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General debate

Statement by:

Philippines



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PHILIPPINES

**15th Ministerial Conference of the
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development:
“From Inequality and Vulnerability to Prosperity for All”
Virtual Barbados, 5-6 October 2021**

**PHILIPPINE STATEMENT
Delivered by H.E. Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr.
(Pre-Recorded)**

I thank the people and Government of Barbados for hosting this meeting. I congratulate Ms. Rebecca Grynspan on her assumption as UNCTAD’s first woman Secretary-General. Like most men who admire women for all the qualities we mistakenly attribute to men; I was expecting to be congratulating a man, as finally the first exception.

The UNCTAD Conference was established in 1964 at the time when the colonized were breaking through the crust of colonialism. The process was bloody. Structurally lopsided and damaged economies, the colonizer left behind were intended to make the colonized regret his liberation. It sought to improve trade relations, pursue equity in global economic structures and enhance the participation of developing countries in global economic governance. We now see that UNCTAD should have equally and explicitly committed itself to the freedom of the formerly colonized. Where freedom every good thing follows, if it is allowed to or if it is not appropriated by the few of the new ruling class.

For the Philippines, historical justice demanded a more equitable and progressive economic order post-independence. We believe, and continue to believe, that developed countries have a special responsibility in this twin regard. Not just bread and freedom, but the bakeshop and always - freedom.

In 1979, the Philippines hosted UNCTAD’s Fifth Conference. It was a critical time. The post-war economic heyday of the 60s had, by then,

given way to economic disruptions arising from widespread political instability and again, economic injustice. This time, from the new masters. Then came the Middle East oil crisis in the mid-70s.

UNCTAD Manila became both a confirmation and a reset and restart, at least we hoped. It reaffirmed the fundamental principles that led to the establishment of the Conference. It launched a new and necessary conversation on the imperative interdependence of the independent as well as structural change toward equity after the metropolitan, colonial economic, and political dispensation.

I mention these two historical turning points because we are again at a critical juncture. Just as we did in 1964 and 1979, we need to find fresh approaches in 2021 to prepare ourselves for the rest of the decade.

This pandemic has caused the most significant disruption in economic, social and political; not to mention life itself, since the Second World War. It demands no less than a major shift in another or at least reinvigorated paradigm.

A virus has brought an ugly light to the long-ignored vulnerabilities of developing countries and to existing gaps in the multilateral development processes. These vulnerabilities proceed from fundamental inequities. Some of them vestiges of colonialism; others, the re-imposition of colonial inequities by native elites. They need a clean and final snip. Addressing them requires a decisive transformation of multilateralism.

I do not mean revising the rules-based international order that underpins the United Nations. Authoritarianism is not making a comeback in any lasting sense. It is just disguising itself as a call for intelligent order in democratic societies. Authoritarians do not possess intelligence it is why they opt for sweeping singular, ignorant, and immoral responses. But sooner than later, authoritarianism will reveal its only real agenda - exploitation by incompetent yet unaccountable government.

Our call for transformation proceeds from a recognition of persistent inequity in global governance. We need a new outlook that does not shy from a factual diagnosis of the state of affairs, but that does not require throwing away foundational values that underpin every good we seek to attain, like individual freedom, dignity, and safety.

This must start with a frank reflection of the profound impact of globalization of developing countries, where independence was followed

by reversion to submission to foreign interests protected and managed by native elites. While globalization has been a force for substantial progress, it has left the many behind by enriching a few more.

We need a multilateralism that respects the policy space of states but these states must be democracies or we are asking for more space for the same elites to maneuver for self, therefore, against the people's interests. I will re-state my old proposition that the UN is a collection of sovereignties, not a sovereign collective. But they must be sovereign democracies.

This new democratic multilateralism must facilitate inclusive transformations and resilient structures that leave less behind and take many more forward - in the digital economy, in the creative economy, in universal health coverage, in migration and remittances, and the employment of micro, small, and medium enterprises. Importantly, it must always integrate the interests of all developing countries including middle-income countries where 75% of the world's population and 62% of the world's poor live. Ignoring these facts means the world economy where developing countries exploit the underdeveloped. The poor exploiting the poorer among themselves.

What we have in mind is a world economy that fosters the well-being, inclusion and empowerment of the marginalized and vulnerable. We seek a new world order – no longer for some, but for all.

Finally, we need a multilateralism that looks beyond the broader horizon of the current crisis to the one that has been a palace in which we should put at front and center of our best endeavor - the mortal and well advance challenge of climate change.

In this bold reinvention of multilateralism, UNCTAD must reclaim its centrality. Just as UNCTAD's consensus-building and decision-making pillars informed and enhanced the material and moral evolution of the current global regime, so must it now find its way back to the core of meaningful deliberation and action in the global economy.

Thank you.