



# PHILIPPINES

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**Statement**

**of**

**H.E. Alberto G. Romulo  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of the Philippines**

**High-Level Segment of the  
1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Geneva, 22 June 2006**

## A FRESH START

Dr. Alberto G. Romulo

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Mr. President, congratulations on your election as the first chair of our Human Rights Council.

The Philippines has every confidence in your ability not only to lay the groundwork but to set the tone for carrying out the Council's important tasks.

Our Delegation pledges to give its support to help you and your Bureau in charting a path for our Council in its inaugural year.

### **Our vision of the Council**

The Philippines envisions the Human Rights Council as enabling the community of nations – in cooperation and partnership – to protect and promote the human rights of all the world's peoples.

We see this Council as a forum in which the global community can deal with human-rights violations devoid of hidden political agendas.

We also see this Council as a body geared towards maximizing capacity building and technical assistance for human rights promotion and protection.

We see the Council as a partner, not an opponent, of states in question, particularly those in need of international assistance in the field of human rights.

In an increasingly complex world, burdened by old problems and saddled with new dilemmas, the creation of the Council gives us a chance for a fresh start.

To this inaugural session, we must exert our every effort to lay solid foundations and to erect strong, basic structures that will enable this Council to live up to our expectations.

### **Drawing on a rich heritage**

In choosing our building blocks for the Council, we should draw from the positive aspects of the Commission on Human Rights.

The Commission's heritage includes the international human rights instruments and norms that were developed either through its initiative or under its patronage.

There is also the Commission's network of complaints mechanisms, designed to give voice to human-rights victims and to redress violations.

The Commission also succeeded in involving global civil society – as well as other stakeholders – in a global human-rights debate.

At the same time, we should avoid the political pitfalls that limited the Commission's effectiveness, and which led to acrimonious debates or deadlocks.

Our new Council must always be wary of the hazards of selectivity and of politicizing human-rights issues.

### **The primary role of the state**

In our efforts to ensure that complaints of human-rights violations are given a proper airing, victims' rights should be foremost in our minds.

And in all this, we should not lose sight of the vital role of the state.

General Assembly Resolution 60/251 establishing this Council emphasizes that:

*The promotion and protection of human rights should be based on the principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue, and aimed at strengthening the capacity of Member States to comply with their human rights obligations for the benefit of all human beings.*

We urge this Council to implement all the provisions of this Resolution – which cite the Council's tasks in human-rights education, advisory services, technical assistance, and capacity-building. These provisions should be implemented in consultation with Member-States.

We also urge this Council always to keep in mind the needs of developing member-countries, even in its routine activities.

### **The complaints mechanisms**

An important task before the Council is its review of the complaints mechanisms.

We join others in urging for the strengthening of the special procedures mechanism.

Setting clear, precise, and judicious standards for admitting human-rights complaints will enhance the work of the Council.

We must also take care that these mechanisms are not misused – whether deliberately or not – for other than their intended purpose.

### **Opportunities for innovative action**

The creation of this Council offers us opportunities to take innovative action.

The most important of these is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which empowers this Council to review fulfillment by all UN Member-States of their human rights obligations and commitments.

During its first year, the Council shall also review all the mandates and mechanisms passed by the old Commission on Human Rights, with a view to streamlining them.

The Council is mandated to deal with human-rights crises and emerging crisis situations and with building state capacity to protect and promote human rights.

We look forward to working with all members in finding the modalities for translating these provisions into actions that are effective, equitable, and acceptable to all Member-States.

### **Our nation's pledge**

Let me reiterate my country's commitment to its pre-election pledge – a pledge that remains our basic reference and roadmap – to continue enhancing our own efforts to promote and protect human rights.

In a few short days, Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo will sign into law the bill abolishing the death penalty.

We will soon accede to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Our Presidential Human Rights Committee is in the process of endorsing our accession to the Optional Protocol to the Torture Convention, a key instrument that enters into force today.

We are making sure that the sanctity of human rights is preserved in our efforts to fight terrorism – particularly in drafting our anti-terrorism law.

We continue to look for partners to support continuing education for our law-enforcement and security personnel in the protection and respect for human rights.

We are vigorously pursuing efforts to bring justice to victims of crimes, including through the creation of a high-level police task force.

We are improving access to justice by the poor and other vulnerable sectors of society.

### **International migration**

Large-scale migration of workers across national boundaries is one of the pressing realities of our times. Migrant workers, particularly women workers, are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. We thus call upon all states to become party to the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families.

The protection of the human rights of migrant workers will be a key feature of our active participation in the Council.

### **Building regional human rights mechanisms**

The Council can also play a part in the regional promotion of human rights. On our part, the Philippines is taking an active role in the development of national human-rights institutions in Southeast Asia. We are an active member of the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism. Our independent Commission on Human Rights has been used as a model for other countries.

We hope that, working closely with the Council, we will be able to share with other developing states what we have been able to do in promoting human rights in our region.

### **Our continuing commitment**

Mr. President, promoting human rights is a constant endeavor for democratic governments. My country's membership in this body attests to our commitment never to slacken in this task.

The Philippines is honored to be among the founding members of this Council – just as it was privileged to be a founding member of the Human Rights Commission.

Among those who were at the founding of the Commission was General Carlos P. Romulo – one of the few to broach the subject of human rights in his opening address at the 1945 San Francisco Conference.

For General Romulo, in an uneven world, human rights must be a constant. He believed that –

*Nations will rise and fall, but equality remains the ideal. The universal aim is to achieve respect for the entire human race, not just for the dominant few.*

Much has happened since these words were spoken, but equality and respect for the entire human race remains elusive.

The Council gives all of us the opportunity for a fresh start.

For the Council is a forum of cooperation and not of confrontation. It is a forum that is inclusive and not exclusive. It is a forum that is salutary and empowering.

I am confident that it will be a forum that will play a crucial role in the protection and promotion of human rights – and in the attainment of the universal aim of respect for the entire human race.

Thank you.