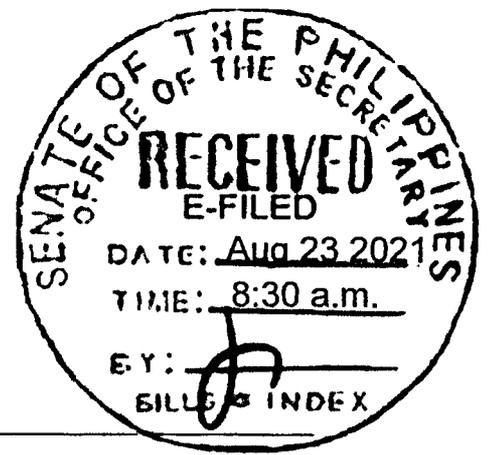


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Third Regular Session)

SENATE
P.S. Resolution No. 849



Introduced by **SENATOR IMEE R. MARCOS**

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS TO
CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE POOR
INTERNET ACCESS AND DIGITAL SERVICES OF THE COUNTRY RESULTING
TO GROSS DIGITAL DIVIDE

WHEREAS, Article XII, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution states that, "The goals of the national economy are a more equitable distribution of opportunities, income, and wealth, a sustained increase in the amount of goods and services produced by the nation for the benefit of the people, and an expanding productivity as the key to raising the quality of life for all, especially the underprivileged. Further, Article XIV, Section 10 of the same Constitution provides that, "*science and technology are essential for national development and progress*";

WHEREAS, as the COVID-19 virus continues to spread globally, the Philippines, along with other countries, was forced to put economic activities on hold to contain the virus. Since March 2020, the government has been mandating several restrictions to work, learning, and mobility. Schools have adopted blended learning types, while employers are implementing work-from-home setups to safeguard their employees and prevent the spread of infection;

WHEREAS, internet connectivity is now an "*indispensable tool*" in the country's response to the pandemic and to the so-called "*new normal*" where life is forced to move online;

WHEREAS, many Filipinos carry on with their daily activities in their own homes with the use of internet access and digital services. Many are working and studying from home, using their computers or mobile phones to tick off boxes from their daily tasks, including grocery shopping, buying meals, or even settling bills and government dues;

WHEREAS, internet connectivity has become extremely crucial during this time of pandemic wherein it is now considered as a "*lifeline*," not just merely a fundamental right or a privilege, as businesses and individuals turn to digital technologies and services to keep themselves virtually "*afloat*";

WHEREAS, achieving universal access to high-quality internet is an important public policy goal but despite an accelerated shift to the digital space enabling service delivery, over 700 million people around the world remain without digital access;

WHEREAS, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) explained in a report that the pandemic is exposing the digital gap between countries and societies especially between and within the least developed countries;

WHEREAS, in the Philippines, connectivity remains higher in urban centers and weak digital infrastructures persist in more rural areas. The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) cites that a higher incidence of urban households have internet compared to rural households, with Metro Manila households having the highest access at 32.3%;

WHEREAS, according to the COVID-19 Action Network (CAN) data, over 40% of Filipinos, 52% of public schools, and 57% of households nationwide still don't use the internet;

WHEREAS, inequalities are magnified by the fact that the need for internet access is deemed a basic human right. However, in the Philippines, only 17.7% of all households have internet connection, according to the National ICT Household Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute and the Philippine Statistics Authority. Moreover, 7 out of 10 barangays do not have access to fiber-optic cables, while 64% lack access to a cellular tower wherein only half of the country's 42,064 barangays have telco operators in their areas;

WHEREAS, it is much worse in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and in the regions of Bicol, Eastern Visayas, Cagayan Valley, Mimaropa, Northern Luzon, Palawan and Central Visayas, which are all either unserved or underserved, according to the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC);

WHEREAS, the Philippines has yet to spend on actual physical infrastructure to provide telecommunication services to its citizens which is in contrast to its neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, which is spending \$233.5 million to boost broadband speed and coverage, Taiwan, which has allocated \$2.4 billion to upgrade its digital infrastructure, or Vietnam, which has invested \$820 million for 23,000 kilometers of submarine cable system;

WHEREAS, in a survey conducted by analysts at a British firm called, "Cable.co.uk," data showed that fixed broadband internet access in the Philippines is one of the most expensive in Asia despite of having a mobile average download speed of only 32.84;

WHEREAS, Former DICT Acting Secretary Eliseo Rio stated that telecommunications should be given as much importance, in terms of budget, as power supply, ports and roads: *"Right now, our connectivity is still poor in terms of access and speed, compared to other countries. What we need is for government to*

actually invest in telecommunications infrastructure to really provide better services to Filipinos," Rio said;

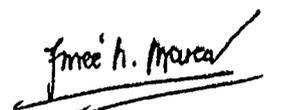
WHEREAS, this need becomes starker because much work is now done online, and human interaction has become more digital than ever. Internet connectivity in the time of the pandemic has become paramount that further development in the sector is needed, and it is needed fast since internet connectivity has become a basic human right as important as food, shelter, and clothing;

WHEREAS, the digital divide has especially far-reaching consequences when it comes to education and the economy. For children in low-income school districts, inadequate access to technology can hinder them from learning the tech skills that are crucial to success in today's economy;

WHEREAS, despite various projects put together by the DICT, the internet access and digital services of the country remain poor and inadequate. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated existing inequalities accentuated by the widening of the digital divide. It is so apparent that based on data collected by We Are Social Inc., internet access in the Philippines is only limited to one-third of the population which leaves the rest of the country bereft of the benefits of the internet, especially in three key areas: education, information and communications, and finance which leads to the plunge of the economy;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, directing the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the poor internet access and digital services of the country resulting to gross digital divide.

Adopted,


IMEE R. MARCOS