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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE LONG-TERM VISION 2040 AmBisyon Natin 2040

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Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I am very pleased to be with all of you today and join NEDA in finally sharing with you what NEDA has been working on for a year now. I am honored that NEDA, an institution I have served for several years, has chosen to invite me to introduce this initiative and give you an overview of this project we initially called Filipino 2040.

But allow me to backtrack a bit and share with you how this all started. Some time ago, I read this report called “Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century” and it caught my interest. The report talked about how Asia is in the middle of a historic transformation. To quote the report: *“If it continues to follow its recent trajectory, by 2050 its per capita income could rise sixfold in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms to reach Europe’s levels today. It would make some 3 billion additional Asians affluent by current standards. By nearly doubling its share of global gross domestic product (GDP) to 52 percent by 2050, Asia would regain the dominant economic position it held some 300 years ago, before the industrial revolution.”*

It was supposed to be an exciting prospect. Unfortunately, the Philippines was barely part of it. To my dismay, the Philippines was classified as slow- or modest-growth aspiring country, together with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji Islands, Iran, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Even the video of the report did not contain any significant Philippine landmark. It was, for me, hard to accept. Then I realized that the Philippines was not favorably recognized there because the data used was the country's growth performance before 2010, whereas the Philippines' story has markedly changed in the last six years. The Philippines' economic performance has been stellar, thus earning the title "the rising tiger of Asia", among other encouraging titles bestowed upon the Philippine economy. And our recent analysis of data shows that the economy is indeed on a higher growth trajectory and the quality of growth is a reason for optimism.

And so I said I could not let this pass. We could not allow ourselves to be left behind, to remain a laggard in an otherwise highly dynamic, rapidly growing and prospering region. We need to reshape our future, to become part of the Asian Century. We need to have a positive long-term vision for the country.

Meanwhile, even before my stint as NEDA chief, there were already discussions in different fora and media pushing for the creation of a long-term development plan, apart from the medium-term development plan of each administration. Private sector and civil society organizations, even some members of Congress, had been clamoring for a long-term development plan that transcends the fixed six-year term of political administrations. These were all seriously considered.

But then we also considered political realities. We are aware of the fixed six-year term of a president and the tendency of each new administration to abandon even good plans and programs of its predecessor to signify change and create a new "brand". A long-term plan crafted under one presidency runs the risk of discontinuity under the successor presidency.

Given all these, we thought that the best and the first thing to do is to have a common vision for ourselves over the long term. We need to define our long-term goals as a nation and unite around it such that medium-term plans of each administration will be anchored on this set of goals or our long-term vision.

And so we put many heads together and embarked on this long-term vision exercise. Let me emphasize that it is NOT a plan. It is a vision or a set of long-term goals based on the standard of living that Filipinos want to have in 25 years or so. While people may differ on short- and medium-term objectives, as well as on approaches or strategies to achieve these goals, we believe it is important and possible to reach a consensus on a long-term vision.

True to NEDA's commitment to inclusive development and to sound, evidence-based planning and policymaking, we did our best to design this initiative to be participatory, methodical, and rigorous. We need to make sure that the long-term vision that we will arrive at will be broadly acceptable and at the same time sound and achievable. To guide the overall implementation of the visioning exercise, an Advisory Committee composed of eminent persons representing various sectors such as the government, private sector, academe, and civil society. Experts from different fields of development were also consulted, especially on the thematic technical papers.

Thus, this exercise has been painstakingly rigorous and careful. It involved, on the one hand, research and technical studies that look at various thematic areas that are widely known to be factors affecting a country's development. These include growth and poverty, health, education, demography, innovation, infrastructure, environment, energy, finance, governance, and the global economy. These studies continue to be, and are actually intended to be, works in progress. Results of these technical studies will be released in the following months this year.

On the other hand, and very importantly, we conducted methodical public consultations through focus group discussions and a national survey to ensure that what we arrive at is truly representative of the aspirations of the Filipino people. A total of 42 FGDs were done

nationwide, with emphasis on poor and marginalized sectors of society. Based on the results of the FGDs, a questionnaire was devised for a survey designed to be nationally representative with 10,000 respondents. Together, these technical studies, FGDs and survey provide evidence-based examinations of the aspirations of Filipinos and possibilities of realizing them. Moreover, as you perhaps noticed, NEDA has launched a communication plan, now called AmBisyon Natin 2040, to generate public awareness on this effort. AmBisyon Natin 2040 is a play of English and Filipino words “The Vision” and “Our Ambition”. With your help, we hope to be able to engage stakeholders and develop a strong constituency for this vision, who will take this effort through the succeeding administrations.

Today, we will be listening to the people’s voices as NEDA will share with all of us the results of the public consultations – the first in this series of discussions NEDA intends to have with you. Again, let me emphasize that this long-term vision is envisioned to be a basis of unity among Filipinos, considering how people are easily divided on issues especially in this election period. Eventually, we hope to come up with a document, or a set of documents, that is not overly prescriptive. It should allow room for flexibility as our country faces new challenges in the years leading up to 2040. As the guidepost for future development plans, this 2040 vision can be calibrated to account for future conditions and provide suggestions on how to move forward.

We are grateful that the long journey towards a long-term vision for the Philippines has now come to this point. Yet certainly, we know that it is just a start. We would like to thank everyone who has been involved and remains engaged in this undertaking. The tireless public servants of NEDA, the Advisory Committee, experts from the academe and private sector, civil society representatives, and all the other individuals who gave their valuable time for this project, the AmBisyon Natin 2040 of the Filipino people will not see the light without you. *At para sa lahat ng Pilipino, sama-sama natin sanang tuparin ang gusto nating kinabukasan para sa sarili, pamilya, at sa ating bansa.*

Salamat at mabuhay tayong lahat.