

## **COUNTRY STATEMENT**

**SECRETARY SILVESTRE H. BELLO III**

**ASEAN High Level Conference on Human Resources Development**

**Panel Discussion 2: Human Resources Development in Post-Pandemic Era, 16 September 2020**

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1. Distinguished fellow ministers, it is my pleasure to share with you the initiatives taken by our country in promoting human resource development under the “new normal”. We welcome the adoption and launching of the Roadmap on the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World. This will guide member-states and help us take concrete steps to continue to promote HRD in these challenging times.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis like no other. We are facing a global health crisis that has become an economic crisis. As human and health toll grows, the economic effects have become far worse. The International Labour Organization has estimated that 4.8 percent of working hours were lost during the first quarter of 2020, which is equivalent to approximately 135 million full-time jobs. Moreover, the number of jobs lost during the second quarter is placed at 305 million. About 1.6 billion informal economy workers, considered the most vulnerable sector, have experienced drop in income or loss of livelihood due to lockdown measures.
3. COVID-19 makes us realize that it is not enough to just survive. To achieve a better normal, we need to take bolder actions to revive what has been lost or damaged—and to thrive on a decent future of work built on the principles of resilience, equity, justice and solidarity.
4. To achieve this, we recognize the importance of a human-centered agenda as espoused by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work. The Philippine Department of Labor and Employment is finding ways to promote decent work for all in the new normal. We, at the Department, have always emphasized that employment must be preserved. We issued guidelines to help companies explore means of preserving employment by adopting flexible or alternative work arrangements. We see this as a coping mechanism and is beneficial to reduce business costs and save jobs while maintaining industry competitiveness and productivity. The Department strongly believes

that this is a better alternative than outright termination of services of workers or total closure of establishments.

5. We implemented swift measures to safeguard the incomes of displaced local and overseas workers through various income support programs. We also guided the private sector in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces when economic activities were gradually resumed. We facilitate the employment of jobseekers through online services.
6. While the pandemic has underscored the need for flexible work or remote work, digital transformation has become imperative. The workforce has to embrace technology and enhance lifelong learning skills, such as resilience, adaptability, empathy, creativity and critical thinking. Upskilling and retooling are crucial in this digital transformation to make workers more competitive.
7. Our education and training sector is implementing measures for the continued learning of students through various modes of distance learning, including online, and radio and television broadcast. Our technical and vocational education and training (TVET) authority, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, has been offering free online courses which jobseekers and adult learners can take to develop their skills and enhance their employability. This is important for the increased adaptability of workers to shift to new jobs, industries or occupations as the pandemic continues to transform economies. Meanwhile, our national authority on industry development, the Department of Trade and Industry, is working with stakeholders to implement an Inclusive Innovation Industrial Strategy. In line with this, it is also formulating action plans to aid in the country's adoption of digitalization and automation.
8. In all these initiatives, a key concern of the Philippine Government is ensuring that the measures are inclusive and that no Filipino is left behind. While through technology there is the potential of offering wide learning and employment opportunities, we also recognize that the benefits may be limited to those that have access. In addition, the disruptive effects of technology adoption may also be disproportionately felt by the vulnerable. To address this, the Philippine Government also endeavors to broaden access to information and communication technology through infrastructure improvement and direct provision of digital tools especially for those with lesser means.

9. In all of this, it is important to sustain dialogue with social partners so that government responses are attuned to the realities on the ground, especially as this pandemic is new to all of us. This is also in view of the complex and wide-ranged nature of HRD across industrial development, education and training, and labor. The DOLE has the advantage of having strong social dialogue processes and structures in place.
10. With this, we stand with our ASEAN neighbors in working to continue to promote HRD in the post-pandemic world. We are hopeful that with our combined efforts, we can revive and even thrive in the new normal.
11. Thank you and I wish us all a productive and meaningful panel discussion.