

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE 36TH JOINT MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) TOURISM COMMISSION FOR
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AND THE UN TOURISM COMMISSION FOR SOUTH ASIA**

[Delivered at the Grand Ballroom of Sheraton Cebu Mactan Resort in Lapu-Lapu City |
28 June 2024]

Thank you very much, Secretary Christina Frasco for your wonderful words and your kind introduction.

[Please take your seats.]

The UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili; together with me is the Special Assistant to the President, Secretary Anton Lagdameo; the Deputy Speaker and the Representative of the 5th District of Cebu Congressman and Deputy Speaker Duke Frasco; the other honorable members of the House of Representatives who have joined us today; of course, our good friend and exemplary leader as Governor, Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia; Lapu-Lapu City Mayor Junard Ahong Chan; the ministers and delegates of the 36th Joint Meeting of the UN Tourism Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UN Tourism Commission for South Asia; our stakeholders both in the public sector and in the private sector who have worked together to bring tourism in the Philippines to the rest of the world; my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I am extremely happy to be here today, surrounded by the decision-makers, visionary leaders, and trailblazers who share the same passion and advocacy for sustainable and innovative tourism program in our region.

My deepest appreciation, of course, goes to our Secretary and the Department of Tourism, because under the stewardship of Secretary Christina Frasco, they have done all the preparations leading up to this event.

I also extend my gratitude to the UN Tourism Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UN Tourism Commission for South Asia for having entrusted us with the responsibility of hosting this very significant gathering.

Apart from having the chance to shape the course of the future of tourism in our region, I consider this event as a tremendous chance for exposure for the Philippines and a very welcome boost to our efforts to show that we are one of the world's leading tourist destinations.

I am very, very optimistic that your meetings will be a platform for collaboration, for discourse, and the sharing of best practices on such crucial topics for this sector as we prepare for the activities leading up to the World Tourism Day of 2024.

I am especially delighted to know that two important matters to be discussed here involve Education and Product Development through Green Transformation in Tourism.

Indeed, education is always going to make any industry better and certainly tourism is no different.

We need to raise the standards and practices in this crucial sector by investing in education, training, and skills upgrading of all the personnel who are working in this industry.

We will require experts and professionals from different fields to come [in] and help to make tourism a meaningful, and educational, and impactful experience not only for our tourists but also for our stakeholders.

For what good will any tourism effort be if it ends up destroying the local culture and ecology.

So, this brings us to another important topic that we also need to address when it comes to developing our respective tourism industries, which is sustainability.

We need to adopt sustainability in our society and economy, and certainly in the sector of tourism.

We must go green in the transformation of our tourism products and services as a solution to address climate change, resource preservation, and long-term industry sustainability.

As a matter of fact, I would take that even a step further and if we are to talk about tourism, I am of the belief that the greener you are, the better the tourism experience will be.

So, we are also working with the private sector to pursue reforms that will make tourists “visit, stay, spend, and return” to the Philippines. These include measures such as easing Visa access, enhancing water sanitation and healthcare facilities in tourist destinations, [and] improving connectivity hubs such as airports.

By adopting these practices, we create a tourism industry that not only creates responsible visitors but also uplifts the lives of those who are part of that activity.

Tourism plays a vital role in our economies and in our societies.

In 2023, the share of Tourism Direct Gross Value Added to the Philippine economy that amounted to 8.6 percent of our GDP or 2.09 trillion pesos, which roughly amounts to 35 billion US dollars. This is an impressive increase of 48 percent compared to our previous year's numbers.

Once again, congratulations to the Department of Tourism and to the work that has been led by Secretary Christina Frasco. *[applause]*

It marks the highest record of growth in gross value added in tourism since the year 2000.

In 2023, we welcomed 5.45 million international tourists into the country, exceeding our target of 4.8 million for the year.

And additionally, just from January to March of this year, international tourist arrivals in the Philippines have reached 2.9 million for that period. These highlight the robust recovery and continued appeal of our country as a top travel destination.

But going beyond monetary values and numbers, these figures also mean millions of lives being changed for the better.

And that's why I hope that our efforts here will lead to even better practices [and] more tourism arrivals not just for our country but for the entire world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am truly excited to see the outcome of this meeting as we pursue our own understanding of the stories and traditions in every culture and dish that we encounter.

Let us continue to use our cultural capital to connect and sample experiences and flavors that are profound and transformative.

Once again, I extend my gratitude to the UN Tourism for your leadership in advancing tourism, not only here in the Philippines, not only here in our region, but in the entire world.

I call on all the delegates, stakeholders, and partners to contribute eagerly to the success of this gathering.

Let us celebrate our own cultural diversity and wonders as we build a brighter, better and greener future for tourism here in Asia, the Pacific, and the world.

Thank you all very much and I wish you great success at this conference. Maraming salamat po at magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat. *[applause]*

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