

GENERAL DEBATE STATEMENT
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Head of the Philippine Congressional Delegation
to the 146th IPU Assembly in Manama, Bahrain

Theme: Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance

**Mr. President,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning/afternoon.**

On behalf of the Philippine Delegation, I would like to extend my warmest greetings on the successful convening of the 146th IPU Assembly.

In this increasingly interconnected world, even the pace and shape of our progress is influenced by different stakeholders. For this, we recognize such interdependence requires us to craft legislation that ensures no one is left behind, especially those belonging to vulnerable sectors.

In the Philippines, our Parliamentary body endeavors to promote inclusivity through these measures:

On sustainable development and futures thinking

In 2019, I advocated for the creation of the first-ever Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking in the Philippine Senate. As a party to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Philippines is committed to integrate the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into our national development plans and policies.

The purpose of this Committee is to track the progress of the Philippines in terms of achieving the various SDGs. It also looks at legislation with the intent of preparing for various futures, and promoting a shift to Futures Thinking, as a major policy reform.

One of its major outputs was the **Committee Report on the Futures of Education** in the Philippines, where it examines the current situation, problems, and aspirations, and gathers the recommendations of experts and other stakeholders in order to secure the best possible future for education in the country.

As the Senior Vice Chair for the Committee on Finance, we pushed for funding for Futures Offices in in our national budget- Department of Education; Department of Health, and Department of Science and Technology. We provided funding for research on the futures of food systems and food security, in public universities. Similarly, we ensured funding for the futures of food production.

Education/alternative learning

Recognizing the importance of education to bring the country towards its most desirable future, the Philippine Parliament created the **Second Congressional Commission on Education** in 2022, and this representation **co-chairs the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education and Development and Basic Education**. The Commission undertakes to make transformative, concrete and targeted reforms in the education sector, which includes addressing social inequalities and ensuring inclusivity in education.

Our **Alternative Learning System Act** seeks to lessen out-of-school youth and provide free basic education to those who want to learn but do not have the means to attend traditional schools.

This is also in line with the **Inclusive Education Act** that ensures all schools shall have equitable access to every learner with a disability, such that no learner shall be denied admission based on disability.

Truly, education is one of the greatest equalizers.

Health

The **Universal Health Care Act**, guarantees all Filipinos equitable access to quality and affordable healthcare goods and services. Over the years, we have made access to health care much more affordable. but there is still a lot of work to be done.

I also fought for the passage of the **Sin Tax Reform Laws of 2012 and 2020**. These measures ensured funds for **Universal Healthcare** by taxing harmful products, including alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and vapes.

Our **Cheaper Medicines Act** provided for a market-based capping approach to the prices of drugs and medicines, allowing the Secretary of Health to set what we now call the Maximum Drug Retail Price. And,

On women

Our **Magna Carta of Women** codifies women's human rights and seeks to eliminate discrimination against Filipino women. The law also requires the allocation of at least 5% of the total budget of government agencies for Gender and Development (GAD) programs and activities, creates a GAD Focal Point System in each agency, integrates GAD perspectives in all policies, plans, and programs, and mandates the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of GAD implementation.

Our **105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law** extends paid maternity leaves from 60 days to 105 days for women workers in the public and private sectors, including those in the informal economy. Working mothers who avail of maternity leaves must receive their full pay. The law also provides for an additional 15 days of paid leave if the female worker qualifies as a solo parent under our **Solo Parent Welfare Act of 2000**. There is also an option to extend for an additional 30 days leave without pay.

On children

“A loving and caring family for every abandoned, neglected, and orphaned child could soon become a reality.” I made this statement last year, when we passed the Domestic Administrative Adoption and Alternative Child Care Act which simplifies the country's domestic adoption system by making it administrative in nature, and streamlining the processes and requirements. We also have several laws in place against online sexual exploitation of children (OSAEC): **Anti-Child Pornography Act, Cybercrime Prevention Act, Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act**, and the **Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act**.

Another challenge that profoundly affects our children are the devastations during calamities. Our **Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act** mandated the government to establish and implement a comprehensive strategic program of action to provide children, pregnant and lactating mothers affected by disasters and other emergencies with the utmost support and assistance necessary for their immediate recovery and protection.

Furthermore, our **Health and Nutrition of Mothers Act** ensures the protection and promotion of the health and nutrition of mothers and their children during the first 1,000 days of life.

Addressing ageism, promoting inclusive workplaces

Our **Establishment of Persons with Disability Affairs Office Act** ensures that policies, programs, and services for persons with disabilities are implemented at the local level for the improvement of their overall well-being and their integration into the mainstream of society.

Additionally, our **Anti-Age Discrimination in Employment Act** and the **Expanded Senior Citizens Act** paved the way to a more inclusive, more diverse workforce—promoting employment of individuals based on their abilities, knowledge, skills, and qualifications rather than their age.

Before I end, I would like to add that I have personally benefited from these Assemblies. I was just a neophyte senator when I first attended the IPU back in 2005. Being among and learning from fellow Parliamentarians, most especially women parliamentarians, gave me the confidence to discuss women's issues in my own parliament. I am a firm believer that women must hold positions in decision-making bodies to truly give voice to women and to achieve genuine gender partnership.

With the gender and SDG lense always in mind when crafting legislation, I hope that we can fight intolerance and genuinely promote an inclusive society.

Thank you and good afternoon.