

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s
SPEECH AT THE PHILIPPINE BUSINESS FORUM**

Melbourne, Australia

March 4, 2024

[00:00:00]

Well, thank you very much for that very warm welcome. Thank you, Secretary Pascual for your introduction.

I begin today by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we are having our meeting today. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend the respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

With us here today are the House Speaker, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Speaker Martin Romualdez; Secretary of Finance, Ralph Recto; of course, the Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry, Secretary Fred Pascual; and Secretary Lotilla, who has been demoted to the lower level of the... [laughter] I don't know why that happened, but Secretary Popo Lotilla is also here; and the Special Assistant for Investments in the Philippines, Frederick Go; ladies and gentlemen. Good morning.

Also joining us is our Ambassador, Hellen De La Vega; and we have also with us the Ambassador of Australia to the Philippines, Ambassador HK Yu; [applause] and of course, all our distinguished guests, our very valuable partners in the private sector; and those of you who have now stamped—have now put in your minds, put in your consciousness the possibilities and potentials of the Philippines.

Australia holds a special place as the Philippines' newest Strategic Partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Through this visit, we are sending a clear message that the Philippines is enhancing our regional economic integration agenda on several aspects.

I've always had myself a personal fondness for this city, so it is a great opportunity to come back and visit to be here at this forum with all of you.

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I am honored to stand before such a distinguished audience today. Your presence in this gathering speaks volumes about the importance of fostering

robust business partnerships and collaborations between our nations. It not only underscores the significance of this forum, but also emphasizes the vitality of our economic and commercial ties.

As such, I thank the business organizations who have been tirelessly working in fostering meaningful connections and facilitating practical and tangible business opportunities, providing insights, information exchange and strategic engagements.

Let me also extend my appreciation to the companies that are already partnering with us and making it happen in the Philippines, for your plans and significant investments that directly contribute to our economic development. Some of you have shared your plans and commitment to the Philippines and I am grateful for your continued trust, confidence and interest in our country.

This assembly serves as a celebration of the robustness and resilience of the Philippine economy. We take pride in being an ideal destination for complementation in both manufacturing and services.

Recent global challenges, especially those that were initially highlighted by the pandemic, have underscored the dangers of sole sourcing and concentrating that supply in a single country or a single source.

The urgent need to diversify production locations and explore alternative materials to de-risk and minimize disruptions in supply chains has become self-evident. Moreover, the transition to a low-carbon or net-zero scenario has further propelled the de-risking trend.

So, for the Philippines, these global developments present an opportunity to enhance our participation in regional and global value chains.

As part of our development strategy, we are keen to explore new avenues of cooperation and foster mutually beneficial partnerships that are commercially meaningful but also have a social effect.

I invite esteemed Australian businesses to consider the Philippines as a reliable partner that can support your expansion and operations. Let us embark on a journey of strengthened economic ties, mutual growth and shared success.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to purposeful reforms, evident in key legislative amendments. And it is why we always ask members, the leadership of the legislature, to join us. Because many of the plans that we have and many of the initiatives that we are proposing and endorsing require new legislation.

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It is a new world, it is a new economy, it is a new global economy to which we need to adjust, not only our business sector, not only our private sector, not only our finance sector but also our legislative sector to make the very important structural changes that are necessary for us to adjust to the new global post-pandemic economy.

For example, the amendments to the Public Service Act, the Foreign Investments Act, the Real */sic/* [Retail] Trade Liberalization Act and Renewable Energy Act, they all mark a new era for strategic investments.

Coupled with streamlined businesses, infrastructure development, and the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program or the CREATE Act, these reforms position the Philippines as one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia.

In fact, we are in the process of improving the reforms under the CREATE Act and we have used as a guide the inputs that we have received from potential and present investors in the Philippines, in terms of the ease of doing business, in terms of modifying the tax structure, in terms of making it a more attractive investment destination.

Our overhaul of fiscal incentive structures and responsive policies, including those facilitating public-private partnerships or PPPs, play a pivotal role in promoting private sector participation.

Furthermore, there is the establishment of the Maharlika Investment Fund, our sovereign wealth fund that underscores our dedication to financing priority projects and driving socioeconomic impact.

The key principle that we have adopted, the very fundamental principle that we have adopted, was to consider the private sector as partners in the development of our—on the transformation and development of our economy.

It is very early on, we quickly recognize that government can do very much but we must also realize that government cannot do it alone; and the private sector does many things that government does not do; and there are certain things that government does that private sector actually would be better at doing than leaving it with the government.

And so, these partnerships have become very important, are central to any transformation, any success that we may enjoy in the near future. This is the view of our strategic financial planners, our economic group, and all together, we all have come to that conclusion. And it is something that we continue to promote and to continue to encourage.

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So, we prioritize the ease of doing business, exemplified by efforts to simplify tax payments, streamline regulations and showcase our unwavering support for businesses.

I signed Executive Order No. 18, which establishes green lanes for strategic investments, simplifying procedures and reducing bureaucratic hurdles.

Simply speaking, these Green Lanes, as we are slowly transforming the way we do business, both in the bureaucracy, both in government, and of course in the general economy, as we are awaiting the legislation to come through, as this have to be very examined in very close detail, we have established these Green Lanes.

And the general idea is that for any investor who comes to the Philippines, that they will no longer have to wing it as it were, and try to go to the documentation process and learn as they go along.

They will be taken in hand by a specific person and a specific group in each department, the relevant department, and that group will attend to all the needs of a prospective investors so as to be able to put up a company, to start a bank account, to get the permitting down, to get the clearances, et cetera.

And this we do so as to make more rapid the entry of foreign direct investment but also to make businesses more profitable. Because the cause that are implied by inefficiencies are lessened at the very least.

So, I am pleased to announce the enactment of three priority bills:

The Public-Private Partnership Code of the Philippines, which paves the way for transformative partnerships and fosters infrastructure development;

Number two, the Internet Transactions Act, which provides the framework for a robust digital economy, aligning the country's policy with the demands of the 21st century;

And finally, the Tatak Pinoy Act or the "Proudly Filipino" Act, which I recently signed into law just last 26 February, which will support industry development and enable greater participation of the Philippines in global value chains.

So, we continue to accelerate and deepen policy reforms to improve the environment where businesses such as yours will continue to thrive.

On renewable energy, a very important part of our strategic planning, we accord great importance to addressing climate change and achieving energy transition, as we in the Philippines are highly vulnerable to the climate crisis.

In line with this, we have put in place several energy transition policies, investment enablers such as incentivizing energy efficiency and conservation, that will support and facilitate the efforts to decarbonize the economy. This move strengthens our dedication to environmental stewardship and encourages the private sector to actively engage in sustainable practices.

I recognize that Australia also places equal importance in this area, as it is a priority under the elevation of our Strategic Partnership.

In this regard, I welcome the opportunity for greater cooperation on climate change and energy transition. I'm glad to see that we have made a good start here today with the agreements that we have come to, between our private sector partners. Aligned with our efforts on decarbonization, we are positioning ourselves as a regional hub for smart and sustainable manufacturing.

To achieve this, we are at the forefront of attracting sustainability-driven strategic investments powered by renewable energy. We also recognize that there are complementarities to be explored in critical minerals, and we are open to having a dedicated dialogue with your companies about sustainable processing of green materials. This will be further supported by our strong adherence to high labor and environmental standards.

We have our trade and investment policy tools in place through the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement to enable our regional economic integration agenda.

I am hopeful that this will be complemented by other policy tools that will enhance Philippines-Australia supply chain partnerships and facilitate greater foreign direct investments.

So, in conclusion, let me reiterate our gratitude for your presence and active engagement in this forum. The members of my economic team will provide the support needed by your businesses for investments to continuously grow and prosper.

Together with you as our Strategic Partner, we can make investments happen in the Philippines. I am confident that the relationships forged here today will contribute significantly to the economic vibrancy of both our nations.

Thank you very much and good morning to you all. [applause]

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