



PRESS RELEASE

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Social Watch Philippines offers a civil society review of the PH Agenda 2030 in UN High Level Political Forum

The Philippines will deliver its Voluntary National Review (VNR) tomorrow, 15 July 2019, at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF is held in New York, USA from Tuesday, 9 July 2019, to Thursday, 18 July 2019; including the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from Tuesday, 16 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2019. The UN HLPF, with the theme “*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*”, includes in-depth discussions on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In an event in 10 July 2019, Social Watch Philippines (SWP) led a discussion called, “*Conversation on Tobacco Control Initiatives, Impact of 17th Congress Tobacco Tax Increase, and Universal Health Care-Implementing Rules and Regulations*” where the SWP Spotlight Report for 2019 on the SDGs entitled “*The PH SDG Agenda: Closing Gaps, Overcoming Policy Incoherence*” and the Philippine VNR were discussed by SWP Co-Convenor Dr. Maria Victoria Raquiza and the National Economic and Development Authority Usec. Rosemarie G. Edillon, PhD respectively. Three years ago, SWP has also made its statement on SDGs, through its Spotlight Report, on overcoming poverty and achieving sustainable development.

Discussions on the SDGs are crucial to development not only in the Philippines but internationally through setting the international standard among different developed and developing nations. It gives direction and focus on which to prioritize for development. Relevant to the present UN HLPF and the Philippine VNR, discussions on the SDGs from the 2019 Spotlight Report, SWP Co-Convenor Dr. Raquiza, and Usec. Edillon included the following points in the Agenda:

Education. Usec. Edillon’s presentation sheds light on the improvement of enrollment and completion rates for primary and secondary school. However, SWP believes that equitable access to quality, historically and culturally appropriate education remains a challenge. According to SWP Co-Convenor Dr. Raquiza, while education has become more accessible through government programs and free tuition, it does not fulfill the need for food and daily living expenses while studying. As such, vulnerable and marginalized groups must still receive help from the government in this crucial human development stage. According to recent statistics, only 12% of enrollees of free tertiary education come from poor families. Resources allocated to education is still below the ideal 6 percent to GDP level.

Decent work and economic growth. According to Usec. Edillon’s presentation, PH economic growth remains firm. However, Dr. Raquiza raised the point that precarious work among formally employed has also risen. This implies that many Filipinos do not enjoy job security and suffer from lack of benefits. The quality of employment also did not increase with the economic growth. According to Dr. Raquiza, significant increase in public investment in all sectors—agriculture, manufacturing and services should be prioritized and to transition workers from informal to formal, from vulnerable to stable, and from precarious to regular across all three sectors. Promoting social enterprises can be a way to ensure that the ‘fruits’ of labor productivity growth is equitably shared between capitalists and workers.

Reduced inequalities. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the poverty rate of the Philippines has gone down in the past years. From 27.6% in 2015, Poverty is only at 21% today. However, despite reported lessening of poverty, self-reported poverty is still at 38%, meaning that around 4 out of 10 Filipinos feel that they are poor. As highlighted by the Spotlight Report, there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor and the reported growth does not trickle down to the vulnerable sectors of society. As such, government must generate revenues by progressively taxing those who have most significantly benefited from the economic growth and improve tax administration, and address tax evasion and avoidance, and use these revenues to provide universal quality social services that are affordable and accessible, in particular, education, health, housing and in the provision of water and sanitation and target hard-to-reach groups, especially those in far-flung, remote and upland areas.

Climate Action. According to the Spotlight Report, from 2011 to 2018, the Philippines has been a consistent third placer in the annual climate-oriented World Risk Report, except in 2014, when it placed second.



The most vulnerable sectors are women, children, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities, especially those who depend on natural resources for their livelihood. According to Usec. Edillon, the number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters have lessened from 846,651 persons in 2015 to 682,315 persons in 2018--a significant improvement. This was made possible by the implementation of disaster risk reduction and management strategies by the Philippine government. However, as highlighted once again in the Spotlight Report, we still need a better Department of Energy that will seriously implement the Renewable Energy Act of 2008. Coal-powered energy brings with it damage to the environment. Its implementation has been suspended for the past three years, and the time to implement it is now.

Partnerships. According to the Spotlight report, the Philippines should form partnerships with other nations based on a clear view on how we can take into account our own capacity to generate resources in the most progressive way possible. If unchecked, growing trade and current account deficits can lead to economic vulnerabilities that can lead to a growing debt problem, which is unsustainable. Focus should be made on the alarming trend of illicit financial flows, the Marcos wealth, chunk of it yet to be recovered, and our continuous non-lifting of the bank secrecy law which makes the country a potential haven for money laundering and other illicit activities.

Justice for Children. According to the Save the Children report contributed in the Spotlight report, the Philippines has a relatively strong legal and policy framework protecting children from violence, which recently included protection of children in conflict situations. However, this progress is undermined by the proposed measures to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the war on drugs, and other issues. The need to strengthen the implementation of the policies both at the national and local levels and raising the resources for child protection should be prioritized.

Indigenous People. The Spotlight report discusses how indigenous peoples face huge threats to survival and well-being as global priorities are set to be viewed differently from theirs. Tribes aspire for reduced inequalities and the recognition of its peaceful and just institutions to become fully functional so that in their own terms and wisdom. They wish to achieve sustainability in solidarity and without compromising their cultural heritage.

Tobacco as a Development Issue. As the Spotlight Report highlights, aside from health, tobacco problem extends to poverty, gender inequality, environment, to name a few. Around P210 billion of economic losses is attributable to just four diseases associated to tobacco use here in the Philippines. The most vulnerable to the ill-effects of tobacco are the poor. Addiction to it hampers on their food security and it also hampers on environment protection and climate change due to its significant damage on worldwide deforestation and greenhouse gases emission. As such, extensively studying the direct and indirect relationship of tobacco control to other SDG targets is a compelling endeavor for government, advocates, and other stakeholders.

The 2019 Spotlight Report is a result of a series of conversations, big and small meetings, as well as participatory consultations with representatives from grassroot communities, NGOs and various development workers. It is a contribution to helping shape a people-centered 2030 Agenda for the country. It also aims to find ways to work together, eliminate the great divide in incomes and wealth and leave no one behind.

**Social Watch Philippines (SWP) is a network of over a hundred civil society organizations and individuals engaged in research and lobby efforts in holding the government accountable for the fulfillment of national, regional and international commitments to eradicate poverty and carry out social, economic, and gender justice. SWP promotes people-centered sustainable development by proactively monitoring the progress and delivery of social commitments forged by the government and influencing the outcomes of policy decisions through citizen's participation in public finance.