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PHILIPPINE CONSULATE GENERAL

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PHL PURSUES SPACE DIPLOMACY



Above screenshot photos were taken during the webinar.

15 October 2020, Los Angeles – In 2019, the Philippines passed Republic Act (RA) 11363 creating its Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) and officially joining the club of Southeast Asian nations that man their own space agencies. RA 11363 embodies the country’s goal of “becoming a space-capable and space-faring nation within the next decade.”

Building on the country’s space narrative is the recently concluded webinar organized by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in collaboration with PhilSA entitled, “*International Space Cooperation and the Philippines*” and held on 01 October 2020 via Zoom.

No less than the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr., welcomed the participants and underscored the importance of space as a “public good” and venue for countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Long before the establishment of its own space agency, the Philippines has seen the importance of space diplomacy and international cooperation in ensuring that space remains a “public good.” As early as the 1960s, the Philippines has been participating in the global effort to regulate space interaction through the United Nations (U.N.).

DFA Undersecretary for Administration, Jose Eduardo E. Malaya III cited four out of five UN treaties on outer space to which the Philippines is a signatory namely, the *Outer Space Treaty* (1967), *Rescue Agreement* (1968), *Liability Convention* (1972) and the *Moon Agreement* (1980).

As foreign relations extend to a new frontier, diplomacy takes on more science and outer space related issues. The DFA is thus making sure that it is fully prepared to fulfill its mandate as a member of the Philippine Space Council (PSC), which supervises PhilSA under the direct leadership of the President.

The DFA's own space diplomacy corps include its offices of United Nations and other International Organizations (UNIO), Undersecretary for International Economic Relations (OUIER), Treaties and Legal Affairs (OTLA) and its foreign service posts, particularly the Philippine Embassy (PE) and Permanent Mission (PM) in Vienna, Austria.

UNIO Executive Director Roberto Manalo perfectly described the discussion on laws on international space as "a nexus of diplomacy" as countries like the Philippines pursue international space cooperation. OTLA's Atty. Melissa Anne Telan presented the DFA's mandate in all treaty-makings to be undertaken by the Philippine government, including those on international space cooperation.

Vienna PE/PM, under Ambassador Maria Cleofe Natividad, serves as the country's leading overseas arm in pursuing cooperation discussions and in closely working with the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

UNIO Director Joyleen Espinosa presented trends arising from the increase of space actors and space activities such as congestion and competition in space, its growing military uses, heightened interest in space security and development, as well as increasing concerns on space sustainability.

Another development is worth noting was presented by OUIER Special Assistant Eric Tamayo, is on the increasing commercialization of space. In 2019, the value of the global space economy was estimated at US\$350 billion.

In this light, the Philippine government's priorities are set on harnessing outer space as a driver of sustainable development; ensuring access to assistance in the development of national space capacities; working towards a rules-based, equitable and inclusive global space governance regime; and harnessing human resources for space development.

Another government agency that sits in the PSC and serves as Vice Chair to the Office of the President is the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The DOST, prior to the creation of PhilSA, has been breaking new ground in the country's initial space-faring venture, as presented by PhilSA's Director General Joel Joseph.

Excitement began building in 2016, when it launched the Filipino-made microsatellite *Diwata-1* under its Philippine Scientific Earth Observation Micro-Satellite Program and with the support of Tohoku and Hokkaido Universities in Japan. Subsequent launches then followed in 2018 of *Diwata-2* and *Maya-1*, which was developed under Kyutech's 2nd Joint Global Multination Birds Project.

The *Diwata* microsattellites have been sending vital information for weather forecasting, agriculture, land use planning, disaster risk management and defense while *Maya-1* is capable of “capturing images of Earth from space, conducting magnetic field measurements, testing a low-cost commercial off-the-shelf Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver, and recording single-event latch ups in orbit.”

Following these strides, Director General Joseph underscored that the Philippines’ “local [space] technological capability is building from the ground up, but not from scratch.” The country’s present capacities for optical imaging, radar imaging, ship-tracking, ham radio, communication and data store-&-forward, as reported by PhilSA Executive Assistant Rocell Nino B. Vicente, will further be strengthened as more satellites are created and launched into space. There are also more in the pipeline.

Other speakers who tackled existing U.N. treaties on outer space were foreign experts on cross-cutting themes, namely, UNOOSA Director Simonetta Di Pippo on “Introduction to the Work of UNOOSA and COPOUS;” Tokyo University Prof. Kazuto Suzuki on “Outer Space Treaty: Peaceful Uses and Celestial Territories;” Georgetown University Prof. David Koplou on “Outer Space Treaty and its Operational Aspects;” Chief of the Committee, Policy and Legal Affairs Section of UNOOSA Niklas Hedman on “The Rescue Agreement and the Role of the United Nations;” and Western Sydney University Prof. Steven Freeland on “Moon Agreement and the Liability Convention.”

Joining the participants from different parts of the globe was the Consulate General’s Information Officer Mary Grace “Joss” D. Leaño. END.