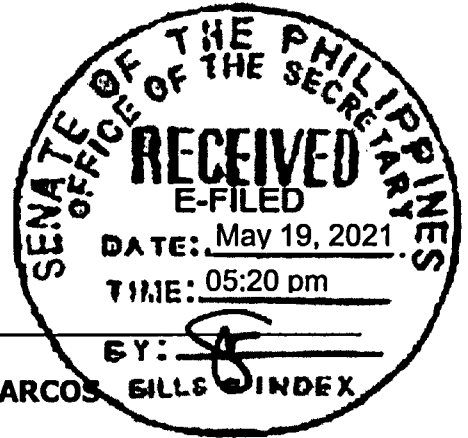


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)

SENATE
P.S. Resolution No. 728



Introduced by **SENATOR IMEE R. MARCOS**

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN
INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE DELAYED
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE "PIPOL KONEK" PROJECT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
RESULTING IN THE SLOW PROGRESS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN
PROVIDING FREE INTERNET ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 17 of the 1987 Constitution provides that, "*The State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development.*" Further, Article XIV of the same Constitution provides that the State recognizes that science and technology are essential for national development and progress, and shall give priority to research and development, invention, innovation, and their utilization;

WHEREAS, the Philippines is recognized as a high-user of online services wherein, in January 2021, there were 73.91 million internet users, which represents an increase by 4.2 million or 6.1% from 2020;

WHEREAS, according to the advertising firms *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite*, the Philippines is yet again the country with the highest internet usage, with Filipinos clocking in close to 11 hours per day at 10 hours and 56 minutes of internet use. Moreover, Filipinos spend an average of 4 hours and 15 minutes each day on social media, topping the global usage rankings for the 6th straight year;

WHEREAS, in 2017, President Rodrigo R. Duterte signed Republic Act No. 10929 otherwise known as the "*Free Internet Access in Public Places Act*". The Act authorized the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to partner with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide free internet access to the public;

WHEREAS, with the enactment of R.A. No. 10929, the Free Wi-Fi Internet Access in Public Places Project, otherwise known as "*Pipol Konek*", was implemented in June 2016 by the DICT, in partnership with the UNDP. The said Project aims to provide free broadband internet access to public places across the country;

WHEREAS, despite the enactment of R.A. No. 10929, based on National ICT Household Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute and the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country only has 17.7% of Filipino households with internet connection. Moreover, seven out of 10 barangays do not have access to fiber-optic cables, while 64% lack access to cellular towers;

WHEREAS, due to the DICT's prior limited capacity, R.A. No. 10929 enabled the government to partner with the UNDP for the initiative, which in turn selected and hired SpeedCast International Ltd., a Hong Kong satellite firm, to implement the P1.3-billion free WiFi project of the country;

WHEREAS, Presidential Spokesperson Herminio L. Roque, Jr. has said that the government is unhappy with the poor performance of SpeedCast International Ltd., noting that only about 10,000 of the 120,000 targeted free wireless internet sites have been completed. Roque added that it is unacceptable that only 8.3% of the 120,000 target sites have been provided free wireless internet access, nearly four years after President Duterte signed R.A. No. 10929;

WHEREAS, Presidential Spokesperson Roque stated, "*Ang posisyon po talaga ng Presidente at DICT ay itigil na ang involvement nitong current contractor na foreign... at ibalik na ang pera na naibayad na sa kanila dahil pupuwede na pong ipagpatuloy 'yan ng DICT.*" Roque further said that the DICT was able to establish WiFi sites five times more effectively than SpeedCast did from 2015 to 2019;

WHEREAS, there have been allegations that the delay was due to incompetent people tasked to handle the Pipol Konek project. For instance, a dentist was reportedly hired as a Project Manager, despite his lack of the appropriate expertise;

WHEREAS, the government wants a refund of the more than \$21 million it paid, due to SpeedCast's inability to deliver its obligations in installing the WiFi sites;

WHEREAS, aside from inefficiency issues, SpeedCast also faces allegations that, with the assistance of the local customs broker it contracted, the company had undervalued six shipments in its declarations to the Bureau of Customs. The DICT stated that it had already created a task force to investigate the said allegations;

WHEREAS, challenges in the bidding and implementation process, limited access to cost-effective and up-to-date technology options, as well as limited capacity of the Philippine telecommunications companies at the local levels have slowed the progress towards the goal of providing free internet access to all;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, directing the appropriate Senate committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the delayed implementation of the "Pipol Konek" Project of the Department of Information and Communications Technology resulting in the slow progress of the government in providing free internet access to the public.

Adopted,


IMEE R. MARCOS