

# PRESS RELEASE

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

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### **SOJ REMULLA AT PH HUMAN RIGHTS REVIEW IN UN: PH FORGING AHEAD WITH JUSTICE SECTOR REFORMS TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY**



**GENEVA** – Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin C. Remulla reaffirmed the Philippine Government’s openness to enhancing existing partnerships and forging new ones to advance human rights, including ongoing justice sector reforms, at the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) held on 14 November 2022, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Secretary Remulla briefed the HRC on progress in the implementation of the national agenda on human rights since the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of the UPR in 2017 under the four pillars of (a) justice and law enforcement reforms, (b) investments in economic, social and cultural rights, (c) constructive and open engagement with the international community, and (d) protection of vulnerable groups.

Secretary Remulla underlined the new energy towards strengthening national accountability mechanisms, pursuing the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., for the Philippines to embark on “*comprehensive, transformational reforms across all five pillars of our justice system*”. These are “*game-changing reforms aimed at redefining the Philippines’ legal culture in order for us to deliver “real justice in real time” which we owe to the Filipino people*”, Secretary Remulla stated.

In just a little more than 100 days after the leadership transition last June 2022, significant breakthroughs have already been achieved. These include the prompt indictment of a high-ranking government official in relation to the Percy Lapid case; release of 728 persons deprived of liberty as part of the larger program of decongesting detention facilities; streamlining of investigative and accountability processes for better case build-up; indictment of 25 police officers resulting from the work of the Review Panel that looks into incidents in the context of the anti-illegal drug campaign; and the dismissal from service of 27 police officers, demotion of 18 and suspension of 98 officers and filing of criminal charges following the internal investigation of the Philippine National Police on cases of abuses within its ranks. Nine (9) additional cases will likewise be with the AO 45 mechanism that tackles the issue of extrajudicial killings.

Secretary Remulla revealed that following the discovery of 176 unclaimed and abandoned cadavers of PDLs at an accredited funeral home of the National Bilibid Prison, he directed the conduct of an inventory and medico-legal investigation to determine the cause of deaths and hold those responsible accountable.

*“The Government does not take hesitate to take action when there is compelling evidence to do so” and this should “dispel the mistaken notion of a “culture of impunity” in our country”, Secretary Remulla underscored. “We will not tolerate the denial of justice nor any violation of human rights,” he added.*

Noting that the promotion and protection of human rights is a never-ending job, Secretary Remulla vowed that the government *“will fix what needs fixing and improve what needs improving”*.



Secretary Remulla assured the international community that *“human rights are intrinsic in the fabric of Philippine society and democracy. In this regard, we welcome partnerships to help us move forward – partnerships that respect the sovereignty and agency of the Philippine Government to fulfill its obligations and do right by its own people”*.

On 13 November 2022, Secretary Remulla met with Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary execution to discuss the next steps for the planned training program on the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death for authorities, with the participation of the Commission on Human Rights and other stakeholders.

Secretary Remulla likewise cited the Marcos administration's people-centered and comprehensive governance and development agenda to ensure the Filipino people's economic, social, and cultural rights, prioritizing agriculture, agrarian reform, health, education, infrastructure development, energy, social welfare and development, employment, the environment, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Secretary Remulla highlighted the high importance the Philippine Government attaches to the UPR process, noting that the Philippines accepted and implemented 103 out of the 257 recommendations from the 3rd cycle of the UPR. The accepted recommendations focused on issues related to, among others, the right to development; environment; human rights and counter-terrorism; right to life, liberty, and security of persons; administration of justice; prohibition of all forms of slavery; right to privacy and family life; right to work and to just and favorable conditions of work; right to social security; right to adequate standard of living; right to health; right to education; and the rights of women, children, persons with disability, migrants, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons.

Secretary Remulla particularly noted that the Philippines hosts Rohingya refugees, providing them free education through the Complementary Pathway program, and is in discussions with partners, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the US, on the possibility of the country temporarily hosting other persons at risk.

Joining Secretary Remulla in the delegation were Philippine UN Permanent Representative Evan P. Garcia, Justice Undersecretary Jesse H. T. Andres, Justice Undersecretary Raul T. Vasquez, Undersecretary Severo S. Catura of the Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat (PHRCS), and other officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Justice, PHRCS, and the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations in Geneva.

The UPR is a State-led review process of all 193 UN member states' implementation of human rights obligations through a constructive dialogue among states and other stakeholders, including national human rights institutions and NGOs. It started in 2007 pursuant to UNGA Resolution 60/251 of 2006.

The Philippines joins 13 other States – Algeria, Bahrain, Brazil, Ecuador, Finland, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Tunisia, and the United Kingdom – as a state under review during the 41st Session of the UPR Working Group scheduled from 7 to 18 November 2022.

The Philippines has participated in the past 3 cycles of the UPR – in 2008, 2012, and 2017. **END**