

Remarks of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr.

*For overseas Filipinos on the Occasion of the 123rd Anniversary of the Declaration of
Philippine Independence*

I convey my warmest greetings to all Filipinos overseas as we celebrate the 123rd anniversary of the declaration of Philippine independence.

I recall back in 2018 when I was in New York, we celebrated this special event with our iconic Independence Day parade along Madison Avenue. Tens of thousands of Filipinos flocked to Manhattan to be part of this fiesta grande and we danced the day away.

Wherever Filipinos may be in the world — in New York, London, Dubai, Melbourne, Tokyo, Egypt and many other places, June 12 will always be our special day. We get together, eat Filipino food, indulge in familiar joys – Pinoy music, art, film, dance, stories that for a day take us back home.

As the one thing Filipinos look forward to every year, surely this was one of the top things sorely missed last year because of the pandemic. This year, celebrations will be subdued as we have just started to cross the threshold from isolation to vaccination.

The theme of Kalayaan 2021: Spirit of Freedom in Unity and National Healing cannot be more appropriate. Vaccinations have progressed all over the world, including in the Philippines — yes, here; don't smirk. We have surpassed the one-million-mark of fully vaccinated people. We are cautiously optimistic that as the numbers of the vaccinated continue to increase, so infections and casualties will decline.

During this pandemic, the Filipino diaspora has contributed much to the world — in keeping besieged healthcare systems afloat especially in the most advanced countries; in manning maritime vessels key to trade and commerce; and in running critical infrastructure of many countries. I commend Filipino front liners abroad for doing what they are best known for — selfless service and gentle nurture, so desperately needed in these terrible times. Our healthcare workers are our best and most credible ambassadors of goodwill beside whom even diplomats pale. They don't just avow saving lives; they do it.

The Filipinos' dominant global helping presence single-handedly vindicated our push for receiving countries to adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. I was there in the United Nations when some countries expressed reservations over the Global Compact. Many of these countries now see the Filipino as essential to their recovery. They cannot heal without you. The global Filipino has redefined to a higher level what it means to be an essential worker. I cannot convey enough of my deep respect for you.

Our esteem will always go hand in hand with our commitment to extend fast, responsive and quality service through our Embassies, Missions, and Consulates abroad. Our repatriation efforts in this pandemic, which started with teams going to Wuhan, continue to this day. No matter where you are, if you are in grave risk, you can count on the DFA to leave no one behind. That is our blood compact with overseas Filipinos if we have to suture our cellphones to our ears and our fingers to the keyboard.

The DFA, together with the Department of Tourism and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, has been rolling out virtual fetes through the Fiesta Filipinas series. We are also holding an online Independence Day concert, entitled "Lessons for a Changed World" — a virtual room with a view on the way of life of our Indigenous Peoples. In addition, each foreign post is mounting its own virtual celebrations. As we heal together, let us celebrate our nationhood together. And if we cannot do it physically, DFA will bring all this to you in your homes.

I cannot say for certain that normalcy will be completely restored. But I believe that down the dark tunnel the global situation will improve. And the Filipino diaspora is part of the light at the end of it. Pandemic or not, this is the best time to be Filipino.

Mabuhay!