



Office of the President of the Philippines

STATEMENT

Presentation of Credentials of the Ambassadors of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Belgium, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Italy, Sweden, Israel and Malta 20 October 2021

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte accepted the credentials of the new Ambassadors of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Belgium, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Arab Emirates, Italian Republic, Kingdom of Sweden, State of Israel and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta at a ceremony held on 20 October 2021, in Malacañan Palace.

President Duterte lauded the more than five decades of strong bilateral ties between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia as he welcomed H.E. Hisham Sultan Al Zafir Al Qahtani as Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Philippines.

The President reiterated the Philippines' strong support for Saudi's Labor Reform Initiative and thanked the Saudi Government for including Filipino nationals in its free COVID-19 vaccination drive. The President also expressed appreciation for Ambassador Qahtani's personal contribution to the success of the special repatriation mission of distressed Filipinos from the Kingdom early this year.

For his part, Ambassador Qahtani extended the cordial greetings of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and pledged to expand the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries during his tour of duty.

President Duterte noted the Philippines' long-standing ties with Belgium as he accepted the credentials of H.E. Michel Parys as Ambassador of Belgium to the Philippines.

The President said he looks forward to the signing of the Joint Plan of Action with Belgium on expanding cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere.

Ambassador Michel Parys, for his part, expressed his commitment to further strengthen bilateral engagement in trade and investment, maritime cooperation, fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, combating climate change and promoting regional peace and stability.

President Duterte lauded 75 years of fruitful ties between the Philippines and the United Kingdom as he accepted the credentials of H.E. Laure Beaufilet as Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Philippines.

The President thanked the UK for its assistance in the repatriation of Filipino nationals from Afghanistan and encouraged stronger cooperation in COVID-19 response, labor, defense and security, support for Mindanao, climate change and other areas of mutual interest.

The President specifically called for the effective implementation of the recently-signed MOU on the recruitment of healthcare professionals.

Underscoring that the UK-Philippines relationship *"has never been so strong"*, Ambassador Beaufile expressed confidence that ties will continue to strengthen with the upcoming launch of a new *"Enhanced Partnership"*. She added the UK will continue to work with the Philippines on five pillars of cooperation namely, political, economic, climate, defense and consular. Ambassador Beaufile also paid tribute to thousands of Filipino healthcare workers in the UK.

President Duterte accepted the credentials of H.E. Mohamed Obaid Salem Alqataam Alzaabi as Ambassador of United Arab Emirates to the Philippines and thanked him for his personal contributions in assisting distressed Filipinos in his previous capacity as Director of the Foreign Nationals Department of the UAE's Foreign Ministry.

President Duterte said the Philippines values its 47 years of bilateral ties with the UAE and hopes to further strengthen partnership in various areas of mutual interest. He thanked the UAE for its generous donation of medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccines and for the inclusion of Filipinos in its free vaccination program.

Ambassador Qahtani, for his part, conveyed the warmest greetings of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. He stated that his mission is to develop the bilateral relations between the UAE and the Philippines during his tenure.

President Duterte said he looks forward to the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Philippines and Italy, as he accepted the credentials of H.E. Marco Clemente as Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Philippines. The Philippines, he said, wants broader economic ties with Italy in order to accelerate post-pandemic recovery. In this regard, he sought Italy's support for the resumption of discussions on the Philippines- European Union Free Trade Agreement.

For his part, Ambassador Clemente assured the President that he will work towards the strengthening of cooperation, bilaterally and within the context of ASEAN and the United Nations. Areas of common interest are defense, energy, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, sustainable development and climate change. The Ambassador also assured the President of Italy's support in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of vaccine donations.

In accepting the credentials of H.E. Annika Thunborg as Ambassador of Sweden to the Philippines, President Duterte thanked the Swedish government for hosting around 15,000 Filipinos and for the technical assistance for the improvement of the *"Edsa Busway"*.

Ambassador Thunborg, for her part, conveyed the friendly greetings of His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf, King of Sweden, as she vowed to devote her efforts to enhance relations in the areas of trade and direct investment and international, political and cultural affairs.

President Duterte welcomed H.E. Ilan Fluss as he begins his second assignment to the country, this time as Ambassador of the State of Israel. In accepting his credentials, the President said he looks forward to even deeper and broader engagement with Israel.

President Duterte expressed his gratitude for Israel's assistance of COVID-19 vaccines, medical supplies and equipment and sharing of technical expertise and best practices on pandemic response.

Ambassador Ilan Fluss, for his part, conveyed the personal greetings of President Isaac "Bougie" Herzog. The Ambassador noted that the Philippines and Israel have always maintained close and strong bilateral ties which have been strengthened by President Duterte's historic visit to Israel in 2018. He added that during his tenure he will endeavor to further deepen the bilateral partnership in key areas such as innovation and technology.

President Duterte lauded Malta's humanitarian work in the Philippines as he welcomed H.E Leopoldo Lazatin as Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Philippines.

Ambassador Lazatin said Malta aims to contribute to improving the lives of Filipinos through partnership with the Philippine government on various development programs. **END**