



PHILIPPINES

PHILIPPINE STATEMENT AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 49TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

01 March 2022, Geneva, Switzerland

**Delivered by the Hon. Menardo I. Guevarra
Secretary (Minister) of Justice of the Philippines**

Mr. President, Madame High Commissioner, Excellencies:

It is my great honor to speak at this High Level Segment of the 49th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Our recent experience confirms how constructive engagement can yield valuable dividends towards the protection and promotion of human rights.

This experience likewise demonstrates how constructive engagement creates opportunities for the integration of human rights ideals into policies and measures designed to promote the security of our nation, the peace of our communities, and the safety of our people.

Our constructive engagement found its iterative expression in this Council's Resolution 45/33 passed during its 45th session.

The Resolution endorsed support for our efforts at further strengthening our government's human rights and accountability mechanisms.

Energized by this support, our national institutions have since then proceeded to discharge our human rights commitments, in accordance with international law principles, and consistent with our national interest.

In particular, the Review Panel formed under the Department of Justice which I lead is now prepared to endorse to the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) two hundred fifty (250) cases that involve reported deaths arising from the government's anti-illegal drugs operations in the Central Luzon area.

Earlier, the Review Panel has indorsed to the NBI fifty-two (52) other cases. From this previous indorsement, four (04) cases have reached actual prosecution in our courts.

The NBI is currently preparing five (05) more complaints to initiate the prosecution process against erring law enforcement operatives.

The work of the Review Panel has been complemented by investigations conducted by the Philippine Inter-Agency Committee on Extra-Legal Killings, Enforced Disappearances, Torture and Other Grave Violations of the Right to Life, Liberty and Security of Persons, otherwise known as the AO35 mechanism.

In the past year alone, this inter-agency committee created fifteen (15) Special Investigation Teams that looked into extra-legal killings and other incidents involving gross violations of human rights and of humanitarian law.

The committee has recently completed its investigation and will shortly initiate the process to prosecute a number of law enforcement officers involved in the service of judicial warrants which resulted in the death of known activists in Southern Luzon.

The progress we have thus far achieved rests on the collective effort of the Philippine National Police, the DOJ, and other relevant institutions committed to instill respect for human rights and exact accountability for those who violate them.

This effort stands to benefit even more from our government's Joint Program with the United Nations.

The AO35 mechanism has been in continuous dialogue with the office of the UN Resident Coordinator and the office of the UN Special Rapporteur for Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions for capacity-building initiatives, specifically on the 1991 Minnesota Protocol on Investigations of Potentially Unlawful Deaths.

Other related projects and programs involving the DOJ, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, and our law enforcement organizations have likewise been drawn up for funding under the UN Joint Program.

Signed in July last year, the Joint Program enhances capacity-building and technical cooperation between the Philippines and the UN.

Pledges for the Joint Program are currently being prepared by the governments of Norway and Australia.

An invitation to the United States for a pledge to the program was likewise made during the 9th Philippine-US Bilateral Strategic Dialogue held last November 2021 in Washington, D.C.

In December 2021, the first meeting of the UN Joint Program Steering Committee was convened.

Last month, the Technical Working Group on Civil Space and Engagement led by our Commission on Human Rights conducted its first inception meeting with ten (10) civil society organizations in attendance.

Meanwhile, the Philippine government has invited two (2) Special Rapporteurs to undertake official visits to the country between now and next year.

We look forward to working with the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children late this year, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in 2023.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

As ordained by our Constitution and following the holding of our national elections, a change in administration will take place in the Philippines by the 30th of June this year.

But our country's firm commitment to human rights will remain unaffected by the passing incumbency of administrations, rooted as it is on our long history of engagement with this Council and reflected in policies that protect and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of our people.

The Philippines will remain positively engaged with the international community and all human rights mechanisms on all issues concerning rule of law and accountability institutions in the country. But we will draw the line between parties that engage in good faith, and those that abuse and exploit these mechanisms to make demands of accountability with little or no factual basis.

Finally, the Philippines assures the international community and all its development partners of our commitment to further build on the gains we have thus far achieved, and to further deepen our honest, open, meaningful and enduring cooperation in the sphere of human rights.

Thank you and *Mabuhay!*
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