



PHILIPPINES

STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MRS. GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES

63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
23 September 2008

**NATIONAL STATEMENT
AT THE 63rd UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
GENERAL DEBATE**

**Gloria Macapagal Arroyo
President of the Republic of the Philippines**

Mr. President and friends,

The developing world is at a tipping point. In the Philippines, we feel the pain of high prices of food, fuel and rice.

Our people pursue the universal dream of a better life for themselves and their children: better education, better healthcare, higher wages, a dignified retirement.

We are proving the value of a new paradigm for self-reliance through the use of first, a targeted strategy with a set of precise prescriptions to ease our price challenges we are facing; second, food self-sufficiency and more energy independence and third, long term reforms.

This is a positive example we wish to share with the rest of the world.

Our gains in the last seven years were hard-earned. We made tough and sometimes painful reforms to reset our economy - tax increases, banking reforms, crackdown on smugglers and tough fiscal discipline, to name a few. Thankfully, these reforms have given us some running room to weather the first wave of global price shocks that reverberated across the world earlier this year.

It hasn't been easy, but Filipinos are tough and resilient. We have pulled together. We have been able to draw on additional revenues to provide targeted investments in food and fuel to keep our poor afloat until a better day.

But we are also realistic that we cannot do it alone. We need a strong UN as never before. We need rigorous international cooperation as never before.

Economic uncertainty has moved like a terrible tsunami around the globe, wiping away gains, erasing progress – not just here in Manhattan Island, but also in the many islands of the Philippines.

Just when we thought the worst had passed, the light at the end of the tunnel became an oncoming train hurtling forward with new shocks to the global financial system. The setbacks from these global shocks of the past year, and the past weeks, are real and profound. It will take time and perseverance to put the pieces back together.

To address these global challenges, we must go on building bridges among allies around the world: to bring the rice to where it is needed to feed the people, investments to create jobs; and keep the peace and stability in the world.

It is, therefore, timely that our Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has organized this year's agenda around the impact of the global economy on the poor.

He deserves our highest praise for his quick and decisive action on the global food crisis. His Comprehensive Framework for Action involves the UN, donor countries, civil society and the private sector. It seeks to achieve food security through the right combination of policies, technologies and investments. This is a model of the United Nations in action.

Since the volatile global economic situation became apparent many months ago, in the Philippine we have increased and stabilized the supply of rice, and delivered targeted subsidies to the poor. We have reached out to our neighbors like Vietnam and others in ASEAN and elsewhere to ensure a stable supply and affordable prices. We have clamped down on price gouging and invested more billions in planting and agricultural modernization.

We have increased our energy independence by 17% through greater use of geothermal, biofuels and other renewables and we expect to attain 60% energy independence in two years.

Biofuels have been cited for being a positive factor for clean energy. At the same time, they have also been cited as a negative factor that contributes to higher food prices. We are pursuing a policy of using non-food biofuel sources planted on land unusable for food production purposes. We see this approach as a way for countries to seek a sustainable balance between food and energy needs.

For food self-sufficiency, our food baskets are North Luzon in our largest island and the southern island of Mindanao.

Mindanao has fields of the highest productivity, yet also the majority of our poorest provinces. It is a sad irony that our food basket has some of the highest hunger in our nation.

The prime reason is the endless Mindanao conflict.

Our archipelago of 7,000 islands has had its share of religious strife, ethnic tension and violence.

For years we have worked to achieve peace in Mindanao. Much progress was made until violent elements within the Moro Islamic Liberation Front decided to take the law into their own hands. We will restart the dialogue when the area is secure, our people are safe and responsible elements in the MILF regain control.

There is no alternative to peace. I stand before you today to declare loud and clear that we are committed to the process of peace in Mindanao. ~~With the help of the global village that we call the United Nations, peace will prevail.~~

We gratefully acknowledge here today the central role of so many friends and allies, like the UN; Brunei, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and others in the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the US and other bilateral ODA partners; the EU and Sweden. All have played a big role in advancing peace and development in Mindanao.

We will refocus the peace talks from one that is centered on dialogues with rebels to one of authentic dialogues with the communities. The context of our engagement with all armed groups shall subscribe to the UN-recognized principle of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration.

We maintain high hopes in inter-faith dialogue as a means to building bridges rather than barriers between communities of different cultures and ethnicity.

In continuation of this effort, the Philippines will host the first-ever Special Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue for Cooperation and Development in May next year. We will also cooperate with the Alliance of Civilizations.

We are also pleased that our Secretary General will join us in Manila during the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development. Our overseas Filipino workers are true global pioneers. There isn't a ship abroad that doesn't have Filipino crew or a nation without highly skilled Filipino workers. The movement of people from one country to another will surely increase as globalization continues to erase borders. This should be recognized as having implications on the growth and development of both sending and receiving countries.

In many troubled places of our world, the U.N. is the last great hope for peace and security. For this reason, the Philippines contributes one of the largest police contingents to U.N. Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. President,

Your leadership is more vital than ever. The Philippines will fully support you as you lead our General Assembly for the coming year.

In conclusion, Mr. President and friends,

There are hundreds of millions of good people across this globe who are struggling as never before. We must hear their cry for help. It is within the collective power of the leaders at this UN Assembly to fulfill the universal dream of better education, better health, food on the table, and a dignified life.