

**REMARKS BY  
SECRETARY ENRIQUE A. MANALO  
AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)**

Theme: Safeguarding Humanity:  
Exploring Human Rights in Times of Conflict  
Commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of  
Human Rights (UDHR)

14 December 2023, PWU Conrado Benitez Hall

Mr. Marco Alfredo Benitez, President of the Philippine Women's University  
(PWU);

Dr. Felina Young, Chancellor and Senior Vice President for Academic  
Affairs, PWU;

Dr. Benjamin Muego, PWU Professor of International Relations and  
Diplomacy and our moderator for today;

Mr. Orest Nowosad;

Faculty and students of the Philippine Women's University;

Distinguished guests and colleagues;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning.

I am very honored to join you this morning to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The UDHR is a seminal document which affirms the inalienable rights and dignity of every individual, irrespective of race, religion, or background. The Philippines, through the late General Carlos P. Romulo, played a pivotal part in crafting the Declaration, particularly its first article emphasizing that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

In fact, our commitment to upholding human rights predates the Universal Declaration, exemplified by the establishment of the Philippine Women's College in 1919. Later recognized as the Philippine Women's University (PWU) in 1932 – your institution was the first university for women in Asia founded by Asians. PWU embodies gender equality and access to education for all, way before these concepts became widespread.

In the current geopolitical landscape, we are reminded every day of the relevance and importance of the UDHR. With conflicts in many parts of the world, the UDHR remains a beacon for safeguarding our common humanity and promoting dignity and justice for all.

Seventy-five years ago, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Philippines stood with the international community in endorsing the UDHR. The Declaration represented a collective vow that the horrors of the past should not be repeated.

Conflict has profound impacts on the realization of human rights. It creates an environment where basic human rights can be compromised or negated. Civilians caught in conflict often face indiscriminate violence, displacement, and loss of essential services. In such scenarios, the right to live free from fear and want, as articulated in the Declaration, becomes a distant aspiration.

In times of conflict, when the very fabric of humanity is tested, it is imperative we reaffirm our commitment to human rights principles. It is especially crucial that we prioritize protection of the most vulnerable. For human rights are not a luxury or a privilege reserved for times of peace. Rather, they are the bedrock upon which stable societies and just nations are built.

The Philippines recognizes the need to uphold human rights and international humanitarian law principles in preserving human dignity, including in situations of conflict.

Our Constitution renounces war as an instrument of national policy. We have established an independent national human rights institution, the Commission on Human Rights. And we have ratified eight core international human rights treaties, as well as key international humanitarian law instruments, such as the Geneva Conventions.

While the Philippines, like other nations, is not immune from conflict, this only strengthens our resolve to promote human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Department of Foreign Affairs recently held an outreach program in the City of Marawi, visiting an elementary school in which children were reminded of their rights, especially in times of conflict. Together with local and BARMM officials, community leaders, and other government agencies, the DFA organized the installation of a large peace mural that commemorates the resilience, hope, and human rights of the people of Marawi.

As we celebrate the UDHR and its relevance in times of conflict, Marawi stands as an example of the power of the human spirit to rebuild and renew our fundamental faith in human rights.

Indeed, our adherence to human rights and the UDHR is deeply rooted in our national identity and is a longstanding Philippine tradition. As a founding member of the United Nations, the Philippines was there at the start, and has helped shape not only the UDHR, but also the larger international human rights framework.

Throughout our history, the Philippines has been instrumental in pushing for global human rights norms and instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the

Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Ambassador Rosario Manalo served on the CEDAW Committee as its Chairperson and has been one of its most active and ardent members. Other distinguished Filipino diplomats and experts have also served on UN human rights bodies with distinction, such as Ambassador Jose Brillantes on the Migrant Workers Committee and Professor Virginia Dandan on the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In the ASEAN region, we work to expand human rights awareness through dialogue, capacity-building and leadership in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

In the multilateral arena, the Philippines continues its open and constructive engagement with UN mechanisms and international partners. In the UN, we remain a strong voice for the protection of the rights of women, migrants, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and older persons.

Multilateral cooperation is paramount in addressing the complex nexus between conflicts and human rights. The Philippines remains committed to working with the international community to promote peace and ensure that human rights are not just an aspiration but a lived reality for all.

Looking at emerging human rights challenges, the Philippines continues to live up to its tradition as a trailblazer, being ahead of the curve.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has described climate change as the greatest existential threat of our time. The Philippines has long known the detrimental impacts of climate change on human rights. Over a decade ago, we pioneered resolutions on the topic in the UN Human Rights Council. Today, the world recognizes the need to address how climate change affects human rights, especially of the most vulnerable, including through the recently established Loss and Damage Fund.

President Marcos Jr. has also emphasized the necessity of defining new norms and rules to ensure responsible behavior in cyberspace and to prevent the weaponization of artificial intelligence. I reiterated this sentiment at the UN General Assembly when I called for partnerships that guarantee that new technologies will not be used to exploit the vulnerable and violate human rights and human dignity.

This week the Department is hosting a Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on Autonomous Weapons Systems that brings together government officials and experts to discuss the ethical and humanitarian dimensions of autonomous weapons.

On this issue, the Philippines has once again sided with the cause of human rights and humanity. With a group of other countries, we have

called for the prohibition of lethal autonomous weapons as they can easily blur and violate international humanitarian principles and human rights.

Climate change and emerging technologies can exacerbate conflicts and make them even more large-scale and detrimental. In these times of rapid change, the UDHR provides the anchor for our actions to safeguard human rights and dignity in face of these new and emerging threats and conflicts.

As a responsible member of the international community, and true to our human rights and humanitarian tradition, rest assured that the Philippines is working with partners to address these threats and bolster the international human rights framework once again for the benefit of our peoples and future generations.

Thank you.