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NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

PREPARED BY THE
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SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES

SESSION NO. 50
Wednesday, February 15, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:03 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel “Migz” F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Maria Lourdes “Nancy” S. Binay led the prayer, to wit:

Butihin at mapagpalang Diyos, pinupuri at pinapasalamatan Ka namin sa panibagong araw na Inyong ipinagkaloob. Naniniwala po kami na patuloy Ninyo kaming bibiyayaan ng sapat na lakas para harapin ano mang hamon ang aming pinagdadaanan. At ngayong buwan ng mga puso, dalangin po namin na patuloy Ninyo kaming turuang magmahal gaya ng Inyong pagmamahal sa amin.

Tulungan Mo po kaming laging ipamalas ang Inyong pagmamahal at laging tumayo kasama ng mga dukha, api, at walang kakayahang ipagtanggol ang kanilang mga sarili.

Gabayan Ninyo din po kami sa pagpapatuloy ng aming sesyon at nawa’y patuloy kaming manindigan para sa katarungan, kapayapaan, at pagkakaisa.

Pagpalain po Ninyo ang aming bansa. Dalangin po namin ang isang kina-bukasang puspos ng pag-asa at ginhawa.

Ang lahat ng ito ay aming hinihiling sa Ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak, at ng Espiritu Santo.

Amen.



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

With 21 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

Senator Cayetano (A) arrived after the roll call.

Senator Cayetano (P) was absent and out of the country as indicated in the letter dated February 14, 2023 of her chief legislative officer.

Senator Escudero was unable to attend the session as he was on official business as indicated in the letter dated February 14, 2023 of his chief of staff.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

Senator Villanueva acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the following guests:

- Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin;
- Special Assistant to the President (SAP) Antonio Lagdameo Jr.;
- Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual;
- Labor Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma; and
- PLLO Secretary Mark Llandro L. Mendoza.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the guests to the Senate.

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. 49 (February 14, 2023) and considered it approved.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Letter from the House of Representatives, informing the Senate that on 6 February 2023, the House of Representatives passed the following House bills, in which it requested the concurrence of the Senate:

House Bill No. 1270, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTING POLICIES FOR THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE WELFARE OF WORKERS OR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS IN THE FILM, TELEVISION, AND RADIO ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; and Public Information and Mass Media;

House Bill No. 6571, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES IN THE ACQUISITION OF RIGHT-OF-WAY, SITE, OR LOCATION FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10752, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE RIGHT-OF-WAY ACT"

To the Committees on Public Works; Justice and Human Rights; and Ways and Means

House Bill No. 6683, entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH, REPEALING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6971, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE PRODUCTIVITY INCENTIVES ACT OF 1990

To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; and Ways and Means

House Bill No. 6716, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FISHERFOLK RESETTLEMENT AREAS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SEC. 108 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8550, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "PHILIPPINE FISHERIES CODE OF 1998," AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10654

To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Urban Planning, Housing and Resettlement

House Bill No. 6717, entitled

AN ACT SUSPENDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE USE OF MOTHER TONGUE AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION FOR KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 3 PROVIDED UNDER SECTION 4 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10533, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "ENHANCED BASIC EDUCATION ACT OF 2013"

To the Committee on Basic Education

and House Bill No. 6718, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING PROTECTION AND INCENTIVES TO FREELANCE WORKERS.



**To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development;
and Ways and Means**

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1876, entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING OPEN ACCESS IN DATA TRANSMISSION AND
PROVIDING ADDITIONAL POWERS TO THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICA-
TIONS COMMISSION

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To The Committees on Science and Technology; and Public Services

Senate Bill No. 1877, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PROGRAM FOR
ALL BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

Introduced by Senator Lapid

**To the Committees on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures
Thinking; And Finance**

Senate Bill No. 1878, entitled

AN ACT TO DESIGNATE THE FOURTH (4TH) DAY OF NOVEMBER OF EVERY
YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE PROVINCE OF
QUEZON TO BE KNOWN AS HERMANO PULI DAY, MANDATING
CONCERNED AGENCIES TO CONDUCT EVENTS DURING ITS OBSERVANCE

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Local Government

Senate Bill No. 1879, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING THE HALAMANAN FESTIVAL OF THE MUNICIPALITY
OF GUIGUINTO, PROVINCE OF BULACAN A MAJOR TOURIST
ATTRACTION AND DECLARING FOR THAT PURPOSE JANUARY 22 OF
EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE
MUNICIPALITY OF GUIGUINTO AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

To the Committee on Local Government

Senate Bill No. 1880, entitled

AN ACT CREATING PROGRAMS FOR INCARCERATED PARENTS AND THEIR
CHILDREN



Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality; Justice and Human Rights; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1881, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE MEDIA ARTS UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Public Information and Mass Media; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1882, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY SERVICE REQUESTS RELATED TO CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation

Senate Bill No. 1883, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING A NATIONAL MEDICINE SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1884, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTALLATION OF AUDIBLE TRAFFIC SIGNS WITH PUSH BUTTONS FOR THE BENEFIT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, THE ELDERLY AND PREGNANT WOMEN

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Public Works; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 481, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY - DASMARIÑAS FOR WINNING THE MICROSOFT SHOWCASE SCHOOL BIGGEST IMPACT AWARD FOR ASIA

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules



Proposed Senate Resolution No. 482, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING JOHANNE SIY FOR
BEING HAILED AS THE 2023 ASIA'S BEST FEMALE CHEF OF THE YEAR

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 483, entitled

A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PHILIPPINE SENATE'S CONDOLENCES TO THE
GOVERNMENTS OF TÜRKIYE AND SYRIA ON THE DEATH TOLL CAUSED BY
THE 2023 TÜRKIYE-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE; CALLING THE PHILIPPINE
GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE AID; AND UNDERTAKE AN INFORMATION
CAMPAIGN FOR EARTHQUAKE PREPARATION AND RESPONSE

Introduced by Senator Pimentel

To the Committee on Rules

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

With the permission of the Body, the session was suspended.

It was 3:12 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:22 p.m., the session was resumed with Senator Ejercito presiding.

SECOND ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

RESOLUTION

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 484, entitled:

RESOLUTION CALLING FOR AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION INTO
INCREASED LOGISTICS COSTS IN THE PHILIPPINES CAUSED BY RISING
PORT FEES AND CHARGES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

To the Committee on Public Services

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Report No. 29, prepared and submitted by the Committee on Foreign Relations, on
Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485, entitled

RESOLUTION CONCURRING IN THE RATIFICATION OF THE "REGIONAL
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT,"

recommending its approval without amendment.

Sponsors: Senators Zubiri and Legarda

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 29 on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 29 ON PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 485

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485 (Committee Report No. 29), entitled

**RESOLUTION CONCURRING IN THE RATIFICATION OF THE REGIONAL
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT.**

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senate President Zubiri for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485, the Resolution Concurring in the Ratification of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, Senate President Zubiri delivered the following speech:

Before I begin my sponsorship, I want us all to take a moment to recognize all our key agencies that are in the Chamber today in support of this measure.

We have with us the Office of the President represented by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin; Special Assistant to the President Anton Lagdameo, Jr. We have with us Undersecretary Leonardo Roy A. Cervantes; as well as the Department of Trade and Industry led by Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual, Usec. Ceferino S. Rodolfo, and our chief trade negotiator, Asec. Allan Gepty; the Department of Finance Secretary, Benjamin Diokno; the Department of Labor and Employment led by Sec. Bienvenido Laguesma and Usec. Felipe Egargo; the Department of Agriculture led by Usec. Agnes Miranda, Usec. Domingo Panganiban, Asec. Arnel De Mesa, Asec. Noel Padre, and Asec. Rex Estoperez; the Department of Foreign Affairs led by Usec. Jesus Domingo, Usec. Antonio Morales, Usec. Eduardo de Vega, and Asec. Bernie Candolada; the Bureau of Customs led by Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio and Asst. Commissioner Vincent Philip C. Maronilla; the Tariff Commission represented by Commissioner Marissa Paderon; the DTI-Bureau of Investment represented by Exec. Dir. Corazon Dichosa; the National Economic and Development Authority represented by Usec. Rosemarie Edillon; and our PLLO Secretary, Dong Mendoza.

Buong-buo po ang suporta ng ating gobyerno sa Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement—full house, full support, ‘ika nga, ng ating mga kaibigan dito. Of course, matagal na pong suportado ng gobyerno ang RCEP at concurrence na lamang ng Senado ang hinihintay nito. This is precisely why I stand here today to present the RCEP Agreement for approval and concurrence of the Senate.

Una na po itong sumalang sa Senado noong Eighteenth Congress by our dear Minority Leader, who ably handled all the hearings and the debates on the floor, Sen. Aquilino “Koko”



Pimentel III. *At narito po muli tayo*, and I believe that with the benefits of time and, more importantly, additional consultations with concerned sectors, we have a good opportunity to evaluate RCEP anew.

Magandang balikan natin ang RCEP ngayon, especially since we can now observe how well our fellow RCEP signatories have been faring since all greenlit the implementation of agreements in their countries.

Ayaw ko pong mapag-iwanan tayo. Ayaw ko pong tingnan tayo ng ibang bansa bilang isang isolationist o isang North Korea dito sa region na sarado sa malayang kalakalan. Ayaw ko pong pigilan ang paglago ng ating industriya at pag-unlad ng ating mamamayan. But it would be wrong to simply argue that we must join it because others did. We must not simply be swept by the bandwagon, rather we should join out of the belief that it will create a snowball effect on jobs for our people and markets for our produce.

I truly feel it is imperative that we consider the Agreement anew. And what best way to go about this than by sweeping RCEP back down to the basics so we can try to understand what it can really do for our country.

The RCEP agreement is the largest regional free trade agreement in the world, a critical policy tool to strengthen our participation in the global economy. At its core, the Agreement is really about establishing clear, stable, and predictable rules in doing trade and investments in the region so it will be more convenient and competitive for our businesses and investors to be integrated in the global economy. Let me repeat: It will make it clear, stable, and predictable roles in doing trade and investments.

That is why in RCEP, we have chapters and provisions covering trade in goods, rules of origin, customs procedure and trade facilitation, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, standards and technical regulations, and conformity procedures, trade remedies, services, investments, intellectual property, e-commerce, competition, small and medium enterprises, economic and technical corporation, and dispute settlement, among others. *Kaya nga comprehensive agreement talaga ito.*

In other words, RCEP Agreement covers almost all aspects of the economy. *Hindi lang po ito tungkol sa reduction or elimination ng tariff rates, o pagbubukas ng merkado sa importasyon. Talagang all-encompassing po ang coverage ng RCEP.* Thus, as we examine this Agreement, we have to appreciate it in its broader context.

Let me emphasize as a premise that in a globalized economy, the Philippines cannot afford to isolate itself from the rest of the world or even send a signal to that effect.

As a policy, we want to attract more investments. That is why we recently passed here in the Senate the Foreign Investments Act, the Public Services Act, and the Retail Trade Liberalization Act. We need to provide incentives so we passed the CREATE Law so that investors would come to the Philippines, do business, generate jobs, and eventually, fuel our economy.

Today, production of goods and services have already been revolutionized by international trade. Goods and services are no longer either “Made in the Philippines” or “Made in China” in that one “wins” when its products are exported to another country, or “loses” when it imports products into their country.

In a global economy, products are put together in one country from many components sourced in other countries, and then sold all over the world. As a result, vastly fewer products are solely made in any one country. *Tingnan ninyo po ang mapa. Iyan iyong ating trade agreement—RCEP.*

Let me say this: This is what RCEP is all about. If you look at the slide, it provides a stable platform for countries in the region to optimize their participation in the global economy and the global value chain. *Iyong nakikita po natin*, that is 30% of the global economy. That is the global population, and that is 30% of the GDP of the world.

Thus, when the Philippines signed this Agreement, almost all business organizations, industry associations, and foreign chambers manifested strong support for the country’s immediate ratification.

To name a few, we have the support of the following: 1) Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the largest business organization in the country; 2) the Australian-New Zealand Chamber



of Commerce of the Philippines; 3) Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association, Inc.; 4) Confederation of Wearable Exporters of the Philippines of the garments sector; 5) Canned Sardines Association of the Philippines; 6) Federation of Philippine Industries; 7) Garment Business Association of the Philippines; 8) IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines; 9) Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry; 10) Joint Foreign Chambers—the coalition of the American Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines, Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce, Canada Chamber, European Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines, Korean Chamber, the Philippine Association of Multinational Regional Companies Regional Headquarters, Inc. (PAMURI), and the Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc. (PhilExport).

Even international bodies and organizations such as the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) have recognized the value and importance of RCEP, especially in our post-pandemic recovery.

Sadly, to date, the Philippines is the only RCEP signatory state that has not yet ratified the RCEP Agreement, and businesses and foreign investors are already getting wary with the consistency of our trade and investment policy direction. *Siguro naman, mga kapatid ko rito sa Senado, hindi naman siguro tayo ang pinakamagaling sa kanilang lahat. Ito po ay mga bansa na katulad ng ating mga kababayan sa ASEAN region, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and China.*

Let me give you a little background: The RCEP took effect on January 1, 2022. After a quick review and progress of its implementation over a year, our friends in ASEAN have already been reaping the benefits of this RCEP Agreement. And do not take it from me. *Baka sabihin ninyo, si Migz ay bolero o baka iyong DTI ay bolero iyan. Ipapakita po namin sa inyo sa screen. Ang sabi ko sa mga taga-DTI ay ipakita natin ang nailalabas sa ibang bansa.*

For example, Vietnam's exports to RCEP countries reached US\$108.48 billion in 2022, and they increased by 16% from the previous year. Many of these gains were from exports of agricultural products. Seafood exports for Vietnam increased by 34% in the first few months of 2022 upon joining and ratifying the RCEP, with RCEP countries accounting for 64% of total exports.

Fruit and vegetable exports to China—*papuntang China po ito*—surged 30,000 tons in December last year. Among these fruit and vegetable products was durian. And in just one month, Vietnam earned nearly US\$50 million from exporting durian to China. This is one product where the Philippines should have a competitive advantage. *Kami nina Senator Dela Rosa, Senator Go, at Senator Pimentel na taga-Mindanao, durian ang napakarami sa amin and we can export this immediately to China. This is one product where the Philippines should have a competitive advantage, which is not being utilized as we continue to withhold participation in RCEP. It is Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam that send durian to these countries. Mas masarap po iyong durian natin, with due respect.*

Also, Thailand and Cambodia likewise reported gains in total trade with RCEP countries of 7.1% and 4%, respectively. Thailand's exports to RCEP countries totaled US\$140 billion in 2022. As for Cambodia, its garments industry—*iyong paggawa po ng mga damit* for export—has been making money since the entry into force of RCEP. In total, its garments industry earned US\$10.25 billion from exports in the first three quarters of 2022. This represented 24% year-on-year growth—24% increase. This is an industry where the Philippines hopes to regain a comparative advantage through RCEP. *Hindi ba magaling tayo ryan?* We should also have a thriving garments export.

Meanwhile, Malaysia is forecasting a 9.3% growth in exports in 2023 with RCEP's full entry into force being one of the factors.

Definitely, this development is a clear indication of RCEP's positive effects. We cannot afford to be a fence-sitter while witnessing other ASEAN member-states reaping the benefits of this Agreement. Not only will we be put to a disadvantage, but we will also be missing out on a lot of opportunities.

Let me show some advantages of RCEP that we are missing out as we further delay our participation: *Una*, the fact that this is the largest free trade area in the world, composed of 15 parties, is in itself an advantage. *Tingnan po natin ang mapa.* Imagine, we can source raw materials and intermediate goods from these 15 countries, process the products in the Philippines, and export these products back to RCEP (countries). *Sana ay makuha ninyo lahat. Kung mayroon tayong*

pabrika sa Pilipinas at gusto po tayong gumawa ng isang produkto rito pero ang raw materials ay kukunin natin sa RCEP countries, zero tariff po iyan pagpasok dito sa atin at paglabas din, at pagpasok sa kanila ng finished product ay zero tariff.

While it is true that we have already existing FTAs, the benefit of a wider cumulation cannot be enjoyed in these FTAs. As an example, in RCEP, Philippine garment manufacturers will be able to source fabrics from China or anywhere in the world, export it back to Japan at a preferential tariff. This is not previously possible because the rules of origin under the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP)—*iyang ating* FTA with Japan—and the Philippines-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (PJEPA) restrict Philippine exports to sourcing fabrics only from Japan or ASEAN countries. *Kaya kung gusto po natin mag-export para sa Uniqlo, hindi po natin puwedeng gawin iyon unless we get our fabrics from Japan under the existing agreement.* This strict rule is not reflective of all the sourcing patterns and requirements of Philippine garment manufacturers.

Also, under RCEP, the Philippines was able to secure zero tariff rates for garments compared to the 5% tariff rate under the existing ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Agreement (AKFTA). Right now *po*, 5% tariff *ang* garments *natin kapag ipinasok natin sa* Korea. But under this RCEP, zero tariff *na po*. We can send our garments to Korea at zero tariff. *Pagdating sa Korea, wala po tayong taxes na babayaran; thus, we can sell cheaper, mas mura po ang mabebenta natin.*

If the country continues to be not a party to the RCEP Agreement—*making po tayong lahat*—garment manufacturers in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other ASEAN members-states will have a comparative advantage against our own garment manufacturers. *Lugi po tayo, hindi po natin maibebenta nang mas mura.*

RCEP also works in favor of our fish canning factories as they can globally source fish and export them to RCEP regions. Currently, some Philippine tuna canneries source the raw material from non-RCEP parties. *Marami po tayong kaibigan na may* fishing industry. They get their fish now from Papua New Guinea or Norway. Under the FTAs with Japan, they are unable to get preferential tariff because of their sourcing pattern. So the exporters pay high export duties. With RCEP, their exports to Japan will now qualify for preferential tariffs. So, these are from the provinces of General Santos, Zamboanga City, Palawan—*iyong mga* high fish producing areas *natin. Magkakaroon na sila ng* advantage with this.

Our farmers and producers of papaya and durian, as I mentioned earlier, will also benefit because they can now export these products to South Korea at a preferential arrangement, that is, from 24% in the ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Agreement to zero percent in 10 years under RCEP. So, imagine, *kung hindi tayo sasama rito, 24% taon-taon ang babayaran nating taripa para sa ating mga prutas na papasok po sa* Korea *na hindi nila puwedeng gawin katulad ng* papaya *at* durian. They cannot produce them in Korea. So, at least we have a chance that within 10 years, zero percent *ang taripa.*

Same also with our farmers and producers of coffee. Because they can now export these products to Japan at a preferential arrangement, that is from 10% to 12% in the ASEAN-Japan Economic Partnership, to zero percent. *Pababa po iyan.* That is cumulative. *Pababa ng* 1%, 2%, 3% in 16 years under RCEP. *Sa* Davao *masarap ang* kape. They have coffee beans in Davao, Bukidnon, Cordillera, Cavite, and Batangas. *Iyong katabi ko* (referring to Senator Tolentino) has a very good coffee production industry.

Another advantage is that manufacturers of mixtures of preserved fruits (i.e., fruit cocktail) and fruit juices (i.e., pomelo juice, carrot juice, mango juice) will enjoy an improved concession in Japan, that is, from 5%-9% now existing, to zero percent in 2016 under RCEP. *Kung hindi tayo mag-RCEP, sa* Thailand *na lamang sila bibili. Wala na po tayong* chance *na makapasok doon kasi mahal po ang ating produkto. Napakasimple lamang po. Ito ngang* fruit cocktail—right now, Cagayan de Oro is where Del Monte plant is, and General Santos is where DOLE produces fruit cocktail for our fruit salad—5% to 29% *po ang* taxation *nito ngayon* under the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership. If we join RCEP, it will be 0% in 16 years. *Wala na po tayong babayaran na taripa.* Imagine, *puwede na tayong mag-retire* as farmers. I will retire as a farmer. I hope I can plant this papaya, make fruit cocktails, and send it to Japan one day.

Even our beverage companies can now export alcoholic beverages like beer, gin, and rum to South Korea at a preferential arrangement, from 15% tax *sa* existing ASEAN-Korea Free Trade

Agreement to 0% in 15 years under RCEP. Can we imagine, 0%? So, *lahat po, pati iyong Don Papa, ay puwede nang ipasok doon.*

These are just examples of Philippine key products of interest that were able to gain improved market access in the RCEP, and will likely be disadvantaged if the Philippines stays out of RCEP. *Klaro po. Ipinapakita ko lamang ang mga concrete example para ma-digest nating lahat.*

On trade rules, RCEP also provided simplified and convenient rules of conducting trade in the region, from flexible certification procedures; advanced rulings for tariffication, valuation, and rules of origin; and time-bound consultations and resolution of issues relating to trade measures, among others. *Ibig sabihin po ay simple na. Kasi kung hindi po tayo sasali riyon at doon lamang tayo sa existing free trade agreements natin—iba ang free trade agreement sa Japan, iba ang sa ASEAN-China, at iba ang sa Korea—kung sa ease of doing business pa, malilito tayo kung magdadala tayo sa iba't ibang bansa. Litong-lito po tayo sa iba't ibang rules of conducting trade kaya simplified na ito.*

In the process, business will be able to take advantage of the enhanced preferential access to RCEP parties, and strengthen their capacity to participate in global value chains. This will be beneficial to MSMEs because this agreement provides a platform called the RCEP-SME Chapter, and institutionalizes support and cooperation for them to be integrated in the regional global product chain and a bigger market.

I would like to put this on record. RCEP is the first and only free agreement of ASEAN with a dedicated chapter on SMEs. First and only. *Iyong ibang charters natin with ASEAN, wala po tayong dedicated sa small and medium enterprises. This is it. To give an example, iyong sinabi ko kanina, Potato Corner now will have an easier chance to go all over ASEAN, maybe even China, because of these simplified rules. Sabi ko nga, sa amin sa Camiguin—because I love the Island Province of Camiguin sa Cagayan de Oro, I do not know kung nakabisita na po kayo riyon—we have these pastels. Iyong parang pandesal na may caramel sa loob na napakasarap. They produce that in Camiguin. Now, with these simplified rules and ease of doing business, makakabenta na sila sa Indonesia. They can sell in Malaysia without having any difficulty with these simplified cross-border rules.*

RCEP will also push for a legal framework that is favorable e-commerce, especially during a time when cross-border activities increasingly shifted online.

What are the positive results as a consequence of RCEP? As economic activity increases—consequence po ito. *Hindi po ito para sa exporters; hindi ito para sa importers. Ano ba ang mga negosyo na makikinabang sa RCEP?*

Because of these consequences, more factories will be put up. The goods and services will be transacted and have to be mobilized, *kaya lalakas po ang complementary sector such as transportation, trucking ng mga gamit, logistics, warehousing, cold storage, pati energy production, and even infrastructure will flourish, not to mention attract more investments. Kaya narito po si Secretary Laguesma of the DOLE because he knows na dadami ang trabaho natin kapag tayo ay sumama rito. Jobs, jobs, jobs, wika nga.*

Sa paglago ng ating kalakalan sa RCEP region, asahan natin ang ripple effect sa iba't-ibang sektor. Halimbawa, sa pagpasok ng foreign investments, hihilain nito nang pataas ang ating construction industry. Sa paglakas naman ng ating exports, kasama nitong palalakasin ang transport sector na kakailanganin natin sa paghatid ng ating mga produkto, at siyempre, sa paglago ng iba't-ibang manufacturing industries katulad ng garments, tech parts, and canned goods. Tataas din ang demand on related industries katulad ng packaging.

Iyan naman ang pangako ng RCEP. Mas maunlad na kalakalan, mas maraming trabaho, at mas murang bilihin.

Let us now focus on the problems of agriculture. *Kasi, dito po tayo nakabinbin at lahat ng sector, siyempre, ay concerned, particularly on agriculture.*

Of course, with all these benefits, we understand the issues and concerns of some groups of farmers who are opposed to the ratification of the RCEP agreement. *Ako po, alam naman po ninyo na tumayo ako dito ng ilang beses at dinedepensahan ko po ang ating mga magsasaka. I stood up many times against importations, I stood up many times against smuggling, I stood up many times for different industries, particularly the sugar sector.*

Bilang isang agrikulturista by education and by profession, naiintindihan ko po ang mga pangamba ng ating mga magsasaka. Alam ninyo naman po kung paano ko ipaglaban ang ating mga magsasaka dito sa loob ng Senado. Kaya gusto ko pong tiyakin sa sektor na hindi tatapakan ng RCEP ang ating mga magsasaka; at hindi nito papatayin ang ating agrikultura. Hindi ko rin naman po ito isusulong kung hindi benepisyo ang nakikita ko, at dala natin dito. At ako ang unang haharang nito kung makakasama ito sa atin.

In the public hearings—and this is very important—it was confirmed that highly sensitive agricultural products such as rice, swine meat, poultry meat, potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbage sugar, and carrots are exempted or excluded. *Hindi po sila kasama dito. Itong mga produktong ipinapakita ko sa inyo na araw-araw ay isinisigaw ng ating mga kritiko, ay hindi kasali sa RCEP. Sa ating mga kababayan na nakikinig po sa atin on Facebook Live.*

In fact, for the record, in RCEP, the Philippines merely gave additional preferential agreements to 33 agricultural tariff lines, specifically for Australia, New Zealand, China, and Korea compared to the existing ASEAN + 1 FTAs. This is only equivalent to 1.9% of the total agricultural tariff lines. *Ito, napakaganda po nito. Iba iyong tariff lines sa produkto, mga kapatid: out of 33 agricultural tariff lines, 17 tariff lines are for raw materials, eight tariff lines are for inputs, and only eight tariff lines are for final goods.*

Itong 33 tariff lines—ipakita natin sa screen—it is only equivalent to 15 agricultural products. It is only 15 agricultural products, and many of which we do not even produce. Babasahin ko: “fish fillet; frozen mackerel; celery; sausages; olives—wala po tayong olives kasi Mediterranean country lamang iyan at ayaw ng ulan. Kapag umulan, patay ang olive tree; spinach—maliit lamang ang spinach, kaunti ang spinach natin sa bansa; olive oil—wala po tayong olive oil. Black pepper—we have a thriving black pepper industry, but if we can see right now, it only affects Republic of Korea, 5%, and in year 15th, it is 0%. So, napaka-gradual ng bagsak, 15 years pa bago maging 0%.

Itong live chicken and live swine sasabihin ng mga pilosopo, “Ay, mayroon tayong live chicken, mayroong live swine.” Alam ninyo po mga kababayan, magpadala kayo ng live swine dito galing ng China, isang linggo o sampung araw ang biyahe sa barko ay patay na iyon, unless may tao na magpapakain doon sa barko, hindi ba? Masyado naman mahal kung ililipad sila.

This live chicken, ganoon din. Lalo na ngayon. Sigurado kapag dinala mo iyan sa ibang bansa dito sa barko, halos kalahati na ang mortality niyan. Patay na iyan. It does not make any sense. They lose half their weight, right? So, it is obvious. Our chicken and poultry producers, and our swine producers are protected. If my fellow senators will ask me, itong live swine and live chicken was for our Asian neighbors that are contiguous to one another. Hindi po sila archipelago. Ano po iyan—Cambodia, Myanmar, China—with all these Indochina countries like Vietnam. Kaya siguro inilagay nila iyon.

Preserved onions. Corn starch. Iyong corn starch nga 1% lamang ang bagsak in year 20 pa—1% lamang. Ito iyong nakakatawa. Wala naman pong feeds. Kasi may lumapit sa akin, iyong feeds, mura sa ibang bansa. Pagpasok dito, paano naman kami? It is feeds for primates. Hindi po feeds for livestock. Pagkain ng unggoy iyan. Iyan lamang ang natatangalan ng tariff rate. All right.

So, moving on—am I clear as day? All right.

Napaka-insignificant po ng trade natin sa mga produktong ito. Kaya ikumpara mo sa benepisyo na makukuha natin sa RCEP, walang duda, mas lamang po ang arrangement na nakuha natin.

With respect to the availability of World Trade Organization (WTO) remedies as raised by the group of farmers—

Article 7.9 of the RCEP agreement is clear on the matter: “Nothing in this Agreement shall affect the rights and obligations of the parties under Article XIX of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 and the Safeguards Agreement.”

Sa madaling salita, nandiyan pa rin po ang WTO safeguards. Hindi mawawala ang WTO safeguards.

The transitional RCEP safeguard measure under Article 7.2, referred to by oppositors, is just an additional trade remedy available to RCEP parties. What is only prohibited is the imposition of both transitional RCEP safeguard measures and WTO safeguard measures on the same goods at the same time.

Equally important *po ito mga kababayan*—adequate flexibilities or safety nets are provided in the agreement to cover unwarranted or exceptional circumstances that may occur in the future, including measures related to security, health, and emergency situation.

“Ano po ito?” *Tinanong ko po ang ating* trade negotiator. *Puwede pa rin pala po tayong magpasa ng* legislation. We can pass legislation, including rules and regulations for the departments that can restrict imports on the premise of public safety, public health, and emergency situations. So, our hands are not tied. If we feel *nalulugi ang isang sektor*, we can pass legislation or pass regulations. It will not be violative of the agreement.

To further allay the fears of the agriculture sector, we have also come up with a set of guidelines—*ito, maganda po ito. Ito po ang recommendation ng aking kapatid, ate, Tita Ganda, Loren Legarda, our Senate President Pro Tempore, during the hearing of the RCEP—that we will add further protective measures and capacity building programs for the sector, thereby ensuring that they can take full advantage and opportunities afforded to us by the Agreement—and I thank Sen. Loren Legarda for not sleeping last night to make sure that these guidelines and instructions are in place.*

Under these guidelines, two-pronged *po ang atake natin para gawing competitive ang ating* agricultural sector against importation. *Patitibayin natin ang* border and quarantine controls—*iyan ang utos natin dito sa ating* guidelines—*kontra-smuggling*, and—I just like to put on record, the President just appointed a new Bureau of Customs Chief because he really is hell-bent on catching agricultural smuggling.

We will also modernize and empower our own sector. To the second point, we will strengthen various developmental programs of the Department of Agriculture, such as the National Rice Program, National Corn Program, High-Value Crops Development Program, National Livestock Program, National Organic Agriculture Program, National Fisheries Program, Agricultural Machinery, Equipment, Facilities and Infrastructure Program under the Agriculture Modernization Plan.

Kasama rin sa guidelines *ang access ng ating mga magsasaka. Nararapat na* credit insurance, loans, and grants.

We also have trade promotion, productivity, profitability, and competitiveness programs such as the Science, Technology, Innovation-Driven Industrialization Strategy, the Shared Services Facility, the Philippine Export Competitiveness Program, and the Consultancy for Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Program, among others. These are from my favorite agency, the Department of Trade and Industry.

We also have made space for good governance measures, to foster trust, transparency, and accountability. *Dito, palalakasin natin ang* feedback mechanism, *at sisiguruhin namin na may* genuine representation and participation *ang lahat ng ating* stakeholders, including agrarian reform beneficiaries, indigenous communities, *at sa ating mga* board, council, *at* committee.

Kasama natin ang sektor sa policy and program development, including budget preparation and allocation.

Under the guidelines, we are also pushing for job generation and human capital development programs to ensure the competitiveness of the Filipino workforce—*iyan, diyan magaling si* Majority Leader “TESDAMAN” Joel Villanueva—including continuous capacity-building, reskilling, upskilling, and cross-skilling of workers to adapt to technological development and evolving business models and industries. And I thank Secretary Laguesma for being here, supporting this.

Toward environmental protection—which is the love of my dear colleague, Sen. Loren Legarda, we will ensure the effective enforcement of environmental laws, rules, and regulations, the adherence to multilateral environmental agreements in the conduct of trade or investment, and the implementation of stringent measures against industrial waste, hazards, and illicit activities. We will

also push for the effective use of trade remedies to address unfair trade practices or the sudden surge of imports that threaten to adversely affect our concerned local industries.

For this purpose, I seek your permission and I seek your support that we create a Senate Special Oversight Committee on the RCEP Agreement to monitor the policies and programs of concerned agencies and departments, and if necessary, come up with legislative proposals to pursue structural reforms and address implementation gaps. We will also have an advisory group of stakeholders to guide the Committee on its functions, particularly our agriculture stakeholders. *Kasama po sila* as our consultative body.

We have already spent enough time debating and evaluating the pros and cons of the RCEP Agreement. What is clear is that the RCEP Agreement is just a policy tool we have to use. The most important question to us really is, how do we utilize this agreement and seize the opportunities that it offers?

Ito na po ang trabaho natin sa gobyerno. Our task is to ensure that our stakeholders make use of this potent agreement and that necessary interventions be done to capacitate and empower our stakeholders particularly our MSMEs, farmers, fisherfolk, professionals, and workers—for them to be competitive in the global industry.

The fruits that RCEP will yield is not the proverbial guava that will fall into our open mouth. We will have to work for it, my dear friends, and we will have to sweat for it.

I am making it clear, because RCEP should not be oversold to our people as a magic cure and overpromised as our economic salvation.

What it is, is an opportunity, and a bridge toward a better-connected economic region, where the Philippines can establish itself as a major economic force. We have the resources to do so, and most especially the hard work and innovation of our people, and I truly believe in our people to lead the way. With RCEP, we may finally have a tool to push us to the very top.

Not joining the biggest free trade deal in the world will make us the biggest losers. To be left out of RCEP is to be left behind in a region where economies use free and fair trade to propel their growth.

But let us not ratify this pact out of fear, but out of the goodness it could bring. The provisions in this agreement are not barriers to our development, but a bridge to progress. Not walls that block our growth, but a ladder to climb out of the economic situation the pandemic has created.

As of today, we are the odd man out of RCEP, the last man standing out in the cold, not because we are not invited, but because of our inaction.

Kaya umaksiyon na po tayo. Huwag na tayong matakot sa RCEP.

Let us accept RCEP.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (A)

Senator Cayetano (A) congratulated Senate President Zubiri for his comprehensive and articulate presentation of the RCEP which he said is a very good trade agreement. He then welcomed the members of the Executive department who were present in the Session Hall to show their support for the Senate concurrence to its ratification.

He noted that an agreement always comes with benefits, such that those who do not enter into such commitments, usually pursue them later on. Therefore he urged the Body to take advantage of the RCEP since even Senate President Zubiri and Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda were pushing for its ratification. He suggested that Congress also pass, and provide funding for safety nets and capability-building measures needed for it as well.

REMARKS OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva stated that he, along with other *ex-officio* members such as Senator Pimentel, also signed the committee report on the resolution.



COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE LEGARDA

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485 under Committee Report No. 29, Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda delivered the following speech:

Nobyembre taong 2011 nang ipinagtibay ng ASEAN leaders ang ASEAN Framework for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership sa 19th ASEAN Summit sa Bali, Indonesia.

Nang sumunod na taon, ang mga pinuno ng 10 ASEAN member-States at ng anim niyang ASEAN Free Trade Agreement partners na kinabibilangan ng Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, at India ay opisyal na nilunsad ang RCEP negotiations. Ito ay naganap noong November 2012 nang isinagawa ang 21st ASEAN Summit and Related Summit sa Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Sa loob ng walong taon, ginanap ang masusing negosasyon sa RCEP na pinamumunuan ng Department of Trade and Industry, dala-dala ang mga patnubay mula sa mga sektor na kinonsulta. There was a total of 28 full rounds of RCEP negotiations, eight regular and 10 intersessional ministerial meetings that were convened over a period of eight years. On top of this, there were four RCEP Leaders' Summits held wherein at the fourth RCEP Summit on November 15, 2020, the RCEP agreement was signed.

Ngayon, 12 taon matapos nilunsad ang RCEP, tinatanong pa rin natin ang ating sarili, kailangan ba natin ito? RCEP's rich historical antecedents and claims on its benefits, on the other hand, begs the question, "Why not?"

I will be the first to agree or to argue, however, that the number of years spent in one's study or the negotiations of international instruments, such as the RCEP, does not define the quality of a treaty.

What defines a good treaty for each participating country are its principles, the goals that are given life through informed and carefully weighed commitments, and vigorous capacity-building measures and safeguards to address the peculiar circumstances of each participating member economy, including the respective economic sectors that are struggling to deal with various forms of barriers that inhibit growth – barriers that hinder their participation in cross border trade and global value chains. I have carefully weighed the risks of RCEP vis-à-vis the benefits that it will bring to our people.

Let me underscore the following:

Based on 2020 data, the RCEP Free Trade Area accounts for 29% of the world's trade, 29% of the world's GDP, 33% of global inward Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), 47% of global outward FDI, and 2.3 billion population or 29% of the world's population. We ask ourselves, can we actually afford to dismiss the opportunities offered by this regional market?

The very sensitive agricultural products are excluded from our tariff commitments in RCEP. In fact, under RCEP, more agricultural tariff lines were excluded from tariff commitments compared to our commitments under the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) and the ASEAN +1 FTAs.

Under RCEP, the Philippines only offered, as the Senate President so ably mentioned, 33 agricultural tariff lines covering only 15 products for further liberalization specifically for Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea, compared to the existing ASEAN+1 Free Trade Agreements. This is only equivalent to 1.9% of the total agricultural tariff lines.

Second, the global and regional markets are already open, and trade has been liberalized. We already have bilateral trade agreements and the ASEAN Free Trade Agreements. Whether we concur with the ratification of RCEP or not, the world has already evolved into a global marketplace with pockets of regional markets. The RCEP is essentially a step toward ensuring that a rules-based, transparent, and conducive business environment is promoted to ensure sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Now, why would we not want to be a part of this?

Third, RCEP offers better market access for key Philippine products such as preserved pineapples, coconut juice, papaya, and durian for markets like China, Korea, and Japan. It offers additional guaranteed market access for services in Australia, China, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand. Many of our production sectors need more markets and they are clamoring for it.

The RCEP offers enhanced and stable rules to encourage investments and presents opportunities for our professionals and service providers in the RCEP region.

The RCEP offers opportunities for economic and technical cooperation in order to boost our competitiveness and build our comparative advantage in sectors with the greatest strength.

Hindi po bulag ang Senado sa mga hinaing ng hanay ng ating mga magsasaka. Ako po ay nakikiisa sa inyong mga hinaing kung kaya sa aking pag-sponsor po ng RCEP ay naghahain din po ako ng malakas na panawagan para maipatupad ang mga sumusunod na alituntunin sa pagpaganap ng RCEP.

Una, sa ating mga namamahala, sa Department of Trade, Department of Agriculture, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Budget and Management, Department of Agrarian Reform, Tariff Commission, Intellectual Property Office, National Economic and Development Authority, iba pang mga ahensiya ng gobyerno—matutong makinig sa mga magsasaka at iba pang sektor ng ating ekonomiya. Promote inclusiveness, not just as an end goal but also with the way we will achieve our goals.

Matuto po tayong makipag-usap sa ating pinagsisilbihan. Buhayin po sana natin ang Anti-Smuggling Committee, ang Public-Private Agriculture Budget Monitoring Committee, at iba pang mga komite na magbibigay daan sa isang tunay at patuloy na diyologo at pakikipagtulungan sa hanay ng gobyerno at mga sektor ng produksiyon.

We need to strengthen public-private cooperation through joint consultative and monitoring mechanisms. This will enhance accountability, promote mutual learning, encourage best practices, and harness trust.

Ikalawa, itaguyod ang transparency sa lahat ng kalakaran. If we want to optimize the benefits of global and regional trading systems offered not just by RCEP, but by other multilateral and bilateral trading systems, we need to make transparency among the cornerstones of transactions in government and with our trading partners. Share information that will allow our sectors to grow and be informed that the vast opportunities in the domestic, regional, and global market place. Gamitin ang datos para mapalaganap ang kahusayan sa ating produksiyon.

Ikatlo. Reform and improve our programs. Makipagsangguni sa mga sektor na layunin nating matulungan. Sino ba ang mas nakakaalam kung anong programa ang nararapat kung hindi ang mga sektor na nais nating tulungan.

Set targets and timeframes for our programs that are responsive to the needs of our farmers, our micro enterprises, and other production sectors. *Dapat lamang po na may time frame at due date sa lahat ng pinapangako nating programa. Wala pong forever, at bawal ang walang katapusang paghihintay sa mga pinapangakong tulong sa ating mga farmers at mga sektor na nangangailangan ng tulong.*

Better MSME and agriculture sector access to finance technical and infrastructure support, creating competitiveness in our sectors, harnessing the power of digital infrastructure and technologies, strengthening the supply chain connectivity, promoting a productive and efficient workforce, accelerating green growth, building resilient businesses, just to name a few, should be addressed by our programs.

We cannot be competitive based on promised assistance to our ailing sectors. We need concrete action to be delivered fast. Remember that the Philippine Congress appropriates resources to serve specific purposes. We must make sure these are well-spent within the time frame that we committed to deliver them. Our state of competitiveness will define how much more opportunities we can turn into success stories in RCEP.

The services sector is an example of such a success story. The Philippines is a net service exporter with consistent trade purposes from 2012 to 2020 with an all-time high of US\$13.08 billion in year 2020.

Ikaapat. We need to create comparative advantages to our economic sectors. It all boils down to finding our niche and seizing opportunities and defining our role in the regional and global marketplace. Dapat po nating linangin ang oportunidad na naghihintay sa larangan ng trade and services para sa ating mga manggagawa at mga negosyante. Trade and services is a growing



key interest in the Philippines, evident in its fast-paced growth recorded from 2012 to 2020. With a compounded annual growth rate of 5.5%, the country's services exports have brought in an average of US\$30.6 billion every year.

Ikalima at pinaka-importante sa lahat. Patatagin at pag-ibayuhin ang governance. Dahil dito ay kalakip ng resolusyon na amin pong isinusulong ang pagtatayo ng oversight committee ng RCEP implementation para masubaybayan at sigurahuhin na ang mga ipinangakong tulong para sa mga sektor ng agrikultura, kasama na ang paglalaan ng budget at tulong pinansiyal at teknikal sa ating mga magsasaka at mangingisda at MSME, ay matutupad.

In this light, we will provide funding, but also demand deliverables; exact accountabilities, but be fair; pursue structural reforms as necessary; ensure that our MSMEs are supported so they can take advantage of the opportunities of RCEP; and require stronger public-private cooperation and partnership.

We will support initiatives to strengthen country representation in the global and regional stage to achieve the greatest outcomes for our people in various global and trade arrangements.

The RCEP has given all of us an opportunity to underscore the value of public-private academe dialogue. It raised an opportunity for us to remind our Executive department to heed the call of innovation so we are not left behind.

Republic Act No. 11293, otherwise known as the Philippine Innovation Act, was signed into law on April 17, 2019. Nearly four years hence, we have yet to realize a whole-of-government collaboration that removes fragmentation in the country's innovation governance.

I therefore call on NEDA, DTI, DA, and the private sector to take advantage of the policy mechanisms under the Philippine Innovation Act.

Hindi lamang po pamahalaan ang inaasahan nating kumilos upang ang sektor ng magsasaka at mangingisda ay ating matulungan. May mga sektor na tiyak nating makikinabang, kung kaya't hindi lamang isang beses kundi tatlo sa nakaraang taon hinihikayat tayo ng industriya at mga propesyonal na ratipikahan na ito. Kaya po nananawagan po ako sa kanila—sabay-sabay nating iangat ang sektor na nagpapakain sa atin. Isama ko sila sa pagbuo ng mekanismo para matiyak ang mga hakbang na kailangan para hindi na ulit maramdaman ng mga magsasaka na naisahan na naman sila.

One example is a legal fund or a commitment to legal representation when the commitments are not met or when provisions of law are not complied with, or mandates are not fulfilled. Another is to help them bridge capacity, innovate to produce raw materials they need, and assist with financial management. There are many ways to make sure that what we know to be imperative for the success of this venture will actually happen.

To my esteemed colleagues, fellow workers in government and to the public we serve, my decision to lend support to the ratification of RCEP is premised on my conviction that an open, transparent, and predictable trade and investment environment generates new opportunities for everyone.

The RCEP Agreement, the instrument that binds us with the other participating countries, will help us achieve the right conditions to expand our markets for goods and services, create more jobs, build opportunities to strengthen the various economic sectors in ways that will make them more competitive, and more importantly, assist our MSMEs, having been the principal author in my second term, in participating in cross-border trade as well as in regional value chain.

RCEP will help us deepen engagement not just with other participating countries, but more so among various economic sectors in our society and with government.

We cannot stand in isolation as we face this huge wave of global and regional economic integration. We need to build capacities and efficiencies to achieve competitiveness.

Our benchmark for efficiency and productivity should be leveled against the best in the world and in the region. We should not see RCEP as a mere agreement for setting rules, for regulating trade and trade related activities. RCEP, as in other global and regional trading agreements, will help our economic sectors push their performance. This will hopefully benefit our consumers. The end



goal, however, is for the various areas of production to find a niche that will allow them to be a part of the global and regional value chain.

Aking hiling na ang mga alituntunin na atin pong binanggit kanina ay tanggapin bilang parte ng ating hinahaing resolusyon na ating ipapasa. Ang mga ito po ay binuo natin matapos ang masusing konsultasyon sa iba't ibang mga sektor.

I invite all of you to join me in supporting and concurring in the ratification of the RCEP Agreement.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Senator Tolentino expressed his support for the RCEP, which, upon accession, would make the Philippines a part of the group responsible for more than US\$25.8 trillion in economic output, 29% of the global domestic product, US\$12.7 trillion in global trade, and a market of 2.3 billion people, or 30% of the world's population.

He then called on the Department of Foreign Affairs to transmit to the Senate five additional key treaties that had not yet been ratified. He believed that the ratification of the following treaties could bolster the RCEP, especially in its initial stages:

- The Hague Choice of Court Convention;
- The United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods
- The United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts;
- The Convention on the Recognition of Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters; and
- The Hague Evidence Convention.

He recalled that on January 25, 2022, during the Eighteenth Congress, he had asked the DFA to submit the treaties to the Senate for concurrence, and asked why the Department had not yet done so.

In addition, he cited Article 12.10 of the RCEP, which states: "Each party shall adopt or maintain a legal framework governing electronic transactions, taking into account the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce 1996; the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts done at New York on 23 November 2005."

He opined that while the RCEP could stand on its own as a treaty, the ratification of the other significant accords would further strengthen it.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Padilla lauded the presence of officials from the Executive department and expressed his appreciation for the unity displayed by the Executive and Legislative branches in shepherding the RCEP.

He noted that the Senate President's sponsorship speech underscored the importance of foreign investments to the country. He also observed the substantial growth of Vietnam and other neighboring countries that had opened their doors to FDIs. He lamented that the Philippines ranked 13th out of 14 Asia-Pacific economies, and was third in the world in terms of regulatory stringency on FDIs.



He expressed hope that the same support from the Executive department would be available when the time came to consider FDIs in the Senate.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR POE

Senator Poe stated that a number of legacy measures passed during the Eighteenth Congress, including the Public Service Act, the Trade Liberalization Act, and the Foreign Investments Act, were intended to open up the Philippine economy.

She then urged the National Economic and Development Authority to hasten the formulation and adoption of the Public Service Act's Implementing Rules and Regulations in order to facilitate the law's implementation.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 485

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the resolution.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 4:35 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:38 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Zubiri presiding.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri thanked the members of the Cabinet who were present and invited them to stay a little longer in order to hear Senator Poe's privilege speech on a matter of paramount importance to public safety and security.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR POE

Availing herself of the privilege hour, Senator Poe delivered the following speech on the alleged human trafficking activities at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport:

I would also like to thank our esteemed Executive Secretary, as well as the Special Assistant to the President, for giving us time today to hear this very important report which can touch on national security and expose corruption

I think 2023 is NAIA's year; unfortunately, not for any good reason. More than a month after the infamous New Year's Day air traffic system glitch, *nandito na naman po tayo dahil sa isa na namang aberya sa airport.*

Nito lamang Lunes, just two days ago, February 13, 2023, 3:09 p.m., *ay nakatanggap ng* anonymous tip *ang* PNP Aviation Security Group *tungkol sa* human trafficking activity involving an aircraft with Tail No. N9527E, that was set to depart at about 10 p.m. on the same day at NAIA going to Dubai. *Matapos beripikahin, nakumpirma na may naka-schedule nga na flight ang nasabing eroplano sa araw at oras na iyon.* The anonymous information also noted that only six passengers have been declared but a total of 14 passengers will actually board the aircraft.



Ang nasabing eroplano ay operated ng Cloud Nine No. 1 Leasing Company Limited — isang Hong Kong-registered leasing company at ang kanilang assigned aircraft ground handler ay isang local company, ang Globan Aviation Services Corp. o GLOBAN.

Bandang alas singko ng araw din na iyon, the PNP Aviation Security Group-NCR briefed the aircraft inspectors about the possible interdiction operation at mahigpit silang binilinan na huwag pirmahan ang anumang dokumento hangga't hindi nai-inspect ang nasabing eroplano at ang mga sakay nito.

At 7:45 p.m., the aircraft inspectors, together with four general aviation police station personnel, proceeded to the Balagbag Ramp where the subject aircraft is stationed for departure. Pagdating nila ay agad nilang ipinaalam sa GLOBAN representative na iinspeksiyunin muna ang eroplano at mga pasahero nito bago pirmahan ang Safety and Security Flight Coordination Sheet na kailangan para makalipad ito.

Mga 9:15 p.m., tatlong foreign national crew na sakay ng dalawang GLOBAN van ang dumating. Sumunod dito, mga 10:11 p.m., isang GLOBAN van sakay ang tatlong immigration officers at tatlong iba pang sasakyan na sakay ang anim na foreign nationals ang dumating na rin. They were escorted by the Airport Police Department's patrol vehicle.

Matapos ang verification procedure ng immigration officers, lumalabas na lahat ng anim na pasaherong dumating ay sila ring nakasaad sa General Declaration. Pero nakapagtataka, dahil sabi ng GLOBAN handler ay may hinihintay pa silang isang pasahero.

We were able to secure a copy of the flights' General Decalaration at nakasaad dito na tatlong crew at anim na pasahero lamang ang dapat na sakay ng eroplano. Ngunit base sa impormasyong nakuha namin mula sa Bureau of Immigration, pito ang pasaherong nakasaad sa hawak nilang General Declaration: isang Malaysian, Korean, Chinese, Vanuatu, at tatlo mula sa Saint Kitts and Nevis. Nasabi rin sa atin na ang hawak nilang visa ay mixed ng tourist, employment, at Special Resident Retiree's Visa.

Iyong mga pangalan—na hindi muna namin ipapakita sa ngayon—ay mostly mga Chinese na pangalan pero ang citizenship nila ay iba't-iba. Mayroong Saint Kitts and Nevis na alam naman natin doon sa mga lugar na iyon ay mayroon silang Investors Visa Program. So, kahit na anong nationality nila, basta mayroon silang investment doon ay puwede nilang makuha ang kanilang citizenship.

Bandang 10:20 p.m., may dumating na dalawang van sakay ang hindi isa, pero walong Asian-looking nationals. These individuals were not included in the General Declaration but they attempted to board the aircraft. It is "attempted," dahil natigilan sila nang makitang kumukuha ng video ang isa sa aircraft inspectors. However, at around the same time, the inspectors noticed three unauthorized individuals entering the aircraft followed by the aircraft door closing.

So, iyong anim na na-clear ay nakapasok na at mayroong nag-attempt na walo pa na papasok pero napigilan dahil may nakitang mayroong nagbi-video. Pero bago isara ang pinto ng eroplano ay may nakalusot na tatlo na wala doon sa manifest.

Agad inutusan ng mga aircraft inspector ang GLOBAN handler na pigilan ang departure ng eroplano. Matapos nito agad nagpunta ang head ng PNP Aviation Security Group sa rampa at kinuwestiyon ang immigration officers: Una, kung bakit aalis ang eroplano nang hindi dumadaan sa preflight inspection; at pangalawa, bakit may mga karagdagang mga pasahero na wala sa General Declaration.

Ang sagot ng immigration officer ay na-proseso na raw nila ang mga karagdagang pasahero at "clear to travel" na ang mga ito kahit wala sa flight manifest. Iniimbestigahan na ng Bureau of Immigration ang insidenteng ito. Hinihintay din natin ang kanilang tugon tungkol sa issue.

At about 10:40 pm, despite efforts to coordinate with the GLOBAN representatives and immigration officers, the aircraft continued to take off. After this, PCol. Ocampo called a certain Retired General Robles of CAAP to request the control tower to hold the departure of the aircraft. Ang sabi ni General Robles ay, "Hindi ito posible dahil naaprubahan na ang flight navigation clearance."

Apparently, hindi ito ang unang pagkakataon na nangyari ito. Noong December 2022, may mga Chinese nationals din na sumakay sa isang private aircraft at umalis ang eroplano na walang pre-flight inspection clearance. Talo pa ang mga tao sa gobyerno. Sila, hindi na dumadaan sa immigration process. Doon sila mismo ibinababa doon sa runway, doon sa may mga base na may escort sila. International flight ito, hindi ito domestic. Nai-report na ito sa MIAA ngunit katakataka, wala namang naging aksyon. At hanggang ngayon, tinatawagan natin ang general manager, mukhang nagmumuni-muni pa sila kung ano ang dapat isagot dito.

Malinaw na may irregularity at paglabag sa existing policies at procedures ng airport agencies tulad ng MIAA, Immigration, PNP Aviation, at CAAP. Una, walang pre-flight inspection clearance na kailangan bago ang departure ng ano mang international flight. Pangalawa, may mga indibidwal na nakapasok sa Security Restricted Area na hindi dumaan sa tamang security screening procedure at documentation. Hindi rin malinaw kung ang mga bagahe nila ay dumaan din sa nasabing proseso. Ano ang mga dala-dala nila doon? Kapag tayo ang ine-escort papasok doon sa may tarmac ng airport, iyan ay usually domestic flight at saka isang katutak na kailangan mayroon tayong dinadaanang proseso. Ito, parang kasama pa nila ang immigration sa paghatid sa kanila. Walang nakalista kung ano ang mga dala-dala nilang bagahe. Puwede palang pumuslit dito kahit sino? Puwedeng espiya? Puwedeng human traffic? Nakakatakot. Ano ang mga dala-dala nila?

More than just a protocol glitch, the issue digs deeper as it involves national security and human trafficking. We call on the Bureau of Immigration to explain how individuals were able to fly out of the county with just a whim of uttered clearance from an immigration officer, without an amendment of the General Declaration, based on proper procedures.

Bakit sila kailangan i-transport palabas ng bansa na walang dokumentasyon? Malinaw na may itinatago ang mga taong nasa likod nito. Is this a case of human trafficking? But we have yet to confirm. Hanggang ngayon, despite our consistent follow-ups, we are still awaiting the report from MIAA.

I have been recently reporting to the Body about human trafficking and abduction incidents involving POGOs. *Siguro kailangan rin nating masilip kung may kinalaman ba ang industriya sa insidenteng ito. Bagama't iba-iba ang nationality ng mga pasaherong involved, mapapansin na Chinese-sounding names ang lahat ng pasahero maliban sa isang Korean.*

We call on the proper committees to look into this further so that we can strengthen and reinforce our borders at once. Let us not allow private flights in our airports as a way for human trafficking.

MANIFESTATIONS OF SENATORS

By Senate President Zubiri

Reacting to the privilege speech of Senator Poe, Senate President Zubiri expressed his utter disgust of the actions of the immigration officers. He recalled that whenever cabinet members and legislators accompany the President in official trips, they will have to undergo a rigid process by surrendering their passports a day before; check-in baggage will have to be sent half a day for immigration, customs, and PSG inspection. He supposed that the group could not only be involved with spies, but also with criminals who are avoiding arrest in the Philippines so they fly out in the dead of the night.

He appreciated the presence of Secretary Lagdameo and Executive Secretary Bersamin in the Hall as they have the ear of the President. He stressed that heads must roll as he could not believe that the three other passengers managed to board the plane, despite the aviation police preventing them. He said that while the Philippines is trying to get a good image with the Federal Aviation Federation (FAA) in the United States, the incident would not go unnoticed. He said that they will take note of it and could even put the country in the blacklist of the airline industry, and human trafficking.



By Senator Villanueva

Senator Villanueva joined Senator Poe in denouncing the incident mentioned in the privilege speech. He stated that not only did the speech talk about national security and human trafficking, but it also talked about accountability of persons concerned as it involved sensitive matters. He stated that there should not be VIP treatment accorded to such people that they could do whatever they wish. He stressed that the matter is an issue of accountability – of graft and corruption.

By Senator Dela Rosa

Senator Dela Rosa requested that the privilege speech be referred to the appropriate committee, so that investigations could be done right away. He lamented that while the Chinese-sounding names were able to get away with VIP treatment, their compatriots were blinding the Coast Guards with laser lights in the West Philippine Sea. He expressed disgust over the thought that the Chinese were blatantly violating protocols and laws just to get VIP treatment. He then moved that the speech be referred to the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs of which he is the chairperson.

The Senate President believed that the three committees to hear the matter are the Committees on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, Public Services, and Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations on the issue of corruption. He stated that there will be public officers who would be punished – those who allowed the Chinese to enter the area with VIP treatment. He said that the officials were flashed with money that blinded them, and they should be taken out of their office; they should be exposed. He then expressed his full support to the effort of Senator Dela Rosa.

By Senator Hontiveros

Senator Hontiveros expressed her full support for the expose of Senator Poe on the human trafficking attempt. She stated that while it is not known if the incident was only the first time, as chairperson of the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Equality that has been investigating human trafficking, regardless of the circumstances, and whichever committee hears the matter, she would wholly support the call of Senator Poe for the Senate to investigate, and actively participate in the hearings.

Senate President Zubiri added that more than the immoral act, the immigration officials committed an unethical act because they violated immigration laws. He stressed that the people behind it should be exposed and punished.

By Senator Legarda

In associating herself with the thoughts of Senator Poe, Senator Legarda stated that such incident is disgusting whenever it happens to the Philippines. She supposed that it was the first time that the perpetrators got caught, and that there could be other incidents that were not recorded. She questioned the frequency of the practice; who are the officials involved; the identities of the victims and where they were brought; and what other illegal activities the perpetrators are into. She urged the Body to look into the details of the matter. She added that when she inquired from Senator Poe the explanation of the heads of the Bureau of Immigration and the MIAA, the latter said that the agencies have not responded. She stated that it was unbelievable that the heads of agencies could not give an excuse within an hour after they were asked. She said that at the proper time, she would join the hearing, and expressed appreciation to Senator Poe for bringing the matter to the floor.



By Senator Padilla

At the outset, Senator Padilla expressed his support to the privilege speech of Senator Poe.

He recalled that Senate President Zubiri requested the media to report about the good image of the Philippines and not just negative news. He lamented that it is unfortunate that the airport and immigration officials themselves commit illegal acts that tarnish the image of the country. He stated that whenever such incidents happen in airports or other ports it goes to show that government is permissive to such actions. He said that it will be difficult to promote tourism and foreign investment when criminals are free to come in and out of the country.

He then urged the Body to participate in the hearings to be conducted on the matter. He believed that heads will roll as those responsible for such acts will be held accountable and punished.

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that the Senate has the power to arrest as it has been done in the past when Senator Gordon was the chairperson of the Blue Ribbon Committee. He said that if any Member see that a resource person is not cooperating with the investigation, he/she may be held for contempt.

By Senator Hontiveros

In addition to her manifestation earlier, Senator Hontiveros inquired from Senator Poe whether flight provider was Global or GLOBAN. She recalled that GLOBAN was the provider that attempted to smuggle Mohit and Twinkle Dargani out of the country at the height of the Pharmally investigation. She said that the Body not only investigate the NAIA but GLOBAN as well.

Responding thereto, Senator Poe affirmed that the provider mentioned in the speech was GLOBAN. She said that unless there was another GLOBAN company, its business should be checked.

By Senator Gatchalian

Senator Gatchalian associated himself with the privilege speech of Senator Poe and stated that he will attend the committee hearings on the matter at the appropriate time. He also raised concern that "very very important persons" (VVIPs) might already easily bribe authorities the Bureau of Immigration, the PNP, and other enforcers into abandoning their morals and duties in exchange for large payoffs from the VVIPs. He stated concern that in such cases, time would come when Filipinos would no longer trust and seek assistance from its authorities.

He also complimented Senator Poe for bringing the issue before the Body's attention so that it could put a stop to the illegal entry into the country of foreign criminals who use money to control authorities and enforcers to breach laws and obey their command. He emphasized that those involved in human trafficking must be held accountable in order for the illicit scheme to end.

At this juncture, Senator Dela Rosa clarified that the PNP personnel were not involved in the wrongful act committed by the airport police, as it was the police authorities who attempted to prevent the passengers who were not listed in the travel manifest of the chartered plane from leaving the country. Senate President Zubiri acknowledged and congratulated the PNP Aviation Command for doing their job.

Senator Gatchalian accepted Senator Dela Rosa's correction and apologized for the error. Nonetheless, he stated that authorities in many branches of government, such as the Bureau of



Immigration and the Bureau of Customs, have been involved in corruption and bribery in the performance of their duties. Although it may appear unstoppable, he stressed that such irregularities must be exposed in order for the Body to be instrumental in ending such misuse of authority and abuse committed by foreign criminals in the country.

Senate President Zubiri stated that at the proper time, the committee that would be designated to conduct hearings on Senator Poe's privilege speech could have the concerned persons cited for contempt if they fail to respect the Senate's authority and abide with its subpoena orders. He further stated that the Senate might also issue a detention and arrest order against such individuals.

By Senator Estrada

Senator Estrada also supported Senator Poe's privilege speech and expressed his confidence that heads will roll among those participating in the probe under Senator Dela Rosa's leadership.

By Senator Padilla

Relative thereto, Senator Padilla stated that the film "Plane" starred by Gerard Butler was about a commercial plane that had to make an emergency landing in Jolo, Sulu owing to a critical engine failure caused by a lightning storm. He stated that the movie's apparent passivity and cowardice of the Philippine government, as well as Jolo Island being governed by separatists and militias, were inaccurate depictions of the country's authorities and the actual reality on the ground.

He then urged the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board to denounce and ban the film, stating that the Philippines should not accept its misleading claims.

Senate President Zubiri agreed, and shared the same sentiments of Senator Padilla. He stated that a new film that portrays Jesus Christ the God of Christians but a prophet to Muslims according to the Qur'an in a negative light should also be banned by the MTRCB and that he would lead the Chamber in a call to prevent the film from being shown in the country. He stated that casting a negative light on Allah, the God of Muslims, would also cause an uproar among Muslims. He then asked that Christians and Muslims work together on questions of faith.

At this juncture, Senator Dela Rosa stated that he has seen the film "Plane" and was disgusted by it. He said that Gerard Butler's character, who initially mistook Jolo, Sulu for Davao as the emergency landing site, created a negative image of the Philippines. He stressed that the condition depicted in the film, in which many insurgents hacked off foreigners' heads for no apparent cause, was a far cry from the real and tranquil Davao City. He believed that the film's director was instilling fear among foreign tourists from visiting the country, notably Davao City and the Jolo Islands.

In a positive aspect, he stated that he was delighted to see the feeder roads and National Task Force to End Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) highways in Mindanao used as a road runway where the plane landed and took off.

Senate President Zubiri stated that he had only watched the trailer and that he decided not to watch the movie due to distaste. He then recalled how peaceful it was in Mindanao whenever he visits Camiguin Island with his family and without being accompanied by security, whenever he strolls the malls on his own in Iligan City and Bukidnon, and whenever he travels along the very safe Davao-Bukidnon route. He also complimented the beauty of Jolo, Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi.

He stated that he, together with Executive Secretary Bersamin, NEDA Secretary Balisacan, and Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco, had already complained to the President about the portrayal of the Philippines as a chaotic country, which could harm the country's tourism promotions. He then joined Senators Padilla and Dela Rosa in condemning the film "Plane."

By Senator Tulfo

Senator Tulfo remarked that the Philippines definitely has issues with national security due to numerous incidences of human trafficking and unlawful entry and exit of Chinese criminals using private planes.

He stated that the identities of the ground handler and the scheduler of the chartered flight's arrival and departure must be established and that they must be held accountable.

He also agreed with Senator Dela Rosa that the MIAA personnel implicated should be held accountable and be punished, and that the Aviation Security Command (AVSECOM) and its system should be calibrated. He stated that airport security has been so lax that numerous foreign nationals have managed to enter the Philippines illegally, with some joining the Abu Sayyaf and drug dealers.

While he acknowledged that NAIA security should be improved, he believed that the country's authorities should focus their efforts on the ground handler of the chartered flight.

Senate President Zubiri noted the manifestation of Senator Tulfo as he assured that the information requested by the latter would be provided during the committee hearings.

By Senator Ejercito

Senator Ejercito thanked Senator Poe for bringing the matter to the Body's attention. He then stated that the Netflix film "The Big Boss" was a true story about a large international syndicate operating in the Philippines that was involved in gunrunning, human trafficking, prostitution, and drug trafficking. He said that in the movie, the PNP, elected and appointed government officials, and the courts were depicted as accepting bribes and payoffs in exchange for allowing the syndicate to operate in the country. He believed that the movie was disturbing and would pose risks. He urged the Body to perform its oversight duty to ensure that the government entities involved are trustworthy and reliable.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, the session was suspended.

It was 5:19 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:01 p.m., the session was resumed.

REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator Poe and the manifestations thereon to the Committee on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations (Blue Ribbon) as the primary committee, to the Committee on Public



Order and Dangerous Drugs as secondary committee, and to the Committee on Public Services as tertiary committee.

THIRD ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the message from the Office of the President as to the necessity of the immediate enactment of Senate Bill No. 1849, to wit:

15 February 2023

SEN. JUAN MIGUEL F. ZUBIRI
Senate President
The Philippine Senate
Pasay City

Mr. Senate President:

I have the honor to transmit the letter of President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr. certifying to the necessity of the immediate enactment of Senate Bill No. 1849, entitled:

AN ACT AMENDING SECTIONS 2, 6, 10, 11 AND 15 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11709 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "AN ACT STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM AND PROMOTING THE CONTINUITY OF POLICIES AND MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, BY PRESCRIBING FIXED TERMS FOR KEY OFFICERS THEREOF, INCREASING THE MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE OF GENERALS/FLAG OFFICERS, PROVIDING FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE ATTRITION SYSTEM, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR"

pursuant to the provisions of Article VI, Section 26 (2) of the Constitution.

Best regards.

Very truly yours,

(Sgd.) LUCAS P. BERSAMIN
Executive Secretary

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 6:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:31 p.m., the session was resumed.

CHANGE OF REFFERALS

Upon request of Senator Angara and with the consent of Senator Villar (M), chairperson of the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of referral of Senate Bill No. 319 (Domestic Bidders Preference Act) from the Committee on Finance to the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship as the primary committee, and to the Committee on Finance as the secondary committee.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Upon the instruction of Senator Villar (M), chairperson of the Committee on Trade, Commerce

and Entrepreneurship, Senator Villanueva manifested the inclusion of Senate Bill No. 319 (Domestic Bidders Preference Act) and Senate Bill No. 1868 (Protected Geographical Indications Act) in the subcommittee under the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship chaired by Senator Angara.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 6:32 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:32 p.m., the session was resumed.

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, February 20, 2023.

It was 6:33 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on February 20, 2023

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