



PHILIPPINES

**THE PHILIPPINES' CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE/ REVALIDA
WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
GENEVA, 10 OCTOBER 2021, 15:00 – 18:00**

**DELIVERED BY HON. JESUS CRISPIN C. REMULLA
SECRETARY (MINISTER) OF JUSTICE**

OPENING STATEMENT

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I am Jesus Crispin Remulla, the Secretary of Justice. It is my privilege and honor to engage in this constructive dialogue with the distinguished members of this Committee. With me in my delegation are officials from various executive agencies, namely, the Department of Justice, Department of Foreign Affairs, the Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat, Philippine National Police, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Dangerous Drugs Board. We are also joined by a high-level official from our Supreme Court

This dialogue continues a time-held commitment to engage with the UN treaty bodies, inspired by the pronouncement of recently-elected President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr. at the 77th UN General Assembly of an “open, inclusive, and rules-based international order that is governed by international law and informed by the principles of equity and justice.”

Our national elections in May this year had the highest voter turnout in history, at 83% or 55.6 million out of 65.7 million registered voters exercising their right to suffrage in a free, fair and orderly manner, and with more than 18,000 elective posts being vied for. With 63% of the votes cast, Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. became the first majority President in decades.

As we embark on this new chapter in our country's history under a new administration, we pause to look at what we have done as human rights advocates. We are fully aware of the pressing challenges on human rights and we shall address them. On the

other hand, we shall seek opportunities to further build on our gains, advocating “*Real justice in Real time.*”

I take pride in leading the Department that is at the forefront of defending human rights by way of dispensing justice through institutions such as the National Bureau of Investigation, National Prosecution Service, Administrative Order no. 35 mechanism to address grave violations of the right to life, liberty and security of persons, Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking, and specialized task forces for pressing issues illegal drugs, terrorism, and online sexual abuse or exploitation of children (OSAEC) and indigenous peoples’ concerns, among others. These institutions promote access to justice by vulnerable sectors.

Under my watch, we have begun undertaking flagship transformational reforms of our justice mechanisms and processes, putting emphasis on inclusivity and social justice, as follows:

1. **Decongest jails and ensure a humane treatment for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs)** by building a new, world-class correction facility; and conducting a comprehensive administrative review of all prisoner records in order to release those who have no further cause for detention. We target 5,000 PDLs for release by June next year.
2. **Strengthen coordination between prosecutors and law enforcement** to streamline investigative processes, facilitate case build-up in order to improve the quality of cases and chances of success in prosecution.
3. **Pursue the objectives of the DOJ Review Panel** on cases of deaths arising from the anti-illegal drug campaign. Forty-six (46) police officers were charged in court from the 302 cases which were referred to the NBI for case buildup. From the past drug operations, 222 police officers were found administratively liable and suspended from the service.

We have pursued a strengthened witness protection program to encourage CSOs, witnesses, and families of victims to come forward and file appropriate cases.

4. **Strengthen programs on rehabilitation, prevention, education and assistance to drug victims and their families** as part of the anti-illegal drug campaign, as directed by President Marcos, Jr.
5. **Further the State's commitment to the UN Joint Program on Human Rights** which provides an inclusive platform for cooperation with multi-stakeholders on programs on accountability, rule of law, and human rights.

Madam Chair,

[Migration and trafficking]

Over 10 million Filipinos of the 120 million Filipinos today live and work overseas. At least a million Filipinos, based on ILO records, migrate for employment every year. Their continued protection is assured by the newly created Department of Migrant Workers. In 2021, 21,291 distressed overseas Filipinos were assisted.

With the increasing number of Filipinos migrating overseas, associated challenges such as human trafficking are adequately addressed. The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking which includes the Bureau of Immigration, continues to protect the rights of Filipino migrant workers and victims of human trafficking, especially of women and children. Under the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Person, 3,988 rescued survivors in 2021 were provided access to counseling, financial assistance, skills training, and temporary shelter.

[Drugs]

Filipinos elected former President Rodrigo Duterte on a platform to address illegal drugs, which stakeholders deemed as a threat to the human right to life, a disabler of civic space, and a destroyer of families, especially the youth, the most vulnerable. In keeping with Article 23 of the Covenant that emphasizes State duty to protect the family as a fundamental unit of society, the State

pursued an anti-illegal drug campaign. Former President Duterte ended his term with 87% approval rating.

Our anti-drug policies adhere to international standards. We are guided by the recommendations and guidelines on drug prevention and control by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Narcotics Control Board.

Through the Philippine Anti-Illegal Drugs Strategy (PADS), all agencies of the government have been directed to implement initiatives to eliminate the drug problem in the country. More importantly, accountability mechanisms are in place for the proper and effective implementation of the campaign against drugs.

In 2016, the Dangerous Drugs Board implemented “Operation Plan Rescue” which guided State action on the **voluntary** submission of drug users and dependents to access community-based treatment and rehabilitation services and interventions.

The State, through Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), enforces its anti-illegal drug campaign of the government in a human rights-based manner, ensuring transparency and accountability in their operations, including through the use of body-worn cameras during ALL overt anti-illegal drug operations, consistent with the Rules promulgated by the Supreme Court. Currently, the agency has procured 806 units of body-worn cameras of international standard distributed to all PDEA regional and provincial offices.

From July 2016 to August 2022, 4,627 children ages 4-17 were rescued during the anti-illegal drug campaign. They were referred to appropriate case management mechanisms handled by social workers. Those with drug use disorders were given treatment, rehabilitation and reformation interventions.

[Children]

No less than the UN WOMEN lauded the Philippines for having the most comprehensive definition of domestic violence and for providing elaborate and innovative mechanisms for reliefs and remedies.

In 2019, the Supreme Court issued the Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law, with the aim of ensuring that our justice system treats each child in conflict with law in a manner that recognizes and upholds their human dignity and worth. Relatedly, UNICEF recognized the States' effort to provide special protection in situations of armed conflict through a law passed in 2019 declaring children as "zones of peace" and providing protection from grave child rights violations.

[Women and children]

The work of the Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and their Children (IAC-VAWC) has enabled accountability mechanisms to act on 13,538 cases out of 21,458 incidents reported from 2021 until September this year.

As a member of this Council, the Philippine National Police, partnered with all Centers and Residential Care Facilities (CRCF) nationwide where children can be turned-over for their safety and security. As of this year, the PNP, in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), has enlisted a total 71 facilities for safekeeping nationwide of which 12 facilities are located in the populous National Capital Region.

The PNP has likewise crafted various manuals and policies for the elimination of violence against children such as PNP Child Protection Policy (PNP-CPP) and Guidelines in handling Children in Situation of Armed Conflict (CSAC).

In line with the policy of continued organizational strengthening of the PNP, the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) has trained 5,828 WCPD investigators in 2,008 Women and Children Desks nationwide.

[Transnational crime and trafficking]

The PNP sustains its strong partnerships with foreign law enforcement counterparts, INTERPOL, ASEANAPOL, and other similar bodies involved in transnational investigations and cooperation of TIP-related and other gender-based violence cases.

Under a cooperation agreement aimed at freezing financial assets of traffickers, the PNP and the country's Anti-Money Laundering Council undertake joint investigation of trafficking-

related cases. The PNP-Women and Children's Protection Center (PNP-WCPC) facilitated the arrest of 21 suspected perpetrators in 2021 and the rescue of 159 victims.

In response to the global challenge of trafficking in persons, the Philippine government recently launched an aggressive campaign against the same, leading to 103 convictions in 2021, 42 of which are cases of online sexual exploitation of children. To further the State's efforts in this regard, a special law was also passed this year penalizing online sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

For the first semester of 2022, IACAT monitored 50 TIP and TIP-related convictions, 24 or almost half are also OSAEC convictions.

[Persons deprived of liberty]

To ensure the welfare of all persons deprived of liberty, the State's Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) constructed new jail facilities, with the support of local government units, NGOs and civil society.

The Bureau of Corrections continues to address the issue of overcrowding in their facilities. A mega prison that we have, *New Bilibid Prison*, houses 17,000 maximum security prisoners in a jail built for only 5,000 people.

We are now reforming our correction system. We have budgeted around P4 billion pesos to relocate the maximum security prison to a far out island called Mindoro. Pending the completion of this project, we have already released 371 inmates, 300 from New Bilibid Prison.

In the meantime, the Philippine Congress passed the Bureau of Corrections Act providing for the regionalization and reformation of our correction system. In an unprecedented move, we have also activated our agency, the 2,080-strong Public Attorney's Office (PAO), to ensure that all detention facilities be visited to ensure that PDLs are being treated properly. We have redirected PAO to not only defend indigent clients but to make sure that those PDLs with pending cases are not being held even **one day** beyond their supposed period of detention. The biggest chunk of the

Department's budget is earmarked for this purpose and hopefully, as earlier stated, we can release 5,000 prisoners in a year's time.

[Closing]

Finally, in reviewing our compliance with human rights commitments, this administration's new-found resolve, borne by its overwhelming mandate, should be given primacy and duly supported.

The Philippines acknowledges the wisdom and expertise of this Treaty Body in assisting our efforts to further strengthen our accountability mechanisms and processes, ever respectful of domestic remedies and national priorities.

We love our country and our countrymen more than anyone else. All we ask is time to put our resolve into action. We have begun the work, and we will be faithful to complete it. We will build on what we have and undertake real reforms which are beneficial and necessary for our society to flourish.

I end my talk and begin action, knowing fully well that the effort to protect and promote human rights is a never ending job. We call on fellow human rights advocates and defenders to join our progressive and relentless efforts to advance human rights.

As our President has said before the UN General Assembly in September this year, we have always been an optimistic and courageous nation. Despite the enormity of the present challenges we face, we believe that solutions are within our collective grasp. Our goal is *Real Justice in Real Time*. With the continued guidance and support of the international community, we will remain on track in achieving this goal.

Thank you very much.