

SEC. KARLO ALEXEI B. NOGRALES
Cabinet Secretary

61st Session of the Asian Productivity Organization
Governing Body (APO-GBM)
10 April 2019
Marriot Hotel Manila, Pasay City

(Recognize dignitaries and other guests present) CURRENT APO CHAIRMAN JAVIYOGE JAYADEWA RATHNASIRI (FROM SRI LANKA); INCOMING APO CHAIRMAN DR. PASU LOHARJUN (FROM THAILAND); APO SECRETARY GENERAL SANTHI KANOKTHANAPORN; THE HEADS OF DELEGATIONS FROM THE 19 MEMBER ECONOMIES; THE HONORABLE ADVISERS, (MOST OF WHOM HOLD SECRETARY LEVEL POSITIONS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES)

Welcome to the Pearl of the Orient, Philippines. On behalf of the Philippine Government and our President, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, please do enjoy your stay in our country. I am pretty sure you are all in the best of welcoming hands with our Philippine delegation.

I am honored to have been invited to speak before this illustrious gathering of the region's top thinkers, scientists, industrialists, and advocates of sustainable development this side of the planet. They say great minds think alike; I think the more appropriate turn of phrase is that great minds bring about great, positive change—change that benefits our fellow man.

Ladies and gentlemen, this session of the APO Governing Body could not have come at a better time for the Philippines. As Cabinet Secretary, I have the distinct privilege to be privy to the direction and focus of the government's campaign to make "change" a household word, a tangible reality, and a reason for hope for all Filipinos anywhere in the country and the world.

The APO holding its 61st session in the Philippines holds an assurance and a promise to my people that they are not alone in their historic search for a better, more productive life. After all, we have our brothers and sisters in the Asian region joining us in this journey.

I understand that it has been 21 years since the APO held its last session here in the Philippines. This was during the time of former President Fidel Ramos—who just last month celebrated his 91st birthday—the leader who chose the battlecry of Philippines 2000, a development program that helped lay the foundation for the country becoming Asia's newest tiger by. It was of no coincidence that the APO was here to witness that era.

And now, I am privileged to stand here before you two decades after to again beseech the Asian Productivity Organization to help usher a new golden age for the Philippines.

Our country has much to gain and learn from the admirable advocacies and pursuits of the APO; many of which have received great acclaim from the peoples of the region.

We recognize these admirable success stories—the successful empowerment of Filipina farmers by teaching them the value of working smart; or how the Lean Principle is modernizing workplaces and upscaling healthcare in Thailand; the industrial miracle that is the Autokeen Technology in Malaysia; and the promise of Plant Factories in Chiba University in Japan that are revolutionizing the way we think of agricultural productivity.

These are all novel examples of how an idea can change society; how the intention to help others achieve productivity can magnify a simple innovation into a breakthrough technology—technology that can revolutionize the way we live and the way we work.

These breakthroughs stand witness to the significant role of the APO in the region as a non-political, non-discriminatory, non-profit “catalyst, think tank, information clearing house, regional adviser, and institution builder.”

And at this juncture of history, our country, the Philippines is standing at the proverbial crossroads of change. Our people are asking the hard questions. Where are we going? How are we going to get there?

We join the call of the Secretary General of the APO, Dr. Santhi Kanoktanaporn to be “transformed in order for us all to change.”

As I was reading the Secretary General's Message to the APO, I could not agree more with his views on national development. To quote Dr. Santhi:

To achieve growth and socio-economic development, economies now need to shift from an extensive-growth strategy to a productivity-driven one.

A national productivity-driven growth strategy must adopt a holistic approach to productivity management that addresses all the proximate factors and enablers affecting the country's productivity, including those at the enterprise, sectoral, and overall economy levels. However, the approach requires productivity movement at a national level.

This is a clarion call to all governments of these blessed region to reorganize all National Productivity Organizations; all industry leaders, trailblazers, and stakeholders and rally them towards a concerted movement that would harness the very best of the development sciences, disciplines, and models in business and industry available.

In mobilizing a multi-sectoral productivity movement, the Philippine Government is taking a step further in ensuring its national agenda for its people to enjoy "a life that is stable, comfortable, and secure by the year 2040."

The 2017-2022 Philippine Development Plan of the Duterte Administration envisions a future where “every Filipino enjoys a *matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay*”¹—in English a life that is *stable, comfortable, and secure*.

Our National Economic and Development Agency, or NEDA, provided the criteria by which we can determine if we have achieved this goal: If a simple Filipino family is earning enough; when it can send all their children to college; when the family owns at least one car; has enough money to support its daily needs; owns a medium-sized home; if at least 30% of Filipino families own a business; can relax with family and friends; or at least 21% of families are able to take occasional trips around the country; then we can say, without a shadow of a doubt—“*we have made the Filipino family stronger, more resilient, and capable of helping himself, his fellowmen and country.*”

We believe that after three years, the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte is on the right track and we are optimistic that we have laid the groundwork necessary for Filipino families to lead these lives.

This bright outlook is shared by my countrymen, who are optimistic about the economic prospects of the Philippines, as reflected in survey numbers that show that more people believe their lives are better now compared to before, and that most people Filipinos believe their lives will be

¹ 2017-2022 Philippine Development Plan

better a year from now. More people—within and beyond the shores of our country—believe our economy will improve, and the country’s economic performance should be credited for this positive outlook.

To quote NEDA Secretary Ernesto Pernia, “the economy has been on a roll. It has been growing at least 6 percent for 14 consecutive quarters now. This is the strongest economic growth we have seen since the mid-1970s. The Philippines’ economic growth is sustained and uninterrupted. The Philippines continues to be among the best performing economies in the region.”

We are not resting on our laurels. Government continues to take action to improve our poverty, hunger, and employment numbers. The Rice Tariffication Law, Ease of Doing Business Act, and the signing of Executive Order No. 65 promulgating the Eleventh Regular Foreign Investment Negative List should ease rice prices, attract more investments, and boost the country’s business competitiveness, respectively. According to NEDA, 826,000 jobs were generated in 2018; unemployment last year dropped to 5.3%, while discouraged jobseekers also declined to 11.5%, which was better than the government’s target.

We are not where we want to be, but we are getting there; and we hope that the Asian Productivity Organization—with its myriad programs and interventions revolutionizing industries and workplaces all over the region—can be a partner we can count on to make our vision a reality for our people.

Since its inception in 1961, it is the APO that had seen with our leaders, through the same eyes of hope and inspiration, the potential of the Filipino to learn, explore, and utilize available resources and technologies and turn them into new solutions that anticipate the need of our industries.

As we welcome the APO to our Philippine shores, we look forward to the tides of goodwill and partnership between the countries and peoples we represent.

One region. One Asia. One APO.

Thank you very much, and mabuhay po kayong lahat.