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SESSION NO. 51
Monday, February 20, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:02 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel “Migz” F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Alan Peter S. Cayetano led the prayer, to wit:

Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God. Let us bow our heads.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Lord, Father God, how great Thou art. How great the plans You have for us, to prosper us, and to give us a hope and a future.

We ask ourselves again and again and sometimes even dare to ask You, “*Bakit, Lord? Bakit po naghihirap ang mga Pilipino? Bakit po napakahirap mamuhay sa Pilipinas?* Why is there so much hardship and suffering? Why is the food so expensive, the medical treatment out of reach? Why is housing not readily available? *Bakit po ang sama ng signal ng internet at koneksiyon ng aming cellphone?*

You may simply answer that You gave us everything--all the resources you have given us, all the natural resources, the best talented people, islands, mountains, valleys, and minerals. But there is so much greed and corruption.

You have reconciled us through the Lord Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection. You have paid for our debt in full, yet there is so much idolatry. You have given us free will. *Ibinigay mo po sa mga Pilipino ang mga most nutritious at pinakamasarap na mga pagkain, yet obesity, sobrang pag-inom, at sobra po sa asukal.*

You have given us the most beautiful places to worship, to do fellowship, to exercise, *pero katamaran din po na mag-exercise.* We are given medical breakthroughs, even longer lives. *Mayroon na pong stem cell ngayon.* But instead of treating our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit, we drink, we eat, we live unhealthy lives, and we give ourselves to immorality.

Yet instead of answering us this way, You tell us that You so loved the world that You gave Your Son, that whoever shall believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. You tell us to listen to Your Word. You do not even require all Filipinos to listen and



to obey Your Word. You tell us that if Your people, who are called by Your Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek Your face and turn from their wicked ways, then You will hear from heaven, and You will forgive our sins and You will heal our land.

Father, we humble ourselves. We pray. We turn from our evil ways. We ask You Lord, please heal our land. Many lean on their own understanding and ask, "How, *paano*, Lord? *Paano po magbabago ang Pilipinas? Paano po mangyayari na ang kayamanan na ibinigay Ninyo ay matikman ng bawat Pilipino--imbes na kailangan na mag-abroad at magtrabaho po sa iba, imbes na mapalaki ang sariling anak, nagpapalaki po ng anak ng iba para lang kumita, makapag-aral, ang kanilang anak?"*

Lord, teach us not to rely on our own ways but on Yours and not to lean on our understanding but to lean on Your understanding.

When we were young, some of us here in the Senate, *mahilig pong pumasok sa school, iyong iba po hindi*. Pero, *tinuruan po kami ng tatlong R*—reading, writing, arithmetic. *Sabi po sa aming mga magulang, matuto lang kami ng three Rs, kaya na ng mga anak ninyong mamuhay sa mundong ito. Madali lamang*—reading, writing, arithmetic.

Lord, You gave us also three Rs. First, revival of the heart. You said, where our heart is, there our treasure is. *Kung nasaan ang kayamanan, nandoon po ang ating puso*. So, *kung ang kayamanan natin ay pera, nandoon sa pera ang ating puso. Korapsyon ang aabutin natin. Pero, kung iyong kapwa po ang mahal natin, then Kayo po Panginoon ang aming treasure*. Unless our heart is with You instead of this world, there will be no real change or transformation. With the revival of our hearts, we learn to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Then, You promised us that everything, every single thing, will be added unto us.

The second R is restoration of the Church. The Church is not the building. It is not the lay people *vis-à-vis* the priests, the ministers, the imams, and the pastors. *Tayo po ang simbahan*. The Church is the Body of Christ. *Tayo po*, together, we are the Church.

The original Church moved mountains with faith, fed thousands through faith, provided for orphans and widows, opened free medical clinics, opened schools, and taught the young people. Yes, miracles were everywhere in the original Church. The sick were healed, the blind could see, the deaf could hear, the lame could stand up and walk again. But also, the Church raised up medical staff and opened clinics.

Many of the duties, *marami sa inaasa natin sa gobyerno ngayon ay dati pong obligasyon ng simbahan po natin*. But, if the Church is not generous, how can we ask government to be generous? If the Church is immoral, how can we ask government to be moral? If the Church is corrupt, how can government be clean and not corrupt?

From the revival of our heart comes the change in the Church—restoration.

Once again, the Church can take its rightful place in our nation, from the revival of hearts to the restoration of the Church comes reformation of the society—change that is not skin-deep, but real change that transforms. *Tunay na pagbabago*. Transformation.

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us of the plan He has for us. *Pero may kasunod po ito. Sabi po sa verses 12 and 13*: "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity."

So, Lord, we search for You. Hear the prayers of Your humble senators who are elected nationwide. We humble our hearts and we seek You. We pray that You free us from the captivity of sin, idolatry, love for money, materialism—which is the new idolatry—from poverty, from sickness, from addiction even to social media. We claim

Your plans to prosper us to give us hope in the future. Use the Senate mightily, use our Senate President mightily, use our Majority Leader mightily, use our Minority Leader, use every single senator, staff, people behind the cameras, and use us mightily.

Lead us Lord God, Holy Spirit.

We ask for all these in Jesus' mighty Name.

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

The Manila Symphony Orchestra led the singing of the national anthem and, thereafter, rendered the Senate Hymn "*Senadong Marangal*" and the instrumental versions of the songs "*Minamahal Kita*" and "*Kalesa*."

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. E.	Tulfo, R. T.
Gatchalian, W.	Villanueva, J.
Go, C. L. T.	Villar, C. A.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, M. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.

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

Senator Tolentino 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.

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

On behalf of the Body, Senator Villanueva greeted Senator Estrada who celebrated his birthday on February 17, 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

Senator Villanueva acknowledged the presence in the gallery of French Senator Olivier Cadic and French Ambassador Michele Boccoz, who hosted the members of the Philippine Senate during their visit in October of the previous year.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the visitors to the Senate and informed the Body that Senator Cadic represented all French citizens living abroad in the French Senate. He remarked that similar representation could probably be done in the Philippines since there are many OFWs all over the world.



He also acknowledged the warm reception accorded by the French Senate to the Philippine senators, including Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda, Majority Leader Senator Villanueva, Deputy Majority Leader Senator Ejercito and Senators Poe, Lapid, Binay, Go, and Gatchalian, during their visit in France on October 24.

He also thanked his counterpart in the French Senate, Senate President Gérard Larcher, as well as Senator Mathieu Darnaud, the head of the ASEAN French Parliamentary Group.

He then mentioned that the Philippines and France are celebrating their 76th year of diplomatic relations, which began in 1947.

He stated that the Philippines and France maintained diplomatic relations because both countries shared a love for democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and freedom of navigation in the West Philippine Sea. He stated that France has been an outspoken supporter of the Philippine cause for freedom of navigation in the West Philippine Sea.

He then expressed his desire to continue discussions with the French government, with Senator Cadic's support, on defense relations, energy cooperation, climate change mitigation cooperation, economic relations, development cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges, noting the presence of many OFWs and French expatriates in the country.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

With the permission of the Body, the session was suspended to allow the senators to greet the French delegation.

It was 3:27 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:40 p.m., the session was resumed with Senator Ejercito presiding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

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

- Manila Symphony Orchestra led by its conductor and executive director, Mr. Jeffrey Solares;
- Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual, Usec. Ceferino S. Rodolfo, and Asec. Allan B. Gepty of the Department of Trade and Industry;
- Executive Director Ma. Corazon Halili-Dichosa of DTI-Board of Investments ;
- Usec. Felipe N. Egargo, Jr., Usec. Carmela I. Torres, and Asec. Paul Vincent W. Añoover of the Department of Labor and Employment;
- Sr. Usec. Domingo F. Panganiban, Asec. Arnel V. De Mesa, Asec. Paz J. Benavidez II, Asec. Jane C. Bacayo, and Asec. Noel A. Padre of the Department of Agriculture;
- Usec. Krystal Lyn Tan Uy of the National Economic and Development Authority;
- Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio and Asst. Commissioner Vincent Philip C. Maronilla of the Bureau of Customs;
- Asec. Rolando C. Puno of the Department of the Interior and Local Government;



- Usec. Anna Mae Yu Lamentillo, and OIC Usec. Emmy Lou Versoza-Delfin of the Department of Information and Communications Technology;
- Officials of the Executive department;
- Mayor Roberto C. Cajés and Municipal Administrator Judith D. Cajés from the Municipality of Trinidad, Bohol;
- Vice Mayor Danilo D. Bandala from Corella, Bohol;
- Mayor “Inday” Grace Carmel D. Paredes-Bravo and Vice Mayor Arth Ryan Palabrica from the Municipality of San Francisco, Agusan del Sur;
- Vice mayors Vivian T. Chiong, Merly C. Masugbo, Jose B. Salac, Nonie Jumawak, Julieta J. Macapaz, and Saul L. Maraon from Zamboanga del Norte;
- Mayor Rafsanjani “Bimbo” Ali of General S.K. Pendatun, Maguindanao;
- Barangay Captains Alimodin “Wating” A. Usman and Eddie M. Ilaó from Davao City; and
- Mayor Maila Ting Que together with the councilors from Tuguegarao City, Cagayan.

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. 50 (February 15, 2023) and considered it approved.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 29 ON PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 485 (Continuation)

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

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

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senate President Zubiri, sponsor of the measure, with Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda as cosponsor, and Senator Villanueva for his interpellation.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:44 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:45 p.m., the session was resumed.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

At the outset, Senator Villanueva expressed support to the resolution. He then asked for a summary of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.



In response, Senate President Zubiri stated that it was an ASEAN-led free trade agreement (FTA) which consolidated existing regional FTAs among ASEAN+1 economies, namely, Japan, China, Australia, Korea, and New Zealand, into a modern, comprehensive, high-quality, and mutually beneficial economic partnership agreement. He emphasized that RCEP updated the coverage of existing ASEAN FTAs by taking into account emerging trade challenges such as electronic commerce, competition, intellectual property, and government procurement. He said that RCEP was comprehensive since it included trade areas not previously covered by existing ASEAN FTAs, such as small-medium enterprises (SMEs), government procurement, electronic commerce, and competition.

In terms of quality, Senate President Zubiri stated that RCEP's levels of commitment would provide more stability and predictability to businesses and investors because the agreement would go beyond transparency and cooperation. He also stated that RCEP would be mutually beneficial because it took into account the different development levels of participating countries and provided flexibility, technical cooperation, and capacity building to support the implementation of commitments as well as utilization of the agreement to optimize benefits from the free trade area. Finally, he said that RCEP would establish an open, inclusive, and rule-based trading system that may serve as major platform to deepen and broaden economic integration in the ASEAN region.

He also agreed with Senator Villanueva that the timely concurrence in the ratification of RCEP will optimize and enhance the country's trade benefits, as well as address emerging trade issues in various regions of the world.

The Chair acknowledged Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda, who was also helping the Senate President defend the measure. From time to time, the Senate President Pro Tempore would intervene to provide additional replies to the queries of the Members.

As to why RCEP was considered the world's largest free trade deal, Senator Legarda replied that according to 2020 data, RCEP's free trade area accounted for 29% of the world's trade, 29% of global GDP, 33% of global inbound Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), 47% of global outward FDI, and 2.3 billion or 29% of the world's population. She noted that, with the exception of the Philippines, all ASEAN countries had ratified the RCEP with major trading partners, and that it was not the region's first FTA; in fact, the Philippines has bilateral trade agreements with non-EU countries in Europe, including Liechtenstein, Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland.

Furthermore, she said that the Philippines used to have a trade deficit, which meant that the balance of trade with those countries did not favor the Philippines, which is why, as chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Relations, she sponsored a measure seeking for the balance of trade in 2018. She added that there is currently a trade surplus as a result of the export of U.K. brands such as Dyson electric fans and vacuum cleaners manufactured in Laguna. She then hoped that the Body would unanimously concur in the ratification of the agreement because RCEP would fix the rules of origin, benefiting the country where the products are manufactured.

Asked by Senator Villanueva whether the Philippines would lag behind if it did not participate in the RCEP, Senate President Zubiri replied in the affirmative. He stated that one year after signing the RCEP, Vietnam's exports climbed by 16.4%, with totaling US\$108.48 billion, while seafood exports increased by 34%. He stated that by 2022, Vietnam would have generated US\$50 million from durian fruit exports.

He stated that Thailand also raised its export with RCEP countries by 7.1%, totaling US\$300 billion; while Cambodia increased its total trade by 4% totaling US\$31 billion, with the export of its garment products to Australia earning 17.6%, or a value of US\$102 million. He pointed out that



while the aforementioned countries were gaining daily from RCEP countries, the Philippines was losing prospective investments in the global market.

Asked by Senator Villanueva what would happen to other existing FTAs with the Senate's concurrence in the ratification of RCEP, Senator Legarda responded that because the RCEP is more than just a trade liberalization agreement, the ASEAN+1 FTAs will still be implemented alongside it. She added, in addition to tariff reductions, RCEP would extend support for MSMEs, simplify the rules of origin, and digitalize MSMEs; as a result, businesses would now be able to choose which FTA to use based on the level of commitment and preferential arrangements secured in the FTA concerned. Noting an RCEP provision that imposes zero tariff, she stated that exporting products to an RCEP party under the prior ASEAN+1 FTA would be advantageous.

Senate President Zubiri affirmed that RCEP would still be a partner to various ASEAN FTA parties.

When asked if businessmen will be able to choose which FTA to employ based on which would be most beneficial to them, the Senate President replied in the affirmative.

Senator Villanueva questioned on the need for an RCEP agreement in the face of existing FTAs with key trading partners, specifically on what added benefits the RCEP provides which other FTAs could not.

In response, Senate President Zubiri believed that while the ASEAN has existing FTAs with key trading partners, the degree of commitments and preferential arrangements in the FTAs was not as extensive as the RCEP. To illustrate, he stated that the government's existing FTAs do not mention MSMEs, e-commerce, and the digital economy which flourished in the advent of the pandemic, and that they have already been incorporated into the RCEP agreement. Furthermore, he stated that RCEP was responsive to the growing needs of the stakeholders as a result of the growing interface between economies and emerging technologies. He then emphasized that the agreement was about establishing clear, stable, and predictable rules for trade and investments in the region, akin to a new rulebook for the region's 15 nations, that would make it easier and more competitive for businesses and investors to integrate into the global economy.

He also emphasized the Rules of Origin, which he mentioned in his previous speech. Using the country's garments business as an example, he surmised that if China was being considered as a potential source of cotton raw materials, under the Philippines' existing FTA with Japan, with the Rules of Origin in mind, the source could only be either within the Philippines, Japan, or any of the country's ASEAN partners, except China. However, he noted that under RCEP, businesses could not import materials from China, which would be used to produce garments in the Philippines, and transport them to Japan or to any other country.

Furthermore, he informed the Body that according to a *Philippine Daily Inquirer* story, garment manufacturers in the Philippines were able to secure \$6,480,000 worth of orders from Japan under the existing FTA. He then stated that because the Philippine government had yet to ratify RCEP, there would be some restrictions on sourcing low-cost textiles and fabrics from China.

However, he suggested that if the price was lower, the country may receive orders from neighboring countries such as Cambodia. But he believed that because Cambodia can now source directly from China and other countries that were already party to the RCEP and are offering cheaper alternatives, it will be able to sell to Japan as well. While he was pleased that Philippine garment manufacturers were able to get orders from Japan, he would be even happier if the Philippine government resolved to join RCEP, as it would provide the garments industry additional options for sourcing materials.



At this juncture, Senator Legarda clarified what the Rules of Origin meant. She stated that, in comparison to FTAs, the RCEP emphasizes the relevance of said rules, to wit:

“Rules of Origin are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and restrictions in several cases depend on the source of imports. There is a wide variation in the practice of governments with regard to rules of origin. Rules of Origin are important because many trade rules, regulations, and laws provide deferential treatment—also known as preferential rules of origin—to goods and products based on where they originate from. For example, under a trade agreements rules of origin, certain goods may be granted duty-free or reduced tariff treatment.”

Senator Legarda then reiterated Senate President Zubiri’s example on the Rules of Origin, stating that neighboring countries of China such as Laos or Cambodia may have the advantage of obtaining their materials at a lower cost, putting the Philippines at a disadvantage due to higher import tariffs as a result of the Philippines’ non-participation in the RCEP.

Senator Villanueva concurred with Senator Legarda, recalling from the sponsorship speech of Senate President Zubiri that the country was set to gain additional as well as new preferential tariff commitments; and that in the future, when most tariffs in the ASEAN +1 FTA and RCEP equalize, Philippine businesses may simply opt to use the RCEP so that there was only one set of rules to follow. He then emphasized the RCEP’s flexibility, saying that despite the ASEAN region’s existing FTAs, it was still necessary to cater to the interests of stakeholders, given new technological breakthroughs and other changes in the region. He also emphasized its importance in boosting trade.

When asked if there would be direct benefits if the Philippine government ratified the RCEP, Senate President Zubiri said that there would be several; for instance, numerous industries such as semiconductors, manufacturing, and electronics would have a larger market, as well as easiest access to countries such as New Zealand and Australia, which he described as hard to penetrate. In terms of the country’s agricultural products, he stated that while some could argue that they would be at a disadvantage, they would, in fact, benefit from the country ratifying the RCEP. He then named some of the agricultural export products that will continue being exported under the RCEP, to wit: pineapples, bananas, coconuts products, durian, papayas, fruit cocktails, and fruit juices, among others.

He then informed the Body that with thriving trade with other countries, Philippine manufacturers would then hire more skilled workers who would have to undergo training with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). He also stated that transportation services such as trucking and haulage, as well as services such as cold storage, would grow.

He added that along with the furniture sector, MSMEs supported by Mr. Joey Concepcion’s Go Negosyo would benefit from the RCEP, including: 1) the Small Coconut Farmers Association of Liptong, in Negros Oriental, which produces virgin coconut oil; 2) Potato Corner; 3) entertainment software company Xeno; and 4) Red Clay Pottery Craft from La Union. He also mentioned RFM Corporation, HanCole Industries, and KLT Fruits, Inc. as part of a long list of enterprises that may gain from the RCEP and compete with other countries due to lower pricing and access to inputs at low-cost; exporting tariff-free to other countries. He predicted that once the agreement’s ratification has been concurred in by the Senate, the country’s export figures will increase exponentially on the first and second years.

Senator Legarda stated at this point the benefits of RCEP, as follows: 1) Primarily support the country’s programs and policies for the resurgence of manufacturing, with 66% of imported products supplied from the RCEP free trade zone where the bulk of intermediate goods are being sourced; 2) Exporters could also gain access to a vast free trade zone with preferential tariffs under simplified trade rules, emphasizing clarity and transparency in rules in order to do business with

ease; 3) RCEP provides business-friendly mechanisms to facilitate trade through clear and transparent procedures, including flexible certification procedures that Philippine exports could take advantage of, such as Certificate of Origin, Declaration of Origin by approved Exporter, and Declaration of origin by Exporter or Producer. She stated that said certifications would make it easier for businesses, especially MSMEs, to use the FTA and take advantage of preferential agreement.

She believed that it would be best to place into the *Record* the benefits of the RCEP as determined by Dr. Cororaton's study, which was part of the briefing materials provided by the DTI and the DA. In response, Senator Villanueva thanked Senators Zubiri and Legarda for clarifying the issues on the RCEP. He expressed delight that costs would be cheaper as a result of decreased or zero tariff rates of imported raw materials and intermediate goods, resulting in lower production costs for producers and manufacturers, as well as enhanced jobs creation.

Senator Villanueva added to the following benefits of the RCEP, to wit: 1) simplified and business-friendly customs and procedures, 2) preferential arrangements; 3) stable and predictable business environment for investors and professionals; 4) encouraging new players, as well as new opportunities in the financial sector; 5) thriving IT-BPO sector; and 6) wider sourcing of raw materials for a bigger market that included 14 countries.

Asked if the programs mentioned were also included in the recently passed 2023 budget, which would take into account the different industries as well as the various government agencies involved, especially concerning the agriculture sector, Senate President Zubiri replied that all industries were already in support of the measure, thus allaying agriculture industry's hesitation. He then informed the Members that Assistant Secretary Gepty had been a highly effective trade negotiator from the outset, defending the agriculture sector's interests, which resulted in the exclusion of major Philippine agricultural products from the RCEP; with no tariff increase.

Senate President Zubiri then proceeded to enumerate the following products as being excluded from the RCEP: 1) swine meat (fresh, chilled, or frozen); 2) edible offal of bovine animals. 3) fresh, chilled or frozen (liver); 4) poultry meat (fresh, chilled, or frozen); 5) potatoes (fresh or chilled); 6) onions, shallots, garlic, leeks, and other alliaceous vegetables; 7) cabbages, cauliflowers, kohirabi, kale, and other edible brassicas, fresh or chilled 8); carrots; 9) lettuce and chicory (fresh or chilled); 10) manioc (cassava); 11) sweet potatoes; 12) coffee; 13) maize (corn); 14) rice; 15) cereal groat, meal, and pellets; 16) rolled or flaked grains; 17) other prepared or preserved meat, meat offal, or blood; 18) tunas in airtight containers; 19) sugar; and 20) instant coffee and complete animal feed.

Senate President Zubiri gave assurance that the farmers would be protected under the existing trade rules and would be given assistance through several government funded programs for 2023, such as:

- National High-Value Crops Program – P1.8 billion;
- National Livestock Program – P4.5 billion;
- Promotion and Development of Organic Agriculture Program – P900 million;
- National Corn Program – P5 billion;
- National Rice Program – P30.2 billion;
- Halal Food Industry Development Program – P21 million;
- National Urban and Peri-Urban Agricultural Program – P318 million;
- Exports and Investments Development Program – P773 million;
- Industry Development Program – P529 million; and
- MSME Development Program – P736 million.



He said that the DTI, DA, and DOLE have likewise given their support to the farmers.

He also commended BOC Commissioner Rubio, whom he praised for his dedication to the agency's anti-smuggling campaign, noting that Customs personnel were able to raid and file cases against agricultural product smugglers in just four days.

For his part, Senator Villanueva pointed out that concurring in the ratification of the RCEP would do the following: 1) Lower cost of production for the industries; 2) Create a more business-friendly environment; 3) Make local products more competitive; and 4) Make the Philippines an innovation hub and center of training and education.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Senator Gatchalian asked on the current tariffs and importing procedures of Philippine products such as rice, sugar, and poultry, which are excluded from tariff liberalization under RCEP. Senate President Zubiri replied that it is 35% for rice and 65% for sugar. Senator Gatchalian then asked why such rates would not be changed to protect local farmers and producers.

At this juncture, Senator Legarda clarified that under the RCEP, tariffs imposed on vulnerable and sensitive agricultural products, such as rice and sugar, would remain unchanged. In fact, she stated that just 15 agricultural items in the treaty are included in the 33 tariff lines. She noted that the RCEP negotiations began during the Aquino administration in 2012, and was continued and signed at the end of the Duterte administration, with Senator "Koko" Pimentel, defending the need to concur in the ratification of the agreement

Senate President Zubiri said that the tariffs for sugar for most of nations is 65% but is five percent for China. He assured Senator Gatchalian that the tariffs, especially for rice and sugar, would remain the same. He said that everyone knows how much he cares for the agriculture sector, particularly the sugar industry. He then recalled defending the sugar industry during plenary deliberations on the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law.

He said that after his discussions with the negotiators from the DTI and DA, he was assured that the agricultural sector would not be affected by RCEP. Senator Gatchalian welcomed the fact that the tariffs for the most common agricultural products would remain constant, noting that the livelihood of local farmers are being adversely affected by high production costs and unpredictable weather.

Asked on the agricultural products that would be allowed to come into the country with lower tariff rates, Senate President Zubiri gave the following data:

PRODUCTS INCLUDED IN THE 33 TARIFF LINES:

<i>Products</i>	<i>Current Tariff</i>	<i>PH RCEP Tariff Commitment</i>
1. Fish Fillet	Australia New Zealand: 5%	Year 15: 0%
2. Frozen Mackerel	Australia New Zealand: 4% Republic of Korea: 5%	Year 20: 3%
3. Celery	Australia New Zealand: 16%	Year 20: 15%
4. Sausages	Australia New Zealand: 32%	Year 20: 23%
5. Olives	China: 5%	Year 1: 0%
6. Spinach	China: 5%	
7. Olive Oil	Republic of Korea: 5%	
8. Live Swine	China: 30% Republic of Korea: 24/28%	Year 20: 20% Year 20: 20%

<i>Products</i>	<i>Current Tariff</i>	<i>PH RCEP Tariff Commitment</i>
9. Live Chicken	CN: 30% Republic of Korea: 28/32%	Year 20: 20% Year 20: 20%
10. Black Pepper	Republic of Korea: 5%	Year 15: 0%
11. Palm Nuts and Kernels	Republic of Korea: 5%	Year 15: 0%
12. Preserved Sweet Corn, Chilis and Other capers	Republic of Korea: 16%	Year 20: 15%
13. Preserved Onions	Republic of Korea: 16/32%	Year 20: 15/20%
14. Corn Starch	Republic of Korea: 16%	Year 20: 15%
15. Feeds for Primates	China: 3%	

Adverting to olives and olive oil, Senate President Zubiri expressed reservations because there is no olive industry in the country. He stated that it is because olives are only grown in countries with tropical climate, such as Middle East countries like Israel, Southern Italy, and Greece.

As regards live swine and live chicken, he said that the Philippines does not import live chicken and swine unless it is for breeding purposes. He surmised that merchants would lose money if they sold imported live swine and chicken in public marketplaces due to the cost of transportation and the high mortality rate of the livestock.

He stated that item no. 15, feeds for primates, might refer to food for monkeys which might be required in other countries for experimentation or research.

In response to further comments, he affirmed that only 15 agricultural products are allowed to enter the country through reduced preferential tariffs but within a timeframe of between 15 to 20 years. He also agreed that it would be impractical for the Philippines to import live swine or chicken. He then surmised that the tariff lines were intended to avoid over exportation and importation of such livestock to other countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

He also confirmed that under the RCEP, only agricultural products that are not produced in the Philippines can be imported, while locally produced goods are exempt from tariff barriers.

Asked which items had the most potential to benefit the country in terms of exports, Senate President Zubiri responded that processed food, such as canned pineapples and other fruits like durian, banana, and papaya, had the most promise.

He said that the emerging new market can be served by small farmer cooperatives that pool harvested produce to meet import demand for processed agricultural products.

He stated that seafood products, which, under the rules of origin, may be fished from one area of the country and canned in another, will also have the potential to be sold to the 14 signatory-countries.

Asked whether the products would be exported to RCEP countries at zero tariffs, Senate President Zubiri answered in the affirmative, adding that as a result, they would be sold at a lower price, making them more affordable to consumers.

At this point, Senator Gatchalian sought details about a particular item within the RCEP on Trade in Services and the practice of professions.

Senate President Zubiri affirmed that the RCEP guarantees professionals and service providers access to signatory countries, including legal, auditing, bookkeeping, taxation, architectural, hairdressing



and beauty, passenger and freight transport, audio-visual, telecommunications, financial, hotel management, air transport, cargo and handling, and gaming services.

Senator Gatchalian opined that the item presented immense overseas employment opportunities for Filipinos, whom, he pointed out, are a service-oriented people as evidenced by the more than four million OFWs abroad.

Senate President Zubiri pointed out, however, that any Filipino intending to work in RCEP countries must meet all of the standards for practicing a particular profession. He added that it would also apply to foreigners from RCEP countries looking for work in the Philippines. Senator Gatchalian stated that opening new markets not only for Filipino goods but also for Filipino talents would benefit the country.

Asked how the RCEP can benefit Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Senator Zubiri stated that the RCEP, in addition to providing MSMEs with a larger market, also provides preferential tariffs under simplified and singular trade rules. He stated that the resulting clarity and transparency will help businesses in accessing the market. He likened it to the local Ease of Doing Business Law, but on a wider scale.

He stated that he had met with several MSME owners who were eager to export their products to RCEP countries. He mentioned Pastel de Camiguin, Potato Corner, and KLT Fruits, as well as manufacturers of pottery, handicrafts, and textile makers. Furthermore, he stated that packaging industries like those in Valenzuela stand to benefit from the RCEP agreement.

He also stated that the Philippines would be able to import various equipment and agricultural inputs at zero tariff, making them more affordable to MSMEs.

At this point, Senate President Zubiri noted that of the FTAs signed by the country, only the RCEP included particular provisions on MSMEs.

Senator Gatchalian summed up the benefits of the RCEP to MSMEs, as zero tariff importation of equipment and inputs, the access of new markets, and trade facilitation.

He then described how a Valenzuela-based manufacturer that supplied products for Pottery Barn in the United States was forced to close because of stiff competition and logistical issues, and surmised that the RCEP provided potential areas that Local Government Units can look into to maximize the country's participation in the treaty.

Asked about specific mechanisms within the RCEP that address trade facilitation for MSMEs, Senate President Zubiri responded that in addition to expanded market access and equipment importation, the trade agreement includes business-friendly, clear and transparent procedures such as flexible certifications like certificates of origin, declarations of origin by approved exporters, and declarations of origin by exporter-producers.

He also stated that under the RCEP, matters concerning trade measures should be addressed within 60 days and resolved within 180 days. He stated that such issues would include hygienic measures, technical regulation norms, and conformity assessment procedures.

He then stated that the Economic Cooperation Facility of the RCEP shall also provide capacity-building and technical cooperation activities to help MSMEs use the agreement, increase their overall competitiveness, and promote their goods and services throughout the region.

He noted that countries that had already ratified the treaty created agencies inside their respective governments to handle RCEP matters.

Relative thereto, Senator Gatchalian asked whether the Bureau of Customs, which is responsible for trade facilitation in the country, was prepared to undertake the tasks mandated by the RCEP, given the numerous challenges it had, and was still, facing.

He also sought information on the consequences the Philippines could face if it fails to meet its commitments under the RCEP, and how the Legislature can exert its jurisdiction to compel government agencies to comply with the commitments. Senator Legarda stated that a Special Oversight Committee on RCEP shall be created to address such matters. She stated that it was likewise a response to allay the fears of interest groups with regard to the treaty and to ensure that the sectors will be protected and that its projected Gross Domestic Product growth as a member-country will be achieved.

Senate President Zubiri stated that an RCEP Joint Committee had been created which would monitor the implementation of the agreement, including procedures within the Bureau of Customs. He then reiterated that the Senate would create a Special Oversight Committee on RCEP composed of key committee chairpersons as well as the Minority Leader, that would monitor the treaty's implementation as well.

Senator Gatchalian agreed with Senate President Zubiri that the oversight committee was a critical aspect of the resolution since it ensures the Senate's steadfast commitment to RCEP, particularly for the benefit of the MSMEs.

He assumed that whereas large corporations can afford to pay brokers and accountants to help them in their trade, the oversight committee would ensure that trading for MSMEs is convenient because they cannot afford to hire professionals to assist them. He stated that one of the measure's attractions is the ease of facilitation and simplified trading for MSMEs. He urged the Body to do everything to ensure that the agencies are committed and that proper reforms are implemented so that the people can benefit from the RCEP.

Concerning the BOC issue, Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that the agency has developed a national single window that connects to the 10 ASEAN member-states and provides one-stop-shop processing and filing of trading documents. He expected an RCEP trading window to be set up as well.

He added that Secretary Pascual, who was present in the hall, informed him that the department had launched the Exports and Investments Development Program to expand the MSME program. He then suggested that the DTI create a one-stop-shop for MSMEs in relation to the RCEP. He stated that a small basket weaving cooperative, for instance, could go to the DTI for assistance in marketing its products to Australia and New Zealand.

Senator Gatchalian thanked Senate President Zubiri for the assurance that both the Executive and Legislative branches would do everything possible to maximize the RCEP's potential. He believed that the negotiations had progressed significantly, as the Senate discussed the RCEP for many months before coming up with its full potential that would benefit the people.

Senator Legarda remarked that the Magna Carta for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises was dear to her heart as she was its principal author during her second term as a senator. She then read to the Body her statement, which focused on the MSMEs and their access to the global supply chain:

“Aside from the enhanced market access, the RCEP will also provide business friendly mechanisms, as well as clear and transparent procedures to facilitate trade for companies, especially for MSMEs to do business and conduct trade in the region. This will facilitate the integration of businesses into the global value chain.”



She explained that RCEP's rules of origin allow companies to use inputs from the region so that the final goods receive preferential tariff treatment, which would allow MSMEs to provide inputs to larger companies; the RCEP Agreement applies less import duties on goods from the region-parties could also buy from RCEP could take advantage of the lower cost of tariffs, giving MSMEs a good opportunity to sell their goods to consumers in the RCEP community.

She further explained that existing manufacturers like electronic products for automobiles and computers can expand their operations in the Philippines, and cater to the growing demand in member-regions. She stated that in addition to operations and technical assistance, there is an entire chapter on e-commerce that promotes trade facilitation through paperless trading and cashless transactions. She noted that because it is something new for the local MSMEs, the DTI may implement a special capacity-building program in the coming years so that the MSMEs could take advantage of the RCEP's e-commerce provision.

Regarding job generation, Senator Gatchalian remarked that new markets create new opportunities for people. He noted that the Senate President's sponsorship speech underlined the downstream benefits to people when markets open up – logistics, drivers, and laborers. He then inquired about the number of jobs that RCEP would produce.

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that according to a study conducted for the DOLE, the benefits of trade policies such as RCEP represent shifts in employment from low productivity to high productivity jobs. He stated that by 2031, it is projected that 1.4 million job would be created, mostly in the service sector: agriculture, 308,490 jobs; industry, 77,683 jobs; and service, 991,000 jobs. He stated that 1.4 million Filipinos will have a better life.

Senator Gatchalian stated that in addition to opening markets, a concrete and tangible result of the RCEP is job generation. While 2031 is not far away, he believed that RCEP would help reduce unemployment, particularly after the pandemic. In terms of trade, he stated the Philippines has a perennial trade deficit. He estimated that the deficit was about P43 billion in 2021. He then asked how the RCEP would improve the country's trade standing.

In response, Senate President Zubiri remarked that there is no magic pill that can fix the trade imbalance because certain industries such as steel, cement, food, fertilizer, and oil and oil products must still be imported into the country. He cited Senator Legarda's statement that the Philippines used to have a trade deficit with four non-EU countries – Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Iceland from which cheese, milk, and Swiss chocolates were sourced. He stated, however, that when the Philippine government ratified the FTA with the aforementioned countries, the markets have opened up and the Philippines has started sending them tropical fruits and other products. He believed that the experience with the four countries would boost trading with other nations and reduce the trade deficit.

Senator Legarda also cited the study of Dr. Cororaton, which found that exports of electronic equipment would substantially increase, from \$17.66 million in 2022 to \$264 million in 2031, or from \$2.73 million in 2022 to \$25.45 million in 2031; vegetables, fruits, and nuts from \$2.85 million in 2022 to \$28.21 million in 2031; other food products, from \$1.5 million to \$19.98 million over the same period. She said that the oversight should have its review of the RCEP by then.

Senator Gatchalian stated that RCEP would yield a trade surplus of approximately P200 million on certain industries under various scenarios, but would definitely not exacerbate the country's trade deficit.

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that when the American group Envirotech Vehicles or EVT learned that the Philippines would be a part of the RCEP, the company not only planned to export to the country, but also to set up a manufacturing plant of electric vehicles in the country,

which they could sell to the 14 other member-states, including Australia and ASEAN countries, particularly public utility vehicles powered by electricity. He expressed hope that the company, which sources its batteries from China, would use the Philippines as its hub, assembling the EVTs in the country and selling them to other countries. He stated that, unlike Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, which are land-locked and must transit through Vietnam and Thailand, the Philippines has ports around the country.

Senator Gatchalian also voiced optimism about the RCEP, its benefits, and its minimal drawbacks. He stated that he was very optimistic with the accord as its negotiators have the farmers' best interests in mind. He then commended the negotiating team led by Assistant Secretary Gepty.

Finally, Senator Legarda informed the Body that the Philippines-Switzerland FTA in 2018 increased trade by 2.4%, or from P802 million that year to P821 million in 2019; and by P101.49 million in 2020 and P89 million in 2021. She stated that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the trade deficit had become a trade surplus. She expressed hope that the country's lucky charm would continue with the RCEP.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR ESTRADA

At the outset, Senator Estrada expressed his support for the treaty. He then inquired about the rationale behind the RCEP.

Citing his sponsorship speech, Senate President Zubiri stated that the agreement is essentially about "establishing clear, stable and predictable rules in doing trade and investments in the region so that it will be more convenient and competitive for our businesses and investors to be integrated in the global economy." He emphasized that the trade agreement will enable the Philippines to trade with 15 countries, representing 30% of the world's population or nearly 30% of the world's GDP, or 30% of global trade. He added that the country would enter into a regional agreement that would provide it with massive amounts of foreign direct investment. He stated that countries such as Japan, South Korea, China, Australia, and New Zealand are seeking for other markets to create their manufacturing hubs because building on their own soil has become too expensive. He emphasized that if the Philippines joins the RCEP, it will become part of a bigger free-trade agreement, and manufacturers from member-nations will be able to enter the country without breaching any trade regulations. He stated that the RCEP has practical trade arrangements that the ASEAN+1 FTAs do not have.

As to when the negotiations for the RCEP agreement began, Senate President Zubiri replied that it started in 2012.

Senator Legarda added that the RCEP negotiations began in 2012 under President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III's administration and were endorsed by ASEAN economic ministers. She stated that President Duterte signed the trade agreement in 2020, after eight years of negotiations. She added that following the transmission of the RCEP Agreement to the Senate by Senator Pimentel, chairperson of the Committee of Foreign Relations in the Eighteenth Congress, technical working group meetings and committee hearings were held, which continued until the Nineteenth Congress under Senator Marcos' committee chairmanship and, currently, under her (Senator Legarda's) subcommittee chairmanship and Senate President Zubiri's co-chairmanship.

Senate President Zubiri explained that the Senate did not yet concur in the executive ratification in the 18th Congress (Proposed Senate Resolution No. 963) under the Duterte administration because the Body decided to revisit the issue in the 19th Congress (Proposed Senate Resolution No. 485) so that the new administration under President Marcos could study the measure further.



Concerning the status of the RCEP Agreement in the 18th Congress, Senate President Zubiri stated that Proposed Senate Resolution No. 963 was pending on Second Reading at the time, with its committee report almost ready for a vote.

Senator Estrada stated that the 15 RCEP participating countries signed the agreement in November 2020, while the Philippines was still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. He inquired whether the country had recovered from the pandemic. Senate President Zubiri stated that the Philippines' GDP had already recovered significantly, with a 7.6% growth rate. However, he noted that it still had an inflation rate of 8.7%, and that ideally, the inflation rate should be lower than the GDP rate in order for Filipinos to feel growth rather than high commodity prices. Nonetheless, he stated that the President and the Executive and Legislative economic teams were doing everything possible to reduce commodity prices.

He also noted that while other ASEAN countries lag behind, the Philippines, along with Vietnam and Indonesia, has been dubbed the region's "darling" in terms of phenomenal growth rates, owing primarily to OFW remittances. Nonetheless, he stated that Senate approval of the RCEP Agreement would be required to boost the country's manufacturing sector.

Senator Hontiveros stated that she was a member of the previous Congress and that the Senate was unable to concur in the RCEP Agreement because the Body then considered the agriculture sector's many concerns. Similarly, she stated that the Body gave the Executive branch time to respond to the aforementioned concerns before deciding on the concurrence. She added that she would raise the same concerns from the agriculture sector during her interpellation.

Senate President Zubiri confirmed that the measure needed to be studied further in deference to the agriculture sector, which required follow-up meetings and consultations. Furthermore, he stated that a set of guidelines under the resolution must be included for approval by the relevant parties.

Senator Estrada stated that he had read reports that India was concerned about increased trade deficits with countries with which it has foreign trade agreements due to a lack of safeguards that would allow it to respond to import surges, the threat of import competition in agriculture, insufficient market access for service exports, and increased mobility of people to deliver the aforementioned service exports.

Apart from their differences, Senate President Zubiri explained that India was hesitant to trade with China because they were concerned about an influx of Chinese products into their country. He noted that India's population was already growing at an exponential rate and was on its way to overtaking China, which has a one-child policy.

He opined that the Philippines could import steel and tropical fruits such as durian and papaya to India. Senator Legarda, for her part, revealed that the Patnongon Multi-Purpose Cooperative cotton processing facility in Antique, which she established through the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA), was funded by the Philippine government but imported equipment, technology, and expertise from India. She stated that the Philippines would no longer be required to import cotton from China because the cotton processing facility in Antique already does the planting, ginning, and spinning with Indian equipment.

Senate President Zubiri stated that the Philippines is already exporting unwrapped gold, housing storage units, refined copper, digital monolithic integrated circuits, lead waste, and scrap to India. He stated that in return, India exports light petroleum oil and derivatives, medicines, carabeef, and motorcycles.

The Chair, Senator Ejercito, added that the Philippines had been importing Bajaj scooters, Mahindra motorcycles, and Kirloskar generators from India.



When asked if the country has enough infrastructure, investment in labor training, and education to maximize its RCEP membership, and whether the country had already successfully cut bureaucratic red tape and improved the ease and cost of doing business in the country, Senate President Zubiri responded that the Philippines would have to come up with a better framework than the already existing FTAs and the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement because the RCEP Agreement would require it to come up with a better framework than the existing FTAs and the ASEAN Free. He stated that the country has a mechanism in place, as well as an RCEP Committee, to implement local programs such as doing business in free trade zones, a regional interactive platform, inclusive innovation and industrial strategy, ease of doing business, shared service facilities, and the Philippine Export Competitiveness Program.

He also stated that the RCEP organization would establish its secretariat in the 15 member-countries, which do not include the Philippines where the multilateral agreement has yet to be ratified.

When asked how the Philippines would be affected by the delay in ratifying the RCEP Agreement, he responded that with longer delays, the Philippines would lose access to more affordable imports and markets for its exports. On the import-export front, he noted that the majority of the country's manufacturers import its products, particularly packaging, and that without RCEP membership, the country would be unable to obtain packaging from other ASEAN countries and would have to obtain it from China and other countries with import tariffs, making packaging more expensive. He emphasized that RCEP membership would result in lower imports and exports that are more affordable and competitive than those of other countries.

In response to further questions, Senator Legarda stated that large countries that are also RCEP members, such as China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea, would face lower tariffs when purchasing goods from smaller fellow member countries, as opposed to the Philippines, which is not yet an RCEP member. She reasoned that Japan, for example, would prefer a product from another RCEP country because it would be less expensive than one from a non-member country.

Senate President Zubiri further quantified the loss of non-membership, stating that there was a -26% decrease in real GDP growth and missed opportunities to increase GDP by 2% as a result of non-membership.

He stated that the following industry and business organizations have expressed support for RCEP membership: PHILEXPORT, Confederation of Wearable Exporters of the Philippines, Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association of the Philippines, Federation of the Philippine Industries, Go Negosyo, Employers Confederation of the Philippines, Export Development Council, Tuna Manufacturers Association of the Philippines, Canned Sardines Manufacturers Association of the Philippines, Canned Sardines Manufacturers Association of the Philippines, Philippine Chamber of Commerce, Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Foundation, Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce Philippines, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP), American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (AmCham), PAMURI, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Korean Chamber of Commerce, and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce.

He added that the majority of the organizations mentioned that have plants and factories in the country wanted access to RCEP inputs and parts that they would assemble in the Philippines and then export to the 15 RCEP countries. As a result, he continued, businesses would be able to expand and hire more workers. He revealed that an American investor, anticipating a large profit from the RCEP Agreement, was attempting to hire 2,000 Filipinos to manufacture and export electronic vehicles in Clark.



When asked if the RCEP would help combat inflation, he responded in the affirmative, saying that the country would be able to obtain cheaper products for assembly. He also stated that the country's non-membership in the agreement would have an impact on its image as a potential destination for foreign investments due to local firms' limited access to the RCEP market in comparison to firms in signatory countries. He surmised that other countries might think there was something wrong with the Philippines for isolating itself or falling behind other countries that were already reaping the benefits of RCEP membership. He recalled that even Japan's Prime Minister and manufacturers have praised RCEP and have asked the Philippine delegation to join the agreement during their meetings. He mentioned that Japanese companies in the country, such as Marubeni Philippines Corporation, Mitsui & Company, and Sumitomo Electric Incorporated, would want to import cheap parts that they could assemble in the Philippines and then re-export to other countries. He stated that most RCEP countries would rather go to Vietnam or Thailand than the Philippines to set up a manufacturing plant because their products would have 14-nation market access.

To Senator Estrada's query as to when the Philippines could participate in the trading environment, Senate President Zubiri replied that it would be 60 days after the deposit of the instrument of ratification.

As regards the importance of RCEP to the global FDIs, Senator Legarda explained that it covers 29%, or nearly one third, of global trade, and a market of 2.3 billion people in terms of foreign direct investment destination, accounting for 33% of global inward FDI and 47% global outward FDI between the ASEAN nations and the RCEP non-ASEAN nations. She said that it also accounted for 50% of the global manufacturing output, 50% of global automotive products, 70% of electronics, and the main GVC hubs of China, South Korea, and Japan, among others. She informed the Body that the Philippines was the only ASEAN country that had not yet to ratify the RCEP.

Regarding its micro effect, she cited the thriving chocolate industry because many had already ventured into cacao planting. However, she stated that under the ASEAN-Japan FTA, to which the country was a signatory, Japan currently imposed a 21.3% tariff on Philippine-made chocolate. She stated that once the country becomes a signatory to RCEP, Philippine-made chocolates would have zero tariff when exported to Japan after 16 years.

Senate President Zubiri stated that tariff reductions would be phased in. He also stated that the RCEP market would be larger in terms of population than the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) market composed of Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Asked by Senator Estrada why NAFTA countries were not included in RCEP, Senate President Zubiri responded that the NAFTA has its own tariff system that is distinct from RCEP.

When asked whether the gains from the previous Congress' amendments to the Public Service Act, Retail Trade Liberalization Act, and Foreign Investment Act would be lost if RCEP concurrence was delayed, Senate President Zubiri replied in the affirmative, explaining that it would send mixed signals to investors that the Philippines was not truly ready for the global market.

Senator Estrada stated that it was revealed during technical working group briefings that the DTI and DA never met with the agri-fishery sector to discuss their concerns about the agreement. In response, Senate President Zubiri stated that the issue of lack of consultation was raised, but he did not want to cast any doubt on the matter. He stated that former Senate President Pimentel did an excellent job defending the issue on the floor. He asked for more patience as he had called for a whole-day hearing so that the DTI could address the concerns raised by those opposed to the treaty, particularly the agriculture sector.

Asked whether the oppositors were already supportive of the treaty, Senate President Zubiri admitted that he was not sure due to the hold-outs from the WTO-General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT), which the agriculture sector blamed for their current situation. However, he mentioned countries like Brazil and India that improved their sugar and grain industries during the WTO-GATT inception. He opined that the country's agricultural issues were not limited to RCEP and WTO. He mentioned the lack of government support and the farmers' reluctance to adopt new technologies and innovations. He stated that the farmers were complaining about the government's hybrid rice program because they wanted to use inbred rice to produce their own rice seedlings rather than buying hybrid rice. He averred that with inbred rice, the farmers could breed their own rice seeds for planting, but it should also be considered that using inbred rice could result in lower production than with hybrid rice. He stated that the increase in hybrid rice yield would be sufficient to purchase another set of hybrid rice for the following crop season.

Senate President Zubiri believed that the problem was of a cultural nature, and he sympathized with DA officials who were attempting to modernize agriculture but were met with resistance from some farmer groups. He emphasized the need to modernize the equipment for more efficient planting. He stated that farmers' traditional and cultural mindset must be replaced with modern perspectives. He added that the country must be competitive; otherwise, commodities will become more expensive due to a decline in agricultural output.

In this regard, Senate President Zubiri assured that Congress would never abandon the agriculture sector. He stated that Congress would establish a Special Committee for RCEP oversight to ensure that the DA, DTI, and all their agencies adhere to the mandates outlined in the various government programs and guidelines.

Senator Legarda, for her part, stated that with or without RCEP, government agencies, particularly the Department of Agriculture and the fisheries sector, must assist the fisherfolk, farmers, and those who bring food to every Filipino's table, especially since the country would hopefully accede and complete the concurrence in the ratification of RCEP. She stated that government must ensure that safety nets are in place and that MSME, as well as the farmers and fisherfolk who have long been neglected and longed for better days, are protected. She clarified, however, that the initiative was not a panacea that would immediately reduce the trade deficit, empower MSMEs, and solve the problems of fisherfolk and farmers overnight. She stated, however, that the country could not fall behind the other ASEAN nations that have already ratified the agreement.

Similarly, she asserted that the concurring resolution's unprecedented guidelines would be implemented. She believed that with the exception of the VFA of 1999, it would be the first time in the history of the Senate that such lengthy guidelines and recommendations with resolatory clauses incorporating the oppositors' wishes were included in the instrument of concurrence. She urged the senators to support the Senate President and the oversight committee in ensuring that government agencies, such as the DA, DTI, DOLE, BFAR, NEDA, Tariff Commission, and Bureau of Customs, would not shirk their responsibilities in relation to the RCEP's implementation.

Senator Lagarda also proposed conducting regional consultations on how the Senate finance committee could enhance the GAA in the coming years to comply with what was promised to the oppositors. She noted that the spending on agriculture was minimal at 2% of the country's GDP, compared to Vietnam's 6% and Thailand's 4%. She proposed the budget increase for the agricultural sector, especially in light of the RCEP's ratification.

Asked if RCEP has the potential to create quality jobs and increase wages, Senate President Zubiri confirmed that the agriculture sector would gain approximately 308,000 jobs, the industry would gain approximately 77,600 jobs, and services sector would gain approximately 991,700 jobs, for a total of nearly 1.4 million jobs.

On whether the creation of jobs would be realized eight years later, Senate President Zubiri noted that according to a DTI study, it would be incremental: in the first year, there would be approximately 73,000 jobs, with the agriculture sector receiving 20,000 and the services sector receiving almost 60,000; in the second year, there would be approximately 203,000 jobs, and so on, until the target of 1.4 million jobs was reached.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

In reply to Senator Dela Rosa's query on the additional efforts made by the government to fully prepare the farmers for the implementation of the RCEP, Senate President Zubiri stated that after the 2022 elections, president-elect Bongbong Marcos requested a study on RCEP's impact on farmers to determine the severity of the problem in the agriculture sector, and that President Marcos subsequently headed the Department of Agriculture, with the assistance of Senior Undersecretary Panganiban. He stated that the DA had submitted banner programs such as the National Rice Program to increase rice production and the Rice Tariffication Law authored by Senator Villar, which benefited farmers through import taxes on rice.

He disclosed that as of 2022, 1,733,957 individuals and 3,899 groups benefited from the National Rice Program, and in 2023, the program aims to assist 3.6 million rice farmers with a budget of P30 billion, which would fund high-quality seeds, discount vouchers for fertilizer, equipment purchases, and small-scale irrigation projects.

Regarding the National Corn Program, he stated that its objective is to increase the production of high-quality corn, cassava, sorghum, and soybean for the livestock, poultry, and food industries; to provide seeds, fertilizers, bio-fertilizers, fuel subsidies, post-harvest machinery, and facilities for farmers' cooperatives and associations across the country. He noted that the beneficiaries of the corn program for 2022 were 111,678 individuals and 764 groups, while in 2023, a budget of P5 billion will assist 452,000 individuals and 1,252 groups.

Regarding the National High Value Crops Development Program for food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable growth, Senate President Zubiri stated that the program aimed to promote the production of high-value crops such as mangoes, bananas, pineapples, cacaos, onions, low-land and high-land vegetables; programs on production; procurement of seeds and planting materials; provision of farm production equipment and machinery; rehabilitation and maintenance of production facilities such as greenhouse, nurseries, and rain shelters; and training and enhancement through DAR and DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research. He noted that beneficiaries of the program for 2022 were 11,456 individuals and 9,700 groups, and for 2023, with a budget of P1.8 billion, 12,828 individuals and 8,655 groups.

In addition, he stated that the National Livestock Program includes: the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (INSPIRE) program to increase swine production and help pig farmers recover from the onslaught of African Swine Fever; the Animal Genetic Resources Improvement Program for the development, maintenance, and upgrading of nucleus/multiplier farms; animal health services; livestock and poultry training programs; support for biotechnology; an animal health field resource development; and a Livestock Economic Enterprise Development (LEED) program. He stated that for 2022, the program had assisted 65,400 individuals with a budget of P4.5 billion, and for 2023, the target beneficiaries would be 23,682. He added that funding was also made for the National Fisheries Program under BFAR as well as for the National Organic Agriculture Program, both of which would be administered by a special committee.

At this juncture, Senator Legarda cited some of the recommendations that the oppositors submitted and that were included in the resolatory clauses of the RCEP resolution, to namely:



DA's adherence to the call under the United Nations' Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) for smallholder farmers, which seeks to stimulate the development of public policies and investments in favor of family farming from a holistic perspective, unlocking the transformative potential of family farmers; to balance the benefits expected for large-scale agriculture under RCEP; and the adoption of the Consultancy for Agricultural Productivity Enhancement (CAPE) Program, Food Safety Program, Packaging and Labeling Assistance Program, Innovation System Support Fund (ISSF) Program, Manufacturing Productivity Extension (MPEX) Program, and other productivity enhancement and innovation programs.

As for the local government, Senator Legarda said that the LGU officials would be urged to implement local ordinances in accordance with national policies, as part of local government support services programs such as the province-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System (PAFES), among others. She said that the programs would involve the genuine participation of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), farmers and fisherfolk, indigenous peoples (IPs), women and other marginalized sectors in the government, agri-fishery boards, councils, and other relevant committees, public-private partners, and stakeholders in multi-sectoral committees such as the Committee on International Trade of the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF).

On whether the agricultural sector was fully aware of the DA's plans and programs, Senator Legarda remarked that the matter had been negotiated for ten years spanning three administrations; in fact, trade deficits have existed since the 1970s. Even though some agencies within the Executive department were not fully prepared, she believed that they did their best and that there was still much to be done in order to save the agriculture and fisheries sector.

Noting that RCEP only offers 33 agricultural tariff lines covering 15 commodities that were not immediately zero tariff with the exception of olives and olive oil, Senator Legarda emphasized that since all ASEAN nations had already ratified the RCEP, the Philippines would now be at a disadvantage because the RCEP countries that were trading partners outside the ASEAN region would lower their tariffs for other ASEAN nations that would export the same produce to countries like China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, while products from the Philippines would enter the said countries with high tariffs. She stated that the prospective 1.3 million jobs and safety nets would not be implemented if RCEP were not ratified. She then brought up the need for a special oversight committee comprised of experts who would monitor and recommend effective agricultural programs outlined in the concurring resolution, as it could no longer be amended once ratified. Nevertheless, she surmised that Congress, as the holder of the purse strings and function of oversight, could contact the agencies as often as necessary to ensure compliance to the agreement they made with their oppositors.

Regarding opposition to the RCEP, she revealed that the agricultural sector complained to her about lack of support, mismanagement, corruption, and insufficient resources despite the existence of FTAs and bilateral free trade agreements such as JPEPA. But she emphasized, however, that the Philippines must keep pace with other ASEAN nations or risk falling behind.

Senator Dela Rosa then asked about existing financial aid provided to farmers. He mentioned that he inquired the matter since he had submitted Senate Bill 206, or the Filipino Farmers Financial Assistance Program Act, which aimed to provide farmers with direct conditional financial assistance. He stated that the measure could be viewed as additional assistance to farmers to cushion the impact of RCEP on their incomes.

Senate President Zubiri remarked that he is fully supportive of the bill, or any measure that would directly benefit the farmers, but that despite the Senate coming up with meaningful initiatives, the aforementioned assistance was not being received by the beneficiaries for one reason or another. In this regard, he expressed his commitment to support Senator Dela Rosa's bill.



Senate President Zubiri then enjoined his colleagues to work with him on the following measures: High Value Crops Program at P1.8 billion; National Livestock Program, P4.5 billion; promotion of Organic Agriculture Program, P900 million; National Corn Program, P5 billion; National Rice Program, P30 billion; Halal Development Program, P21 million; National Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program, P318 million; as well as the Farm-to-Market Road, P17 billion, which he said would greatly benefit low-lying roads that had been the subject of frequent flooding in Mindanao. He added that the oversight committee that the Body would set up should ensure that mechanisms were made available to the oppositors so that funds would go to the intended beneficiaries; so that every peso would be accounted for; and so that every initiative was implemented on the ground.

As to possible worst-case scenarios in the Philippine economy, with or without Congress' concurrence on the ratification of the RCEP, Senate President Zubiri mentioned that there was a possibility that the country might be left behind in terms of FDIs. As an example, he mentioned the American investors he had brought to the country, who viewed the Philippines and the entire ASEAN region as a potential market for e-vehicles. He stated that the investors hoped to replicate their success in Singapore, where they have set up 2,000 electric school buses. He stated that should the country decide not to join the RCEP, there was a chance that the investment would go to Johor, Malaysia because of its market's few restrictions, with the investors being able to sell their e-vehicles at competitive prices to the other 14 countries with very little tariff. Should the Americans decide to invest in the Philippines despite the government's non-ratification of the RCEP, they would have a very limited market and might ship their e-vehicles back to the United States or the ASEAN +1 FTA. He also believed that the problem stemmed from the very limited availability of goods. Explaining further, he stated that the investors could not source their inputs from China and then sell their products to Japan, nor could they source their goods from non-ASEAN countries and then sell their products within the ASEAN region. He clarified that although there would still be a market for the goods, it would be more expensive due to the imposition of tariffs on the products.

In another example, he informed the Body that the country was once the largest producer in the garments industry; manufacturing for luxury brands such as GAP and Banana Republic in the United States. He stated, however, that currently, the Philippines was being replaced by Laos and Cambodia due to cheaper production materials and lower tariff exportation rates due to the two countries' membership in the RCEP. Citing his earlier example of a Japanese order for garments amounting to US\$6.5 million, he argued that it was not impossible that Japan might instead transact with RCEP member countries offering lower costs, causing the Philippines to lose opportunities.

Senator Legarda then shared a quote from Mr. Cielito Habito on the government's delayed ratification of the RCEP: "In delaying formal entry into RCEP, we've virtually held hostage the ability of 90 percent of our economy (in GDP terms), and three-quarters of our workers, to gain from widened economic opportunities offered by greater access to a vastly expanded market."

She stated that there are safeguard measures in place within the RCEP that would provide for mechanisms for parties to address threats or injury to domestic industries, such as suspension or further reduction of customs duties; an increase in custom duties following a surge in imports; or anti-dumping and countervailing measures, affirming parties' rights and obligations under relevant WTO rules. Senate President Zubiri affirmed Senator Legarda's statement.

Concerning potential situations that the agriculture sector might face following Congress' concurrence in the ratification of the RCEP, Senate President Zubiri reiterated that due to the sector's exclusion from the agreement, there would be no difference or change in the tariffs on agricultural products, whether or not the Philippines ratified the RCEP. However, he noted that other sectors, such as the manufacturing industry, would have another opportunity to recoup lost investments, citing Cebu as having the best skilled workers to compete with Chinese artisans. He also stated that Filipinos are equally adept at automotive restoration activities such as painting,



mechanical, and restoration works. In this regard, he mentioned the possibility of reviving the industry, which he believed could have a market in Australia due to country's status as an RCEP member. He also surmised that the Philippines could use the RCEP platform to sell to New Zealand and Japan, given Japan's fascination with classic Mustang cars like the 1967 and 1969 models.

Senator Dela Rosa thanked Senate President Zubiri and Senator Legarda for their answers, saying they clarified matters regarding Congress' concurrence on the agreement's ratification. He added that as a farmer's son, scrutinizing the agreement would be beneficial. In response, Senate President Zubiri stated that he too was a farmer's son. Senator Dela Rosa then stated that as a fellow native of Mindanao, the Senate President would understand how people in the area relied on agriculture, subsisting on fish and on corn.

Senate President Zubiri stated that, indeed, one of the industries that could benefit the most would be the tuna industry, allowing Mindanao-based ventures to freely export to other RCEP countries. He added that while Congress' concurrence to the ratification of the RCEP was important, it was the DA and how they would implement existing laws as well as new programs that would be most important.

Asked if there was a deadline for concurring with the RCEP, Senator Zubiri stated that while there was no prescribed timeline, delaying the concurrence would result in missed opportunities; At this point, he reiterated that Cambodia's exports increased by 7%, while Vietnam remained as the Philippines' biggest competitor, alongside Indonesia. He believed that if the Philippines passes up the opportunity to gain a wider market for its products, it will be relegated to Tier Two countries in terms of trade, together with Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar; when it should constantly aim for Tier One, alongside Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand, among others. In closing, he stated that if the Senate could only leave one legacy to future generations, it should be the RCEP.

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.

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. 1885, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL HEROES COUNCIL UNDER THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE PHILIPPINES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committees on Culture and the Arts; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1886, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10121 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "PHILIPPINE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT ACT OF 2010" AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Local Government

Senate Bill No. 1887, entitled

AN ACT INTEGRATING THE SUBJECT ON CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION INTO THE SCIENCE CURRICULUM OF GRADES 2 TO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL OF PHILIPPINE EDUCATION SYSTEM, BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC”

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committees on Basic Education; and Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change

Senate Bill No. 1888, entitled

AN ACT RENAMING AGHAM ROAD AND BIR ROAD LOCATED IN QUEZON CITY AS SENATOR MIRIAM P. DEFENSOR-SANTIAGO AVENUE

Introduced by Senators Angara, Cayetano (AP) and Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Senate Bill No. 1889, 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

Introduced by Senator Lapid

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

Senate Bill No. 1890, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE VIROLOGY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE, TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Science and Technology; Ways and Means; and Finance

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 486, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION ON THE PRESENT STATE OF OUR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BUILDINGS AND OTHER STRUCTURES BOTH



VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL WITH THE END IN VIEW OF REVIEWING, REVISING, AND UPDATING OUR PRESENT BUILDING CODE TO MAKE IT MORE ATTUNED TO AND COMPLIANT WITH INTERNATIONAL SAFETY STANDARDS

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committee on Public Works

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 487, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES TO THE VICTIMS OF THE EARTHQUAKES ON 6 FEBRUARY 2023 IN SYRIA AND TURKEY

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committee on Rules

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1891, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10845, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE ANTI-AGRICULTURAL SMUGGLING ACT OF 2016, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 1892, entitled

AN ACT ENHANCING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN AGRICULTURE TO ADVERSE CLIMATE EVENTS BY INSTITUTIONALIZING THE USE OF CROP CLIMATE CALENDARS, EQUIPPING FARMERS FOR CLIMATE SENSITIVE DECISION-MAKING, AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO LOCALIZED WEATHER AND CLIMATE INFORMATION”

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; Science and Technology; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1893, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO XIAYI ‘CHARLOTTE’ ZHANG

Introduced by Senator Dela Rosa

To the Committee on Rules

Senate Bill No. 1894, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO TIANQI "WILLIAM" YUAN

Introduced by Senator Dela Rosa

To the Committee on Rules

Senate Bill No. 1895, entitled

AN ACT REMOVING AS ABSOLUTORY CAUSE THE SUBSEQUENT MARRIAGE OF THE OFFENDED PARTY TO THE OFFENDER IN CASES OF RAPE, THEREBY EXTINGUISHING CRIMINAL LIABILITY, AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE ARTICLE 344 AND REPEALING ARTICLE 266-C OF ACT NO. 3815, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE REVISED PENAL CODE, AS AMENDED, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 1896, entitled

AN ACT REDEFINING ADULTERY, FURTHER AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 3815, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE REVISED PENAL CODE, AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Marcos

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

Senate Bill No. 1897, entitled

AN ACT TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE SHARED SERVICE FACILITIES (SSF) PROJECT FOR MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (MSMES) BY AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6977, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "MAGNA CARTA FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES," AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9501, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "MAGNA CARTA FOR MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES"

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; Economic Affairs; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1898, entitled

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A LIFELINE RATE FOR INTERNET SERVICES, AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE SECTION 17 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7925, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY ACT OF THE PHILIPPINES"

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committee on Public Services

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 488, entitled

RESOLUTION IN DEFENSE OF FORMER PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE,
THE 16TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, AGAINST
THE INVESTIGATION OR PROSECUTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL
CRIMINAL COURT

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 489, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING FILIPINO ATHLETE
ERNEST JOHN "EJ" OBIENA FOR HIS OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN
THE 2023 INDOOR POLE-VAULTING SEASON

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 490, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING FILIPINO ACTOR
ROMEO "JOHN" GONZALES ARCILLA FOR WINNING THE COVETED
VOLPI CUP FOR BEST ACTOR IN THE 78TH ANNUAL VENICE INTER-
NATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 491, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE (USA-COL)
UNIVERSITY OF SAN AGUSTIN – COLLEGE OF LAW MOOT COURT AND
DEBATE TEAM FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE AND
REMARKABLE VICTORIES IN MULTIPLE INTERNATIONAL MOOT COURT
COMPETITIONS

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 492, entitled

A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE STRONG OPPOSITION OF THE PHILIPPINE
SENATE TO THE RESUMPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL

COURT INVESTIGATION ON CRIMES COMMITTED IN THE PHILIPPINE
TERRITORY RELATIVE TO THE WAR ON DRUGS CAMPAIGN OF THE
DUTERTE ADMINISTRATION

Introduced by Senator Estrada

To the Committee on Rules

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 the following day.

It was 6:43 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

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



Approved on February 21, 2023