

Closing Remarks of Senate President Franklin M. Drilon
Launching of the Human Development Report
Crowne Plaza Hotel

A HUMAN-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Professor Solita “*Mareng Winnie*” Monsod, members of the Philippine Human Development Network, friends, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is an honor and privilege to join you on the launching of the 2012 Human Development Report. This is also an opportune time to congratulate and thank the Human Development Network (HDN), comprised of eminent men and women in the country, for consistently publishing thought-provoking and policy-inspiring reports.

I clearly remember a forum sponsored by the HDN in 2008 at the UP School of Economics. There was a vibrant and invigorating discussion on the resolution of armed conflicts, particularly the government’s negotiations at the time with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It was an issue that was raised by the *2005 Philippine Human Development Report*. Despite the vigorous debate and the strong disagreements on certain points, the forum succeeded in underscoring the importance of the peace negotiations and in outlining the pros and cons of various approaches to the problem. It is worth noting that under the leadership of President Benigno Aquino, we now have an impending peace agreement with the MILF that promises a

lasting peace in Mindanao, especially that part which has been left behind in terms of human development.

The seven reports that the HDN has produced since 1994 in partnership with the United Nations Development Program have never failed to engage our country's best minds and spur lengthy and passionate discussion and consensus on the human development issues we are confronting with. What I appreciate most are your consistent efforts to underscore people-centered development and your unwavering commitment to bring the results of your studies to the attention of policymakers and government executives.

The 2012 Report with the theme, "*Geography and Human Development*", bears the hallmarks of HDN reports such as independence of mind, scholarly rigor, novel and uncompromising, and humane viewpoint. The report highlights the neglected geographic dimensions of human development. It demonstrates how important factors in our people's lives, such as: diseases, natural living conditions, barriers to mobility, security hazards and disasters, are all founded on very specific local geographic conditions.

As the 2012 Report pointed out, geography is a deep determinant of human development. Thus, the differences in the levels of life expectancy, average years of schooling, poverty incidence and the 2009 HDI values among provinces can be explained by geographical factors.

The Aquino administration's "*daang matuwid*" and its efforts to ensure quality public service backed by adequate fiscal resources are slowly and steadily bearing fruit. However, I agree with the HDN Report that we need to do more. Our response to the many human development issues must be smarter and more adept as well by addressing the

challenge of geographic heterogeneity. We need to rethink policies and institutional arrangements; this time, addressing the implications of local geography.

I agree with the Report's key policy recommendations, which are: *first*, the promotion of domestic integration through building of institutions designed to correct market distortions; provision of essential education, health, water and sanitation services; investments in local infrastructure; provision of incentives to spatially targeted programs, such as slum upgrading or relocation. *Second*, the integration of leading and lagging areas by reducing the distance between people and economic opportunities.

I share the view that there is a need for the executive branch to look closely at how plans are formulated and how programs are designed. They have to identify the needs of specific areas, spillovers and scale economies across sectors. They have to find a way to accommodate the specific priorities and concerns of local areas. Development plans should strongly consider a truly spatial-geographical element that goes beyond the identification of special agro-industrial centers in each region or the pro-forma run by the regional development councils.

While I agree that greater weight must be put on the role and participation of the provinces in the formulation of national development strategies and investment plans, I am inclined not to agree with the report that the province is a crucial bridge between parochialism and centralization. The province is not large enough to be integrated and connective. Moreover, it has been observed that provinces tend to be parochial. Hence, I would like to push for stronger regional development councils.

Based on my experience, I believe that Regional Development Councils (RDCs) can make a big difference in the successful formulation of development plans and implementation of viable programs in the provinces. RDCs would play a key role in efforts to spur growth.

On the other hand, Congress can play a significant part in facilitating changes during the budget deliberation process. We shall scrutinize the budget submitted by different agencies and identify the gaps in national programs using reliable, intelligent and coherent inputs.

We need to consolidate the inputs from our local government colleagues, the private sector and civil society, so that Congress and the national government agencies are reading from the same page of the development playbook.

Be assured that I share your idea that government must provide the most essential means to human development, especially education and health. It is worth noting that this government is determined to institute difficult but meaningful reforms with the goal of enabling each Filipino to live healthy, self-sufficient and productive lives.

The Reproductive Health Law and the new Sin Tax Law, which were debated on lengthily and passionately, are a testament to the government's willingness to try even painful and controversial approaches to achieve its economic and social development goals.

The Sin Tax Law introduces higher taxes on tobacco and alcohol products based on a revised tiering system. It is expected to generate an additional P248.5 billion in revenues in the first five years from 2013 to 2017, of which P34 billion is expected to be realized in 2013. Majority of the

incremental revenues will be earmarked for health programs that will include enrolling the poor into the universal healthcare program and upgrading of hospitals and other healthcare facilities. Moreover, the law indirectly discourages our people, especially the youth, from smoking, which is harmful to their health.

I am very proud to report that for the past three years, we passed the National Budget on time, thus, enabling the construction of more school buildings and much-needed infrastructure.

On a personal note, I have given government hospitals such as the PGH and NKI substantial amount of money from my PDAF to fund worthy projects and medical assistance for the poor members of our society.

Moreover, I allocated a huge portion for the construction of class rooms in partnership with the Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce Inc. (FCCCI). To date, 1,500 classrooms have been constructed, and 200 more classrooms are being constructed. A total of P332.8 million has been allocated for these classrooms. The success of the classroom building project is a story of a fruitful and corruption-free partnership between government and the private sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, I assure you that your Senate, the Senate of the Filipino people, will continue to explore all avenues to address the country's economic woes, social ills and political weaknesses. We want to provide our people with opportunities and choices. We aim for inclusive growth and development. No Filipino man, woman and child will be left behind.

I know that all this is not a walk in the park. It is a long process and we do not promise an overnight miracle. We need to generate more jobs for our people. We need to build better infrastructure to encourage foreign investments, improve business climate and attract more foreign tourists. We need to make the economy more competitive.

And more importantly, as highlighted in the 2012 HDN Report, there is a need to strengthen our local governments and regional development councils. The health and wealth of the LGUs truly matter in the lives of our people. Thus, we have to consistently arm the LGUs not just with resources but with technical support as well.

Since the 2012 Human Development Report primarily deals with special geographically influenced conditions, it is a very useful reference not only to policy-makers but also to frontline government agencies, international donor agencies and local governments.

I would like to conclude by expressing my deepest appreciation to the Human Development Network for consistently coming up with excellent reports, papers and publications on subjects that are of fundamental importance to our country's development.

Thank you very much. *Mabuhay!*