

**Keynote Address of the
Hon. JEJOMAR C. BINAY
Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines**

**ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
(AICHR) Regional Workshop on Human Rights-Based
Approach to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially
Women and Children**

9:10 am, 27 November 2013, Dusit Thani Hotel

**His Excellency Pehin Dato Dr. Awang Haji Ahmad bin Haji
Jumat, Chairperson of the ASEAN Intergovernmental
Commission on Human Rights,**

**The Honorable Rosario G. Manalo, Philippine Representative
to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human
Rights,**

**H.E. Chan Heng Chee, Representative of Singapore to the
ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights,**

**H.E. Raffendi Djamin, Representative of Indonesia to the
ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights,**

**The Honorable Felizardo Serapio, Executive Director of the
Philippine Center for Transnational Crime,**

**Distinguished representatives of ASEAN Member States to
the Experts' Working Group on the ASEAN Convention
Against Trafficking in Persons and Regional Plan of Action,
Distinguished delegates and resource speakers,
Colleagues in government,
Friends from civil society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning. It is indeed an honor to address you at the
opening of this important workshop on the promotion of a
human rights-based approach to combat trafficking in
persons, especially women and children, in the ASEAN
region.**

**At the outset, allow me to express the deepest gratitude of
the Philippine Government and people for the immense
outpouring of solidarity and support your Governments and
peoples have rendered to the families of victims and affected
communities in the central Philippines in the aftermath of
super typhoon Haiyan.**

**I believe this reflects the true spirit of ASEAN Community, as
we strive to build societies that care for each other, united in**

our common goal to protect human dignity, particularly in times of need.

Let us bear in mind that recurring natural disasters in our region, which are increasing every year, not only in terms of their frequency, but also in the massive scale of their destruction and costs on lives and livelihood, can dangerously exacerbate our peoples' vulnerability to human trafficking.

It is therefore very timely that the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights has organized this workshop which I applaud and fully support.

Combating trafficking in persons, especially women and children, remains a global challenge, which affects all regions of the world. Statistics from the latest Global Report on Trafficking in Persons prepared by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime are harrowing:

- 55-60% of all trafficking victims are women;**
- women and girls together account for 75% of all victims;**
- and**

- **trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation accounts for 58% of all cases globally, while trafficking for forced labor accounts for 36%.**

Of specific relevance to the discussions at this workshop are the following:

- **half of victims detected worldwide are trafficked across borders within their region of origin, while some 24% are trafficked inter-regionally;**
- **the trafficking flow originating in East Asia, including Southeast Asia, remains the most prominent transnational flow globally; and**
- **victims from Asia continue to be detected in large numbers in many countries worldwide.**

As these figures indicate, the scope of the problem is immense. No one country can win the fight against trafficking alone. Combating trafficking in persons is a shared responsibility that all countries in our region need to take up. Only through enhancing international and regional cooperation can trafficking be effectively countered.

And though there are positive measures being enacted in all our countries and some progress is being achieved, it is also clear that so much more needs to be done, and it needs to be done urgently, and together.

First and foremost, the human rights of victims of trafficking in persons need to be better understood, respected, and protected, at all times, by all concerned. This is the essence of the human rights-based approach to combat trafficking.

Trafficking, after all, is a form of modern-day slavery, it is therefore not just a law enforcement issue – it is fundamentally an issue of human rights. It is about fulfilling the tenets of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights that proclaims that “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.”

The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights echoed this in the regional context by including in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration the following provisions:

- in article 4: “The rights of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and vulnerable and marginalized groups are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights and fundamental freedoms;” and
- in article 13: “No person shall be held in servitude or slavery in any of its forms, or be subject to human smuggling or trafficking in persons, including for the purposes of trafficking in human organs.”

These provisions in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration are greatly forward-looking and respond to the challenges facing the region when it comes to combating trafficking in persons.

They provide a strong foundation, anchored in respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, upon which ASEAN can further build up its regional legal framework and institutions to enhance our cooperation in the fight against trafficking in persons.

Let us remember that the prohibition of slavery is widely considered as a peremptory norm of international law, which all states have the duty to uphold.

In this vein, I am glad to note that most ASEAN Member States have already ratified or acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime or the Palermo Protocol.

Let me congratulate the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for being the latest state party from ASEAN to ratify the Palermo Protocol. I encourage other ASEAN Member States which have not yet done so, to ratify this highly important international instrument as a matter of priority.

In addition, it is truly significant that ASEAN has politically committed itself, at the highest levels, to conclude an ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons and a Regional Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

ASEAN Leaders at the 23rd ASEAN Summit held in Brunei Darussalam last month welcomed progress in the development of these two instruments. The Philippines, as Lead Shepherd on trafficking in persons in the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime, has been taking forward work in this important field.

I am heartened that the members of the ASEAN Experts' Working Group negotiating these documents are present here at this workshop.

I hope that through your participation in this workshop, you will gain a fuller appreciation of the human rights-based approach and the urgent need to incorporate it in ASEAN's efforts to combat trafficking in persons, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking and Regional Plan of Action. I encourage you to do your best so that these instruments can be adopted expeditiously, in time for the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015.

Some crucial aspects to consider in developing a regional human rights-based framework to combat trafficking, which I

am sure you will touch upon in discussions over the next day and a half, would be:

- proper identification and non-criminalization of victims of trafficking;**
- provision of adequate medical, psycho-social and legal support, assistance, and protection of recognized victims;**
- reintegration, and where applicable, reunification of family members; and**
- enhancing measures for prevention of trafficking, including addressing demand, and other push and pull, factors.**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

As migration continues to play a large role in our economic and social development as a nation, the Philippines shall continue to take resolute measures and dedicate resources to protect our people, especially women and children and the most vulnerable, from human trafficking.

In 2003, the Philippines enacted its domestic Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which among others, created the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking, and institutionalized cooperation between government and civil society, particularly in the provision of assistance and support to victims.

Earlier this year, the Philippine Government further strengthened its national Anti-Trafficking in Persons law by amending it to include stiffer penalties on traffickers. Thanks to these efforts, we have been able to observe a marked increase in convictions.

In addition to our advocacy in ASEAN, the Philippines actively engages international partners to promote the anti-human trafficking agenda on the regional and global stages.

In the United Nations, the Philippines sponsors resolutions in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council on combating trafficking in persons, including on the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons who visited the Philippines last year.

We likewise support the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the work of concerned UN agencies, such the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Refugees, and other international organizations, especially the International Organization for Migration. I welcome ASEAN’s interaction with these international organizations and regional mechanisms, such as the Bali Process.

Cultivating synergies between different ASEAN sectoral bodies and various stakeholders can only strengthen our individual and collective capacities to eradicate the scourge of trafficking: a multi-stakeholder, “whole-of-ASEAN approach” is truly needed to reach all sectors and audiences, and this is precisely what can be achieved through this workshop.

I note that you have a substantive programme of activities, and I am particularly happy that there is a wide range of stakeholders present here today. Events such as this one provide meaningful impetus to our growing cooperation.

Let us seize this opportunity presented before us.

As we move towards the realization of the ASEAN Community in 2015 and beyond, let us also be ambitious in setting targets: are we bold enough to envision a Southeast Asian region free from human trafficking? Can we build together a people-oriented ASEAN Community wherein the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all are equally protected?

If we wish to live in greater peace, prosperity and human security, we must strive for these goals.

The challenge confronting us is not so much a matter of political will, for I believe we are united in ASEAN in our commitment to fight trafficking in persons.

The challenge is how to harness this unity into focused and sustained energy, with the view to promoting and protecting the human rights of those most vulnerable, those most in need – the victims of human trafficking themselves, which remain mostly women and children, but also, increasingly, men and boys as well.

Hence, the convening of this workshop is so significant. It is a means to mainstream human rights into the work of relevant ASEAN bodies involved in the fight against trafficking and also provides an opportunity for you to engage in dialogue and cooperation with relevant international organizations and concerned stakeholders.

I encourage the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the ASEAN Commission on Women and Children, and the ASEAN Senior Officials' on Transnational Crime to coordinate closely and continue this best practice.

Let me close with this message:

Your work is shaping the future of our ASEAN Community. Make it count.

For the sake of the innumerable victims of human trafficking, who for the most part, go undetected, are prosecuted as irregular migrants, or suffer in silence in the shadows – let us make our work count, and our voices heard.

Only through respect for their fundamental human rights and freedoms can we effectively address their plight and triumph over trafficking in persons in our region.

I congratulate the organizers of this workshop and wish all of you productive discussions and a wonderful stay in the Philippines.

Mabuhay sa inyong lahat at magandang umaga!