

Presidential Communications Operations Office
Presidential News Desk

**INTERVENTION OF
PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE
AT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE SUMMIT ON COVID-19**

[14 APRIL 2020]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

May I welcome the leaders of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Moon Jae-in; Japan, His Excellency Shinzo Abe; and China, His Excellency Li Keqiang.

I thank the Director-General of the World Health Organization for his statement. Thank you ASEAN Secretary-General, His Excellency Lim Jock Hoi, for your comprehensive briefing.

We face a formidable enemy – one that knows no borders and has no regard for human life.

COVID-19 has already claimed more than 100 thousand lives around the world despite the brave efforts of frontliners. Our healthcare professionals are waging an uphill battle against an invisible enemy at great personal risk. Thus, we honor those who passed in the line of service.

This pandemic is shaking the very foundations of our lives in a way we have never seen before and at such staggering costs. It lays bare the fragility of our interdependent world, the frailties of our societies, and the vulnerabilities of our institutions.

When everyone needs the same limited resources, the compulsion to resort to “zero-sum” approaches is especially amplified. Yet, a pandemic requires the exact opposite response.

“Going it alone” is an exercise in futility and absurdity. There can be no victory if we do not defeat the virus everywhere. We have to choose the intelligent and productive path of cooperation. It is the only way.

We thank our dialogue partners – China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea – for choosing this path. We are grateful for your timely and generous assistance in our time of great need especially those on the end of the line.

We must continue working together to end this pandemic with finality.

Our most urgent priority is strengthening the capacity of our healthcare systems. We call for the increased production and the facilitation of trade of vital medical equipment and supplies in our region.

We support the creation of regional reserves of medical supplies to better equip us in this fight.

But equally important, we must significantly enhance scientific cooperation, particularly in the area of vaccine and anti-viral treatment research and development.

The Philippines is ready to participate in clinical trials and medical studies of potential vaccines and medicines such as Avigan.

We are confident our scientists and experts within and outside our region will rise to this colossal challenge. A vaccine and/or treatment must be found sooner rather than later.

Our duty then and that of relevant multilateral institutions is to make sure that all countries will have fair and easy access to vaccines and treatments. Discussions on modalities should be started.

Another vital issue for us is ensuring food security. It is imperative our people do not go hungry. Failure to do so will lead to social unrest with all its attendant complications.

Imposing unnecessary trade restrictions on staple foods, such as rice, and other basic commodities will be harmful to everyone. We have to keep ASEAN markets open and ensure supply chain connectivity. We must also utilize existing mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve.

Your Majesty, Excellencies, we are still in the early stages of this crisis. But it is never too early to think of a post-pandemic recovery plan.

COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill. We face the specter of a global recession.

In the Philippines, we are bracing for a significant decline in economic output. We are instituting social safety nets to soften the blow, including subsidies to 18 million families from the marginalized sectors of our society. Simply stated we are feeding 18 million families as of today.

But this will not be enough. We need to rebuild our economies and stimulate growth domestically, regionally, and globally.

We cannot know yet the full impact of this pandemic. But what is fast becoming obvious is that the world will not and cannot be the same after this crisis. This is a statement repeated by almost all of the leaders. There can never be going back to what it used to be.

This is an opportunity for us to establish a “new normal” using lessons learned from this and other crises. The world after COVID-19 need not be a lesser version of the one before it.

The elements of international cooperation that will allow us to overcome this challenge will form the basis of how we will engage one another as we create a more resilient world.

The Philippines can only heal together as one country. ASEAN can only recover as one region. The world can only bounce back stronger as one global community.

Thank you.

--- END ---

Source: PCOO-PND (Presidential News Desk)