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FIRST REGULAR SESSION

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CALL TO ORDER

At 3:30 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Robinhood C. Padilla led the prayer by reciting verses from the Holy Quran (Surah Al-Fatifah 1:1-7 and Suran Al-Baqarah 2:286).

ROLL CALL

Upon direction of the Senate President, the Secretary of the Senate, Atty. Renato N. Bantug Jr., called the roll, to which the following senators responded:

Angara, S.	Legarda, L.
Binay, M. L. N. S.	Marcos, I. R.
Cayetano, A. P. C. S.	Padilla, R. C.
Dela Rosa, R. B. M.	Pimentel III, A. K.
Ejercito, J. V. G.	Poe, G.
Escudero, F. J. G.	Revilla Jr., R. B.
Estrada, J.	Tolentino, F. T. N.
Gatchalian, W.	Tulfo, R. T.
Go, C. L. T.	Villanueva, J.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, C. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.

With 22 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

Senator Cayetano (P) arrived after the roll call.

Senator Villar (M) was on official business in Brussels, Belgium from December 11-15, 2022 as indicated in the December 13, 2022 letter of the senator's acting chief of staff.



APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the Journal of Session No. 38 (December 13, 2022) and considered it approved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

At this juncture, Senator Villanueva acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the following guests:

1. Kimberly Anne Custodio, gold medalist at the 2022 Jiu-Jitsu International Federation World Championship held in Abu Dhabi, UAE;
2. Stephen Kamphuis and Myron Mangubat, coach and pro-MMA fighter;
3. Mayor Rhett Angara of Baler, Aurora;
4. Mayor Riel Bitong of Maria Aurora, Aurora;
5. Mayor Ariel de Jesus of San Luis, Aurora; and
6. Mayor Sherwin Taay of Dingalan, Aurora.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the guests to the Senate.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1608, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO ANY OFFICER OR ENLISTED PERSONNEL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP) AND THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE (PNP) ON ANY CHARGE BEFORE THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE, COURT, ADMINISTRATIVE OR ANY COMPETENT BODY ARISING FROM AN INCIDENT OR INCIDENTS RELATED TO THE PERFORMANCE OF OFFICIAL DUTY

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Public Order and Dangerous Drugs

Senate Bill No. 1609, entitled

AN ACT PROTECTING FREE EXERCISE AND ENJOYMENT OF RELIGION OF STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committees on Basic Education; and Higher, Technical and Vocational Education



RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 377, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING BATANGAS STATE UNIVERSITY FOR WINNING THE CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE UNIVERSITY CATEGORY AS WELL AS FOR THEIR EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE IN THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED ENGINEERING INNOVATION CHALLENGE (EIC) 2022 HELD LAST NOVEMBER IN SINGAPORE

Introduced by Senator Pimentel III

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 378, entitled

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING AND CONGRATULATING CHERRY ANN RONDINA, JOVELYN GONZAGA, GENESA JANE ESLAPOR, AND FLOREMEL RODRIGUEZ FOR THEIR IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCES AT THE 2022 VOLLEYBALL WORLD BEACH PRO TOUR

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 379, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING FILIPINO OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST AND WEIGHTLIFTER HIDILYN DIAZ-NARANJO FOR WINNING THREE GOLD MEDALS AND BECOMING A WORLD CHAMPION IN THE WOMEN'S 55-KG CATEGORY AT THE IWF WORLD WEIGHTLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIPS HELD IN BOGOTA, COLOMBIA FROM DECEMBER 05 TO 16, 2022

Introduced by Senator Estrada

To the Committee on Rules

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS**BILL ON FIRST READING**

Senate Bill No. 1610, entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING ACCESS TO QUALITY LEGAL EDUCATION BY PROVIDING FOR FREE TUITION AND OTHER SCHOOL FEES IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Justice and Human Rights; and Finance



RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 380, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING SYDNEY SY TANCONTIAN FOR WINNING A GOLD MEDAL AT THE 2022 ASIAN SAMBO CHAMPIONSHIPS IN JOUNIEH, LEBANON

Introduced by Senators Go and Dela Rosa

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 381, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE OUTSTANDING YOUNG MEN (TOYM) AWARDEES FOR 2022

Introduced by Senator Binay

To the Committee on Rules

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri relinquished the Chair to Senator Ejercito.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR POE

Rising on a matter of personal and collective privilege, Senator Poe delivered the following speech to raise the alarm over another abduction case allegedly involving Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators:

Hindi pa talaga tapos ang isyung ito. A trusted friend just told me that two days ago, his sister-in-law was abducted in a very busy area here in Pasay, and brought to a POGO dorm in Cavite where she was sold off to a Chinese-looking buyer.

Before the abduction, the victim was allegedly offered a job as a personal assistant for a minimum of P100,000 a month. However, when she went down her condominium which is in SMDC Shore 2 Residences near Mall of Asia, *isang kilometro lang ang layo mula sa Senado*, to meet up with whom she thought was the employer, she was forced to ride a red Mitsubishi Xpander with conduction sticker YO U537. *Suwerteng may kaibigan na nakakita sa pangyayari kaya nakunan ng litrato ang nasabing sasakyan.*

Sinubukan ng biktima na tumakas ngunit binugbog siya ng kaniyang mga kidnappers. Makikita natin sa mga litrato ang hrap na dinanas ng biktima sa kamay ng mga kumidnap sa kaniya.

Dinala ang biktima sa isang hindi pa natutukoy na lugar sa Cavite kung saan may mga Chinese-looking individuals na gusto siyang bilhin sa halagang P320,000. Nakiusap ang biktima sa isa sa mga buyer kung puwede siyang bilhin para makawala siya sa mga kidnapper at pagkatapos ay tawagan na lamang ang kaniyang kapatid na magbabayad para tubusin siya. Naawa ang buyer dahil sa kalunos-lunos na kalagayan ng biktima na puro pasa at sugat kaya binili siya at dinala sa isang POGO dorm sa Shuangma Industrial Park sa Molino Boulevard, Bacoor Cavite. Hindi pa rito nagtatapos ang kalbaryo ng biktima dahil pagdating niya sa naturang POGO dorm ay mistulang ibibenta raw siya ulit. Agad-agad na tinubos ng kaniyang brother-in-law ang biktima sa halagang P250,000 doon mismo sa POGO dorm na iyon. Marami pa raw ibang biktima ang naroon. The victim's family is willing to coordinate with the authorities on this. Noong tsinek namin sa PAGCOR list of legitimate POGOs as of October 6, lumalabas na isang Brickhartz Technology, Inc. ang nag-o-operate sa Shuangma Industrial Park kung saan nakuha ang biktima.

At this juncture, Senate Ejercito relinquished the Chair to Senate President Zubiri.

Upon further checking, *mayroon na palang na--rescue ang PNP Anti-Kidnapping Group sa parehas na POGO company na ito nito lang* October 30 *na biktima rin ng kidnapping*, identified only as Mr. Pan of Yongping, China. *Hindi lamang iyan*, in another news article last September 30, 23 Myanmar and six Chinese nationals, employees of MOA Cloud Zone Corporation, were rescued by police and social workers. This was upon information of two Myanmar nationals turned over by the same POGO company, Brickhartz Technology. *Anong ibig sabihin nito? Hanggang ngayon, sa kabila ng mga pangako ng PNP, PAGCOR, at Association of POGO Operators, POGO-related crimes still persist. And not just that, all the problems that come with POGO operations, legal or not, also persist and has gotten worse. This sector has turned one vice, which is gambling, into a host of other more serious problems like kidnapping, serious physical injuries and human trafficking. Kung hindi tayo kikilos ngayon, marami pang biktima ang susunod.*

During the Committee on Ways and Means hearing last November 23, the PNP proudly said that there has not been a POGO-related incident lately. But even without any official report, it is clear that these crimes are happening before us. I would eagerly call on the authorities to rescue the victims, but we cannot just go on saving each and every time someone is kidnapped by POGOs.

Allow me to reiterate my call. Let us face the music and decide once and for all if our institutions are still stronger than POGO and can rein in the risk to peace and order, and possible long-term damage to the rule of law while these POGO-related crimes continue. I said it before and I will say it again—an abduction case is one too many. Leave it unresolved and it will spread like wildfire. And here we are, still trying to save it when it has been consistently out of our control.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

Senator Cayetano (P) stated that she was associating herself with the privilege speech of Senator Poe.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Asked by Senator Dela Rosa whether the incident had been reported to the police, Senator Poe opined that it was unlikely because the person who informed her of the kidnapping had not mentioned the involvement of the police in the case. She said that she could seek additional clarification on the matter and added that the aggrieved party had expressed willingness to work with the police.

Senator Dela Rosa observed that the PNP's claim that no POGO-related crimes were occurring contradicted Senator Poe's report. He stated that the government had been attempting to keep everyone safe, particularly in the operations of the POGOs, in an effort to prevent crime, but it was undeniable that crimes continued to be committed.

Senator Poe believed that victims did not file police reports as they believed they could pay the ransom. However, she agreed with Senator Dela Rosa that such incidents occurred because the victims did not report them to the authorities; thus, it was not always the PNP's fault that such crimes were not discovered. She emphasized that victims should be encouraged to report such incidents and have confidence in the police's ability to take action.

Asked on the victim's citizenship, Senator Poe stated that she was not a Filipino citizen and that the legitimacy of her residency in the country was also questionable. She surmised that the victim could be a tourist who requested an extension of her stay in the country but she could be considered to be a valuable asset to POGO operations because she can speak Mandarin.

Senator Dela Rosa thanked Senator Poe for bringing the matter to the Body's attention, specifically to the attention of Senator Gatchalian, chairperson of the Committee on Ways and



Means, who had just completed his investigation into the economic cost incurred by POGO operations. He stated that his committee's investigation on the peace and order aspect was also complete. However, following Senator Poe's disclosure of the incident, he stated that he was no longer certain whether he should deliver his sponsorship speech on his committee report.

Senator Poe stated that she would provide Senator Dela Rosa with incident-related information so that he could use his discretion to determine whether a supplementary report was necessary. In response, Senator Dela Rosa stated that he would gladly accept the report and urged Senator Poe to encourage the victims to come forward and seek assistance from the PNP, or to seek his assistance directly.

She confirmed that the person who reported the incident was a good friend and a reputable citizen. In response, Senator Dela Rosa reiterated his request for the individual's full cooperation with the law enforcement community to expedite the resolution of the case.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva commended Senator Poe for bringing up the issue, noting that criminal incidents involving POGOs were extensively discussed even during the Eighteenth Congress. In light of the link between the rise of crimes such as prostitution and money laundering and the proliferation of POGOs in the country, he urged law enforcers to be on heightened alert for POGO-related crimes.

He also called on the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation to step up its monitoring of POGOs and keep track of the number of such companies and their employees in the country.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

In associating herself with Senator Poe's privilege speech, Senator Hontiveros pointed out the similarity between the case at hand and the human trafficking of Filipinos in Myanmar. She stated that Filipinos are being coerced into participating in crypto currency scam operations in that country, with some of the operations also involving POGO hubs.

Noting that human trafficking syndicates benefit from porous borders, she inquired about the efforts taken to combat transborder crimes. She added that the Department of Foreign Affairs would need to coordinate with the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking to address such issues.

In response, Senator Poe expressed frustration over the need for inter-agency cooperation to solve the problem of human trafficking and for the relevant agencies to arrive at a definitive solution. She pointed out that the government has to finally decide whether or not the POGOs are essential to the nation. She added that despite the fact that the companies were operating in economic zones, government institutions must not overlook the wrongdoings that occur within them.

Senator Hontiveros thanked Senator Poe for highlighting the need for more inter-agency cooperation. She drew parallels between Senator Poe's case, in which foreign nationals are kidnapped and detained within the country's economic zones, and the case of Filipinos who were trafficked in Myanmar and detained in the Shwe Kokko Special Economic Zone. She said that international inter-agency cooperation must therefore be established.

She also mentioned that the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Act of 2022 provides explicit and concrete protections for victims of foreign trafficking. She noted, however, that the victims were still viewed as overstaying illegal aliens. She surmised that it might also be the case with

trafficked Filipinos abroad, and called for representations on their behalf through bilateral agreements to be enacted for their protection.

Senator Poe agreed that even though the kidnap victims were foreign nationals, the government still has the responsibility to protect them. She stated that bilateral agreements between countries can facilitate the safe and humane return of victims to their home countries.

Senator Hontiveros underscored the importance of shifting the way countries view laborers, particularly in light of the cases presented. She stated that regional and international cooperation is essential in order to rescue and aid the victims of human trafficking.

She also brought up the plight of Filipino victims still in Myanmar who could not leave their workplaces due to the country's peculiar political dynamics, and called for their immediate rescue.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva reported that two Iloilo natives, identified as Gelie Sorallo Galon and Marvin Cronico Emperador, had recently been rescued. He stated that both were promised jobs at a call center in Thailand, but were instead illegally trafficked to Myanmar and forced to work for online gambling, web prostitution, and crypto currency scams.


He stated that the rescue was made possible by the joint efforts of his office, the Office of the Senate President, and the Philippine Embassy in Thailand. He disclosed that the Jesus Is Lord Church in Thailand purchased airline tickets to bring Galon and Emperador back to the country. However, he stated that many more Filipino victims remained in Myanmar.

Reiterating his objection to the presence of POGOs in the country, Senator Villanueva stated that he even spearheaded the investigation of over 1,500 illegal POGO workers in Clark Air Base who were granted working permits. He recalled having proposed the inclusion of a provision mandating that the Bureau of Immigration (BI) issue work permits in a regulated matter. He noted that at the time, the BI had issued four times as many working permits as the DOLE's Alien Employment Permits. He emphasized that Article XII, Section 12 of the Constitution mandates that the State shall promote the preferential use of Filipino labor, which all concerned agencies must adhere to.

He expressed hope that the Members would do their part in protecting the morals and lives of the Filipino people, as well as keep in mind the findings of the Department of Finance that the economic contribution of POGOs to the country was insignificant. Additionally, he pointed out that POGOs have led to the increase in prostitution, money laundering, kidnapping, and other criminal activities.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel averred that through all the Senate's investigations on the subject of POGOs, it could be concluded that there was only one authority that can put a stop to their operations in the country. He said that even PAGCOR officials stated in a committee hearing that they would readily put a stop to POGOs if directed to do so by the proper authority. He then disclosed that he had learned from some members of the Filipino-Chinese community that they were also opposed to POGOs out of fear of becoming the next victims of kidnapping or other crimes. He stated that even if the victims were foreigners, the criminal acts still occurred on Philippine soil and would have a negative impact on the country. In addition, he stated that the benefits of allowing POGO operations were not worth the negative consequences, which included violations of data privacy laws.



In this regard, he suggested that it might be time for the Senate to take an official stance on the issue and show that the Philippines is a responsible sovereign State. He also expressed concern over the fact that three previous privilege speeches had been exposing problems in law enforcement on various matters, with Senator Poe's speech as the fourth.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri noted that a number of foreign nationals residing in the country are armed because they are members of illegal syndicates operating in the country. He said that he was glad that there were members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines present in the gallery because they could help address the situation. He also agreed that the Senate had to make a stand on the matter.

At this juncture, Senator Villanueva presented data from the Department of Finance indicating that the net cost of POGO operations comprised only 0.04% of the country's Gross Domestic Product, while the uncollected tax from the establishments stood at P50 billion.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Senator Dela Rosa expressed his sentiment regarding the privilege speeches involving the PNP, law enforcement, and public safety.

Explaining on behalf of the PNP, he believed that the PNP was making every effort to apprehend individuals involved in POGO-related crimes. He noted police officers carrying batons walking along the MOA area up to Entertainment City as evidence that they were doing their duties. Despite the fact that police in the area have not recorded any crimes related to POGO, he urged the victims and potential victims to cooperate with the police, which, he believed, would not turn them down. He expressed sadness and sympathized with the PNP upon hearing four privilege speeches negating an organization he once belonged to.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS


At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri acknowledged the presence of Mayor Jay Warren R. Pabillaran, Vice Mayor Estelito R. Marabe, members of the Sangguniang Panlungsod, and the department heads of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva expressed the view that in order to help the PNP, the government must put an end to POGOs since they have grown out of hand. He pointed out that even PAGCOR, its key regulator, was unable to provide the Senate with precise information about the POGO's workforce because it could not identify who holds valid gaming employment licenses. He reiterated that people in government must put a stop to POGOs before their own family members would get victimized.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Senator Gatchalian informed the Body that the Committee on Ways and Means held three hearings and took into consideration the hearings held by Senator Dela Rosa in his capacity as chairperson of the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs. He stated that the committee report would be distributed shortly and hoped that the Members would have time to read it. He noted that the committee report also took into account the economic component of the POGO, as well as its social ills, social costs, and the hearing's emphasis on POGO-related crimes. He underlined his request that the committee report be forwarded to the Members for review and signature in order for it to be sponsored as soon as the session resumes in January 2023.



REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech and the interpellations and manifestations thereon to the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Tolentino delivered the following speech on the situation in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea:

I rise on a question of personal and collective privilege today, the last day of our session, to discuss the pressing situation in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea (SCS-WPS) dispute. The issue is an urgent concern and its impact affects the lives of our most valuable Filipino *kababayan* in the coastal communities, regional security, and the rules-based international order as enshrined in the United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Moreover, developments in the SCS-WPS are not hob-short and have long-term implications on Philippine national security, especially at a time of rising prices due to geopolitical upheavals, including COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Initially, on China concerns, Beijing remains dedicated to using "gray zone" tactics on the West Philippine Sea to advance its illegal claims without sparking conflict actions that push the boundaries of acceptable behavior, undermine international law, and raise the chances of untoward incidents. *Ito po iyong* Pag-asa; this is existing; I am showing that on the screen. This "gray zone" tactics include swarming activities within the territorial seas of our nine stations in the WPS. This is most especially seen in the Pag-asa Islands, a high tide elevation with a 12-nautical mile territorial sea over which the Philippines has full sovereignty, where the China coastguard—we can see the picture—and the Chinese maritime militia vessels are observed staying in the area.

China is becoming more brazen in its actions toward the Philippine maritime forces in the West Philippine Sea from aggressive maneuvers by China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels in Bajo de Masinloc, to interfering in the provision of humanitarian supplies to government personnel aboard the BRP Sierra Madre in Ayungin Shoal. Beijing's assertiveness continues despite numerous diplomatic protests over such activities. I am glad that some officials of our Department of Foreign Affairs are here, present, as I speak.

Proof of China's growing assertion was seen in November 2022 when the China Coast Guard interfered in the retrieval of space debris which fell within the Pag-asa Islands territorial sea near Pag-asa Cay 1. *Ayun po iyong larawan*. Cay 1 is just 1.9 nautical miles from the Pag-asa Islands manned by our gallant officers from the Army, Air Force, and Navy. They are also here in this plenary hall.

Philippine Navy personnel initially detected the space debris some 800 yards west of the main station of Pag-asa 1. A Philippine team was dispatched to retrieve the debris which drifted near Pag-asa Cay 1, and was in the process of towing the remains—*hayan po iyong litrato*—of a rocket when a boat from China Coast Guard, Boat 5205, swiftly and deliberately interfered. The China boat came within 20 to 30 yards of the Philippine rubber boat and forcibly cut the towing line of the space debris. *Pinutol po nila iyong lubid. Nakikita po natin*.

I would like to show this video. It has never seen before. It has never been seen even on television, in the news.

Nakikita po natin na hinihila sa likod iyong debris. So, this is an actual footage of that incident last month. The China boat, as I have said, came within 20 to 30 yards of the Philippine rubber boat and forcibly cut the towing line of the space debris.

See how dangerous the incident was. *Naka-rubber boat lamang po tayo. Ang lalaki ng kanilang mga barko*.

Chinese diplomats denied that the incident occurred. They denied that the incident occurred, claiming that a friendly consultation took place. But the footage and reports clearly show that CCG assertively took the debris in the area well within Philippine territory.

The Department of Foreign Affairs—again, some officials are here—issued a *note verbale* to China to clarify the matter as the incident was highly provocative. These actions, along with the other gray zone activities, are slowly but surely eroding Philippine sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea and harming the country's strategic position.

Iyan po ay isang larawan ng space debris. This is not the first time that Chinese rocket debris has fallen within Philippine territory or territorial waters. On October 6 and November 7 this year, similar rocket debris was recovered in Calintaan, Occidental Mindoro and Busuanga, Palawan. Even earlier, in July 2022, Chinese rocket debris was also recovered in Occidental Mindoro.

These debris shown in the picture fell in Philippine archipelagic waters off Palawan, Mindoro Occidental and within the Pag-asa Islands territorial sea where Cay 1 is located.

Significantly, the Chinese Coast Guard's retrieval of the debris in Cay 1 is a gross violation of Philippine sovereignty as Beijing has no jurisdiction over Philippine territorial sea. Further, CCG's interference in the retrieval also violated the right of innocent passage under the 1982 UNCLOS, yet another incident in a long and sustained record of repeated violations of international law. Lastly, China's actions demonstrate that Beijing does not recognize the 2016 Arbitral Award, which establishes a 12-nautical mile territorial sea in the Pag-asa Islands.

The rocket debris retrieved bore the markings of China's Long March 5B rocket. I am showing the picture right now, incontrovertible proof of the provenance of the remains recovered in Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, and Pag-asa Islands.

China acceded to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, and Beijing must request the return of space debris that falls in the territory of other states like the Pag-asa Islands in the case of the Philippines, rather than merely seizing the same. This repeated violation is a breach of Philippine territorial integrity, and irresponsible rocket launches are scattering debris that can threaten Filipinos who are plying the West Philippine Sea and our archipelagic waters. These incidents cannot be allowed to continue as they not only can potentially harm Filipino fishermen, but the Chinese Coast Guard actions also violate Philippine maritime rights as enshrined in the UNCLOS and the arbitral ruling award.

Indeed, we are on the right side of international law, and gross violations like this cannot be allowed and should not be allowed to continue.

Before I end this speech, let me stress that it is high time that the government prioritized South China Sea, West Philippine sea as the Philippines has become the laggard among the claimants—a status that threatens not only the country's sovereignty but also the livelihoods of thousands of Filipino fishermen and the nation's energy and food security.

With one strident voice, let us continue to denounce the brazen intrusions into our maritime territory and do all within our power to assert our rights. The rule of law is behind us with the 2016 arbitral ruling.

Let us continue to strengthen and solidify our strategic alliances towards this end, for at the end of the day, this is a fight not only for territory, the environment, and for invaluable resources. It is about taking a stand against oppression, which is sadly increasing in many parts of the world.

We shall not surrender quietly to an invasion of our free and democratic nation.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri thanked Senator Tolentino for his patriotism and for bringing the matter to national awareness.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR LEGARDA

Senator Legarda associated herself with Senator Tolentino and thanked him for bringing the decades-long issue to the floor on the last session day of the year.

She stated that while the issue had been discussed many times over, Senator Tolentino explicitly and clearly mentioned the international agreements that China had breached, including the arbitral



ruling on Philippine national territory and sovereignty. She believed that no elected official would allow such acts to happen. She then inquired as to what the Senate can do to help the Philippine Navy in asserting the country's sovereignty and ownership of the territory, how else it could assist the fisherfolk, families, and communities living in the coastal area, and how The Hague ruling could be effectively implemented.

In reply, Senator Tolentino recalled that he mentioned the need for the country to solidify and strengthen its strategic alliances beyond mere courtesy visits and engage Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and the other claimant countries in the South China Sea territorial dispute on how to best assert the 2016 arbitral award and enforce the Philippines' claims.

Senator Tolentino said that the country also would need to strengthen its position in Pag-asa Island by beefing up support through the provision of more teachers, more school buildings, the presence of BFAR, and the help of the DA. He added that there was also a need to strengthen the Municipality of Kalayaan as an LGU in order for its mayor to hold office in the island and not in Puerto Princesa City. He suggested that the country's position should be announced on the eve of the Philippine President's state visit in Beijing, China in January 2023.

Likewise, he urged the government to further strengthen its position and to resume the oil and gas exploration in the Recto Bank, also known as Reed Bank, as it is within the Philippine exclusive economic zone (EEZ) northwest of Palawan.

With regard to Bajo de Masinloc in Zambales and the Ayungin Shoal, he opined that the government should solidify its continuous exercise of full sovereignty in its territorial sea to protect the fishermen, resources, and their livelihood in the EEZ.

Senator Tolentino also suggested the strengthening of the capacity of the government's radio station in Puerto Princesa in order to enable it to forewarn fishermen on weather reports and, at the same time, impress upon the vessels within the EEZ that a Filipino-owned radio station airing Filipino news and music reaching the territory signifies that they are entering or have entered part of the territorial sea and EEZ of the Philippines. He also saw the need to improve telecommunication in the area and the setting of satellite weather stations and doppler stations of the PAGASA.

He concluded that while the government could pursue various strategic long-term, mid-term, and short-term actions, whether big or small, there was a consistent need to unify them as a coherent whole to protect the country and its territories.

REMARKS OF THE SENATE PRESIDENT

Senate President Zubiri recalled the request raised by the fisherfolk in one of the security meetings on the disputed waters, to fund the purchase of bigger fishing boats that would replace their small boats with *katig* in order to enable them to stand against the swarm tactics by Chinese fishing boats. He suggested that the Body provide funds for 200 medium-sized fishing boats in the 2024 national budget so that Filipino fishermen could also swarm the Chinese fishing boats that enter the EEZ.

Agreeing with Senate President Zubiri, the Chair (Senator Legarda) stated that the Body had already passed the 2023 national budget on Third Reading and would be signed into law on Friday. It pointed out that the BFAR has its own budget, so there was no need to wait for the amendment in the 2024 budget to accommodate the purchase of the fishing boats for the Municipality of Kalayaan in Palawan.

The Chair then commended Senator Tolentino for the suggested actions for the government in Kalayaan and in the sea dispute. It said that the improvement of school buildings and facilities and



the provision of well-trained teachers, a BFAR station, fishing boats for fisherfolk, a PAGASA station, and a doppler radar were all within the 2023 national budget. While the said requests were not yet earmarked, it expressed certainty that the national agencies concerned have the flexibility to allocate their lump-sum funds wherever necessary. It suggested that the Body send written requests to the agencies concerned with regard to the earmarking of funds for the mentioned requests and concerns.

In addition, the Chair requested that funds be also earmarked for the Biodiversity Management Bureau research station of the DENR in the island in order to produce a database or inventory of biodiversity endemic in the area. It stressed that arming the Filipinos in Palawan with funds would be the least the Body could do to secure the fisherfolk and their livelihood.

Further, the Chair suggested that prior to the President's visit to China in January 2023, the Body draft a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate on the issue raised in the privilege speech of Senator Tolentino.

Senate President Zubiri agreed, stating that the Body could pass an unnumbered resolution, subject to style, diplomatically expressing the stand of the Senate on the issue and with words showing regret to the incident shown in the video presented by Senator Tolentino and the swarming of militia boats toward the islands of Palawan, a Philippine territory.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLAR (C)

As chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform, Senator Villar (C) stated that she has always been encouraging the BFAR to provide big boats for the fishermen's use because unlike commercial fishermen, they could not reach the 15-kilometer boundary of the municipal waters using small boats only. She lamented, however, that while the BFAR has the budget—with its budget even bigger than that for the livestock and with a production rate of only 15 percent of the agriculture produce compared to the livestock at 33 percent the bureau still failed to provide bigger boats to the fishermen even with her committee's prodding. She then suggested that the Body force the BFAR to provide the boats under the 2023 budget, without having to increase the bureau's budget.

Senate President Zubiri stated that the Senate committee, to which the speech would be referred, could invite the BFAR officials to explain their intended use for the budget, particularly on the provision of boats to fishermen. He also agreed with Senator Tolentino's suggestion of improving and providing more facilities such as health, telecommunication, and television facilities—in Pag-asa Island for the use and benefit of its LGU and several hundreds of families residing there.

Senate President Zubiri then enjoined all the Members to make a joint effort in ensuring that the proposed amendments for the 2024 budget would not be taken out in the bicameral committee hearing so that the Pag-asa Island and its people would not be left out and would still feel that they are part of the republic. In addition, he said that the Body should also continue to push for the implementation of the Horizon 3 of the AFP Modernization Program.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Senator Dela Rosa suggested that the proposed resolution express the Senate's disgust over the incident, written diplomatically but forcefully in order to make a clear statement that the Philippine Senate is both disgusted and offended by the Chinese people's actions against the Philippine troops in the West Philippine Sea.



He said that the resolution would also inform the Filipinos that the Senate was enraged by the bullying that had been done to its citizens and that it also did not want the country to be stepped on by bigger and more powerful countries.

Addressing China, Senator Dela Rosa stated that the Philippines would no longer be tolerating another act of bullying from its people. He mentioned that in the initial talks of the Philippine representatives with the President of the National Assembly of Vietnam on the bullying incidents in the West Philippine Sea, he said that Vietnam had expressed its willingness to join forces with the Philippines to show the world that both countries do not deserve to be bullied on the territorial dispute. He opined that small countries should cooperate to make the world listen to them against bullying and for mutual respect.

Senate President Zubiri then stated that the unnumbered resolution expressing the disgust of the Senate over the incident caught on the video presented by Senator Tolentino would be proposed. He opined that while diplomacy should be observed, the country should also express its sincere anger and disgust for the offense and wrongful act.

Regardless of who owned the debris recovered, Senator Dela Rosa stated that the Chinese should have recognized and respected that it was already within the Philippine territory. He deemed it to be a blatant disrespect and a clear act to inflict damage to the country's sovereignty.

Senate President Zubiri lamented that the Chinese government denied that its people forcibly took the debris from the Philippine Navy personnel even as it was clearly shown in the video. He said he also experienced similar denial when the Chinese Embassy belied a statement he earlier said.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

At the outset, Senator Villanueva congratulated Senator Tolentino for his privilege speech as he associated himself with the statements made by Senators Tolentino, Legarda, and Dela Rosa on bullying. He stated that according to the dictionary, "bully" is a noun which means a blustering, mean or predatory person who, from a perceived position of relative power, intimidates, abuses or harasses or coerces people, especially those considered unlikely to defend themselves.

He opined that the Filipinos who would not get angry over the video of the incident, are not true Filipinos because he believed that the video footage clearly showed bullying. He expressed disappointment that the Chinese embassy denied that the incident happened.

Asked by Senator Villanueva to clarify whether the incident occurred in the disputed area in the West Philippine Sea, Senator Tolentino replied that the arbitral ruling was clear that the place is part of the territorial sea of the Philippines because it is within the 12-nautical miles area adjacent to Pag-asa Island. He said that Cay 1, as shown in the video and picture, is merely 1.9 nautical miles which is definitely within the 12-nautical miles.

Senator Villanueva then expressed his full support to the resolution to be introduced by Senate President Zubiri and Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda. He informed the Body that he would be asking an executive session with the Armed Forces of the Philippines to find out what they could do under the circumstances. He said that solutions should be found on how to help not only the fisherfolk but also the men in uniform. He pointed out that it was necessary to show that while the country does not have China's military might, the Filipinos has a strong desire to stand up to fight for the country's sovereignty and territory.



On the number of diplomatic protests filed by the Philippines against China and if any has been resolved, Senator Tolentino stated that there were about 400 diplomatic protests filed through the years. He said that he was not privy to the results if any have been resolved. He added that a protest before the United Nations had been submitted. Senator Villanueva informed the Body that according to the Department of Foreign Affairs, 61 protests had been filed by the Marcos administration alone.

He opined that the continuous presence of the Chinese structures in the West Philippine Sea, despite the country's arbitration victory in 2016, endangers not only the territorial sovereignty of the Philippines but also the country's food security. He pointed out that as of 2020, seven percent of the country's total fisheries production or 323,312 metric tons of aquatic products was sourced from the West Philippine Sea where thousands of subsistence fisherfolk from Ilocos Region, Central Luzon, MIMAROPA, and parts of the National Capital Region benefit from the vast body of water.

In terms of coral reefs, he said that these cover an estimated area of 4,630 sq. kms. or 30 percent of the total reefs in the country. He noted the importance of coral reefs to marine life as it provides the ecosystem in which thousands of marine species thrive.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros said that apart from gray zone tactics earlier mentioned by Senator Tolentino "white hall" tactics could describe the move where vessels pretend to be civilian vessels but are actually conducting military operations or moves to achieve military objectives. She asked whether it was a gray zone tactic or white hall tactic when Chinese vessels pretend to be coast guard boats but are actually navy vessels. Senator Tolentino replied that there was a need to distinguish between gray zone tactics and black zone tactics, the former being short of aggressive warfare while the latter involve warfare, for instance, shooting. As to the camouflaging vessels being used by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) militia, he said that there is a lot of literature proving that even Chinese fishing boats are manned by the militia.

Senator Hontiveros lamented that instead of communicating openly and honestly navy to navy, coast guard to coast guard the Chinese were not honest brokers at the table.

On the issue of swarming, she recalled that in an earlier confirmation hearing of the Armed Forces officials, one navy official mentioned the phalanx tactic. She expressed concern that several small vessels of China were swarming Philippine territory, and these vessels did not belong to the Chinese fishermen or coast guard but to the Chinese military in Philippine oceans.

Agreeing with her observations, Senator Tolentino disclosed that the movement of the vessels were controlled by the Southern Theater Command based in Hainan, a military structure.

Senator Hontiveros stated that Cavite, Bajo de Masinloc, Pag-asa Island, Mindoro and Palawan all belong to the Philippines. Particularly, she said that Bajo de Masinloc appears in the Velarde Murillo map which negates the imaginary nine-dash line of China.

Asked by Senator Hontiveros on the supposed friendly consultation mentioned by the Chinese Embassy, Senator Tolentino opined that there was nothing friendly about the incident and no consultation took place. He stated that the footage would show aggressive maneuvers which was not akin to friendliness.

Senator Hontiveros averred that taking something from another is stealing which is not friendly. She expressed her appreciation for the note verbale especially in last few years, because



at least it was a repeated assertion by the Philippines against the actions of another country that claims to be a friend. However, she expressed her reservations that a note verbale is defined as "an unsigned diplomatic note written in the third person in the nature of a memorandum but sometimes considered to be more formal." She asserted that beyond note verbale, she hoped that something stronger, yet diplomatic, would be signed by the Executive, or a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate, as proposed by the Senate President, may be served to the other country.

Senator Tolentino noted that a communique to the UNCLOS Secretariat had been presented by other countries and the same could be done by the Philippines.

Noting the potentially powerful suggestion which was already made a communique, Senator Hontiveros averred that China violated the right of "innocent passage," a concept in the law of the sea that allows a foreign vessel to pass through the archipelagic and territorial waters of another state but subject to certain restrictions.

As to what restrictions were not observed, Senator Tolentino said that the vessel must first ask permission from the archipelagic state that they would like to pass through. With regard to the outer space treaty to which China is a signatory and the Philippines is not, he stated that China should have made a request before retrieving the materials/debris that fell from the rocket but it could be seen from the footage that item was forcibly taken by cutting the rope.

Senator Hontiveros also noted that in the Senate report, there was not just one but several pieces of space vehicles that fell in the provinces of Mindoro Occidental and Palawan. She then asked if it would be possible for the diplomatic officials to verify whether there was really a consultation with the UNCLOS secretariat regarding the debris/materials, especially if China continues with its outer space operations. Senator Tolentino added that damages could be demanded from China in case the debris fell on someone else's property.

Senator Hontiveros remarked that the municipal government of Kalayaan should be informed that they could make a claim for damages, if any, since the debris was seen near Pag-asa Island. She believed that the incident would be a wakeup call to the Philippines being a laggard with respect to time, after it failed to assert the Arbitral Tribunal's ruling for six years. She hoped that stronger diplomatic and political steps would be taken along with other claimant nations, just like Vietnam's victory over the four superpowers: China, U.S., France and Russia. She stressed that the Philippines should not allow itself to be bullied in its own backyard.

Senator Hontiveros then cited Marites Vitug's epilogue from her book "Rock Solid" where the author suggested that the Philippines should have undertaken joint fishing expeditions with other claimant states, or joint environmental actions with China so the Filipino fishermen would not have been oppressed, and China would not have dug up the seabed to construct artificial islands in the Philippine territory and turn them into a military base. She said that the government had given China the onus after it failed to act on the issue many years ago, the reason why the armed forces were now having a hard time straddling a balance.

Finally, she also revealed that a month ago, there was a Twitter post by a certain Ray Powell (GordianKnotRay) who was fishing near Maricaban Island in Batangas while broadcasting a phony AIS signal with a #China prefix, claiming that "this ship has been awfully busy for the past weeks starting 15 November," which post caused a stir among netizens and advocates. She asked whether the incident was another case of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing or something more sinister.

Senator Tolentino remarked that the incident was alarming.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR EJERCITO

At the onset, Senator Ejercito wondered whether China is truly a friend to the Philippines, noting how the POGO industry brought ill-effects to the country, like illegal drugs and smuggled agricultural products. He also asked how many of the 400 *note verbale* or diplomatic protests had been resolved. He remarked that the Philippines was truly a laggard compared to other claimants and although the country could not fight a superpower like China, there must at least be a minimal defensive posture just like how the Vietnamese earned respect from the Chinese navy.

He hoped that with the huge allocation given to the AFP, there would be improvements in national defense because the Philippines must uphold its territorial integrity at all cost. Stressing that the Philippines must not allow itself to be bullied, he wished that there would soon be anti-aircraft missiles against aircraft intrusions as well as surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missile systems, and F-16 and F-35 fighter aircrafts. He mentioned that when he went to France with Senate President Zubiri, they went to Normandy to see where the submarines were being manufactured, and that they also visited nuclear power plants, to show how much they wanted to protect the Philippine territory and sovereignty.

He thanked the Body for restoring the AFP Modernization budget, considering the advances made by China after it had established full-blown military bases. He said that for next year's GAB, he would again propose a budget increase for the military to achieve the defense posture that China would respect because no country would want its sovereignty to be trampled on.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR REVILLA

In associating himself with Senator Tolentino's pronouncement, Senator Revilla stated that it was time that Filipinos sang the lines of the national anthem more passionately—"*Lupang hinirang, duyan ka ng magiting. Sa manlulupig, di ka pasisiil.*" He said that the people owe the country its beautiful and rich natural resources, so they must defend and protect every inch of its territory. He also believed that the Filipinos, known for their bravery, should not submit to other people who bully and violate the dignity of their fellow Filipinos, rather, they must stand and, if necessary, die for their country—"ang mamatay nang dahil sa iyo."

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TULFO

Senator Tulfo also associated himself with the privilege speech of Senator Tolentino. He stated that being an honorable member of the international community, every country should honor its obligations and agreements it entered into, including the UNCLOS, believing in their terms and in the protection that they would provide. But he noted that the actions of China had shown disrespect for the terms of the UNCLOS and the arbitral award.

He believed that taking a stand for the country's waters was crucial because if the Philippine government would just let go such brazen acts in the West Philippine Sea, it would open all its waters to breach and allow other countries to again disrespect the rights of the Philippines under international law. He said that the Philippine waters are a rich natural resource that provides livelihood to Filipinos, so the government must use its funds to explore, utilize, maximize, and protect the country's water resources.

Senator Tulfo asserted that the Philippines should speak the language that other countries can understand, and that would be possible if the military is modernized.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

At the outset, Senator Pimentel thanked Senator Tolentino for bringing the matter to the



attention of the Body. The former urged government to continue with the protest and not be deterred in the event that the Chinese government would not respond to the note verbale. He believed that the Philippine government should protect its own interests, regardless of China's response. Moreover, he stated that silence or inaction could be construed as consent to a questionable action under international law, which could affect the country's future standing. Senator Tolentino agreed with Senator Pimentel.

Senator Pimentel also dissuaded the public from becoming frustrated, stating that even if the Philippines issues a thousand note verbale and China does not respond, such protests are considered to support the Philippines' position under international law. Senator Tolentino concurred, stating that the note verbale that accumulate over time may one day have some evidentiary value.

Senator Pimentel stated that as the Minority Leader, he would be evaluating whether the commitment made by the other senators to provide funds for the Municipality of Kalayaan in Pag-asa Island to improve the quality of life of its residents had been kept. He stated that he was receptive to the proposal that would allocate funds for the LGU because he believed that the residents of the island continued to sacrifice so much for the country, and the government should recognize the act by ensuring that the residents live more comfortable lives in the island.

REMARKS OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that in the briefing with intelligence officials, it was revealed that every shipment of goods, rice, meat, and construction materials to Pag-asa Island was subject to Chinese harassment. He said that verbal announcements from the public announcement system of Chinese vessels claimed Pag-asa as part of Chinese territory. He stated that when the director of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency visited the island, he observed a large Chinese vessel anchored approximately 500 meters off the coast. In addition, he stated that he was also alarmed by reports that Chinese naval and coastguard vessels had surrounded the island.

Senate President Zubiri believed that the Philippine government should take action in response to the Chinese government's aggressive posture. He surmised that the Philippine government might have trouble transporting goods and services to the island if Chinese ships were to block the way.


INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

(Continuation)

Senator Pimentel thanked Senate President Zubiri for his concern, noting that securing funding for the budget item should come first before anything else. Senator Tolentino agreed, stating that a budget allocation could be used to improve the LGU in terms of providing livelihood programs for the island's residents.

Senator Pimentel stated that the program would be viable under the 2024 budget and that for the 2023 budget, the Municipality of Kalayaan would be eligible for financial assistance through the Local Government Support Fund as well as the Growth Equity Fund. He believed that the residents of Pag-asa Island, as well as the fishermen and uniformed personnel in the Ayungin shoal, especially the Philippine Marines aboard BRP Sierra Madre, are modern-day heroes.

Further, Senator Pimentel reminded the senators that despite the fact that diplomatic efforts have been made with regard to the West Philippine Sea dispute, it should not prevent them from using appropriate language in a strongly-worded Senate Resolution, in the light of the physical interference depicted in the video. However, he maintained that diplomacy should always be the ultimate objective.



Senator Tolentino proposed that the Office of the Senate President draft the resolution, which, if approved by the Body at a later time, could be included in the documents that President Marcos could bring to his state visit to China on January 3, 2023.

Concerning the rocket debris, specifically the two metallic objects that were recovered from the waters surrounding Pag-asa and Mindoro islands, which Senator Pimentel was thankful did not strike any vessel or fall on inhabited land masses, Senator Tolentino stated that the Philippines must maintain its stance that the Chinese government adhere to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty procedures, to which it is a party. He said that while the Philippines is not a signatory to the treaty, the situation still posed genuine threat to the country.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Padilla voiced his support for his fellow senators who made earlier interpellations on the subject. He then revealed that he made an earlier expedition to Pag-asa Island together with members of the Philippine Navy, Philippine Marines, Philippine Army, and Philippine Air Force and he was made an adopted son of the island.

He stated that the Armed Forces of the Philippines had never been remiss in its duties regarding the Kalayaan Group of Islands, and that when he went to the island to raise the Philippine flag, specifically in areas K1 to K4, the Philippine Air Force, together with the Philippine Navy, was conducting regular patrols of the skies and surrounding waters to ensure the protection of Philippine territory and property. He believed that Philippine troops would be willing to die for the country and would not tolerate any form of bullying from Chinese-manned vessels.

Senator Padilla reminded the Body that the Philippines never surrendered in any episode of its history involving an invasion by a superpower—whether it was Spain, Japan, or the United States.

He agreed with Senator Pimentel's position that the government should always strive for diplomacy although he surmised that the Philippines would continue to cite the arbitral ruling involving the United Nations Convention on the Law of the SEA (UNCLOS), and China would continue to ignore it. Nonetheless, he expressed hope for positive outcomes on the issue.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ESTRADA

Senator Estrada, as chairperson of the Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation, likewise associated himself with the privilege speech of Senator Tolentino. He said that he was not able to watch the video under discussion, but based on the reactions of other senators, he surmised that he would be equally enraged.

He stated that while he agreed with Senator Pimentel's statement that the Philippines needed to strengthen ties with other claimant countries such as Malaysia and Vietnam, the Philippines would first need to modernize its defense equipment if it was to make any substantial contribution alongside other countries in the face of a superpower like China. He assured the Body that he would hold hearings on the subject, while also urging his colleagues to lend whatever assistance they could to increase the AFP modernization fund. Senator Tolentino expressed agreement with Senator Estrada's manifestation.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GO

Senator Go manifested his stand on the West Philippine Sea by stating that the country's national interest and welfare of all Filipinos should always be the paramount consideration. He noted that Article XII, Section 2 of the Constitution provides that "the State shall protect the nation's



marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone, and reserve its use and enjoyment exclusively to Filipino citizens.”

He pointed out that even former President Duterte assured that the government would promote the country’s right over the West Philippine Sea, and even if the Philippines has less military capability, it should not give up even an inch of its territory.

Senator Go believed, however, that both parties should be open to talks so that the disputes could be settled diplomatically and no Filipino lives would be lost.

REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator Tolentino as well as the interpellations and manifestations thereon to the Committee on National Defense, Security, Peace, Unification, and Reconciliation as the primary committee, and to the Committee on Foreign Relations as the secondary committee.

MOTION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva moved that the Body adopt an unnumbered resolution expressing the sense of the Senate concerning the situation in the West Philippine Sea.

He likewise moved that all the Members be made coauthors of the resolution.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros inquired whether the resolution would be subject to style. Senate President Zubiri replied that one of the “whereas” clauses of the resolution could state that the latest incident was another example of China’s persistent violations of the country’s sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea. He added that another “whereas” clause could mention the bravery of the Philippine Navy in retrieving the rocket debris while facing such a massive force against them.

ADOPTION OF THE PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body adopted the proposed resolution, subject to style.


MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri lauded the Philippine Navy personnel who were defending the West Philippine Sea. He stated that Navy Captain Alba, who was in the Senate that day, had earlier expressed the Navy’s willingness to fight to the death for the sake of the country. He believed that it was only right that the government provide the Navy with much-needed equipment.

He also expressed his admiration for all the Members of the Senate of the Nineteenth Congress for standing up against foreign oppressors because they loved their country and would never give up even a square inch of the land of the nation’s future generations.

CHANGE OF COMMITTEE REFERRAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the privilege speech of Senator Poe delivered earlier on the POGO-related abductions, as well as the interpellations and manifestations thereon, which was earlier referred to the Committee on Public Services, was referred instead to the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs.



PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 277

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 277, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING FILIPINO JIU-JITSU ATHLETES KIMBERLY ANNE CUSTODIO, MEGGIE OCHOA AND THE REST OF THE PHILIPPINE TEAM FOR THEIR SUCCESSFUL RUN AT THE 2022 JJIF JIU-JITSU WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Journal* and *Record of the Senate*.

**SPONSORSHIP AND COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES
OF SENATORS REVILLA AND GO**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of the sponsorship and cosponsorship speeches of Senators Revilla and Go, respectively, into the *Record of the Senate*.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR REVILLA

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Villanueva, following is the sponsorship speech of Senator Revilla on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 277:

It is an honor to rise to sponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 268, commending Filipina jiu-jitus athlete Kimberly Anne Custodio for emerging as champion in the 2022 K=J-I-F Jiu Jitus World Championship held in Abu-Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Tunay naming napakasarap ipabmalakig tayo ay Pilipino! Lalo na sa bawat pagkakataong may nanalong atleta ng kumakatawan sa ating bansa – na ang kanilang tagumpay ay malaking tagumpay rin ng ating lahi!

Ito ang eksaktong pakiramdam sap ag-uwi mo ng tropeyo, Kimberly! Dahi sa mga kagaya niyong buong-pusong inaalay ang lakas, galling, at dedikasyon, para itanghal ang watawat ng Pilipinas sa entablado ng bawat laban niyo, ang panalo mo ay panalo ng bawat Pilipino.

Kimberly triumphantly clinched the gold in the competition after ruling the women's 45-kilogram division.

Her outstanding performance deserves to be commended for bringing pride and honor to our country, for her great victory will serve as a beacon of inspiration to the nation's current and future athletes.

Si Kimberly ay isang malaking patunay na saan mo man dalhin an gating mga manlalaro, laging sadyang mangingibabaw ang galling nito.

Muli, congratulatsins at mabuhay ka! Taan noo, atletang Pilipino!

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Villanueva, following is the cosponsorship speech of Senator Go on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 277:

It is with great pride and honor that I co-sponsor the Senate Resolution congratulating and commending Filipino Jiu-Jitsu athletes Kimberly Anne Custodio, Meggie Ochoa and the rest of the Philippine team for their successful run at the 2022 JJIF Jiu-Jitsu world championship held in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

9

As an advocate of long-term sports development and chair of the Senate Committee on Sports, *ikinagagalak ko po ang matagumpay na pangsungkit ng ating mga kababayan sa torneyong ito*. Kimberly Custodio, successfully clinched the gold medal besting her Thai counterpart Kacie Pecha Pechrada in the women's -45kg division. On the other hand, Meggie Ochoa finished the women's -48kg category after her overwhelming victory against Vicki Hoang Ni Ni of Canada claiming our second gold medal in the coveted international competition.

Along with their successful campaign in this international competition, they have also lifted the country's world jiu-jitsu ranking to 4th spot. *Labis po akong nagpapasalamat sa ating mga kababayang atleta na pinapatunayan ang kanilang aking talento sa mundo ng palakasan*.

Their symbolic win is a true testament of the admirable dedication, determination, and perseverance of Filipino competitiveness in the international sporting scene. Indeed, they have not only brought our nation pride and honor, but also they have become a source of inspiration to the youth and women empowerment.

Nais ko din po pasalamatan ang ating ibang mga kababayan for participating in this competition, as well as their coaching staff, and trainers. This astonishing feat would have not been made possible without the support of each and every one of you.

COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all the senators were made coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 277.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 277

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body adopted Proposed Senate Resolution No. 277, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 268, 270, and 282, subject to style.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva congratulated Kimberly Anne Custodio and her colleagues for winning the gold medal at the 2022 JJIF Jiu-Jitsu International Federation World Championship held in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

REMARKS OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri stated that he was proud of all the Senate employees in the Secretariat and the offices of the senators for all their hard work. He stated that the institution was a truly functional Senate for national reconstruction.

He also pointed out that it was the first time in two years that the Senate as an institution would feel the Christmas spirit, which they should all take to heart. He surmised that even Senator Padilla would celebrate Christmas because he considers Jesus to be a prophet according to the Qur'an. He urged everyone to celebrate Christmas with a renewed hope that the following year would be a better one for the Philippines and that they would work together toward that end.

He then requested that his yearend message be inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

9

YEAR-END MESSAGE OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

At the instance of Senate President Zubiri, following is his year-end message:

Let me take this moment to look back on the triumphs and the challenges of the last year, to help us as we move towards the year ahead.

Today, with pride in our work, we take a short break from a productive season.

But we know that only the plenary aspect of what we do will take a momentary pause. Our mandate obliges us to work through the holidays, from hearing experts on policies which must be perfected, to helping those whose misfortunes darken the season of joy.

Since we first convened 20 weeks ago, we have devoted every single day to carrying out the duties the Constitution has assigned us, and delivering the results our constituents expect of us.

Of the bills we have acted on, none is more important than the national budget, which will soon be on its way to the desk of the President.

It is our *pasalubong* to him when he returns from Brussels.

Consisting of thousands of funding lines, this massive yet minute book of spending, finances the start of the reconstruction our people deserve after three years of being pummeled by the pandemic.

The way the budget, and all the bills, are hammered in the Senate is a proof that ours is not only an institution driven by initiative but also by industry.

The Finance committee, and that means all of us, especially the staff, did not only burn the midnight oil but often turned off the office lights when the day was already breaking.

But whether they are the budget, or bills, our work falls into two genres:

Providing safety nets to those who—not by choice, but by circumstances—continue to fall in between the cracks.

And providing the scaffolding on which citizens, companies, and communities can climb up from the craters of the pandemic.

We champion innovation while helping the indigents, in the hope that those innovations are the very means of ending indigency.

This double-barrel approach is manifested, for example, in the health budget next year. While we will be spending for medical students on scholarship to school and improve hospital facilities, financial aid to families who are one sickness away from bankruptcy will be sustained

And our campaign advocacy of providing specialty hospitals or centers in the regions will be realized soonest, as we have budgeted P2.2 billion for the construction and enhancement of regional specialty hospitals.

While commuter subsidies will be retained, billions are appropriated for rail, so more trains can bring more people to more places, on time.

While we will be giving away farming inputs in a targeted manner, there will be measures that will unlock ownership restrictions on farmlands

These kinds of tandem initiatives—which blend the macro and the micro, the long-gestating with the quick-acting—is the template that this Senate, this hardworking, forward-looking Senate, should follow when we return here this January.

Our labors in the coming months will sustain our path to recovery while battling the headwinds which threaten to slow down our march to a place better than where we were before the pandemic.

Describing the past two Christmases as bleak is an understatement. “Merry Christmas” then was an empty greeting.

But freed from lockdowns, liberated from quarantine, and no longer spending Noche Buena in hospitals, perhaps now we can truly say “Happy New Year” with full of optimism.

This is also the time to write New Year's wishes, and most important, resolutions, the latter a tradition that should not exempt us as a collective body.

First, let me wish, "Peace on earth and good will to men." That brutal war raging far from us must end as we are not spared of its painful fallout of high fuel, food, and fertilizer prizes.

May our government be able to deflect the many crises still buffeting us, especially their effects on the least and the last among us.

We have so much work to do.

Ngunit ang pagbaba ng presyo ng bilihin, pagkain, kuryente, at utilities ay hindi pinapangarap, kundi trinatrabaho at pinaghihirapan.

Handa po ang Senado makibahagi sa paghahanap ng solusyon.

Handa tayong makilahok sa isang executive-legislative battleplan na nakafocus sa pagkain, trabaho, presyo, edukasyon, oportunidad.

This is so because more than finding faults, this Senate would rather find solutions.

Sa ating mga kababayan, and nais n'yo ay nais rin namin: Harinawa'y ang darating na taon ay puno ng sigla, hitik ng makabuluhang pagbabago, at tunay na maghahatid ng ginhawa.

Sa ating pagtutulungan, sa ating pagsisikap, sa awa ng Maykapal, kaya nating kamtin ang mga iyan. May God Bless the Philippines!

REMINDER

Senator Villanueva reminded the Members of Senate that Resolution No. 243 authorizes all standing committees, oversight committees, and special committees of the Senate to conduct hearings, meetings and consultations during every recess of the Senate to have continuity in the process of passing pending proposed legislation and to conduct investigations on issues of national interest in aid of relevant legislation.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, January 23, 2023.

It was 6:00 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on January 23, 2023

Atty. RENATO N. BANTUG Jr.
Secretary of the Senate

