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by

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on

“The Renovation of Parliamentary Buildings in the Philippines”

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Honorable Najib El Khadi, President of ASGP;
Members of the Executive Committee;
Fellow Secretaries General;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Just like its peers among Member Parliaments, the Philippine Congress confronts an unprecedented public health challenge brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a direct consequence of this health crisis, we have all experienced disruptions in our parliamentary work and agenda. We have been forced to enact and implement interim measures that limit physical interactions among parliamentary members and employees alike, to protect ourselves against exposure to the harmful virus.

Despite the challenges, I am pleased to say that the 18th Congress of the Philippines has ably adapted and succeeded in delivering the urgent and important legislation that our country needs. As enunciated during our last meeting, the Congress of the Philippines expeditiously passed legislation providing immediate relief to millions of Filipinos severely affected by the lockdowns. We also passed laws aimed at mitigating the economic losses, enhancing the financial stability of the country, and ensuring the expeditious, effective, efficient, and equitable procurement and administration of COVID-19 vaccines to our people.

As we look forward to the future, our task is clear: We must adapt our ways to the New Normal. We therefore need to explore retooling our work environments to afford our public servants adequate protection against COVID-19.

In this regard, for almost two years after the onset of the pandemic, we have introduced improvements to our facilities, buildings, and other infrastructures. These projects are vital in achieving our objective of instituting health and security protocols that will ensure for our legislators, Secretariat employees, and visitors a secure and safe environment as we undertake our important legislative tasks.

Our information and communications technology infrastructure have been upgraded to accommodate the live streaming and online plenary sessions and committee

hearings, to minimize the exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 that is prevalent in face-to-face interactions. We also resorted to work-from-home arrangements for our support staff on the assurance that office operations will not be hampered.

We have ably adapted our systems for remote legislative proceedings, and are now implementing the renovation and rehabilitation of some of our buildings for the coming New Normal.

Among the priority projects are the Screening Facility Areas for the North and South Gates of the House of Representatives Complex. These gates, as well as the entrances to all buildings inside the national parliament complex are currently equipped with electronic sensors and security cameras. These innovations are part of the new online security system we dubbed the “HousePass System” which includes adherence to health and safety protocols.

We also continue to improve our workspaces by constructing new offices for our Members and staff. Among our on-going projects is the construction of a four-storey Legislative Training Center where forums on key legislative issues and legislative process will be provided to lawmakers.

We are likewise in the process of converting our Sports Facility Center into a Visitor’s Center where visitors are given an orientation into the proceedings and activities of the House of Representatives. It also serves as a reception area for guests and visitors who bring their concerns to their elected representatives.

Recognizing the crucial role that women play in our institution and the need to help them achieve work-life balance, we have constructed lactation rooms that will give nursing mothers a private and safe space as they fulfill their maternal duties.

Antigen testing centers are also installed at the lobby of every major building within the parliament complex. Presently, antigen tests being administered for guests and those physically reporting for work at the start of every week.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that we are still not out of the woods yet. Thus, we continue to closely coordinate and consult with our counterparts in the

Senate and other government agencies to combat the challenge of this crisis, while responding to the needs of our legislators, officials, and employees.

I hope that this opportunity to share with you, fellow secretaries-general, our experiences in the renovation of our parliamentary buildings will contribute towards making our legislative institutions more responsive to the needs of our peoples.

Together, let us sustain the spirit of cooperation and camaraderie between our parliaments.

Thank you and *Mabuhay!*