

Statement delivered by
The Honourable Emmanuel F. Piñol Secretary
Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of the Philippines

On the occasion of the
41st Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)
24 June 2019

Mr Chairperson, Hon. Enzo Benech

Minister for Livestock, Agriculture and Fishery of Uruguay

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Philippine delegation, I wish to congratulate you, Mr Chairperson, for assuming an important role and a responsibility that I am fully aware of, having served as Conference Chairperson in 2017.

We likewise congratulate and assure our support to the newly-elected Director-General, His Excellency Qu Dongyu, in his stewardship of this organization in the coming years. We extend our utmost appreciation to the outgoing Director-General, Dr José Graziano da Silva, for effectively leading FAO in the fight against hunger and poverty and in promoting food security and nutrition for all.

We commend the Secretariat for the presentation of the 2018 State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA), with the theme of “**Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development**,” which is timely and relevant for many FAO members like the Philippines, which is a major origin country for migrants. An estimated 10 million Filipinos, or approximately 10% of the population, are living or working abroad in more than 200 countries and territories. The Philippines is one of the global leaders in migration governance and in protecting overseas Filipinos all over the world.

We concur with the SOFA report that rural migration, both internal and international is central to economic transformation which presents both opportunities and challenges, and that the objective of migration-related policies should make migration a choice, not a necessity.

This augurs well with the aspiration of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte that working abroad would only be an option for Filipinos in the near future. Cognizant of the main drivers of migration, the country’s migration governance dovetails with the country’s national development plan. We note in the SOFA report that only when countries reach upper middle income status that emigration starts to decline. Reaching such status in the next few years is one of target outcomes of the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022, that is anchored on the country’s long-term vision (dubbed as the *Ambisyon Natin 2040*).

Recognizing the importance of migration and development in the country, the PDP underscores the issues and special circumstances of overseas Filipinos and their families. Strategies to empower them include intensifying social protection programs, enhancing access to finance, providing organizational and entrepreneurial support, thereby facilitating their participation in the country’s development, and ensure their smooth reintegration upon return.

As similarly experienced by many countries, rural and agricultural poverty has driven internal migrants in the country to seek opportunities in urban areas (IOM 2013). Nevertheless, the sector continues to account for a significant share of the labor force at around 24 percent in 2018 -- the

second largest group next to the services sector (PSA, Labor Force Survey, 2018). The agriculture sector, thus, remains to play an essential role in the country's inclusive growth and poverty reduction efforts.

To make migration a choice and not a necessity, it would be crucial to create an enabling environment for farmers and the fisherfolk to invest and remain productive in their communities, and return to their homes when they perceive it safe and stable to do so.

The country remains steadfast in improving productivity and profitability in the agriculture, fisheries, and forestry (AFF) sectors and increase access to economic opportunities for small farmers and fisherfolk, (PDP 2017-2022).

In this light, President Duterte signed in April 2019 the *Sagip Saka* Act (Republic Act 11321) to help increase farmers' and fishermen's income and reach their full potential.

The Department of Agriculture has earlier initiated the Special Area of Agricultural Development (SAAD) program to help alleviate poverty among the marginalized sector in agriculture and fishery in 30 of the poorest provinces in the country, from 2017 to 2022. Its Production Loan Easy Access (PLEA) financing program, launched in 2017, was designed to address the needs of small farmers and fisherfolk families, which involves financial literacy trainings and has posted a repayment rate of 91%.

We are grateful for FAO's support, including through its country office in the Philippines, such as through the provision of emergency and livelihood assistance to around 300,000 farming and fishing households in disaster-stricken areas across the country (FAO PH 2017).

Finally, we commend FAO and IFAD for leading the implementation of the UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028, which would help address the impacts of migration to agriculture and rural development by enhancing the achievements of the 2014 International Year of Family Farming and contributing to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you very much.