

KEYNOTE MESSAGE FOR INAUGURATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS EXHIBIT ON U.N. DAY, OCT. 24, 2016

Mr. Ola Almgren, our esteemed UN Resident
Coordinator in the Philippines,

Assistant Secretary Dr. Evelyn Cruzada

Friends from the diplomatic community,

Friends from SM Mall of Asia, SM Prime
Holdings, and Earthsavers-UNESCO DREAM
Center who are the partners of the UN
Information Centre Manila in setting up this
exhibit on the Sustainable Development Goals,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

First of all I wish to thank the United Nations
Information Centre in the Philippines for inviting
me to speak at such an important event on UN
Day. It truly is an honor to be in fellowship with
all of you who share the vision and the goals
that impelled the founding of the United Nations

just after the end of World War II, truly a most tragic war that did not only leave countries and homes in ruins, but also scarred the soul of humanity.

The UN today stands on a narrow divide where it looks out to, on one side, such unremitting crisis and challenge, but also, on the other, the greatest opportunity to make people's lives better.

On one side it is burdened with the people's expectations that it would do everything in its power to advance the three cornerstones on which the UN was built, as embodied in the UN charter: keeping world peace, furthering human progress, and upholding human rights.

And yet that burden of expectations is eased somewhat by the spirit of enterprise that thrives even in the most problematic places. It is this premise— that human enterprise can trump human folly any time— that engenders the Sustainable Development Goals to which 193 UN members - including my country - signed on in 2015, to set the development agenda for the next 15 years.

This year the UN community in the Philippines has used the commemoration to celebrate the SDGs, and it is a most felicitous choice. That the UN in the Philippines can rely on such a remarkable array of champions and advocates for the SDGs - as represented in this Exhibit - gives all of us hope that, no matter how great the challenge, we are, in a manner of speaking, all in this together.

It's been over a year since September 2015, when the UN member-states agreed on the SDGs as successor to the Millennium Development Goals that began in year 2000. The SDGs as we know them include ending poverty; ending hunger, achieving food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture; ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education; ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all; and promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

I now look at all the standees of your SDG champions featured in this remarkable exhibit that we opened today, and I cannot find a more worthy set of advocates.

[NOTE: copy-pasted here their list of the SDG advocates in case you wish to note some of them]:

Annex A
Proposed SDG Advocates

SDG	Proposed Advocate	Profile	Qualifier
1. No Poverty	Efren Penaflorida	Penaflorida was the 2009 CNN Heroes awardee for his “Pushcart Classroom” work.	Penaflorida came from abject poverty. He finished school thanks to a child-sponsorship organization. Knowing the poverty in his urban community in Cavite, he collected what books he could, and modified a wooden pushcart, and pushed his “Kariton Classroom” all over Cavite, bringing books and learning to poor children.
2. Zero Hunger	KC Concepcion	WFP National Ambassador Against Hunger	
3. Good Health	a) Hidilyn Diaz	Silver Medalist in Weightlifting at 2016 Olympic games	Diaz brought home the Philippines’ first silver medal ever, instantly becoming a local hero.
	b) Aly Borromeo	Former Philippine Azkals Team Captain	
4. Quality Education	Sabrina Ongkiko	Ongkiko is a public school teacher.	Ongkiko is known for a series of lectures, including one Ted talk. She is an advocate for commitment to improve the public school system.
5. Gender Equality	Glaiza de Castro	UN Women Ambassador	
6. Clean Water and Sanitation	Anne Curtis	UNICEF Celebrity Advocate; actress	

7. Affordable and Clean Energy	Naderev "Yeb" Sano	Former Commissioner of Climate Change Commission	Sano is a visible environment advocate, He organized and made a walk to Paris for the recent accords.
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	Jodi Sta. Maria	Actress	ILO and DOLE are eyeing Sta. Maria to advocate compliance with the Domestic Workers Law. Sta. Maria became a household name in the role of "Maya", a domestic helper in Filipino soap opera.
9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Hans Sy	CEO, SM Prime Holdings	SM has requested that Sy represent this SDG.
10. Reduced Inequalities	Daphne Osenapaez	UNICEF Special Advocate	
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	Shamcey Supsup Lee	Architect; Ms. Universe Runner-up	Since placing 2 nd in the Ms. Universe pageant, Shamcey co-hosts an architecture and design cable TV show, and CNN Philippines' "Real Talk"
	Derek Ramsay	Actor; Habitat for Humanity Ambassador	Ramsay is popular, and controversy-free
12. Responsible Consumption and Production	Paolo Abrera	TV Host	Abrera is visible as a healthy lifestyle and organic food advocate. He does all the health items on his morning show.
13. Climate Action	Dingdong Dantes	Actor; Former National Youth Commission chair; participated in COP 21	Dantes is extremely popular, and is known for social involvement, having established his own foundation.
14. Life Below Water	Jericho Rosales	Actor and known surfer and diver	
	Marc Nelson and Rovilson Fernandez	TV sports and adventure show hosts; divers	The Nelson-Fernandez team is synonymous with diving and other

			aquatic sports and recreations.
15. Life on Land	Angelia Ong	Miss Earth 2015	
	Jamie Herrell	Miss Earth 2014	
	Kim Atienza	Weatherman; Educational enviro-science TV show host.	Kim is groomed as a Filipino Steve Irwin-type, dressed in a safari hat and khakis, plugging enviro-science topics into his brief weather segment.
16. Peace and Justice and Strong Institutions	Gary Valenciano	Recording artist; UNICEF Ambassador	
17. Partnerships for the Goals	Pia Wurtzbach	Ms. Universe 2015	Wurtzbach is extremely popular and controversy-free.

Indeed, we look to these SDG champions, following the UN tradition of naming special ambassadors and advocates for its various campaigns and tasks around the planet, and feel gratified that when we say "we're all in this together," we couldn't find ourselves in better company.

Last year, when the UN marked its 70th anniversary, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made clear why, more than ever, the sense of solidarity that binds its members remains as important as ever. He said: "The world faces many crises, and the limits of collective international action are painfully clear. Yet no

single country or organization can address today's challenges alone."

We Filipinos recall well what that meant, as we mark the third anniversary of super typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda two weeks from now: within hours after the full extent of the devastation from the strongest cyclone ever to hit land became known, the UN had issued a global flash appeal on behalf of the Philippines. That message, besides bringing in an immediate \$193 million through the UN, struck a chord in people's hearts around the world, making possible the unprecedented billions of dollars in assistance that poured into Yolanda-devastated areas.

Beyond disasters, human progress

Today, three years after that disaster, we stand ready to advance the Sustainable Development Goals championed by the UN, knowing that the world body must constantly seek to advance human progress wherever possible - even while it must constantly put out wars, end conflicts, and respond quickly to disasters and humanitarian crises.

Skeptics may say the Philippines might find it hard to meet the SDGs in the similar manner it

struggled to fulfill its compliance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that ran from year 2000 to 2015. Yet today as we find ourselves feeling the impetus for great change promised by the new administration, there is no reason why we should not move forward with the SDGs, which has been described as a growth strategy that weds "economic development with environmental sustainability and social inclusion."

Our chief UN officer in Manila, the UNDP's resident coordinator Mr. Ola Almgren here, had made an eloquent pitch for SDGs to Filipino businessmen in a speech last year. In urging them to make investments that will lead to the Philippines' achieving the SDGs), he raised this inescapable logic: when business deliberately sets out to build its bottomline on enterprises that empower ordinary people, it doesn't end up subtracting from its profits. On the contrary, by ensuring its market stays healthy, happy, materially comfortable and lives in a safe environment, the business adds to, nay, even multiplies, the return on its investment.

Among others, Mr. Almgren said in that address to the 200 members of the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), investments can be

deliberately picked to provide for decent work, more incomes for the poor, or access to good health programs and a stewardship approach to the use of resources. It may be a venture that provides the blessings of clean electricity to marginalized villages; or frees people from the health risk of solid waste while allowing them to transform this into income-generating enterprises. Or provides OFW families a faster, less risky, cheaper means to convey remittances or transact business.

From experience, that can be better facilitated when the SDGs serve as catalyst for business to pick up the thread normally started by the numerous nongovernment organizations and volunteer groups each day. Picking them up, not to - take note - edge out civil society but to provide people the wherewithal to grow their social enterprises even while business seeks its own ROI. Indeed, there are countless initiatives for human progress that have advanced because some truly smart, caring businessman opted to put his money where his mouth is:

- in renewable energy, especially solar;

- in financial technology that affords ordinary people not just cheaper and faster services but also allows them to mount their own start-ups;
- in environment-oriented enterprises like more efficient recycling processes and technology that allow business to cut costs, reduce the demand on natural resources, and provide jobs all around.

Still, the challenge is daunting. According to estimates provided by Mr. Almgren, the "unmet investment needs of the SDGs are estimated in the range of three to seven trillion US dollars a year in developing countries alone." At first blush it shows the magnitude of the challenge. But on second thought, it simply means also so much opportunity for businessmen and for people with so much resources but nowhere good to invest them in, to seize.

That means most of private business also has to think out of the box, going beyond the trite formulas behind the corporate social responsibility and philanthropy which many businesses like to be known for.

In the words of Mr. Almgren, "It's essential to see sustainable development as actually linked to the core business strategy of a corporation."

Ensuring profit over time is linked, he said, "to sustainability of our environment, our natural resources, and development for the people who make up the workforce and the customers of the corporation."

Going back to our favorite rallying cry, "We're all in this together," ensuring achievement of the SDGs in the next 15 years would mean all stakeholders putting their best on the table: the government and the private sector, as well as development partners, multilateral banks, research institutions, and advocacy organizations.

The UN can continue to enable this process of cooperation among all the stakeholders by providing the avenues for sharing knowledge and information, for technology transfer, and encouraging replication of good practices.

In short, you in the UN provide the venue and the table where people can sit down to talk, and it's potluck: everyone comes with their own contribution.

Speaking of contribution, whenever our country's contributions to the UN are weighed, much has been made of our active role in the UN peacekeeping program. But while it is true

Filipino peacekeepers have a record we can be proud of, we would wish as well, or more so, to be active in those parts of the world that are not in conflict yet there is a great challenge to make a difference in people's lives.

Who knows? Putting our best selves to the task of ensuring the SDGs may yet allow for that more meaningful engagement in the UN.

The inward thrust

In recent years, the UN has come under criticism from around the world, its relevance questioned, even as conflicts and disasters occur in all corners of the planet and require its intervention. That soul-searching is not surprising. It could be partly a response to the undesirable impacts of globalization, where numerous small boats sink instead of being lifted up along the big ones in the tidal swell.

Across the continents, this new air of inwardness is palpable: nationalist movements and political parties enjoy a rising influence, finding cause to agitate local populations against a steady stream of migrants from countries in conflict and torment, such as Syria.

People, led on by short-sighted local leaders, could instinctively call for shutting borders to avoid terrorism, drugs, and criminal syndicates and influence. But we all know that in this day and age, shutting down cannot be the long-term solution to problems. Nations inevitably return to the conclusion that they cannot ignore the neighbors with whom they share borders and people like our Filipino migrant workers, or common resources like the seas - and as everyone knows, the Philippines has had much experience in that kind of engagement. It took us nearly two decades to craft an agreement with our ASEAN big brother Indonesia to lay down protocols for joint maritime patrols of the seas that both our peoples greatly benefit from, but the wait was worth it. We continue to engage our other Southeast Asian neighbors in similar fashion, all united in the purpose of finding the best means to be common stewards of resources like that great Coral Triangle that holds much of the planet's aquatic life. And we will keep engaging, and pushing the envelop, to do whatever it takes to get everyone behind that vital cause of ensuring the environment stays healthy to sustain all our future generations.

We all share the desire to take care of our people, and understand only too well it is something that cannot be done in isolation because we all live in one planet where life-holding systems are interconnected. We live under one sky, fish in one sea and breathe the same air. I cannot dirty my air without harming others, or take way too much from the sea, without jeopardizing the ecosystems and cycles that sustain life.

To be sure, this is not first time that a call for some inward-looking force or exercise is gaining traction around the world. The UN, to stay relevant, must try hard, really hard, to understand the spirit that feeds this, ride it, and never tire of helping people find solutions in concert---never alone.

It could, I'd like to believe, with the SDGs as its spearhead, find ever new ways to hark back to the mid-fifties, just as the UN was capping its first decade, when certain countries were stalling the advance toward internationalism. Mr. Almgren's great compatriot and one of the UN's best leaders ever, the Swedish statesman and UN secretary-general Dag Hamarshjold, offered this wise counsel: "The way to safeguard what you rightly want to defend is not isolation. The

way is a vigorous and self-confident development, in free contact with the world, of the special qualities and assets of your nation and your people – a development which should give them their just weight in the international balance. Giving, thus, to the world what is specifically ours, we could manifest and protect our national character, while accepting changes and opening our minds to the influences of the world.”

That was more than half a century ago when life was simpler; yet today, in this infinitely more complicated world, his message remains relevant. Together, I trust, we all can find our way with such counsel as our guide, trusting we keep helping each other find and celebrate the best in ourselves.

A Happy United Nations Day to all!