

**Presidential Communications Operations Office
Presidential News Desk**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF
PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE
AT THE NIKKEI FUTURE OF ASIA CONFERENCE
[21 MAY 2021]**

Nikkei Inc. President Mr. Naotoshi Okada; Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to address you today. This year's theme is timely as we work towards full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outside of war, never has one crisis transformed our countries so quickly and deeply. The virus spread with such extraordinary speed and ferocity. It left us reeling. No country – rich or poor – was spared.

We can draw many lessons from this global crisis.

First, we are only as strong as our weakest link as a country, as a region, and as one global community. This is why we need greater solidarity for collective, coordinated, and comprehensive responses. Inward-looking policies will lead us nowhere.

The Philippines supports all avenues for increased production of diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines. We also have consistently championed universal, fair, and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

No one is safe until everyone is safe. According to the UN, no country can hope to regain growth until all are able to defeat this virus.

The Philippines is one of the few that have not imposed export controls on critical products. At the height of the pandemic, we did not restrict the export of medical grade masks produced by Japanese companies in our country. This preserved jobs while helping save lives in other countries.

Equitable access to vaccines is our shared responsibility. We take this commitment seriously and we expect the same from our partners.

I thank Japan and other partners in the COVAX facility that has benefited many developing countries, including my own.

Second, while collective international action is vital, this can only supplement national responses. The pandemic exposed long-standing social inequalities and systemic problems. In good times, these inequalities were obscured by high-levels of economic growth. But the many we raised out of poverty just as easily fell back when our economy took a hit.

Inclusive and sustainable recovery requires people-centered and holistic responses. The Philippine Government used all means at its disposal to help the marginalized and vulnerable.

We are working to reduce health [inequities] through enhanced social safety nets. Universal health coverage is central to my administration's development agenda.

We are likewise strengthening our public health system. We welcome external partners to build more responsive and extensive health delivery networks.

Food security is an essential pillar of social stability and order. We made timely interventions in agriculture to promote growth and protect our stakeholders. These include technological innovations [in] agriculture and establishing Agro-Industrial Business Corridors. More broadly, we aim to accelerate the modernization of our agricultural sector. Japanese investment is most welcome.

Very early on in the pandemic, we saw that science and technology would be the enablers of our new normal. The Philippines wants to be [an] active participant in the global digital economy.

We invite more investments to expand e-commerce and facilitate new modes of interaction and exchange in a safe and secure cyberspace.

Third, the pandemic has impelled, if not accelerated, the de-globalization process. The lack of connectivity in many parts of Asia can reinforce fragmentation. This will result in lost opportunities for trade expansion among developing countries.

We are not blind to the geopolitics of diversification and decoupling. However, the Philippines does not see the need to take sides in the ongoing geo-economic competition among big powers.

We maintain that deficiencies in world trade must be urgently addressed. We reaffirm our support for a free and rules-based multilateral trading system.

The key to recovery and shared prosperity remains the free [movement] of goods, capital, and services, as well as the harnessing of valuable human resources.

The Philippines is ready to be a competitive actor in an open and fair global economy. Despite the pandemic, opportunities for growth remain.

Consider this: The Philippines has a large domestic market with a population of 110 million people. Our median age is 25 years old. Forty percent of our population is below 20 years old. We are in a demographic sweet spot.

We are educated, creative, and resilient. Innovation is our big push. This will keep our country on the growth path for decades to come.

The Philippines has preferential access to major global markets. We are giving better incentives to enterprises and investors through the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act or CREATE law.

We are ramping up our Build, Build, Build program. We are maximizing physical integration in our archipelago and improving our connections with the rest of the modern world.

In addition, our transition [to] a greener and more socially equitable economy offers more pathways for economic expansion and modernization.

Finally, the pandemic has not halted the shift of power to the East. If anything, early recoveries in Asia have accelerated it. We seem to be hurtling back to an era of heightened big power competition. This adds another layer of complexity to longstanding security issues in the region.

Great powers must resist the temptation to pursue interests at the expense of smaller countries, in plain defiance of international law.

The pandemic has shown us that zero-sum approaches are self-defeating and, ultimately, futile. What hurts one ends up hurting everyone else.

If Asia is to serve as an engine of global recovery, we all have to act responsibly within a system of norms, commitments, and obligations.

We have to resolve our disputes peacefully according to international law. We have to work together – not against each other – to achieve [common] ends. This is the only way to realize the promise of a prosperous Asian century.

Thank you.

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