

Keynote address by **HON. MARIANITO ROQUE**  
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Forum on Decent Work and Social Justice in Times of Crisis

SMX Convention Center, Manila, Philippines  
22 April 2009

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On behalf of the Department of Labor and Employment, I would like to congratulate the International Labour Organization on its 90<sup>th</sup> year and continuing commitment to pursue social justice and global fairness in the context of realizing decent work for all. “Working for social justice”, is more than just the theme of the ILO’s 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary – this phrase defines ILO’s journey in the past and its direction towards the future – to strengthen the need to focus and address the social dimension of globalization as it impacts on the world of work.

More importantly, I want to recognize the tripartite partners – workers, employers and government – and other social partners, part of what ILO has achieved to this day is primarily attributed to our collective and individual efforts as a country in promoting and defending decent work.

Since joining the ILO, the Philippines has been one of the most active members and strong supporters of ILO policies and programs. Described as an “early developer” among Asian countries - the country is a pioneer in the region in shaping its institutions along international standards with equity and social justice as guideposts.

The Philippines takes pride in being one of the seven pilot countries that developed the Decent Work Common Agenda which the ILO launched in 1999. The Decent Work Common Agenda represents the priority areas of engagement among the tripartite and social partners in promoting decent work. To date, the country has accomplished two cycles of the decent work common agenda and is currently implementing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle. With the theme, “Narrowing Decent Work Deficits”, we acknowledge the gains we made during the first and second cycles, but at the same time recognize that a lot more needs to be done. We are committed to close gaps further across the six dimensions of decent work – opportunities for work, freedom of choice of employment, productive work, equity in work, security in work, and representation at work.

Despite the daunting challenges of the global crisis that continue to threaten economies, businesses and workers all over the world – we must remain steadfast. The crisis must not deter us in doing our work to ensure that decent work is a living reality for our workers and their families. It is decent work that must underpin our collective efforts to mitigate the adverse impact of the global crisis on employment, business, working conditions and labor-management.

Attaining decent work under normal economic conditions is already a challenge, how much more under economic distress? How can we achieve productive employment and decent work while ensuring business viability at the same time? We need to preserve jobs but how best to do this? How can we make income tenable that can provide security for our workers?

This forum is an opportunity for us to address some of these urgent issues. It is also an appropriate venue to explore practical and workable solutions to improve the country's existing measures in addressing the crisis. The last thing that we should do in crisis situations such as this is to sacrifice decent work at the altar of economic exigencies and business bottom lines.

At this juncture and by way of inputs to this forum, let me give you a rundown of our experiences - and possibly some lessons we have learned so far with the global crisis. I hope that these can add significance to this momentous occasion.

**First**, it is important to anticipate the possible effects of a crisis and plan for it as early as possible. In October 2008, at a time when the global financial slowdown began to unfold, we already presented to the President and the Cabinet the Department's contingency plan to respond to the possible fallout of the crisis. Our plan of action is based on accurate and credible information on the actual impact of the global crisis. The Department, other government agencies and employers' associations are working side by side by sharing information on actual workers displacement. This strategy allows us to define areas of cooperation and in turn develop appropriate interventions for affected companies and workers. With accurate and verifiable data and information readily accessible, we can also ensure that media reports are credible and will not cause unnecessary alarm and anxiety among the public. In crisis situations such as these, it is our responsibility to convey a message of calmness and stability to the general public.

**Second**, it is necessary to engage all stakeholders in meaningful discussions of the problem. During the last quarter of 2008, we organized a series of national and regional multisectoral consultations where industry players, workers' organizations, academe, and other government agencies worked together to craft a common agenda. And on January 3, 2009, we held the Malacanang job summit where various stakeholders committed to share talents and resources to mitigate the impact of the global financial crisis, specifically on business, employment, working conditions and labor-management relations.

**Third**, it is important to get the national leadership on board. The Malacanang summit is clear evidence that our President, our economic managers and political leaders, our business and labor leaders, our religious, civil society and academic leaders are united in spirit and action to face the global crisis. The summit has conveyed a strong message that our leaders are committed to do what ever it takes to enable Filipino citizens to go on with their daily routines as normally as possible.

It is within this context that we have crafted the National Economic Resiliency Plan that would keep global crisis at bay and stop it from becoming a full blown Philippines' crisis. The Plan reflects our concrete action programs to promote business viability and growth, preserve and create jobs, and provide support to local and overseas workers affected by the crisis.

Finally, as directed by our President, our services and interventions must be easily and speedily accessible. There shouldn't be complicated requirements, nor any unnecessary procedures. There can be no room for delay; neither shall there be excuse for slow response and inaction.

The global crisis has been a source of apprehension, fear and distress for workers, employers and governments alike. However, it has provided us with opportunities to assess the effectiveness of our existing mechanisms and programs in addressing the impact of such crisis. More importantly, we have translated this into an opportunity to further strengthen our partnerships. The situation has single-handedly galvanized the machinery not only of the government but also the partners as well to deliver timely and appropriate action programs and services.

As we celebrate 90 years of hard work to ensure social justice, we remain positive that we can defend decent work amidst crisis situations. Decent work will never be sacrificed at the altar of economic exigencies and business bottom lines.

As part of the ILO, we remain committed to achieve decent work goals. And we will use productive employment and decent work as the primary instruments to secure greater prosperity, long-term security and better lives for all Filipinos.

Thank you and I wish you dynamic and fruitful interactions at this forum

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.