

PRESS RELEASE

Philippine Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva

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SOJ REMULLA AT UN SIDE EVENT : CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM A PRIORITY FOR PH



The panel discussion on “Prison and Justice Sector Reforms” was participated in by representatives of Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, civil society organizations, and media in-person and online.

28 February 2023, Geneva, Switzerland – Secretary of Justice Jesus Crispin C. Remulla bares the Philippines’ criminal justice reform agenda to an international audience during a panel discussion on “*Prison and Justice Sector Reforms and Human Rights*”, held on the sidelines of the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council on 28 February 2023 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Secretary Remulla said that making the country’s prison and detention facilities more humane and effective are a priority of the Marcos Administration within the larger framework of justice sector reforms.

“[The Philippine government] is not blind to the cries of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), their families and friends; we do not see numbers, but human beings with dignity and rights”, he said.

The Philippine government is steadfast in addressing pervasive challenges, specifically prison overcrowding and protracted litigations, to ensure that persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) continue to enjoy all their other fundamental human rights while in detention.

Secretary Remulla said that as an "immediate fix" to decongestion, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has institutionalized the periodic review of prison records resulting in the monthly release of about 500 PDLs, for a total of 4,124 released PDLs since 1 July 2022. The Public Attorney's Office's review of the status of all clients also resulted in the release of 51,796 detention prisoners by way of recognizance, complete service of sentence and the like. Newly freed individuals are entitled to the expanded rehabilitation services, including values formation, mental health support mechanisms, and livelihood training programs, among others.

"I am proud to declare that in these releases of PDLs, I made it a point to attend. No words can describe the joy and happiness of the families upon their reunion. A true testament to the reformatory nature of our corrections system."



Secretary of Justice Jesus Crispin C. Remulla (center) speaks at the panel discussion on "Prison and Justice Sector Reforms and Human Rights", a side-event at the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), held on 28 February 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland. He is joined by (L-R) Norway Permanent Representative to the UN Tine Mørch Smith, Mr. Terry Hackett of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Philippine Permanent Representative to the UN Evan P. Garcia.

Secretary Remulla further shared that the DOJ is implementing new and game-changing policies and initiatives, including the establishment of state-of-the-art penal facilities, transfer of the New Bilibid Prison, regionalization of prisons, and digitized Probation Information System.

The DOJ will issue a new case build-up rule that will require closer coordination between prosecutors and law enforcement as well as a higher quantum of evidence for the prosecution of cases.

Secretary Remulla noted that this rule *"has an exponential effect on three of the five pillars of our criminal justice system: lower cases that may be filed by the law enforcement agencies, lower docket of our prosecution, decongestion of our judiciary, and the depopulation of our overcrowded correctional facilities."*

"No longer shall our penal code be used, abused or weaponized," he emphasized.

New bail guidelines will likewise be adopted to expand access to justice especially by indigents accused of crimes.

"Our unique situation drives us to find new ways and outside-the-box- solutions to hurdle them. We are not deterred by these challenges. Instead, they inspire us to do more, much more, for the benefit of our children and the future Filipinos."

The side-event was organized by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Norway and the Kingdom of Thailand.

Other officials participating in the panel Amb. Tine Mørch Smith, Norway's Permanent Representative to the UN Ms. Chutarut Chintakanont, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Corrections of Thailand's Ministry of Justice, Mr. Achsanul Habib, Director for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Terry Hackett, Head of Unit for Persons Deprived of Liberty of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The discussion was moderated by Amb. Evan P. Garcia, Philippine Permanent Representative to the UN,

Joining Secretary Remulla from the Justice Department were Undersecretary Jesse H. T. Andres and Undersecretary Raul T. Vasquez.

The side-event was attended by representatives of Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, civil society organizations, and media. **END**