

Keynote Speech of DENR Secretary Roy A. Cimatu delivered by Undersecretary Rodolfo Garcia at the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF), 13th Senior Officials' Meeting (13th SOM), Dusit Thant Manila Hotel, Makati City, 27 November 2017

Excellencies and distinguished Heads of Delegations; members of the CTI-CFF National Coordinating Committees; Executive Director Dr. Widi Pratikto and the members of the Regional Secretariat; our distinguished Development Partners and collaborators; Delegates; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

My country, the Philippines, warmly welcomes you to this 13th Meeting of the Senior Officials of the CT6 countries -- Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste.

We are here assembled to reaffirm our commitments to continue sustainably managing the Coral Triangle region. This is also an opportunity for us to measure where we now are in terms of implementing the 10-year Regional Plan of Action or RPOA for the period 2010-2020.

Two years to 2020 is a timely period to assess what the remaining doables are. Yet, even as we take stock of our accomplishments, we have to look beyond 2020, to ensure the attainment of long-term goals as well as our alignment with broader conventions and programs such as those under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance or the Ramsar Convention, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Incidentally, the Philippines just last month hosted the 12th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, or CMS. Of the six CT6 member-countries, only the Philippines is a member of the CMS. We hope that the other member-countries

of CT6 will consider also joining the CMS, given that their territories may also be hosts or ranges of migratory species, like the yellowfin and bluefin tuna.

The entire Coral Triangle Region is a vital and major base for the food security of over 120 million people. This is also a habitat of many food fish species, including the prized tuna. At the same time, our region contains about 53% of the world's coral reefs, making it a center of marine biodiversity; the nature-based tourism that this makes possible is an important source of revenues for both our governments and coastal communities. Eco-tourism is an industry most appropriate for the conservation and strengthening of our Marine Protected Areas.

We are all beneficiaries of cooperative efforts in protecting the Coral Triangle. Sustaining initial gains while addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, coastal land development and emerging issues on marine debris, however, can be challenging. We are fortunate that our development partners, collaborators, the scientific and academic community, and non-governmental and civil society organizations are pitching in with efforts and resources to address these challenges. At this juncture, as the current Chair of the Council of Ministers, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge you. Let us give our development partners and collaborators a well-deserved round of applause.

Incidentally, the support provided by our development partners as well as by each CT6 member-country to the operations of our Regional Secretariat has been the subject of discussions in previous Senior Officials' Meetings. The Philippines was eventually tasked to initiate a review of the Secretariat's budget, with a view to improving the existing rules of procedure on the management of financial resources, particularly on administrative matters. As Chair of the Council of Ministers during this 13th SOM, I sound a gentle but firm call to the Regional

Secretariat for greater efficiency and transparency in the use of these contributed resources.

And speaking further of the Regional Secretariat, please join me in welcoming and congratulating the new Deputy Executive Director for Program Services, Dr. Sharifa Nora Ibrahim.

As I mentioned at the start, in this 13th SOM we are reviewing and assessing the implementation of our Regional Plan of Action. But that is not the limit of what we can and should do, or what we may discuss. I already made mention of ecotourism, climate change, coastal land development, and marine debris. In addition, we can also consider integrated coastal management as a strategy, and the in-depth valuation of ecosystem services as a resource in policy formulation at the regional and national levels.

We need strong resolve and decisive action to confront the challenges that our region -- the Coral Triangle -- faces. Environmental issues are multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral and trans-boundary in nature, giving rise to complex problems that are very difficult for individual countries, acting separately, to solve. They are a pressing and urgent concern that we need to face together.

We need a joint resources management agreement, a code of conduct that will transform our seas from being geopolitical hotspots to becoming crossroads of sustainably productive amity.

According to Professor John McManus, Professor of Marine Biology & Fisheries at the University of Miami, there is a potential for marine-based tourism in the Spratly Islands, which are contiguous to the Coral Triangle bioregion. The Tubbataha Marine Park off the coast of Palawan in the Philippines is an example

of how an offshore reef can go from being over-exploited to becoming a successfully managed site.

There is plenty of hope for the Coral Triangle – as much hope as we can together generate for its transformation into a sustainable mega-resource. To borrow from the famous “ecothelologist” Thomas Berry, “we are not lacking in the dynamic forces needed to create the future. We live immersed in a sea of energy beyond all comprehension.”

On this note, let us proceed to make this 13th Meeting of the Senior Officials of the CT6 countries a most productive event.

Thank you, Salamat and *mabuhay!*