

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s  
SPEECH AT THE CSIS ASEAN LEADERSHIP FORUM**  
Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.  
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I got a special Filipino footstool. [laughter] So, thank you for such thoughtfulness.

Thank you very much for the kind introduction from Mr. John Hamre, the President and CEO of CSIS and the other CSIS officials.

We have with us the Speaker of our House of Representatives, Speaker Martin Romualdez; [applause] also with us is our Foreign Secretary, Secretary Ricky Manalo; [applause] and our ambassador who cannot wait to see our plane leave. [laughter] He has been working on this trip for a year and I think that we owe him a pat on the back for the very good work, the groundwork that he put. [applause] That he has put in for us to have --- for us to be able to say that at the very least, this visit has been a most constructive and meaningful one.

I was just speaking inside, before we came out and we were talking about the trip and I said, there is a tendency sometimes when we have these official visits or state visits where you make these declarations and pronouncements which are very general and what we refer to as motherhood statements. In this trip, that has not been the case at all. We have gone into a remarkable amount of detail in terms of the establishment and the strengthening and deepening of relations between the US and the Philippines.

I am lucky however that these arrangements and these agreements have come about because we have such a very strong foundation of our relationship.

And now, here we are at the CSIS, one of the world's foremost policy institutions on national security and foreign policy issues and have been a great partner in highlighting the Philippines to its American and of course, international audience.

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Just two weeks ago, our Foreign Affairs Secretary stood before you to provide his perspectives – our perspectives – on the Philippines’ deep bilateral ties with the United States, as well as our country’s place in the Indo-Pacific and in the world.

Today, I would like to delve into what I think our two countries and peoples have been and will continue to be naturally drawn to each other. I dare say that in a similar vein, the future of the United States will hold more promise if the U.S. works closely, hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, in lockstep with the Philippines.

The answer is simple and more fundamental even than our almost 72-year-old treaty alliance: what truly binds our two countries and peoples is our shared value and our commitment to mutual prosperity.

In May last year, a record 56-million Filipinos exercised their right to vote. True to our roots as the first Asian republic, we showed the world, once again, that the Philippines remains a bastion of freedom in the Asia-Pacific.

When I came into office in July last year, I promised to uphold these same values to ensure that democracy delivers to every Filipino, especially while we still reel from the lingering effects of the pandemic and the ripple effects of even the crisis in Ukraine and to the Philippines and to the global economy.

My father once said: “Of what good is democracy if it is not for the poor?” He was absolutely right. I am quite certain that you will all agree that it is this very same principle behind the Biden-Harris administration’s national and foreign policies.

Our two countries are drawn to each other because we recognize that in order to achieve our common goal of peace and prosperity for our peoples, we need to work with like-minded partners.

It is therefore not surprising that over the past twenty months in particular, our two countries have seen a steady exchange of official engagements at all levels of government. This includes my first meeting with President Biden on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York and this visit, the first by a sitting Philippine President to the United States in over ten years.

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I do not know quite how that developed that way as that has not been the case in the past but we are back on our normal road of partnership being working together hand-in-hand.

Together with our most senior Cabinet officials, President Biden and I had frank and open discussions on where we are in our bilateral relationship and where we want our alliance and our partnership to bring us, particularly in terms of addressing the most pressing challenges confronting our two countries today.

We noted that the food, water and energy crises, climate change, terrorism, transnational organized crime and they have all become enormous and complex challenges. Not only for the smaller countries such as the Philippines but even for the large countries and the great powers like the United States.

We are grappling with both new and traditional threats to our peoples' security, nowhere more acutely felt than in the Indo-Pacific region and the Philippines sits squarely at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region.

It is for this reason that I called for evolving our alliance --- to make it more responsive to present and emerging challenges. It is because national security is no longer simply about territorial defense. Economic security is national security.

After some fits and starts in the nearly 125 years since its independence, the Philippines is poised to achieve upper-middle income country status in one or two year's time, we are projected to become the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world by 2040. For our more than 110 million Filipinos, ensuring their economic well-being and uplifting their quality of life has always been the priority of this administration.

We continue to work on finding synergies and aligning our efforts to sustain our economic momentum and secure inclusive development, by expanding cooperation in key areas such as agriculture, energy, infrastructure and to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, to navigate and manage regional and global security challenges.

The Philippines was amongst the first to welcome and embrace the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework because at the outset, we found that our values aligned with the principles underpinning the United States' vision for the IPEF, that of transparency, of fairness, competitiveness, of inclusiveness, sustainability and resilience. One could argue that the Philippines and the United States are natural strategic trade and investment partners.

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The challenge now is to make sure that the IPEF brings about concrete deliverables, including in closing the infrastructure gap amongst partners, encouraging the connectivity between partners. And when I say, when I use the connectivity, it goes beyond digital connectivity which has become the most common use of that word but to include transportation, include trade, include travel --- by land, by sea, by air. And in that way, we strengthen supply chains, we build resilience and we open up access and opportunities not only to the digital economy but to the other emerging sectors that as yet we have not necessarily totally identified but will come down and will be something that we will have to face in the very near future.

We see a couple of issues that are of vital importance to our economic partnerships. First, the re-authorizing of the Generalized *[sic]* System of Preferences or the GSP program is a key first step. Both our countries have greatly benefited from the GSP. The program covers over 2,000 products and certainly we can be expanded to cover other products of interest.

I do not say this lightly. But the Philippines has much to offer when it comes to economic opportunities that both countries can take advantage of. We grew at 7.6% last year, which made the Philippines one of the fastest growing economies in the Indo-Pacific in 2022.

While facing global economic headwinds, we are still projected to grow by around 6% this year and that is the forecast that we are hoping actually to improve on, and another 6.2% next year. We have a young, dynamic and skilled labor force, we have instituted several major economic reforms intended to make it easier to do business in the Philippines. And I am proud to say that our macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong.

As the United States actively looks for alternative locations for businesses in the region, we urge both the U.S. and private sector to consider doing business with us in the areas, of course, of clean energy and decarbonization, agriculture, food security, critical green minerals, digital infrastructure and telecommunications and as has been spoken about, and in health care. We believe that not only do these areas have a high potential for growth, but will also provide the most benefits to our peoples.

To advance our common climate agenda, energy and green metals cooperation will be an important piece of our engagement and must be prioritized. The Philippines is interested in becoming a strategic partner of the U.S. in terms of metal processing for American battery application and development. The increased deployment of clean technologies comes with an increase in demand for inputs of crucial energy resource minerals,

including cobalt, nickel which just happen to be very abundant in the Philippines.

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We are eager to work with the U.S. government to carve out a clear pathway for maximizing incentives under the Inflation Reduction Act to help our resources --- to help our sources of raw and processed materials for battery production to complement your National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries.

We have recently advanced discussions on a possible 123 Agreement. We see nuclear energy as an important part of the country's future energy mix both for ensuring supply and bringing electrical costs down. This will allow us to progress discussions with the U.S. companies offering nuclear technologies for government and for commercial use, while we continue cooperation on other capacity building initiatives under other strategic civilian nuclear cooperation MOU or Memorandum of Understanding.

As I brought up with President Biden, I see as critical the undertaking of technical cooperation and possible U.S. investment in the adoption of geographic information systems, remote sensing, artificial intelligence in the baselining and change detection of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems. This will aid us as we establish our own geospatial database and equip us to move towards strengthening science-based policy-making in our country.

We certainly would welcome discussions on joint action research with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or NOAA and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The NOAA has been providing critical support to the prevention and mitigation of the harmful impacts from the recent oil spill that we suffered in Oriental Mindoro.

Furthermore, with NASA, we hope to formalize our participation in their Asia Air Quality Program. Recognizing that the water sector has the opportunity to lead the change and to deliver transformative solutions in our quest for climate-resilient and sustainable development, we likewise encourage the exchange of knowledge on integrated water resource management and opportunities for joint transdisciplinary action research, with particular focus on the nexus between climate change, biodiversity conservation and food, energy and water security.

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Building on our science, technology and innovation engagements, we hope to work with the United States in establishing the Virology and Vaccine Institute of the Philippines. We can jointly work on the training of

technicians and specialists including post-graduate education scholarships; providing necessary equipment and implements for the Center; and establishing what is envisioned to be the first Biosafety Level 4 Laboratory in the country.

We look forward to welcoming pharmaceutical companies open to taking advantage of incentives in using the Philippines as a base for their vaccine manufacturing and distribution operations. We also look forward to our continued partnership in fighting non-communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, diabetes, obesity. We will require massive investment in the human, physical and technological resources of the Philippine Genome Center, including access to artificial intelligence tools, training of technicians and of scientists, equipment, and relevant research. There are existing cooperative projects that can be built upon or expanded.

We also hope to partner with the U.S. Geological Service in training, research and projects to support our efforts in making a holistic intervention for protecting our coastal areas by targeting environmental degradation in the uplands that impact upon our coastal ecosystems such as through sedimentation, by restoring the shoreline and protecting marine ecosystems.

The United States consistently ranks amongst our top three trading partners and top ten sources of foreign direct investment. We are proud that many U.S. companies including those in the Fortune 500 have found a home in the Philippines and hope that more companies would look to us as they diversify and reconfigure their supply chains.

My friends, ladies and gentlemen, I make this case for forging closer economic ties because creating prosperity and realizing human potential will not only make the Philippines a more reliable alliance partner for the United States, it will also strengthen our democracies. A bilateral partnership that works for our peoples will in turn attract the support that it needs to thrive, creating a mutually reinforcing circle of trust --- one that will truly bring our alliance, our partnership and our friendship into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you all very much for your attention and good afternoon. [applause]  
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