



CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES
LOS ANGELES



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**PHILIPPINE CONSULATE GENERAL IN LOS ANGELES
HOLDS FIRST TOWN HALL MEETING IN 2024 FEATURING
ILOCOS NORTE GOVERNOR MATTHEW J MARCOS
MANOTOC**



18 March 2024 - Post organized its first town hall meeting for 2024 held on 15 March featuring Ilocos Norte Governor Matthew J Marcos Manotoc aimed at promoting the province as a premier destination in the Philippines for tourism, trade and investment. His delegation included the following: 1) Atty. Juan Alfonso Augustus Jose, Chief of Staff to the Governor; 2) Ms Rona Leigh Bueno, Head-Investment Office; 3) A-Xavier R. Ruiz, Head, Tourism Office; 4) Irene Ulit-Bautista, Executive Assistant; 5) Zara Angeli U. Rasco, Staff, Investment Office. The event was attended by 70 participants including those who joined online. The event was also livestreamed via Post's FB page.



Consul General Edgar B. Badajos welcomed all of the participants to the first edition of Post's Economic Diplomacy Initiatives for 2024 and noted that this was the first instance where a head of a provincial government visited Post to promote investment opportunities at the provincial level.

In his message, Governor Manotoc thanked Post for organizing the town hall meeting. He noted that Ilocos Norte is the prime gateway to East Asia and a major commercial hub in Northern Philippines linking North and Central Luzon to Asian countries like Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. The presence of Laoag International Airport makes the province strategic as it is the only international airport north of Clark and Manila. The Port of Currimao is also vital in the transport of goods in and out of the province.

Governor Manotoc noted that a number of investment opportunities are bound to happen in Ilocos Norte because of its irreplaceable geographical location, investment readiness, forward-looking leaders and its established offerings for the renewable energy sector which could woo more investors given the increasing importance being placed on carbon neutrality and on shifting to renewables to address climate change.

The Governor said the Philippine economy, powered by a young workforce, is growing at a very fast pace. He urged Fil-Ams to invest in the hotel industry, renewable energy, responsible mining, data centers and institutions of higher learning.

Presentations

PGIN officials made presentations on the following topics:

- *Investment and other economic activities – Rona Leigh Bueno (Investment Head)*
- *Tourism – A Xavier Ruiz (Tourism Head)*
- *Agriculture – Atty. Juan Alfonso Augustus Jose*

Ms. Bueno noted the following investment opportunities in the province: a) Food and agriculture; b) Tourism; c) Renewables; d) Responsible Mining; e) IT-BPM; f) Services; g) Franchising & Export. To facilitate rapid economic growth and to attract investments, Ms. Bueno noted the presence of four Special Economic Zones in the province. She also noted that the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) is the first Special Economic Zone Institute (SEZI) in the Philippines. She noted that a number businesses and joint ventures are now operating in Ilocos Norte.

Mr. Ruiz presented the tourism assets of the province including its visitor profile and travel characteristics. He showcased the major tourist spots of the province.

Atty. Jose presented the agricultural assets of the province including the investment opportunities on food and agriculture. He identified the available food innovation and technologies and locally manufactured products.

During the Q&A portion, the Governor and his team fielded questions from the floor include those who joined the forum online. Questions included: services offered by the provincial government to senior citizens/retired; foreign equity restrictions in investing in the Philippines, alignment of the province to the objective of the Philippine Export Development Plan 2023-2028; programs of the province in empowering MSMEs to export; Best export quality products of Ilocos Norte manufactures; and Challenges of the province MSMEs faces when it comes to exporting.

Consul General Badajos noted that the Philippines removed the foreign equity restrictions and allowed in 2022 for 100% foreign capital participation in renewable energy projects such as solar and wind. The country is now able to directly carry out the exploration, development, production and use of renewable energy, or sign contracts for renewable energy services or operations, with Filipino or foreign nationals or Filipino or foreign companies or associations with no foreign ownership cap.

The Governor noted the current administration's vision for widening the playing field for renewable energy in the Philippines which has been instrumental in attracting significant interest from foreign investors in offshore wind projects. He noted that Ilocos Norte has all the infrastructure in place and a conducive environment for businesses and invited everyone to invest in the province.

Courtesy Call

Prior to the town hall meeting, Consul General Badajos received the Governor and exchanged views on how to increase and entice our Filipino-American communities and Americans under Post's jurisdiction to invest in Ilocos Norte. Present during the call were

Consul Francis Maynard S. Maleon, PTIC-LA Trade Commissioner Eric Elnar and Political/Economic Assistant Edwin R. De Pacina.



(Clockwise: Political/Economic Assistant Edwin R. De Pacina; Zara Angeli U. Rasco, Industry Relations Officer, Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte (PGIN), Rona Leigh C. Bueno, Investment Head, PGIN, Atty. Juan Alfonso Augustus Jose, Chief of Staff of the Governor, Governor Matthew J Marcos Manotoc; Consul General Edgar B. Badajos; A-Xavier R. Ruiz, Tourism Officer-in-Charge, PGIN; Consul Francis Maynard S. Maleon; Irene A. Ulit-Bautista, Executive Assistant to the Governor; PTIC-LA Trade Commissioner Eric Elnar; and Police Attache Col. Cecile Viloria, OPALOWC).



He expressed the hope that through the visit, a closer coordination on both sides can be made so Post may be able to refer investment and business inquiries about Ilocos Norte directly to the Governor's office. He also expressed the hope that the Governor's trips to the US will be fruitful and will result to numerous opportunities for the province, leading to a further improvement in the standard of living of its residents and a better future for all.

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