

Remarks of

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Excellencies and partners in migration,

Good evening from Manila.

We are once again honored to be part of the first session of this year's International Dialogue on Migration. The IOM has been a staunch partner of the Philippines in its efforts to advance and strengthen the country's migration governance. As a GCM Champion Country, we cannot overemphasize our support for the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration. The Philippines has consistently been active in its development, negotiations, and adoption.

The pandemic did not stop the Philippines to breathe life into the GCM. In fact, the pandemic strengthened our resolve to push for labor mobility in the Middle East, combat trafficking in persons, and incorporate the GCM Objectives in our domestic legislation.

Today, I am glad to share a groundbreaking achievement for the GCM implementation in the Philippines – the enactment of the Department of Migrant Workers Act, which took effect on February 3 this year. This is the first law in the world that codifies the progressive realization of the 23 Objectives of the GCM. Our existing key offices with migration-related functions are now consolidated into a single streamlined entity serving our migrant workers. The law likewise defines

ethical recruitment that enhances the protection of Filipino migrant workers. The law will ensure that labor migration is safe, orderly, and regular.

Labor mobility and human rights are two key principles that the Philippines bannered in its GCM journey. Our unwavering efforts are rooted in the campaign to reform Kafala, a traditional sponsorship system in the Middle East wherein workers are bound to their employers or sponsors during the duration of their contract and are not allowed to transfer to another employer, go home and leave their employers without their sponsor's consent in spite of poor and abusive working conditions. The unintended consequence of Kafala can result to slavery and slave-like conditions. Advancing reforms to Kafala has since brought remarkable developments and enabled us to collaborate with countries of destination such as Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. With the GCM as our guiding framework, this moment in history has now become a movement – the new civil rights movement for migrants that will only get stronger as long as injustice remains. While there are many challenges along the way, political will from both countries of origin and destination is the key in reforming the system.

Among our milestones of Kafala reform is when Bahrain introduced its flexi-visa system in 2017 allowing its irregular migrant workers to be freelance workers and not have their visas tied to a specific employer. The Philippines beginning 2018 has invested at least 1.5 million US dollars to purchase flexi-visas for 1,075 Filipino migrant workers. We are the only country that spend government funds to regularize its migrant workers. This is consistent with Objectives 5 and 6 of the GCM.

Another feat is our continued commitment to pursue trafficking cases of our nationals. One particular case involves two overseas Filipino workers who were survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation committed by fellow Filipinos and

foreign nationals in Bahrain. Both Filipina survivors gave their statements in the Philippines, and the suspects were later apprehended, prosecuted, and convicted in Bahrain in 2020. This highlights the international cooperation between the Philippines and Bahrain in seeking justice across borders.

It is vital that a country of origin supports and encourages a country of destination that institutes reforms in order to make that reform succeed.

Meanwhile in Syria, there were reports of trafficked Filipino women who were undocumented workers. They all ran away from their employers and were eventually sheltered at the Philippine embassy. In 2021, we brought home 110 trafficked Filipinos and assisted them in filing criminal complaints against the traffickers both in the Philippines and in Syria. In February 2022, we had an unprecedented win for the first human trafficking case filed before the Damascus Court, making it a landmark judicial victory awarded by a Syrian Court in favor of Filipinos. The Philippine government spent almost 120,000 US dollars to provide the necessary assistance to our distressed overseas Filipinos.

At the height of the pandemic, we anchored our COVID-19 response in the 5Rs – Relief, Repatriation, Recovery, Return, and Reintegration. We facilitated the repatriation of almost 2 million overseas Filipinos. We also mounted over 110 chartered flights to bring our stranded nationals home no matter the cost.

To anticipate many Filipinos who wish to go back to the workforce, the government put up policies for their safe return to work overseas. Among these is the establishment of a “green lane” policy for the crew change of seafarers at ports. The Philippines has the largest number of seafarers serving the world’s merchant and cruise fleets. We recognize that they are essential workers and their role towards global economic recovery should remain unhampered.

Together with other Member States, the government further continues its efficient roll out of the vaccination program and issuance of the WHO-agreed International Certificate of Vaccination and Prophylaxis. We issue our citizens a vaccination certificate called VaxCert PH which is compliant with international health standards especially on the recommendations of the WHO Smart Vaccination Certification Working Group issued in September 2021. This is instrumental for us in jumpstarting mobility which has been affected by the pandemic the most.

Colleagues, migrant protection has been at the core of our services. This would not have been possible without vigorous partnerships with countries of destination and migration stakeholders. Present challenges are now interconnected and cut across borders and nations. This is the time for global solidarity – to maintain multilateral efforts and collective action to not only fight against COVID-19, but to ensure that migrants are afforded protection by all States, whether they are in countries of origin, transit, or destination.

The protection needed also goes beyond labor protection. Protection against racism and xenophobia has never been more paramount than now. Ironically, Filipinos have been at the receiving end of Asian hate while it is our health workers who are serving the frontlines of the national health systems of countries of destination. We believe that rebuilding this kind of social contract among ourselves can deliver our aspirations of a safe, orderly, and regular migration capable within our reach.

As we move towards the IMRF, we hope to have more meaningful and fruitful discussions to strengthen the implementation of the GCM. I would like to take this opportunity to thank fellow Member States, the IOM, the UN Migration Network, and partners in civil society for the relentless cooperation in advancing the GCM and

protection of our migrants in these trying times. It is only by working as one can we recover as one and eventually heal as one.

Thank you very much.