



Office of the President of the Philippines

STATEMENT

Participation of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level General Debate 21 September 2021

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte participated in the High-Level General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 21, 2021.

Speaking on the first day of the High-Level General Debate, the President discussed how governments can reconcile their obligation to their own citizens with their responsibility to the rest of humanity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, worsening inequality and geopolitical instability.

Noting that injustice is the common thread that ties these global issues together, President Duterte said that the way forward is for countries to expand their notion of “us” beyond the nation, embrace inclusive multilateralism and engage one another on the basis of fairness, equality and respect.

The President urged wealthy countries to put an end to the “*man-made drought of vaccines ravaging poor countries*” by fully supporting the COVAX Facility and further strengthening other cooperation mechanisms.

The Philippines, for its part, committed US \$ 1 million dollars to the COVAX Facility as its modest contribution to the collective fight against COVID-19.

“We strongly urge our privileged partners to fully support the COVAX Facility and further strengthen other cooperation mechanisms. We need this to save more lives, break the cycle of variants and help ensure global economic recovery”, the President stated.

On climate change, the President warned that the world has reached a critical tipping point where failure to act will lead to cataclysmic consequences. He said that the Philippines accepts its share of responsibility and has thus submitted its first Nationally Determined Contribution, with a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030.

"But this contribution will be rendered useless if the biggest polluters – past and present – choose to do 'business as usual'. We therefore appeal for urgent climate action, especially from those that can truly tip the balance," President Duterte noted.

President Duterte also said that the Philippines seeks stronger partnerships to achieve the country's aspiration for a stable, comfortable and secure life founded on freedom, justice and equality. While significant strides have been made, difficult challenges remain.

The President reaffirmed the Philippine government's mandate and obligation to protect the Filipino people against criminals and other lawless elements *"with the full force of our laws"*. President Duterte instructed the Department of Justice and the Philippine National Police to review the conduct of the campaign against illegal drugs, stating that those *"who have acted beyond bounds during operations shall be made accountable before our laws"*.

Noting that millions of Filipino migrant workers suffer inhumane treatment abroad, the President reiterated his call for the abolition of the *kafala* system which he characterized as a *"behemoth that chains the weak, the desperate, and the voiceless to an existence of unimaginable suffering"*.

President Duterte also said that the Philippines recently finalized with the United Nations a *Joint Program on Human Rights*, which is a model for constructive engagement between a sovereign Member State and the United Nations.

In line with the country's longstanding humanitarian tradition, President Duterte announced that the Philippines has opened its doors to Afghan nationals, especially women and children, fleeing from conflict. He also instructed the Department of Justice to work with UN High Commissioner on Refugees to prepare a program to help a specified number of Rohingyas consistent with national capacity.

"The Philippines has limited resources during these extraordinary times. But what we can do for humanity and to uplift human dignity, we will," the President added.

In a period of profound geopolitical change, the President said that it is crucial for all countries to commit to the rule of law fully and firmly.

He underscored that the Philippines is one with ASEAN and other stakeholders in ensuring that the South China Sea remains a sea of peace, security and prosperity.

"The 1982 UNCLOS and the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea provide a clear path towards a just, fair, and win-win solution for all. The Award must be seen for what it is – a benefit across the board to all who subscribe to the majesty of the law. No amount of willful disregard by any country, however big and powerful, can diminish the Arbitral Award's importance," the President stressed.

President Duterte likewise called for UN reforms in the face of multiple crises that demand effective global governance.

President Duterte is the first leader of a developing country from the Asia Pacific to speak at the 76th Session of the UNGA.

The UN General Assembly is the main deliberative organ of the UN where all the 193 Member States are represented. H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th UNGA, presides over the High-Level General Debate that will run until September 27, 2021.

This year's UNGA session follows a hybrid format of in-person and virtual attendance of delegates due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **END**