

STATEMENT

H.E. Enrique A. Manalo  
Secretary for Foreign Affairs  
Republic of the Philippines

78<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week  
23 September 2023

---

***“Solidarity for SDGs and a Just, Equitable and Rules-Based Order”***

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,

It is an honor to address you today, on behalf of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., and reaffirm the Philippines’ solidarity with the United Nations. As a founding member of the UN, our commitment to multilateralism, with the UN Charter as its bedrock, is unwavering.

The UN has bound our nations in common purpose to uplift our shared humanity:

- through the ravages of World War II, conflicts, and regional and global pandemics,
- by establishing the universality of human rights and human dignity,
- and with a rules-based order underpinned by international law that guarantees the flourishing in peace of free and equal nations.

With the UN at the center amidst tides of challenge and change, multilateralism must rise to the occasion.

The UN spirit calls upon us to decisively respond to existential threats such as global warming, degrading ecosystems, diseases, and food insecurity, / and to reclaim the power of dialogue and diplomacy as we manage new complexions of conflict and strategic competition.

We must configure our work to the realities of our time, placing people and communities at the heart of our agenda, refocusing consensus through differences, and recognizing the agency of many voices, not only the powerful few, in shaping our shared future.

The theme of this year's Assembly frames a global conversation on solidarity and trust as essential enablers of global action.

Greater solidarity and trust also arise as outcomes of shared triumphs: they thrive more when multilateralism works, they weaken when our global institutions fail in delivering dividends benefitting all.

#### Rule of law as a collective responsibility

The preservation of a rules-based global order is our collective responsibility. The UN is underwritten by a rules-based order governed by international law and informed by the principles of equity and of justice.

Its present and future rest on the predictability and stability of international law, which safeguards the rights of all states.

If multilateralism must endure, all states must adhere to the rule of law. Guided by an independent foreign policy, the Philippines actively works with nations to promote a rules-based international order.

We advocate the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with international law. This has always been our position with respect to the disputes in the West Philippine Sea, inasmuch as we are prepared to defend our sovereignty, sovereign rights and territorial integrity.

As President Marcos Jr. has declared, we are a friend to all and enemy to none. Our Constitution renounces war as an instrument of national policy, adopts the generally accepted principles of international law as part of the law of the land and adheres to the policy of peace, equality, justice, freedom, cooperation, and amity with all nations.

We recognize the role of international legal bodies in fostering greater solidarity around values that underpin the United Nations. This year, the

General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

As an archipelagic state whose destiny is intimately linked with the ocean, the Philippines is a champion of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of The Sea. And, we are proud to be among the first states to sign this week, the Treaty on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, which opens new windows to cooperate in the responsible stewardship of the high seas.

The primacy of the UNCLOS was affirmed by the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea. The Award definitively settled the status of historic rights and maritime entitlements in the South China Sea, declaring without legal effect claims that exceed entitlements beyond the geographic and substantive limits of the UNCLOS.

For the past seven years, we have celebrated the Award, which is now part of international law.

We thank the many nations that recognize this Award.

Adherence to international law contributes to keeping the Indo-Pacific free and open and our region stable and peaceful.

Excellencies,

During the Cold War, the Philippines shepherded the 1982 Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes convinced that our world should not descend again into large-scale conflict when the possibility of nuclear catastrophe loomed.

Humanity remains in a state of danger from too many destructive and disruptive weapons in existence.

With thousands of nuclear warheads still present and the fissile material cut-off treaty unrealized, heightened arms races and new ways of warfare - including in the cyber and space domains - have transformed the strategic landscape in the 21st century.

The rule of law must reign all the more.

President Marcos Jr. at this Assembly last year called for rules and norms for the responsible use of emerging technologies.

The Philippines is working with partners for rules to govern lethal autonomous weapons systems. We are hosting an Indo-Pacific meeting in December to contribute to the global conversation that is critical to the security of our future.

We advocate the peaceful uses of outer space, the elaboration of the principle of due regard in the space domain and greater responsibility among states to reduce space threats, including debris from rocket launches.

We call for UN partnerships that would guarantee that new technologies are not weaponized, or misused in any way to subvert democracy and freedom, to challenge international humanitarian law, and to exploit the vulnerable and violate human rights and human dignity.

#### Uniting for climate action and climate justice

Mr. President,

We are profoundly concerned over how extreme weather events have caused too much human suffering across the globe, reminding us of three realities:

One: climate change is evolving into a full crisis,

Two: the fight against global warming and sea level rise is a race against time, and

Three: effective climate action requires stronger multilateral cooperation.

We need decisive, responsible, just and sustainable solutions that look after populations and protect persons that have contributed the least to global warming, but have the highest vulnerability by their geography. This is the meaning of solidarity on climate action.

More than a decade ago, the Philippines pioneered a resolution in the Human Rights Council that drew attention to the impact of climate change

on human rights. And though we are heartened that this link is now acknowledged, much more remains to be done.

We join the call for industrialized countries to abide by their obligations under the UN FCCC and the Paris Agreement.

We look forward to COP28 adopting decisions on the Loss and Damage Fund and other climate financing mechanisms.

We thank Vanuatu and the core group of states for rallying the UN to bring the question of state obligations relating to climate change to the ICJ. The Philippines will actively participate in the proceedings.

We are in solidarity with island states taking part in the ITLOS proceedings on obligations relating to climate change and the marine environment under UNCLOS.

Cognizant that the future will see more climate-induced migration and displacement as acknowledged in the Global Compact for Migration, the Philippines and the IOM convened a Ministerial Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Climate Change and Migration this week in New York.

With the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Manila in 2024, the Philippines aims to bridge effectively disaster risk resilience with the climate agenda.

### Sustainable development is attainable

Excellencies,

We are in the homestretch to secure SDG outcomes globally.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is well-integrated in the Philippines' mid- and long-term development plans.

We see untapped opportunities for the Philippines and developing countries, including middle-income countries, to advance South-South cooperation and meet development goals across the world.

As a middle-income country, we support initiatives to make international financial and development mechanisms more attuned to the needs of middle-income countries.

Our partnerships should bridge development divides.

Our collaboration for the future should make our societies more resilient, more cohesive, and more humane.

As I stated at the SDG Summit, if we work together, sustainable is attainable.

Mr. President,

The continued reform of the UN Development System is key to ensuring that the UN delivers transformative development outcomes.

The UN and specialized agencies and funds have the duty of providing efficient, coherent, and accountable support to host states, with the latter's consent and in accordance with their national development priorities.

Solidarity sets the ground for international cooperation as we reinforce the global health security system, following the lessons of the Covid19 pandemic.

The Philippines together with like-minded states has called for equity in the provision of vaccines and resilient health services in the negotiations on the global pandemic treaty. We must never again witness a global emergency of such scale wherein those in most need will be provided for last.

The Philippines supports the Contingency Fund for Emergencies, the COVAX Facility and other mechanisms that harness the power of partnerships to address persistent health challenges and emergencies.

We affirm that health is primordial to our human development agenda.

We are all indebted to Filipino healthcare workers at the frontlines of the pandemic throughout the world. We honor the many who lost their lives in the service of our common humanity.

The pandemic compelled the international community, especially countries of destination, to recognize the contributions of migrants to their societies and to protect their rights.

The Global Compact is the roadmap for this.

### Human rights as an achievement of the UN

Excellencies,

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The Philippines was an active member of the first UN Commission on Human Rights that drafted this seminal document, represented by the late General Carlos P. Romulo, a former President of this Assembly.

Following the Universal Declaration, the Philippines assumed a leading role in the drafting of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the framing of instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

To date, the Philippines is party to eight core human rights instruments. Recognizing human rights as an unfinished business in all parts of the world, we remain a dedicated advocate for the human rights of vulnerable groups, especially women, children, indigenous peoples, migrants, persons with disabilities, refugees, and older persons.

Human rights is first and foremost about people.

To foster trust and engagement, dialogue on human rights must be genuine, based on evidence, and depoliticized.

When constructive and carried out in good faith and with full respect for the agency of states, collaboration on human rights can achieve concrete impact.

## The Philippines as a partner, pathfinder and peacemaker

I have echoed the call for solidarity in fostering and advancing a multilateral architecture that promotes the rule of law and meets the pressing challenges of this century.

Such an architecture demands that we invest wisely in sound, inclusive, and far-sighted multilateral institutions.

The Philippines will continue to partner with the UN and all nations in supporting multilateral institutions that adhere to the highest standards of good governance, equity, inclusivity, transparency and accountability.

We will work in concert with other nations for a 21<sup>st</sup> century multilateralism that includes and works for the benefit of all.

The Philippines has served as a pathfinder for consensus on issues such as climate change and human rights and on security cooperation. We will carry on as a bridge-builder.

In keeping with our tradition as a peacemaker, we will sustain our contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations and continue implementing UN Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism and peace-building, among others.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) manifests the vision of the Philippines for people-focused peace-building.

The Philippine candidature for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the term 2027-2028 manifests our desire to offer the best of the Philippine diplomatic tradition.

We count on the support of all UN member states in this regard.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

The purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the aspirations of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights are unfinished projects whose future is in our hands.



Through solidarity, we can foster a constructive multilateralism that embraces this challenge with courage and perseveres in hope and common purpose.

Thank you. ###