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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.  
AT THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION DAY SUMMIT**

[Delivered at Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City | 15 May 2024]

Maraming, maraming salamat.

Thank you to our Executive Secretary, Secretary Luc Bersamin.

*[Please be seated.]*

Our CHED Chairman, Chairman Popoy de Vera; the Chairman of the Senate committee on Higher, Technical, and Vocational Education, Senator Chiz Escudero; the Chairman of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education, Congressman Mark Go; the officials and the staff of CHED who we are celebrating today; the officials and faculty members of all the State Universities and Colleges, all the SUCs; and the Higher Education Institutions who are present with us; my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

It is with delight that I join all of you today in this summit where gains will be recognized and challenges will be assessed, [and] strategies have been identified that will move higher education forward.

The National Higher Education Day Summit is the first of its kind to be held in our country, so we can collaborate with our higher education institutions (HEIs) and other stakeholders to assess and to steer the direction of higher education in the Philippines.

I do hope that this summit has given its participants a commanding and an unobstructive view of our educational landscape.

Whatever the outputs of this summit are, I hope they will cascade down to campuses and to classrooms, as a force of good, as a [source] of innovation and methods to move our educational standards forward and upward.

No challenge demands greater attention than this. This is the highest priority. I have stated it before but I will state it again that as far as my view of government service is concerned, the most important service that government must provide to its people is a good education. No country can prosper without a good educational background.

Even if we take it down to the individual level, individuals cannot prosper without a good education. And of course together with all the stakeholders, both on the public side and the private side, once again, training, education holds the key.

As of December 2023, 81 Philippine Higher Educational Institutions have been included in various world university rankings—a significant increase from the 52 [HEIs] that were included in July 2023.

However, we must acknowledge that in the recent Times Higher Education's 2024 Asia University Rankings, unfortunately, no Philippine university has reached Top 100, with the country's top schools either dropping or maintaining their rankings.

This just goes to show that much work is still to be done. We must pursue a comprehensive and all-encompassing strategy that will turn this trend around.

The state of our education today shapes the future of the nation.

The battle to win the future is waged in today's schools, where we should arm our young men and women with the right skills to not only survive, but to thrive in a rapidly changing world that does not wait for anyone.

Giving the youth the right competencies and skills and training is the only way for them to prevail, and to prosper, in this highly competitive world.

Our greatest obligation to them is to mold them into critical thinkers, into problem solvers, into visionaries, wielding the skills that will allow them to succeed in the future.

Without an educated workforce that will implement them, any national economic blueprints will remain simply as that --- blueprints. We will not have the means or the capacity or the labor force to be able to make those plans reality.

Without skilled manpower who will run them, industries will grind to a halt, social services will cease to function.

Without a national pool of talent who can master new technologies and adjust quickly to tectonic changes, the country will be perpetually catching up, left behind by other societies whose educational system have been made [them] more adept.

And that is why improving higher education—and making it responsive to the present and future needs of society—is front and center of this administration's national development agenda. The success of many of our plans for the country depends heavily on the availability of a strong, resilient, and skilled human resource to drive the nation forward.

Allow me to share [with] you my fundamental belief on the matter.

One, higher education is too important a mission to be left to government alone. As with all the important developments, all the important plans that we put together, we cannot say that this is only government's responsibility. But we should also allow private parties to participate and not shove private parties to the sidelines. Nor should it be the cause of their diminution, or their demise.

When it comes to educating our youth, government and private schools are not competitors but must be regarded as equal partners.

And as such, government should ensure their viability, [and] treat them as strategic assets whose existence is guaranteed by nurturing policies and support.

Second, of all state expenditures, education delivers the best dividends.

This administration remains committed to the continuing provision of free tertiary education in public universities and colleges for qualified students *[applause]* as provided under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act.

We have allocated close to 134 billion pesos for our state and local universities and colleges this year so that more students can receive free tertiary education and more families will be eased of the burden of having to pay for college.

We know that whatever is spent on education, we should never regard as an expenditure. It is an investment... *[applause]* It is an investment in our people. It is an investment in our country. It is an investment in our future.

Third, mandates must be attached to merits.

Democratizing access to education should not lead to the lowering of academic standards.

Scholastic yardsticks are not movable goalposts which we change every year to improve our numbers. These must be regarded as firm benchmarks that are resistant to the pressures that seek to undercut the quality of that education. We must hold ourselves, our students, the entire system to a high standard and it is the only way that we will succeed in this fast-moving, changing world.

Fourth, there are ways of solving educational problems other than just throwing money at the problem.

Certainly... We could not say that appropriations will always solve a problem. Cash is not always a cure.

Even funding does not automatically guarantee that we will get our desired outcome.

A solution, if intrinsically bad, does not become effective because it has become funded.

I hope you take the above points into consideration. The last thing we need now is a set of new talking points that we rehash once again what we have learned a long time ago.

Besides, what we have learned a long time ago is actually no longer relevant. We have seen the changes in the requirements of the new global post-pandemic economy and for us to be able to participate successfully in that new global economy, we must have a skilled workforce.

And that will depend upon their training and their education.

I would rather that consensus forged in this summit be incorporated in the proposed budget for CHED and SUCs for 2025 because only then can ideas be translated into reality.

So, as we look further into the horizon in our higher [education] sector, I hope that this summit yields answers and solutions to the challenges and opportunities that we now face in our higher [education] sector.

And so, I encourage every stakeholder here to work with us and strengthen our efforts towards an inclusive, equitable, accessible, and sustainable higher [education] sector.

Let us mold a new generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers, and visionaries who will realize our aspiration for a new Philippines, a *Bagong Pilipinas* [and] bring us to a future of growth, opportunity, and prosperity.

In my view, it is the only way that our country will succeed. It is the only way that we will be an active participant in --- not only the economy of the world but in all, as a citizen of the world community that this country will succeed.

So, with this, I trust that the men and women of CHED, led by Chairperson Popoy de Vera, will lead us forward and continue their trustworthy and unwavering service for the benefit of our students and the entire country.

I wish you all a fruitful and engaging summit. And I once again, pledge the total and complete support of this administration for all that you endeavor to do for higher education, to improve the quality that we are providing for our students and for our workforce.

Thank you very much and good afternoon. [*applause*]

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