

**Remarks by Ambassador Leslie J. Baja during the Diplomatic Reception for the  
126th Proclamation of Philippine Independence  
6 June 2024**

Assalamu Alaikum! Minister Mohammed Sadiki, Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests, Excellencies, friends, ladies and gentlemen, *Mga kababayan*, welcome and a pleasant good evening to you all.

Our actual national day is on June 12, which is when Philippine revolutionary forces declared independence from Spain in 1898 after more than 300 years of colonization. But freedom was never realized as the Philippines became an American colony in the aftermath of the Spanish American War. We became formally independent on July 4, 1946. For about 20 years, our national day coincided with that of the United States.

In 1963, our then President declared that henceforth our national day would be on June 12 when we proclaimed independence from Spain. For almost 30 years we were celebrating our 12 June celebrations solo until in 1990, Russia declared that their national day would be on June 12 as well. Talk about complex things!

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, nowadays, national day speeches have become platforms for promoting achievements in bilateral relations or foreign policy thrusts. We make sure that we elucidate the obvious and highlight the not so obvious.

Next year, the Philippines and Morocco will celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations and 5 years since our embassy reopened in Rabat. We have continuously strived to increase the level of our ties in all sectors of cooperation. We are grateful to Morocco for the friendship and partnership that I believe will endure beyond 50 years. I have always said that the four thousand Filipinos in Morocco are our strongest link to the Kingdom.

Last year, Morocco became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of the ten nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN which definitely will enhance Morocco's ties with our region. ASEAN, after all, is currently the 5th largest economy in the world and is projected to be the 4th biggest by 2030. I would like to highlight, Mr Minister, that in the ASEAN-Morocco Practical Cooperation Areas, food and agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry, green innovation and halal food production are integral parts of its economic pillar.

From here in Rabat, I also have the good fortune to represent the Philippines in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal and it is our ultimate goal to strengthen our ties with these countries as well. Just as ASEAN is moving towards attaining a resilient, innovative,

integrated and dynamic community, we find resonance with the African Union's vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. We are determined to be part of this vision.

For the Philippines, the international rules-based order is key to achieving peace, stability, empowerment and dignity of our peoples and equitable sustainable development. As a founding member of the United Nations, we have consistently worked with other nations to promote a more just world order and inclusive multilateralism.

Sadly we still face wars and conflicts, human suffering from rising and protracted humanitarian catastrophes, natural and man made. Eight months ago, as we are still trying to grapple with the invasion of Ukraine which has caused so much suffering to its people, the war between Israel and Hamas broke out. The Philippines has long advocated for a peaceful resolution that upholds international law and leads to lasting peace and security in the region. The current situation in Gaza is dire and a ceasefire is urgently needed for the protection of civilians especially women and children.

In our part of the world, we have long stated that the Philippines does not want conflict in the South China Sea. President Marcos Jr has said that the Philippines is a friend to all and an enemy to none. Nonetheless, he has specifically declared that our “.. country will not lose an inch of its territory.. and continue to uphold our territorial integrity and sovereignty in accordance with our constitution and with international law.”

Through all these conflicts, the Philippines has always called for the peaceful settlement of disputes and stressed that, as stated in the United Nations Charter, aggression and the use of force have no place in resolving disputes.

Mr Minister, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, as part of our efforts to build a cultural bridge between the Philippines and Morocco, we bring you tonight a Rondalla trio from the Philippines, Musicondalla as they are called, who will, as the Spanish word *ronda* means, serenade us tonight. Our gratitude goes to the National Commission on Culture and the Arts of the Philippines and the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation for their sponsorship of our artists.

Many thanks to you all for joining us this evening. Special thanks to all the staff of the Embassy for helping put all these together. I now give the floor to our distinguished Guest of Honor, Minister Sadiki.