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# PHILIPPINES

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*Check against delivery*

**Statement of Philippine Undersecretary of Education  
Mr. Francisco M. Varela  
at the General Debate of the High-Level Segment  
ECOSOC Substantive Session 2011  
5 July 2011, Geneva**

Mr. President,

Allow me to join the Honorable Ministers, Heads of Delegation, and colleagues who have spoken before me in extending their congratulations to you, your bureau and the ECOSOC Secretariat for the excellent arrangements and informative discussions we have had thus far during the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). The Philippine delegation has gathered so much valuable information from the National Voluntary Presentations, policy dialogues and debates, as well as the Breakfast Roundtables and ECOSOC side events and we look forward to a robust exchange of ideas and sharing of good practices in the remaining weeks of this substantive session.

The theme for this year is not only relevant and appropriate. It is urgently necessary and critically important as the self-imposed target date on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) approaches. Education is key to an individual's and a nation's progress and the Philippines welcomes the importance given to it in our present discussions within the context of overall economic and social development. The ongoing discussions together with the Report of the Secretary General and the presentation of summary reports of the four AMR regional consultations present us with a clear assessment of the current actions and progress made towards achieving the agreed education goals within the framework of Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All agenda: **there is a strong need for a shift in global educational priorities from mere access to improving the quality of schooling and promoting creative policies.**

Mr. President,

The Philippine government regards education as a cornerstone of national development and as primary avenue for an individual's social and economic mobility.

The value placed by the Philippine government on education is evidenced by the fact that it is given the highest budget allocation among government agencies each year as required by the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The 1987 Constitution provides that the state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all. Pursuant to this provision in the Constitution, we have Republic Act Nos. 9155 and 6655 which mandate the provision of free and compulsory education in the elementary and high school levels.

However, while significant steps have been taken to ensure accessibility to education, the Philippines admittedly needs to accelerate progress on achieving the MDG target of universal primary education as 2015 approaches. Thus, we continue to lay the foundations for improvement through appropriate legislation and national policies and programs.

**Mr. President,**

Annual national budgets of the Philippines have consistently given highest priority to education in compliance with the mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and we are pleased to state that for this year's education budget, there is an 18.4% increment from the previous year. The increase in the education budget, which incidentally, is the largest increment in over a decade, shows the importance given to education by the President, HE Benigno Simeon Aquino II's government and is expected to enhance present programs geared to improve participation rate and meet the goal of *Education for All* agenda. Just this year, we have implemented the universal kindergarten program whereby around 1.93 million kindergarten pupils experienced their first taste of education.

To counter the barrier posed to enrolment and completion of schooling of children caused by indirect costs spent for uniforms, transportation, and food, the following initiatives are also being implemented: (1) support to the national government's conditional cash transfer program through the provision of crucial education resources to increase enrolment in, and attendance rate of children in targeted schools; (2) implementation of No Collection Policy in schools to minimize burden of indirect schooling costs; (3) conduct of a systematic school-feeding/nutrition program tied to attendance and nutritional status; and (4) mainstreaming of the Child-Friendly School framework to schools to foster a nurturing teaching-learning environment that embraces diversity and that is sensitive to vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

It must be underscored, however, that our initiatives and programs are not geared solely to improve access to education. My country considers **access to quality education** as fundamental to poverty reduction. Hence, striving to meet the Millennium Development Goal of providing universal primary education with our country's limited resources has not hindered us from doubling our efforts to find ways to continue improving the quality of education currently being offered

and to develop relevant school curricula for students. Among the significant initiatives towards this end are the Basic Education Reform Agenda (BESRA) and K 12 Reform which are anchored on the right of every Filipino to quality education. The implementation of the universal kindergarten program is just a first step towards the K to 12 reform which adds two years to the 10 year basic education curriculum in the Philippines. The addition of kinder and two more years of senior high school for free in public schools significantly expand our government's commitment to education, beyond the current offering of free elementary and secondary education. Since recruitment of qualified and competent teachers are needed to ensure delivery of quality education, we have also focused on improvement of teacher education and development as one of the key reform thrusts of our Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda.

Finally, the government has developed innovative ways to improve access to quality education. Public-private partnerships such as the educational service contracting scheme are established whereby the government supports the enrolment of low income students in private schools to decongest secondary public schools. The government is also making use of Information and Communication technology (ICT) as a crucial basic education resource that will allow students to become better learners as well as better users of technology. Close to PHP 2.0 billion every year is being invested in ICT equipment and internet connectivity for schools and the Department of Education's Computerization Program has equipped all 7,274 public high schools with e-Classroom packages and complete computer laboratories. We are now beginning to provide computer laboratories to our public elementary schools as well.

**Mr. President,**

Our effectiveness in implementing reforms in the education sector is not just a function of financial resources, but, equally if not more importantly, of the institutional capabilities of all the critical actors involved in the delivery of education. Moreover, social and political realities have a very critical influence on the pace and effectiveness of the reform agenda that we pursue. It is, therefore, timely and crucial that the global community pulled together and leverage on our collective knowledge, experience, and resources to achieve our MDG goals and promote the learning of our children. The task before us is daunting but my country remains determined and hopeful that regional and international arrangements will provide the necessary environment for our domestic efforts and programs towards the education goals within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All agenda to flourish.

Let me end by expressing the Philippine delegation's full support for your presidency and your determined efforts to ensure the continued effectiveness and relevance of the ECOSOC.

Thank you.

