

**Statement for the General Debate
143rd IPU Assembly
Madrid, Spain, 26-30 November 2021**

***“Contemporary challenges to democracy:
Overcoming division and building community”***

Greetings, fellow parliamentarians.

Today we ask ourselves what are the contemporary challenges to democracy. Once we have identified them, how then do we proceed in a meaningful way?

Our response to these challenges should also ensure that our solutions are long lasting. How do we weigh the effects of our policies, 20-50 years from now? How do we incorporate the concept of intergenerational fairness so that our decisions have a positive effect on the next generations?

In 2019, the Philippine Senate created its very first Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation, and Futures Thinking that is focused on monitoring our progress in sustainable development and mainstreaming futures thinking.

With futures thinking, we recognize that we live in a “VUCA” world: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous. But these problems and challenges can be addressed through futures thinking, where we seek to explore various possible futures using strategic foresight, instead of falling for nearsighted solutions.

And with these tools, parliaments can make informed decisions that are good for the present and the future.

On women representation:

28% of the members of the House of Representatives and 29% of Senators are women. Based on the latest IPU report, this puts the Philippines at the 61st spot out of 188 in terms of women representation in parliament. And way above the average in Asia, which is at 20.8%. The Philippines has had two women Presidents and currently has a female Vice-President. In the upcoming elections, we will definitely see a significant number of

women candidates in all positions from local to national government. But there is still room for improvement as women are still in the minority.

On misinformation and fake news:

The upcoming elections will place the Philippines at a crossroads, as our citizens will elect a new president down to city officials. Sadly, misinformation is heavily amplified by social media and other digital platforms. Deciding on who to vote for, is a critical decision that should be founded on reliable and truthful information, which is now easier to verify through the internet. Now, more than ever, it is our duty to practice and teach everyone, especially the youth, the skill of fact-checking to allow them to make an intelligent decision. Parliamentarians like us must lead by example.

On the role of education:

We know that education is key in changing and transforming lives. We also know that when we invest in girls, it is a direct investment in our economy and future. In the Philippines, based on the sex ratio of enrollment for school year 2020-2021, there is an average of 48% of girls in elementary; 50% in junior high school; and 53% in senior high school. This trend continues in college, where the females outnumber the males. For every one male enrolled, there are 1.28 females enrolled.

Improving the quality of education for all - both boys and girls, raises the quality of jobs, improves productivity, and accelerates economic growth. Not only is this aligned with our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, investing in learners is an exercise in futures thinking, given the long-term positive effects on the society and the economy.

On Climate Change:

With millions of lives affected by climate change, the Philippines made bold commitments in the 2021 Climate Change Conference. We intend to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% in 2030; we are engaging fishermen and farmers for more sustainable practices; we are launching our sustainable finance roadmap for green projects and also a project to transition from coal to clean energy.

On prioritizing the important sectors:

We assigned the highest budgetary priority to education, as required by our Constitution. In the 2022 budget deliberations, spending for education has reached almost 4% of the

country's GDP, which brings us closer to the recommended spending for the education sector. We also made strategic investments in health care to expand accessibility of basic health care, including support for health workers and funding for more public medical schools and other health sciences.

This renewed commitment to health care goes beyond COVID-19 response, it is also meant to future-proof our healthcare system for emerging health threats.

On engaging stakeholders:

During the law-making process, it is common practice to invite all stakeholders to the hearings. The conduct of budget hearings is also done in this way, with civic society organizations including sectoral representatives participating in the hearings.

Actions by Parliaments

In conclusion, whether it be lawmaking or exercising its oversight function, parliamentarians should be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the ideas of futures thinking and intergenerational fairness. In this way, we see democracy at work, reaching the sectors of society that are traditionally left behind. These are not merely international commitments, but our commitment as parliamentarians and public servants to our own people.