

Philippine Statement

Building National Resiliency to Natural Disasters and Major Economic Shocks through Regional Cooperation: The Philippine Experience

Your Excellencies,

Deputy Secretary General Mr. Jan Eliasson,
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President U Thein Sein,
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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon.

On behalf of the Philippine delegation, I wish to convey warm greetings to the distinguished delegates attending the 69th Commission Session of the ESCAP.

The theme topic for this session is very timely and relevant because the world in which we live today is threatened by non-traditional security threats with far greater intensity and frequency than traditional security issues. Many non-traditional security threats such as natural disasters, transnational crimes, terrorism, cyber-crimes, and public health epidemics have become so pervasive that they can now be considered as "core national security issues" demanding far greater attention than governments cared to devote to them in the past.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.¹ Today, however, I will not speak of the number of times we are hit by a major typhoon or super-storm each year; or of the number of lives and properties lost or damaged because of them. Rather, I will speak of how natural disasters have spurred the Filipino people to devise and adopt coping mechanisms, at the national, regional and international levels, to mitigate the effects of such disasters.

At the national level, we have created the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). Working in close coordination with various line agencies and the different local government units, the NDRRMC operates as the nerve-center for efforts to prevent, mitigate, reduce and manage risks every time a major disaster strikes any part of the country.

The Philippine Risk Reduction Act of 2010 expanded the membership of NDRMMC to include not only government agencies, but also the academe, non-governmental

¹ "PHL is 2nd most disaster-prone country in Asia –study," Shaira F. Panela, GMA News, December 27, 2012, (<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/287954/scitech/science/phl-is-2nd-most-disaster-prone-country-in-asia-study>)

(NGOs) and civil society organizations. This holistic "all-of-the country" approach brings together all stakeholders for an effective delivery of **comprehensive, integrated, and proactive response to natural disasters**. This significantly lessens the socio-economic and environmental impacts of disasters on the Filipino people and the Philippine economy as a whole.

In 2012, the UN Office for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) praised the improved performance of the Philippines' early warning system when Typhoon Bopha cut a swathe of destruction across the country.

As part of our national effort to remain resilient, the Philippines has undertaken numerous capacity building measures and training exercises to equip its emergency personnel and stakeholders on handling problems before, during and after each disaster. We have likewise: 1) improved the coordination system between the national and local government agencies, and partner institutions; 2) engaged stakeholders such as local civil societies, churches, and the media; and 3) utilized modern technology for early warning and local knowledge on disaster prone areas and disaster response behavior. As a result of these developments, more effective, useful and coordinated actions were undertaken resulting in improved delivery of information and basic services to the public. From success stories, a few appropriate operational procedures have emerged and become model procedures for replication in other areas of the country hit by natural disasters. They have been integrated as disaster risk reduction components and strategies in many local government units in the Philippines.

The effects of natural disasters, however, often go beyond national borders. Often, national resources are simply inadequate relative to the magnitude of the disasters. It is for this reason that the Philippines has linked some national initiatives on disaster preparedness with regional and global efforts as a means of bolstering national resiliency.

As a signatory of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), the Philippines actively takes part in the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre). In May this year, we will also take part in the ASEAN-ARF DirEX 2013, which is designed to strengthen and sharpen civil-military cooperation and coordination among the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) member countries in responding to natural disasters

We have also provided modest assistance to some ASEAN Member Countries hit by natural disasters,² and to the ESCAP Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries.

Starting in August last year, the Philippines with the help of UNESCAP, has gained access to UNITAR near real-time satellite images of flood inundated areas in the

² In 2004, the Philippine Government sent medical teams to Thailand and Indonesia to help in recovery efforts in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami. In May 2008, the Philippines sent humanitarian assistance to Myanmar in the aftermath of the destructive Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in May 2008. In January 2009, the Philippines gave financial assistance to Myanmar through the ASEAN Cooperation Fund for Disaster Assistance.

country. The images added great value to efforts of the Philippine Government in its monitoring, relief and recovery operations.

The Philippines will continue to place highest priority in providing timely actions in disaster affected areas and improve on its mechanism to pursue national initiatives in addressing natural disasters. We will continue linking national initiatives with regional and global efforts on disaster prevention, and disaster risk reduction and management. We will also continue to cooperate with the region by sharing experiences and lessons learned in preparing for and addressing disasters, in the hope of contributing significantly to regional discourse to address resiliency to natural disasters and economic shocks and to the enhancement of regional initiatives and mechanisms.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The decades after the 1980s showed that national economies are as vulnerable to major economic shocks as they are to natural disasters.

Like natural disasters, major economic shocks know no territorial or social boundaries. Major economic shocks affect every country and every human being, rich or poor, in varying degrees, but much more so the poor, who thereby become even more vulnerable to the ill effects of poverty.

Just like natural disasters, major economic shocks also retard national economic growth and put a damper on sustainable development.

We can draw two valuable lessons from the 1997 and 2008 financial crises. First, "good governance" and "good housekeeping" must never again be taken for granted by both National Governments and their regulatory bodies, and by private financial and banking institutions. And second, major economic shocks are best tackled through multilateral, not just unilateral, initiatives.

Many governments have since instituted good housekeeping measures and succeeded in putting their economies back into solid ground. In the case of the Philippines, "good governance," coupled with sound economic fundamentals, has enabled the country to weather the negative effects of the crises, and to be recently granted "investment grade status" for the first time in its history by a leading sovereign credit rating agency.

As for multilateral initiatives serving as buffer against future major economic shocks, the Philippines has joined fellow ASEAN nations and the Plus-Three Countries in setting up the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) Fund.

Despite abundance of economic data, it is difficult to predict when the major economic shock will shake a country or a particular region of the world. With lessons learned from past crises, however, there is optimism that national governments are better prepared for the next major economic shock, whenever and wherever it may occur. One reason for this optimism is the availability of multilateral fora such as the UNESCAP through which member-countries are able to engage in open and friendly

dialogue to determine areas for cooperation in building national and regional resilience against future economic shocks.

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National governments have many resources at their disposal to build resiliencies. Among these resources is information and communications technology (ICT), which is vital to ensuring the smooth and secured flow of information and communications and, therefore, smooth, efficient, and timely delivery of resources during natural disasters or periods of major economic shocks.

At this year's session of ESCAP, the Philippines is tabling two resolutions, one on ICT and another on civil registration and vital statistics. With these two resolutions, we hope to help member-governments respond more effectively to the basic needs of their peoples through more accurate and systematic data gathering techniques.

While we cannot prevent natural disasters from happening, we can at least prepare our people to mitigate their effects. With respect to major economic shocks, we can at least share information and pool our resources together in addressing their root causes before they reach catastrophic proportions.

We hope that an even higher level of regional cooperation than we are now seeing will be developed to address natural disasters and major economic shocks. We believe that building regional resilience is key to ensuring national resilience in the midst of these contingencies, and that will in turn contribute to sustainable development and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region.

Thank you.