

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of the Philippines, I would like to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Li Yong for his strong commitment and leadership as the Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) during the past eight years. Moreover, I wish to congratulate Dr. Gerd Müller on his election as the new Director-General of UNIDO. We are confident that through your guidance and leadership, we will be able to seize the opportunity to “Build Back Better” from the pandemic.

We likewise wish to congratulate the UNIDO on its 55th anniversary. Over the past 55 years, UNIDO has demonstrated its commitment and efforts in promoting and accelerating inclusive and sustainable industrialization (ISID) in order to advance economic competitiveness, safeguard the environment, strengthen knowledge and institutions, and build a better future for all.

Yet, we all know that this future is threatened by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought unprecedented health challenges and risks that changed people’s lives and severely affected the manner in which we operate and live. Worse, the pandemic has disrupted efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has threatened to reverse our progress in eradicating poverty, ending hunger, improving health care, and ensuring inclusive and equitable education. It is critical, now more than ever, for the international community not to turn a blind eye in its fundamental responsibility to support the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people, who have the least capacity to respond and recover from the pandemic. We need stronger international cooperation and partnerships for inclusive global recovery.

At this point, let me out the significance of the industrial sector in recovering from the pandemic and in building resilience towards future shocks. But we need to be innovative, digital and green.

Still, we should always aim to be inclusive. In preventing COVID19 transmission, the Philippines, as with most countries employed non-pharmaceutical interventions like lockdowns and mobility restrictions, and other containment measures. This resulted in scaled-down production, uncertainty in income flows and for some, closure of business establishments. The MSMEs were the hardest hit.

It was during this time that UNIDO lent a helping hand to bridge opportunities for industrial development for MSMEs.

This year, UNIDO in partnership with the Government of the Philippines helped establish a Global Quality Standards Programme (GQSP) for Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and medical devices. The development of the Philippine standards and conformity assessment for PPEs complements the government's effort to develop a PPE Manufacturing Ecosystem as one of the focused areas to ensure business and public service continuity.

Also apparent is the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) for a resilient recovery. Technology adoption allows the creation of new firms and new industries that can provide much-needed jobs. Innovation paves the way in creating new goods and services, including alternative delivery mechanisms, to serve the needs of society in the areas of health, education, energy, disaster resiliency, and climate change adaptation.

We then need to narrow, if not close, the digital divide. The shift to digital operations proved to be valuable amid the mobility restrictions and social distancing measures in place. E-commerce and digital payments have allowed business transactions to continue and goods to be delivered. It enabled government and schools to continue operations online rather than to completely cease. Online communication platforms have also facilitated home-based work,

virtual meetings, and remote classes. Fintech was utilized, to some extent, to deliver social assistance to vulnerable households.

We need, therefore, to enhance technical cooperation to increase investments in digital skills competency, ICT infrastructure, as well as strengthen partnerships for knowledge transfer.

Innovative solutions and green financing to drive the growth of MSMEs are also important to increase the sector's resilience.

We also reiterate our support to international efforts that will ensure equitable access to safe, affordable and effective diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that UNIDO will include this in its priority work programme.

As one of the founding members of UNIDO and as the country that gave UNIDO its first Director-General, our late Foreign Affairs Secretary Domingo L. Siazon, Jr., I would like to reaffirm that the Philippines will continue to support UNIDO's efforts towards inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

We offer our highest assurance that despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Philippines remains committed and focused on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and will not lose sight of our goal to realize the aspirations of "Ambisyon Natin 2040" or "Our Vision 2040", where Filipinos enjoy strong family and community ties, a comfortable lifestyle and a secure future. Together, let us hope and deliver this future.

Thank you very much.