



# PHILIPPINES

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## **UNDIVIDED AND INDIVISIBLE**

Statement of H.E. ALBERTO G. ROMULO  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines  
High-Level Segment, 4th Session, United Nations Human Rights Council  
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Mr. President,  
Madame High Commissioner,  
Excellencies:

### **All Humanity**

It is a pleasure to be with you again at this fourth regular session of the Human Rights Council, at a time when the Council has reached a critical juncture in its development. Let me assure you again of our full support for your efforts to ensure an effective outcome of this session, and to reach agreement on matters requiring resolution in the Council's first year.

When we created our Council last year, we took a bold and historic step towards giving new life to the words of an old sage – that all humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, where all of us must care and be responsible for each other.

With our new Council, we renewed our commitment and amplified global momentum behind human rights, at a time when we are all facing many new and great challenges.

### **Reinforcing Human Rights in Our Region**

In Southeast Asia, our great challenge is to build a community that is truly caring and sharing – a commitment made by our leaders during their summit last January in Cebu.

For the Philippines, this entails actively reinforcing human rights in our part of the world.

We are taking the lead in ensuring that the regional Charter we are drafting is firmly grounded, in structure and in substance, on a common commitment to human rights.

We are making certain that human rights are reinforced, not weakened, as we build a united front in confronting the evils of terror. Also in Cebu, the Philippines took the lead in making certain that the ASEAN Counter-Terrorism Convention provides ample protection to human rights.

### **Our Nation's Commitment**

The momentum generated by the creation of our Council is also fuelling my nation's steadfast commitment to human rights.

Although two decades have passed, the Philippines can never – and should never – forget the days when a deep, dark shadow was cast over human rights in my country. Nor can we ignore the sad and tragic legacy of political violence that history had bequeathed to our people and government.

Today our commitment to human rights is reflected in our strong democracy, the oldest in Asia.

We are keeping our tradition of political liberties alive, by strengthening the democratic institutions that make our government representative, limited and accountable.

We have reinforced the Presidential Human Rights Committee, a key focal point for inter-agency coordination on human rights. Additional funds have been earmarked for the Philippine Human Rights Commission, to bolster its human rights protection and promotion efforts.

Our commitment is also reflected in the fact that as a founding member of the United Nations, the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Council, we are one of the few countries to have ratified all seven core international human rights treaties.

### **The Sanctity of Life**

At the heart of a nation's soul are its people. For my nation, the sanctity of the life of the individual is a paramount value. For my government, the protection of human life is a sacred commitment.

Such is the value that we give to life, that in our Constitution, we are bound to protect the life of the unborn child.

Last October, we reemphasized our unrelenting commitment to the sanctity of life when we signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – shortly after H.E. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed the law abolishing the death penalty.

By signing the protocol, we uphold in a clear and categorical manner, human dignity and the fundamental right to life – values that remain at the core of our efforts to vigorously address specific human rights issues in an open and transparent manner.

We have taken measures, including adopting the recommendations of independent bodies, to fight politically-motivated killings – the most gruesome aspect of the culture of violence we had inherited.

We are working closely with the international community, to strengthen our capacity, to investigate and bring the guilty to justice.

As a measure of our abiding commitment to human rights, we invited the Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial killings last month to conduct a country visit. We gave him a warm welcome and our full cooperation – which he openly and gratefully acknowledged. We have received his preliminary report which we are studying constructively.

### **Turning the Tide**

But even as we renew our commitment to human rights, the world is confronted by continued assaults on freedom of conscience and faith, on the expression of peaceful ideals and aspirations, and on the right to pursue dignified and productive lives.

To turn the tide, the Council must translate respect and protection for human rights from abstractions into a defined, accepted and verifiable reality.

The decisions of the Council on the need for action against extreme poverty, on the right to development, on regional cooperation, and on the effective implementation of international human rights instruments will serve to reinforce these efforts.

The Council's recommendation to the General Assembly to adopt the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on Enforced Disappearances is a step in the right direction.

We call on the Council to also address the human rights of vulnerable groups, particularly migrants and their families and the women and children preyed upon by those who engage in human trafficking.

Institution-building must remain a priority during this first year of the Council. The Council must have credible, predictable and transparent working methods. We must innovate and adopt new approaches, such as the Universal Periodic Review, and examine all existing procedures, including the special procedures system and other mechanisms. Substantial progress has been made in the

Council's institution-building working groups – but we must work even harder in the next three months to bridge remaining differences.

### **Building a Strong Human Rights Council**

To turn the tide, we must build a strong Council.

First, sovereign equality, a key pillar of the United Nations, has to remain our major organizing principle. No other means can ensure fairness, balance and broad universality in the global discourse on human rights.

Second, we must turn to new cooperative and constructive approaches and reject ways that use human rights as a political weapon, thus leading to divisiveness.

Third, the role of the state as the primary actor responsible for the promotion and protection of the human rights of its citizens must be upheld. Nonetheless, all member states must accept and embrace the reality that there are many other stakeholders who deserve to be part of that discourse. Civil society has always been an important part of the discourse within my country.

Fourth, we must have openness, transparency and accountability in our work. Without this, we cannot compare perspectives and arrive at consensus on what must be done.

Fifth, internal consistency is not enough – the Council must have external credibility as well. It must not turn into a closed-door talk shop. The world has to see and believe in our work for us to truly succeed.

### **Human Rights for All**

Mobilizing resources to strengthen the capacity of developing states to observe the full range of human rights is also crucial to our work.

The Council must do this while at the same time focusing on bringing the practical benefits of human rights to ordinary citizens everywhere. We can accomplish this by enlisting every tool at our disposal.

Human rights education, capacity building, and technical assistance programs should be formulated with the full cooperation of the concerned countries, and keeping in mind the special needs of developing countries.

Human rights were never meant to foster division. Human rights should be a unifying force, regardless of race, gender, creed, level of development or political inclination.

## **Each of Us Responsible**

The Council can advance and promote the unity with which we can conquer the fears, the intolerance, the misguided visions and the mistaken notions that foster disrespect and violation of human rights.

And united we must stand, for if I may complete the words of the Mahatma that I used at the beginning:

*All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, and each one of us is responsible for the misdeeds of all the others. I cannot detach myself from the wickedest soul.*

These words not only inspire us to hope and dream of a world held fast by human rights, but also give all of us a compelling glimpse of our paramount duty.

Thank you.