

REBOUNDED AND MOVING ON

Opening Remarks of Ambassador Albert del Rosario

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As we open this forum, our country continues to struggle amidst the turmoil of simultaneous and daunting difficulties of deep recession and persistent spread of COVID 19. Starting off as a public health outbreak in Wuhan, China, it quickly turned into a social and economic nightmare of global proportions.

The Philippines experienced its worst economic fallout in 73 years, with a full-year economic contraction of 9.5% in 2020. That plunge was also the steepest recorded in Southeast Asia last year, despite the Philippines having one of the most impressive economic numbers prior to the pandemic.

The official February inflation data of 4.7% and the BSP's own forecast of inflation rates going beyond their 2% to 4% target during the first half of this year warns of prolonged economic doldrums that will hit hard on the majority of our countrymen.

The multi-faceted disruptions of 2020 left us with many difficult lessons. It taught us to urgently address the flaws in governance, health, and economic ecosystems. It taught us to trust and heed the warnings revealed by scientific data. It taught us that the world is a living system of planetary linkages that are complex and synergistic. The biggest lesson is that we must maintain the balance of our health and the environment to sustain the economy and the only way we can do this is if we work as a whole society.

Fortunately, the tech savviness of Filipinos has proven to be a great asset, and I would say a great potential for our country. We are quickly shifting from predominantly face-to-face, manual mode of interactions to a technology empowered, digitalized system of communications and transactions.

Public and private institutions can no longer cling to their old ways and must now step-up their digital transformation to deliver their services and products efficiently and extensively. This reality is palpably evident in the surging volume of online transactions and demand for broadband services.

New business concepts have also emerged. Mobility as a service has enabled people to get their groceries, medicines, food orders, and all sorts of goods without the need to get out of their homes. This has given new livelihood to workers who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Business-to-Consumer, and Business-to-Business, relationships can be facilitated with cloud-based technologies to ensure that supply chains and distribution networks are not disrupted.

Financial service institutions have likewise responded to this digital shift enabling any person with a smart device and access to mobile communications and the internet to remotely fulfill their financial transactions thru various e-payment, e-banking and e-commerce platforms.

Developing secure Business-to-Government and Citizen-to Government platforms integrated with real-time information management systems will eliminate the need for physical presence and the slow and archaic paper-based, manual signature heavy process, in getting the necessary permits, payment of fees and taxes, and other documents.

This crisis has unveiled a transformative potential that is actually achievable with existing technologies. We now have an opportunity to overhaul the flawed structures of government bureaucracies to become a digitally revitalized ecosystem of efficient processes and well-managed resources. The governments of neighboring economies and other developing nations have long seen this and have been investing heavily in building strategic digital infrastructure to harness the benefits of a digitally enabled, and connected population.

Technology is a powerful tool not just for communications and business processes, but just as important, in managing the risks to the environment.

This is a realm wherein nimbleness, innovation, expertise, and mobility of resources is needed, attributes that are native to the developmental spirit of the private sector.

From what we see in social surveys, such as the one conducted by Pulse Asia in September of last year, there is undeniable public consensus that the government should engage more actively with the private sector to fast-track economic recovery. The private sector is seen as the driver of investments, creator of jobs, and primary source of livelihood.

The general public looks at the private sector as an important partner of government in getting the recovery work done post-pandemic. Shared prosperity plays a crucial part in uplifting the lives of Filipinos. This my friends is a mission that we must all unite and focus on if we are to recover the economic velocity before the pandemic.

We are already seeing the private sector pushing for a more sustainable and inclusive economic recovery by incorporating Environmental, Social, and Governance principles, which seek holistically positive and long-term returns for all sectors society while taking care of the environment. These can also help attract the right foreign investments that could hasten recovery, stimulate innovation needed in the new normal, and to avert future risks.

Our forum today, entitled, “The Private Sector as the Reliable Partner for Economic Recovery”, is the first of our quarterly series this year.

We are indeed honored to be part of this gathering of business and thought leaders to discuss the vital role of the private sector in economic recovery through public-private partnerships, as well as their insights on the appropriate government policies that should be prioritized in the context of an evolving economic and political landscape. END