

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY TEODORO L. LOCSIN, JR.
FOR THE VIRTUAL DONOR CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINING SUPPORT FOR THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE
RESPONSE
22 October 2020, 8:00-10:30 PM Manila time

Excellencies, good evening from Manila.

Following his sweeping victory in 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte declared to the world, “*We will accept them. We will accept them all. They are human beings.*”

He was referring to the Rohingyas— people who live almost 2,000 miles away from the Philippines, across barriers of geography, culture, language, and politics. But these considerations were irrelevant to my President. For him, they are human beings. And that’s all that matters. Since then, year after year, he has repeated these words with consistent conviction and clarity. Not a clarion call, never an outburst, he speaks with resounding earnestness. The hand-wringing world of talk-gooders won’t admit it but it knows this is not lip service. This is an open door.

A month ago, at the UN General Assembly, President Duterte reiterated, “*the doors of the Philippines are open, as they have always been, to everyone fleeing for safety, such as the Rohingyas.*” “*The Philippines continues to honor this humanitarian tradition in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol.*” But allow me to tell you this simple truth — what really binds us to this obligation is deeper than anything that could ever be written on paper. It is the Filipino heart which in our language we call “malasakit”, a term that has no counterpart in the English language. It means even more than caring for another than for

oneself because it is ordinary for women to care for their children that way. It means caring to the point of sharing the pain. Even before 1951, the Philippines opened its doors with widest latitude to 800 White Russians, the Jewish refugees fleeing German persecution, Spanish Republicans fleeing fascism, Chinese fleeing Civil War, and the second wave of White Russians. Post-Convention and Protocol, we opened our doors again to the boat people from Vietnam, to Iranians, Indo-Chinese, and East Timorese refugees, among others.

The never-ending, recurring scenario of being driven away from one's home because of strife, violence, and persecution is one of our species' unnecessary, heartbreaking inventions. The only way to even this out is to respond with "malasakit", an unbridled concern for the wellbeing of others as for our own. It is in the same spirit that the Philippines is announcing a modest financial contribution of USD 100,000 for the UNHCR to be earmarked for the response to refugees from Rakhine State. But our offer really is, "Come, the rejected by the rest of the world." This is aligned with the Philippines' own set of pledges during the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 on implementing the Global Compact of Refugees.

The Philippines will also continue to support the Myanmar Government's efforts to ensure the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons, the security and the sustainable and equitable development of all communities in Rakhine State. And it will stand by Myanmar and its Great Lady against the same schemes to subdivide her country like the one that divided Libya for easier exploitation. Together with the rest of ASEAN, we will continue to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including through the UN-HCR and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian

Assistance. With this addendum: to the talk and handwringing we add the open door.

I thank our partners, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* for organizing this virtual conference.

(END)

(***Correction:** *This should be the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees** instead of **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.***)