Written Statement of Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III
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The Philippines’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic is a whole-of-government and -society approach emphasizing quick response, resource management, and strategic communication against the virus.

The Philippines is beginning to flatten the curve, but we will not be complacent. As the country anticipates easing enhanced community quarantine restrictions and getting businesses running, we guarantee health system resiliency through:

- Increasing the country’s testing capacity with 35 licensed testing laboratories, with more undergoing assessment, and four mega-swabbing centers for strengthened surveillance and capacity to detect, isolate, test and treat every case. The locally-developed RT-PCR testing kits, approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration, highlighted independence and resourcefulness in developing local low-cost solutions to managing COVID-19.

- Province-wide and city-wide Health Care Provider networks with clearly defined patient pathways for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 cases have been established. Referral hospitals are identified for severe and critically ill patients while temporary treatment and monitoring facilities are established to cater to mild cases.

- Community-managed Local Isolation and General Treatment Areas were established nationwide with 49,560 dedicated beds for isolation of COVID-19 cases. Funds were mobilized in hiring 15,757 additional health workers for government facilities. Along this line, we believe that it is crucial for the WHO to put a spotlight on the Global Code of Practice on the Recruitment of Migrant Health Workers in a pandemic.

We thank WHO for being the primary external support for the public health and clinical management of the pandemic and for emphasizing the UN framework for socio-economic response to COVID-19. The Philippines takes a “health first approach” to national recovery. We are participating in the Solidarity Trial using four treatment regimens.

A major setback was the availability of PPEs for our health workers, who accounted for one in five infections, and Infection Prevention and Control commodities for the general population. The Philippines appeals to the WHO to facilitate regional and global solutions in the procurement of PPEs, testing kits, and equipment.

The PH Government is working overtime in the repatriation and quarantine of overseas and sea-based Filipino workers who have lost their jobs abroad due to the
pandemic. Quarantine and testing guidelines for arriving overseas Filipinos and foreign nationals were issued. This highlights the importance of ensuring that Universal Health Care in countries of origin, transit and destination do not leave behind the migrant populations.

As countries start opening up borders, and learning from best practices, it would be prudent for the WHO to rethink its policy and provide guidance on travel restrictions as well as repatriation.

The war vs COVID-19 will continue until a vaccine to prevent SARS-CoV-2 becomes equitably available. Meanwhile, non-pharmaceutical interventions form the backbone of the Philippines' response to COVID-19. Guidelines and legislative measures are issued to set protocols on physical distancing and safety measures in different settings once social and economic activities resume.

We commend Dr Tedros for his leadership in the emergency response to the pandemic. We call for sustained support to the WHO Health Emergencies Program. The WHO’s stance to support countries with weaker health systems is critical in ensuring equity and resiliency against the pandemic. Now, more than ever, the world needs the highest form of collective will and cooperation to ensure that No One is Left Behind.

Fellow Member States, you have the firm commitment of the Philippines to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you to restore a safer and healthier World.

Thank you.