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**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
AT THE CONFERMENT OF THE ORDER OF NATIONAL SCIENTISTS AND THE
PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF MERIT**

[Delivered at the President's Hall, Malacañan Palace, Manila | 31 August 2023]

Thank you very much. Allow me to greet our Trade and Industry Secretary, Secretary Fred Pascual and the DOST Undersecretary Sancho Mabborang; Presidential Medal of Merit Awardee Trade and Industry Assistant Secretary Allan Gepty; the honorable members of the Cabinet; National Academy of Science and Technology President Jaime Montoya; fellow workers in government; other distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

At the very outset, we must apologize for keeping you waiting. But the truth of the matter is once we sat down and started to discuss with our awardees the different things that we need to do at napahaba ang aming usapan dahil mukhang marami tayong kailangang gawin lalo na sa panahon ngayon ang lahat ng hinaharap natin na mga problema, ang lahat ng pagbabago na nararamdaman natin sa ekonomiya ng buong mundo pati na dito sa Pilipinas, ang ating kabuhatan, ay ang tinitingnan po natin ay ang teknolohiya. At ang importante diyan ay 'yung research and development. Ang pag-develop ng mga new knowledge at bukod doon, hindi sapat na mayroon na tayong magandang research. Marami naman tayong magandang research. Iyong development, doon tayo medyo nagkukulang.

Kaya't iyon ang napag-usapan namin kaya napahaba ang aming usapan dahil napakahalaga para sa ating mga kababayan na itong R&D, hindi lamang sa healthcare kundi sa lahat ng sektor ng ating ekonomiya, ng ating lipunan, ay dapat bigyan ng pansin.

At ito ang magbibigay sa atin ng kakayahan na harapin kung anuman ang mga magiging bagong – sana naman wala ng pandemya, pero 'yung iba't ibang problema na dadating. At bukod doon, hindi lamang 'yung mga bagong sakit na hindi pa natin nakita noon kung hindi pati na 'yung mga sakit na matagal na nating ginagawan ng paraan. Halimbawa, ang pinag-usapan namin ay diabetes, cancer, tuberculosis, HIV. Ito ay hindi naman nawawala ito. Kahit na nabawasan na ang risks sa COVID ay maliwanag na maliwanag na kailangan pa rin natin indintihin at bigyan ng solusyon ang mga pangkaraniwan, let us just say, not unusual pero pangkaraniwan na health issues na hinaharap ng buong Pilipinas.

And that is why I have asked all of those who are involved that we need to now be very conscientious and put together a program wherein we can support in whatever way that the government can on research and development, and as I think all of us know that some of the problems are in the development side.

We kept talking about what are the ways that we can – what are the methods that we can do so that the R&D or the new knowledge, the new technologies can be brought to market as it were, as quickly as possible.

It is the problem that we have faced in all parts, especially with the new technologies of scaling. And that I think is an important issue simply because, again, it does not matter if we have this

very, very clever, very, very advanced and progressive technologies. But if they are not made available to the people, then that effort has gone to waste. And we do not want to do that.

The other side of that problem and as we had identified is that we are confident we can do it so long as it is well-supported. Now, not only by the government. We spoke also about, again, in consonance with our approach, our policy, our concept of – and whole-of-government approach and whole-of-society approach that we include the private sector. Because as we all know, some of these research programs can become quite expensive and they can go on for a long time.

And the government will of course do its part. But I think we will multiply our efforts, there will be a multiplier effect if we include all the sectors of government and also our private sector partners. And so this is what we are planning to do today – this is what we are planning to do for the future.

I have asked Dra. Padilla to put together a program so that will include – well, the DTI is here, DOST, and DOH specifically – we put together a program so we can support such activities as we have been speaking about in terms of R&D and of actually bringing that technology to the general populace.

And it has become more important because as Dra. Padilla was explaining to me earlier, the importance of our genome has been highlighted because – and I was surprised to learn this, that there are specific characteristics to the Filipino genome, to the Asian genome.

And therefore, as I was telling her, I said hindi lang tayong puwedeng mag-antay sabihin mo maglalabas ang Pfizer ng ano ng vaccine, maglalabas 'yung AstraZeneca ng vaccine. Antayin na lang natin 'yan because one size does not fit all.

And that is why this effort of genetic research and all the way through to being able to apply that specifically to the Filipino situation, to the genetics of the Filipino, and it even becomes more granular in the sense that she was explaining to me there are some Filipinos for which these medicines are effective, there's another group of Filipinos for which it is not. So that is really – well, the cracks of the problem.

And it is the nature of the health situation that we face today not only in the Philippines but around the world. But we must be very aware of – well, we must be very aware of the specificity of the responses that we make especially in healthcare considering that we are built slightly differently from everyone else.

And that I think is the – once we realize that and once we put that as part of our thinking and our planning, then we can say that we have made the first steps towards assuring our people, assuring the Philippines that at the very least we have made – we have come, we have found new solutions, we have found new technologies, we have found new products that are specifically directed to Filipinos.

And that's why the importance of this is the reason why today we honor our two honorees today.

We recognize Dr. Padilla for her contributions and her expertise in the field of Genetics. commend her for her instrumental role in the passage of R.A. 9288, or the Newborn Screening Act, which has saved thousands of babies across the country from mental retardation and from death. Not only that, Dra. Padilla's work was also vital in the crafting and passage of another law, Republic Act 10747 or the Rare Diseases Act of 2016.

More recently, Dr. Padilla spearheaded the establishment of the Philippine Genome Center, which played an essential role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Philippine Genome Center was at the forefront of the country's pandemic response and provided the government and the country's policymakers with the information that we need to better understand the virus and implement measures to limit and manage its spread.

Meanwhile, we also commend Assistant Secretary Gepty for being an invaluable force in the negotiations and the eventual ratification of that most important treaty, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which has included now the Philippines into the biggest trade bloc in the world. This should open opportunities for Filipinos and the Philippine companies to export trade and services to a market exceeding 2 billion people that are within the RCEP region.

Under the RCEP, the Philippines will be able to source raw materials and intermediate goods from fellow RCEP countries, process products locally, and then export those products back out to other RCEP countries at a preferential rate.

Our participation in RCEP will strengthen our linkages in regional supply chains and serve as a catalyst for attracting more foreign direct investments into the country.

Both Dr. Padilla and Asec. Gepty exemplify what it means to be a public servant and these awards are our form of recognition and a testament to that service. Their service goes above and beyond typical duties and responsibilities and their achievements have created and will continue to create a positive and lasting impact.

Once again, I would like to thank our awardees today for their outstanding service to the country and to the Filipino people.

May this accomplishment reinvigorate your drive to selflessly serve the country and may you continue to be a shining example to our fellow workers in government and continue to provide inspiration for service for our fellow citizens.

Maraming salamat po. Congratulations muli at magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat. [applause]

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