

**Presidential Communications Operations Office  
Presidential News Desk**

**INTERVENTION OF PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE AT THE 36<sup>TH</sup> ASSOCIATION OF  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) SUMMIT**

[Malago Clubhouse, Malacañang Park, Manila | 26 June 2020]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellencies, Your Majesty,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause disruptions worldwide with far-reaching consequences. To survive, we need to make fundamental and systemic changes. And only a cohesive and responsive ASEAN can help us all safely navigate out of this perfect storm of a crisis.

Greater cooperation and connectivity are vital for our region to thrive under the new normal that COVID-19 imposes on all of us. It is in this light that I welcome our Plan of Action on strengthening economic cooperation and supply chain connectivity, as well as the establishment of the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund.

Certainly, these measures are only the first steps towards recovery and the continuation of our community building.

To bridge the gap between today's crisis and the future that we want, we must address the vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has revealed in our systems. This pandemic has exposed the limitations of our healthcare and social protection systems. It has laid bare the precarious situation of our workers at home and abroad, the viability of our micro, small and medium enterprises or MSMEs, and the weaknesses of our supply chain networks.

ASEAN has existing cooperation in these areas. Our task now is to recalibrate our plans so we can build back better.

We must accelerate the implementation of our connectivity projects to build resilient and sustainable regional supply chains. We have to maximize trade facilitation initiatives to promote the growth and participation of MSMEs in regional and global value chains.

In order to improve the competitiveness of our workers and industries, we must have faster progress on human capital development. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the ASEAN TVET Council. We also want stronger implementation of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

For all its uniqueness, this pandemic is unlikely to be a one-off event. We must, therefore, strengthen our region's capacity to address future infectious disease outbreaks. We can do this by promoting research and capacity-building on health technology development. We must enable the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity to contribute in combatting wildlife trafficking to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases.

Your Majesty, Excellencies, not everything in the horizon is bleak. Viewed through the lens of the environment, lockdowns have led to decreased energy consumption, thus reducing pollution.

This pandemic has taught us that we must choose to be nature's stewards, not its abusers. Lockdowns have also forced us to take full advantage of technology and innovation. The adoption of e-commerce, e-learning, videoconferencing, and artificial intelligence have all been accelerated by the crisis.

We expect many positive outcomes from this development. [For instance, cross-border e-commerce] could expand the export opportunities of businesses, especially smaller ones. Forced experimentation with remote work could spur more services offshoring. These will spread [growth across] regions while minimizing harm to the environment.

As in previous crises, this pandemic has opened opportunities for green alternatives for our recovery. I join other Leaders in tasking our Ministers to craft a recovery plan that is innovative and ambitious, and one that will lead us to a greener and more sustainable future.

Your Excellencies, Your Majesty,

While the challenges we face due to COVID-19 are considerable, we must never forget that there are also other threats that can further undermine our efforts.

The pandemic has not killed terrorism. It remains alive, lurking in the shadows. In some countries, terrorist elements strike even during government relief operations. At a time of great need, these acts are unconscionable. We must, therefore, be always on the alert.

We also need to prepare for disasters and natural calamities. For the Philippines, June to September is the most active period for typhoons. Already an effort under normal circumstances, relief activities become even more gravely complex as we battle COVID-19.

We must also not lose sight of the geopolitical shifts that have [accelerated] in the past six months. The rivalry between the United States and China was already well under way before this crisis. COVID-19 added a new layer to this complex relationship.

The Great Powers will continue to draw us into their respective camps. We should continue to nimbly engage them in ways that most [benefit us]. We must insist on an open and rules-based international order that gives all countries – large or small – not just one voice, but an equal standing.

Even as our region struggles to contain COVID-19, alarming incidents in the South China Sea occurred. We call on parties to refrain from escalating tensions and abide by responsibilities under international law, notably the 1982 UNCLOS. We urge all parties to adhere to the rule of law and to their commitments to international instruments, including the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

As Country Coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations, we face real constraints in dealing with our deliverables. We must not lose sight of strategic interests in the [South] China Sea. We must find innovative ways and exercise flexibility to achieve our common goals. We remain committed to work closely with Member States and China towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

ASEAN solidarity and collective action have never been more critical than today. We thank Viet Nam for its committed leadership of ASEAN under difficult times.

Rest assured that the Philippines will continue working with ASEAN to realize our shared aspiration for a peaceful, prosperous, and secure future for our peoples.

Thank you.

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