

Remarks of Philippine Ambassador Leslie J. Baja
Reception for the 124th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence
8 June 2022

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, *mga kababayan*, a pleasant good evening to you all and welcome to our celebration of the 124th anniversary of the proclamation of Philippine Independence.

This is the first official celebration with colleagues from the diplomatic corps and our Moroccan friends since our Embassy reopened in 2020, after having been closed for over 27 years. Yes, and we are here to stay. Inshaallah.

We established diplomatic relations with Morocco almost 50 years ago and this year we saw the first high level visit to Morocco in recent memory when my Foreign Minister met with Moroccan Head of Government Aziz Akhannouch and Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita. We were able to sign four agreements that hopefully will be the fuel in moving relations forward. Furthermore, both our countries recognized that all states enjoy the right to full sovereignty in all our areas of jurisdiction, thus upholding the principle of sovereignty and sovereign equality of states as enshrined in the UN Charter. Indeed, the potentials for our relations, bilaterally and multilaterally, are as vast as the Sahara. We just have to sift through the fine sands.

From where we stand here in Rabat, we do have the honor as well as covering four other countries – Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. We also seek to intensify relations with them, on all fields, to further our footprint in Africa.

One of our strongest bridges to Africa is the presence of thousands of nationals in this continent, Morocco and our other jurisdictions included. They have always been our greatest resource, as such I call them the better ambassadors of the Philippines all over the world.

A month ago, the Philippines held national elections wherein we voted for a new President, Vice President, half of the Senate, the whole membership of the House of Representatives and local officials. It was Philippine democracy in action, vibrant, sometimes too much, but alive and representative of the sentiments of the majority, as should be the case in all democratic countries. We appreciate the messages of support and congratulations from allies and friends all over the world.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are very fortunate to be able to gather tonight as a family of nations coming out of the Corona virus pandemic. In the darkest days of Covid, we saw how international cooperation helped bring us out of the woods and into this new normal we now face.

Let me therefore thank you once again for joining us tonight, not just to celebrate our national day, but to celebrate friendship and international solidarity. We thank our host country Morocco for its assistance in helping us reopen here in Rabat. As that line in the movie Casablanca goes, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Thank you and good evening once again. *Maraming salamat po sa inyong lahat.*