

**Presidential Communications Operations Office
Presidential News Desk**

**INTERVENTION OF PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE AT THE PLENARY SESSION
OF THE 37TH ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) SUMMIT**

[Malago Clubhouse, Malacañang Park, Manila | 12 November 2020]

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining challenge of our generation. Over the year, we strove to achieve a delicate balance of saving lives while keeping our economies afloat.

We are now confronted with the complexity and enormity of the recovery process. We aim for a comprehensive recovery to build back better, healthier, and more prosperous societies.

The path we must take is clear – it is that of deeper engagement on vital issues that bind us together as one ASEAN Community.

Our immediate priority is health security. We have to strengthen our health systems by ensuring the unimpeded supply of medical supplies and technologies, and by enhancing early warning systems for health emergencies.

Let us therefore fast track the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies, and the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases.

We must work together to ensure that all nations – rich or poor – will have access to safe vaccines. No one is safe until all of us are safe.

On the economic front, we must deepen regional integration and strengthen supply chain connectivity. In this regard, we welcome the conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or the RCEP agreement.

Growth, to be truly transformative, must be enjoyed by all. We must therefore forge ahead with sub-regional arrangements, such as the BIMP-EAGA, to bridge the development gaps within the region.

In mitigating the impact of the pandemic, our actions must be people-centered.

The massive displacement of workers, including migrant workers, compels us to upskill and reskill our labor force. We must equip our people for a rapidly evolving labor market under the new normal.

In this light, we welcome support for the Philippines' inaugural Chairmanship of the ASEAN Technical and Vocational Education and Training Council. Rest assured that we will build partnerships to further implement the Roadmap of the ASEAN Declaration on Human

Resources Development for the Changing World of Work.

As we recover, no sector must be left behind. Our efforts should be targeted and inclusive. We must address the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on women, migrant workers, and other vulnerable sectors. We have to adopt gender-responsive measures and strengthen social protection systems.

We must also intensify cooperation in promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers, regardless of their status.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

More than two weeks ago, the Philippines was battered by Typhoon Goni – and if I must tell you, we are now suffering in the midst of the storm of Typhoon Ulysses. There is a great damage and I may not be around to attend further in this regard for I have to go around and see what I can do for my people.

With timely disaster preparedness measures, we were able to save many lives. But the typhoon left a trail of destruction in infrastructure and property. This represents a setback for our development agenda, particularly in the affected regions.

This calamity is yet another stark reminder of the urgency of collective action to combat the effects of climate change.

We must therefore further enhance our cooperation on disaster risk reduction management to reinforce our capacities, both at the national and regional levels.

More importantly, we must amplify our voices to demand climate justice from those most responsible for this existential challenge we face today. Developed countries must lead in deep and drastic cuts in carbon emissions. They must act now, or it would be too late. Or if I may say addedly, it is too late.

They must also deliver on their commitment to finance and invest in innovative adaptation solutions in the developing world. So we too can have a fair shot at progress and sustainable development.

This is their moral responsibility from which there should be no escape. Otherwise, it would be great injustice – a double blow to those who bear the brunt of the adverse consequences of their past actions and present inactions.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

We committed to build a politically cohesive ASEAN, at the center of the region's peace and security agenda. We have made significant progress towards this goal. But the current geopolitical landscape creates challenges to our claim of Centrality.

As we chart our Community's post-2025 future, it is crucial that we consolidate ASEAN's position in the evolving regional order.

Dictated by zero-sum logic, external powers will continue to maneuver to get us to choose camps. And this we must resist – consistently and firmly.

Peace and stability can only be ensured by an open and inclusive order, where ASEAN remains the fulcrum of regional security processes and mechanisms.

ASEAN Centrality is not, however, a constant given. We have to work for it to deserve it. We have to enhance our credibility as an independent actor able to engage all regional stakeholders with vision and strategic coherence.

We must, therefore, remain united. We must show that we are masters of our region's destiny and that we can work together to achieve shared aspirations and solve common problems.

As I have said before, the South China Sea issue is ASEAN's strategic challenge. How we deal with this matter lays bare our strengths and weaknesses as a Community. We must act with haste.

The Philippine position is clear and firm. We must solve the disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS.

The 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea is an authoritative interpretation of the application of UNCLOS. It is now part of international law. And its significance cannot be diminished nor ignored by any country, however big and powerful.

The Philippines is one with ASEAN in transforming the South China Sea into a sea of peace and prosperity for all. We are committed to the immediate conclusion of a substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. And if I may add, it has been a long time and it is a long wait.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

In closing, allow me to congratulate Viet Nam for its adept and responsive chairmanship of ASEAN. This has been a challenging year and Viet Nam delivered the outcomes it set out and much more.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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