

## **Diasporas & Development: The Philippine Experience & Perspective**

Speech delivered by  
Cabinet-rank Secretary Imelda M. Nicolas  
Chairperson, Commission on Filipinos Overseas  
Office of the President of the Philippines  
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I will not anymore go into the detailed stock estimate of overseas Filipinos as of 2011, since our Philippine Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz mentioned the data yesterday.

### **2011 Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos**

The current situation of international migration in the Philippines necessitates a re-thinking and re-imagining of the Philippine government's approach in addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants and their families while at the same time attempting to maximize migration's positive impact at the individual, family, community, sub-national and national levels.

### **Mandate of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas**

This is what we did at the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) -- an agency under the Office of the President tasked to provide assistance to the President and the Congress of the Philippines in the formulation of policies and measures concerning or affecting Filipinos overseas and to maintain and strengthen the links between them and their Motherland.

We were guided by the marching orders of President Benigno S. Aquino in his 16-point Social Contract with the Filipino people and the transformational nature of his leadership:

*"From a government that treats its people as an export commodity and a means to earn foreign exchange, disregarding the social cost to Filipino families to..... a government that creates jobs at home so that working abroad will be a choice rather than a necessity and when its citizens do choose to become Overseas Filipino Workers, their welfare and protection will still be the government's priority."*

So, under my watch, the institution went through a process of re-thinking and re-imagining its vision, mission and goals. Thus we came up with the following:

### **VISION**

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) envisions a community of well-respected and proudly competitive Filipinos overseas who contribute significantly to the productivity and well-being of the countries where they reside or work while maintaining strong political, economic, and cultural ties with the Philippines.

### **MISSION**

To be the Philippines' premier institution in promoting policies, programs, and projects with Migration and Development as a framework for the strengthening and empowerment of the community of Filipinos overseas.

### **Mainstreaming and Integrating International Migration in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP)**

Aware of the challenges posed by the seeming lack of cohesion and coordination among various government agencies on migration and development, CFO with the cooperation and support of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), the government's planning body, and migration-related agencies worked to mainstream migration and development in the Philippine Development Plan (or PDP) 2011 – 2016, the country's blueprint for development.

As a result, the PDP, for the first time, made 60 mentions of issues and concerns of overseas Filipinos in 7 out of 9 chapters of the Plan from macro-economic policy to inclusive growth, from human development to peace and security, from financial inclusion to social protection.

Currently, the Philippine Development Plan is undergoing a mid-term review and CFO, again with the full cooperation and support of NEDA, is working to further integrate migration policies in the development planning and decision-making processes both in the national and sub-national levels. We also hope to identify and integrate indicators that will measure the impact and contribution of the diaspora beyond financial remittances.

### **Philippines' Current Economic Situation**

After decades of lagging behind our neighbors in the region and falling short of the country's economic potentials, the economic environment in the Philippines seems to be looking up with Moody's recently recognizing the Philippines as "Asia's Rising Star". This, after the Philippines posted a 6.6% growth rate in 2012, and continuing growth forecasts of 6.5% to 7% in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

There are many factors that contribute to this growth and one of them is the strong household consumption, the latter fuelled to a large degree by the record-breaking US\$24 billion in overseas Filipinos' remittances for 2012, making the Philippines the third top country receiving migrant remittances behind India and China.

### **Overseas Filipinos Remittances for Development (OF-ReD)**

One innovative project of CFO is Overseas Filipinos Remittances for Development: "Building a Future Back Home" (or OFs-RED) in partnership with UNDP, Western Union Foundation and NEDA. OFs-RED identifies local conduits together with the local governments and civil society organizations for the use of remittances for productive and job-creating investments particularly in cooperatives, rural banks, microfinance institutions and social enterprises. Just last week, I was just informed that the Phase 2 of the Joint Migration and Development Initiative (or JMDI) funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP and CFO will among other things upscale this initiative from provincial to regional level in the Philippines.

### **Remittances for Development Council (ReDC)**

A trail-blazing outcome of the OFs-ReD project is the creation of the multi-stakeholders' Remittance for Development Council (or ReDC). The Council serves as a consultative forum to discuss issues and concerns about remittances including the reduction of remittance costs as well as an advisory and policy-recommending body for channeling of remittances for local development.

### **Diaspora to Development (D2D)**

CFO, through its flagship Diaspora to Development or D2D program, provides a venue for outstanding Filipinos overseas to re-engage with development initiatives in the Philippines. The D2D program offers a menu of engagements that overseas Filipinos could choose from. These ten areas range from diaspora philanthropy to diaspora investment, arts and culture to educational exchanges, transfer of technology to

medical mission coordination, global legal assistance to advocacy, tourism initiatives to return (physical or virtual) and reintegration.

### **BaLinkBayan, one-stop portal for Diaspora Engagement**

Another new initiative of CFO to reach out to the diaspora is what we call "BaLinkBayan": the Overseas' Filipinos one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement. With the support and cooperation of government agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Health (DoH) the BaLinkBayan online portal will present what investments, businesses, products, philanthropic activities, volunteer work are recommended by the respective agencies in the country's towns, cities, provinces. This is in line with the traditional desire of overseas Filipinos (or any diaspora community for that matter) to "give back" in whatever form to their "hometowns".

### **YouLead (Youth Leaders in the Diaspora)**

CFO is now making an effort to reach out to its 2nd and 3rd generations of Overseas Filipinos through its Youth Leaders in the Diaspora (or YouLead) program. This could take the form of study tours (called Lakbay-Aral) of the various regions of the country to re-introduce them to the culture, history and heritage of their Motherland. CFO is also embarking on a Y2Y (or youth to youth) online-peer-counseling to continue the peer-counseling session started at the CFO's pre-departure orientation program among the young Filipino migrants, supervised by trained Counselors.

### **Kiddie Katapat Savings Program (KKiS)**

Inspired by the movement started by the Child and Youth Finance International to give 100 million children in 100 countries by 2015 financial access and financial education, CFO together with the Land Bank of the Philippines initiated its latest advocacy: the Kiddie Katapat Savings Program or KKiSS for short.

With the approval of the Central Bank of the Philippines, dependents of Overseas Filipinos, who are 7 years old and above are allowed to open and maintain their own ATM Savings account for an initial deposit and minimum balance of P100 (approximately US\$2.50). In turn, we encourage their parents, siblings or guardians who are overseas to match the amount saved by their dependents. Just this month, we started implementing the KKiSS program in the 40 Philippine Schools Overseas (PSO) during their just-concluded conference in Manila.

### **Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora**

In 2011, the Commission convened the first ever Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora to gather outstanding Filipinos and community leaders worldwide and to launch the D2D program. One of the results of the Summit is that the participants on their own decided to form a **Global Filipino Diaspora Council (GFDC)** which is the first global network of overseas Filipinos initially representing 25 countries.

Last February 25 to 27, we convened the 2nd Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora to track the progress and highlight the best practices of Filipino diaspora engagement.

In between these 2 summits, a European Conference called Diaspora to Dialogue was organized in Rome by overseas Filipino communities in Europe

Again, the conference participants in Rome decided to organize themselves and form the "**European Network of Filipinos in the Diaspora**" or **ENFID**, starting with representatives from at least 10 European countries.

This organizing initiative will be replicated in 2014 during the First Conference of Filipinos in the Diaspora in the Middle East and Africa and then during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Summit in 2015.

### **Diasporas and Development: The Way Forward for the Philippines**

We continue to work on institutionalizing these initiatives in all levels of government. Just as the Philippines has been recognized as a global model for migration management, the opportunity to show leadership on migration and development governance and the maximization of the Filipino diaspora engagement, rests on our ability to get our act together for policy coherence and effective coordination.

Thank you.

