, which institutionalizes an alternative learning system on basic education for out-of-school children and adults by giving these learners an opportunity to access and develop basic and functional literacy skills; and
- The law establishing the Philippine National Academy of Sports mandated to implement quality and enhanced secondary education program, with a special curriculum on sports to support and develop the athletic skills and talents of students.

These new laws enhanced the 29 child-rights protection laws enacted during the period of reporting, of which 13 are on the protection of children against cybercrimes, including online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, pornography, trafficking in persons and tortures; and laws that give juvenile justice and foster care to children; 9 on education and sports, such as on basic and early education, scholarships, science and technology; 4 on health, such as on immunization, breastfeeding, and reproductive health; two on youth involvement; and one on the civil status of children.

The enactment of these important pieces of legislation are all informed by the State's respect for genuine, meaningful, and ethical child participation through consultation.

Relatedly, three nationwide children's consultations were conducted in 2022. These are the 7th Philippines National Children's Conference, Children's Consultation on the Preparation of National Voluntary Reviews for the Country's Progress on its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Capacity-building on Children's Participation in Policy Reforms.

The Guidebook on Child Participation in the Philippines was enhanced and used to standardize the conduct of these consultations. Furthermore, the National Strategic Plan on Child Participation in the Philippines, 2017-2022, with the support of the National Committee on Child and Youth Participation, was developed to strengthen the promotion of child participation in the family, community, school, media, and other institutions.

The Magna Carta of Children, a comprehensive children's human rights law, is envisioned to be enacted before the current 19th Congress ends its term in 2025. The passage of this Magna Carta ushers in the creation of the Philippine Commission on Children and the Child Ombudsman.

The State has likewise rendered government services more inclusive and gender-responsive by way of the following:

- Strengthening of the System for Prevention, Early Identification, Referral and Intervention of Developmental Delays and Disabilities in Early Childhood;
- Development of the Gender Responsive Education Policy in 2017, and reiteration thereof in 2022 to protect children from all forms of gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying. The policy covers indigenous children, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender children, and CIGL;
- Issuance of general guidelines on the establishment and operation of gender-sensitive and child-friendly assistance desks and investigation rooms in prosecution offices nationwide; and
- Expansion of services to protect teenage mothers and their children to reduce risks and vulnerability through the "Social Protection Program for Teenage Mothers and Their Children".

The Philippine Government has rolled-out a Budget Tagging System for Children (BTS4C), which determines the budget allocation and expenditure of local government units dedicated to programs, projects, and services for children.

At the height of the pandemic, the Philippine Government also addressed issues on children's health and child abuse with the development of the Health, Nutrition and Child Protection Referral Pathway, which provides a basic guide on the flow of reporting and referral of cases of child abuse and health concerns during the pandemic. Further, the updated policies in the treatment of Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL), who are pregnant, postpartum or infants of young children, in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic and recent international laws and rules were also implemented.

The Philippine Government established a Protocol on the Provision of Proxy Consent for HIV Testing Services of Children Vulnerable to and at Risk of HIV. This protocol allows children and adolescents to be provided with the needed HIV testing, treatment, and other health services, upon recommendation by a social worker and deemed by a physician to be needing proxy consent.

In the administration of juvenile justice, the State has established a Comprehensive National Juvenile Intervention Program, which serves as roadmap to ensure the full implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Law. It also formulated and adopted policies, among others, on the Integration of Juvenile Justice Indicators in the Seal of Good Local Governance, Protocol and Process Flowchart when Handling Children Allegedly Involved in Dangerous Drugs, Guidelines for the Bahay Pag-Asa (youth care institution for CICL) and Other Youth Care Rehabilitation Facilities Handling Children in Conflict with the Law and Child at Risk during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and Integrated Care Management Protocol to guide the duty bearers in proper handling and effective referral of children.

Finally, the Philippine Judiciary has introduced innovations to render courts more child-friendly to protect them from trauma when providing testimonies. Relatedly, judges and court personnel, as well as prosecutors, public defenders, social workers, and law enforcement officers undergo continuing child and gender-sensitivity training by the Philippine Judicial Academy. And during

the pandemic, the Philippine Judiciary adopted online court hearings to sustain the courts' efficiency in handling cases and to ensure its accessibility to all stakeholders.

**Madame Chair,**

The Philippines' continuing advocacy on child rights protection is translated into policies and programs pursued under the Philippine Human Rights Plan in keeping with the Vienna Declaration & Programme of Action of 1993.

Now on its third cycle, which ends this year, the Plan directs the implementation of child-responsive programs by the Executive department; a legislative agenda on children's participation and welfare; an effective mechanism for inter-agency coordination; and a functional monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system. At the Plan's mid-term review in 2020, civil society and child advocacy organizations recognized milestones advancing child rights, such as the enhanced audit for child-friendly local governments. The Philippine Human Rights Plan shall always be informed by child protection.

We are certain that the foregoing achievements have made a significant contribution to the achievements of our sustainable development goals, particularly goals 1 to 5.

**Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,**

While we are pleased to present our milestones and share our best practices in this dialogue, we are also hopeful that your expert and constructive observations and recommendations will render this engagement productive and relevant. We are now ready to answer any questions or provide clarifications you may need.

Thank you. #####