

**PHILIPPINE STATEMENT BY SENATE PRESIDENT VICENTE C. SOTTO III
HEAD OF THE PHILIPPINE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION
FOR THE GENERAL DEBATE, 141ST IPU ASSEMBLY
13 – 17 OCTOBER 2019, BELGRADE, SERBIA**

**“STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL LAW:
PARLIAMENTARY ROLES AND MECHANISMS,
AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF REGIONAL COOPERATION”**

Introduction/Greetings

Madam President,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning/afternoon.

On behalf of the Philippine Delegation, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the National Assembly of Serbia, headed by the Honorable Speaker, Madam Maja Gojkovic, for the warm hospitality extended to all delegations and the fine arrangements you have prepared for us in this historic city of Belgrade. We wish you great success in hosting this Assembly.

The Importance of International Law

Our theme for this Assembly’s Debate, “Strengthening International Law”, is very timely as the world has become more globalized and, in a sense, more unpredictable. Increased trade among our nations and the emergence of a global culture has made us more interconnected and interdependent. However, the fast pace of change in our global world and the changing geopolitical landscape has also brought with it uncertainty and volatility.

Ladies and gentlemen, international law, therefore, is the cornerstone of a peaceful, orderly, secure and just world. It engenders the behavior of nations to follow the rule of law rather than impose their will through the rule of force. It encourages nations to pursue the path of negotiation, conciliation, and if the need arises, arbitration and adjudication.

In our rules-based world, the soundness of legal and ethical arguments prevail over brute force. That is why countries outside the “Great Powers” and developing states, like the Philippines, have turned to international law as the Great Equalizer.

Parliament's role in International Law

For a majority of us, our central role in international law is expressed in parliament's power to concur in the ratification of treaties. In the Philippines' case, our Constitution stipulates that "no treaty or international agreement shall be valid and effective unless concurred in by at least two-thirds of all the Members of the Senate."

As a check and balance to the power of the executive, Parliaments are mandated to scrutinize, assess, and at times, even reject treaties, based on its impact on their country's jurisdiction, security, economy, people, culture and other laws.

Role of our Congress in transforming treaties into domestic law

I must therefore emphasize parliaments' role in translating international law into beneficial domestic laws. By adapting international benchmarks and standards, parliaments have the capacity to enact stronger protections for their citizens especially those who are most vulnerable to abuse and violence.

International treaties and conventions must be translated and adapted into our respective domestic laws so that these may positively and directly impact on the lives and welfare of the very people we represent.

As a long-time advocate of the campaign against illegal drugs and in response to the 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, I led my fellow Senators in crafting the "Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act".

And just in our last Congress, I had the honor of presiding over the Philippine Senate's concurrence in the ratification of the Boundary Agreement between the Philippines and our good neighbor, Indonesia. I believe our Agreement is a prime example of the peaceful settlement of territorial boundaries between nations within the ambit of international law.

Regional Parliamentary Cooperation

Thus We, in ASEAN, have fully promoted the Rule of Law and the use of international law through regional parliamentary cooperation. The Philippine Senate supports our parliamentary regional grouping in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (or AIPA), which has become an excellent model for regional parliamentary cooperation.

In 2017, the Philippines hosted the 38th AIPA General Assembly where ASEAN lawmakers expressed full support for the solution of territorial and jurisdictional disputes through peaceful means and the exercise of self-restraint. This is in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (or UNCLOS).

Conclusion

My Fellow Parliamentarians,

As iron is strengthened by fire, international law is strengthened by parliaments.

As parliamentarians, international law is embedded in our work. Our public stands to benefit from our increased understanding of international law and the better laws we will legislate.

In closing, let me state that the Philippines remains a steadfast believer in the equalizing power of international law and will continue to support the IPU and the United Nation's efforts to encourage governments to place their trust in international law and promote the primacy of the rule of law.

Thank you and good day.