

KEYNOTE MESSAGE

NATIONAL INDUSTRY DIALOGUE ON SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE SUPPLY CHAINS IN THE PHILIPPINES

SECRETARY BIENVENIDO E. LAGUESMA

27 October 2025 | Makati Diamond Residences, Makati City

GREETINGS

□ **SECRETARY FRANCISCO P. TIU LAUREL, JR, DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE**

□ **HIS EXCELLENCY ENDO KAZUYA, AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN TO THE
PHILIPPINES**

□ **MR. ARNAUD PERAL, UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN THE PHILIPPINES**

□ **UNDERSECRETARY DRUSILLA ESTHER BAYATE, DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE**

□ **DIRECTOR KHALID HASSAN, ILO COUNTRY OFFICE FOR THE PHILIPPINES**

□ **COLLEAGUES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT
(DOLE), REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE LABOR SECTOR, EMPLOYERS,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GOOD MORNING.**

**ON BEHALF OF THE DOLE, AND AS CO-CHAIR OF THE PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) OF THE *RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE
SUPPLY CHAINS* (RISSC) ON AQUACULTURE PROJECT, LET ME
WELCOME YOU ALL TO THIS NATIONAL INDUSTRY DIALOGUE ON
SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE SUPPLY CHAINS IN THE PHILIPPINES.**

**AT THE OUTSET, LET ME EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN AND TO THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
ORGANIZATION (ILO) FOR CHOOSING THE PHILIPPINES AS ONE OF THE
COUNTRIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RISCC PROJECT.**

**UNDER THIS PROJECT, THE RESEARCH ON *DECENT WORK AND RESPONSIBLE
BUSINESS PRACTICES IN THE PHILIPPINE AQUACULTURE SECTOR* WAS
COMPLETED. THE RESEARCH FOCUSED ON OUR REGIONS WITH RICH
POTENTIALS FOR AQUACULTURE, PARTICULARLY IN SHRIMP AND
SEAWEED FARMING, HAS BEEN COMPLETED IN NCR, REGIONS I, III, IV-
A, AND MIMAROPA FOR LUZON; ALL THE VISAYAS REGIONS; AND REGIONS
IX AND XII FOR MINDANAO.**

**THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THE STRUCTURE OF THE AQUACULTURE
SECTOR REMAINS LARGELY INFORMAL. IT FOUND DECENT WORK DEFICITS**

AND CHALLENGES WE ALL NEED TO ADDRESS, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREAS OF APPLICATION OF BASIC LABOR STANDARDS INCLUDING ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH, LEVELS OF SKILLS AND PRODUCTIVITY, LOW OR INADEQUATE SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE, AND LACK OR UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WORKERS AND ENTERPRISE IN TRIPARTITE AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE MECHANISMS.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, WORKERS IN THE SECTOR ARE EXPOSED TO HIGH LEVELS OF VULNERABILITY, OFTEN WORKING UNDER CHALLENGING AND HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS, AND WITH LIMITED AND UNSTABLE INCOMES. MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES ARE SIMILARLY EXPOSED: THEY OPERATE WITH

LOW PROFIT MARGINS, DO NOT HAVE PROVISIONS FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY IN THE FACE OF CONTINGENCIES, AND ARE OFTEN HAMPERED BY LACK OF SUPPORT FACILITIES OR TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF BY UNSCRUPULOUS MIDDLEMEN.

I CONSIDER THIS NATIONAL DIALOGUE AS A SUCCESSFUL CULMINATION OF A JOINT ENDEAVOR TO GAIN AND SHARE NEW KNOWLEDGE OF THE AQUACULTURE SECTOR, PARTICULARLY IN SHRIMPS AND SEAWEED FARMING, AS GATHERED FROM THE RISCC RESEARCH. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS A HOPEFUL STEP FORWARD TO UPLIFT THE SECTOR. HERE WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE IDEAS ON HOW THE RESEARCH OUTPUTS WILL HELP LEAD TO MORE INFORMED DECISIONS ON WHAT INTERVENTIONS CAN BE DONE TO MAKE THE WORKERS AND ENTERPRISES IN THE SECTOR MORE PRODUCTIVE, AND TO PROGRESSIVELY ALIGN THE SECTOR'S WORKING CONDITIONS WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTS AT WORK.

DOLE HAS SEVERAL PROGRAMS FOR LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME AUGMENTATION FOR ELIGIBLE WORKERS AND ENTREPRENEURS. UNDER THE DOLE INTEGRATED LIVELIHOOD PROGRAM OR DILP, MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES ARE SUPPORTED IN STARTING THEIR BUSINESSES OR MAKING EXISTING OPERATIONS MORE SUSTAINABLE THROUGH GRANTS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF FACILITIES AND TOOLS, AND FOR ENHANCEMENT OF THEIR TECHNICAL CAPACITIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, ENTERPRISES WHICH ARE ABLE TO ESTABLISH THEIR VIABILITY AND SHOW POTENTIALS FOR EXPANSION IN TERMS OF JOB GENERATION AND PRODUCT MARKETS MAY ALSO GRADUATE FROM THE DILP TO A MORE ADVANCED FORM OF

ASSISTANCE CALLED THE DOLE ADJUSTMENT MEASURES PROGRAM (AMP).

AND DURING OFF-SEASONS, AS IN THE CASE OF SHRIMPS AND SEAWEEDS FARMS WAITING TO BE HARVESTED, FARMERS CAN ALSO BE ELIGIBLE TO AVAIL OF EMERGENCY EMPLOYMENT THROUGH THE *TULONG PANGHANAPBUHAY SA ATING DISADVANTAGED/DISPLACED*

WORKERS PROGRAM, MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE TUPAD PROGRAM, AND OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPSKILLING. IF THEY ARE ORGANIZED, THEIR CHILDREN MAY ALSO QUALIFY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS.

THESE PROGRAMS ARE OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL ELIGIBLE WORKERS, ENTERPRISES AND SECTORS, AND CERTAINLY TO WORKERS AND ENTERPRISES ENGAGED IN SHRIMPS AND SEAWEED FARMING IN THE AQUACULTURE SECTOR. IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AS WELL AS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND NON-GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS, DOLE ADOPTS A CONVERGENCE APPROACH IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION ON TARGETED GROUPS AND PROJECT SITES TO CREATE MORE LASTING AND LONG-TERM IMPACT. WE ALWAYS WELCOME AND APPRECIATE TARGETED, INNOVATIVE AND FRESH APPROACHES IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GAINED FROM TECHNICAL COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS LIKE THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN AND THE ILO IN THIS RISCC PROJECT. BUT WE DO NOT END WHEN COOPERATION FUNDING IS EXHAUSTED. RATHER, WE SEE TO IT THAT THESE APPROACHES ARE MAINSTREAMED INTO EXISTING PROGRAMS AS DEMONSTRATED, AMONG OTHERS, IN

OUR AQUACULTURE PROJECT IN REGION XII WHICH WILL BE PRESENTED IN ONE OF THE SESSIONS TODAY.

TO MANY, THE DOLE PROGRAMS I MENTIONED ARE STILL PERCEIVED AS SHORT-TERM, STAND-ALONE, PALLIATIVE AND STOP-GAP WELFARE MEASURES. IT IS INDEED TRUE THAT THESE PROGRAMS ARE MORE VISIBLE IN TERMS OF THEIR SHORT-TERM BENEFITS. BUT LET ME ASSURE EVERYONE THAT DOLE IS ALSO SEEING TO IT THAT THESE PROGRAMS WILL HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACTS AS PROACTIVE MEASURES TO BRIDGE THE GAP FROM VULNERABILITY TO DECENT WORK AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH.

WE HAVE OFTEN HEARD A GENERAL SENTIMENT THAT THE CURRENT LABOR FORCE NEITHER HAS THE INCENTIVE NOR THE APPETITE TO GO INTO AGRICULTURE AND FARMING, INCLUDING IN AQUACULTURE. MUCH OF THIS IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT AGRICULTURE IN GENERAL, AND SHRIMPS AND SEAWEED FARMING IN PARTICULAR, IS SEEN AS AN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY ASSOCIATED WITH LOW SKILLS AND PRODUCTIVITY, SUBSISTENCE LEVEL INCOME, AND POVERTY. IN SHORT, AQUACULTURE IS SEEN NOT AS A SECTOR THAT COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT DRIVER OF DEVELOPMENT.

WE NEED TO HAVE A DIFFERENT MINDSET FOR US TO UPLIFT THE SECTOR.

THE ARCHIPELAGIC CONFIGURATION OF OUR COUNTRY IS IN FACT ONE VAST NATURAL ENDOWMENT THAT HAS MAJOR POTENTIALS IN GENERATING PRODUCTIVE, SUSTAINABLE, AND STABLE EMPLOYMENT

**AND INCOME OPPORTUNITIES
ESPECIALLY IN COASTAL AND RIPARIAN COMMUNITIES. WITH**

IMPROVED AND MODERNIZED FARMING AND PRODUCTION METHODS, AQUACULTURE ALSO STANDS TO SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE IN LOWERING FOOD PRICES AND ENSURING FOOD SECURITY FOR FILIPINOS. ON THE OTHER HAND, GREATER ABILITY OF ENTERPRISES AND WORKERS TO PROMOTE SOUND PRODUCTION PRACTICES AND COMPLIANCE WITH PHYTOSANITARY STANDARDS CAN LEAD TO THE EXPANSION OF EXPORTS OF SHRIMPS AND SEAWEEDS. IN ADDITION, SOUND FARMING PRACTICES CAN ALSO MAKE THE SECTOR A KEY STEWARD IN PROTECTING AND CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR BENEFIT AND THAT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS, WE SPEAK ABOUT REGULARITY RATHER THAN TEMPORARINESS. WE SPEAK ABOUT IMPROVED PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS. WE SPEAK ABOUT EXPANDED MARKETS, LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY. ONLY IN LOOKING AT AQUACULTURE IN THIS MANNER CAN WE ELEVATE IT FROM A FRINGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY TO BEING A PART OF SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS AND A KEY CONTRIBUTOR IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOAL OF DECENT WORK AND POVERTY ERADICATION.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT MANY AQUACULTURE FARMS STILL RELY ON OUTDATED TECHNOLOGIES AND UNSUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION METHODS, BOTH OF WHICH LIMIT THEIR PRODUCTION CAPACITY, OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION, AND COMPETITIVENESS. ALSO, MANY AQUACULTURE WORKERS ACQUIRED THEIR FARMING SKILLS THROUGH INFORMALLY AND ON-THE-JOB; RARELY DO WE SEE WORKERS WHO ACQUIRED

AQUACULTURE-RELATED SKILLS HAVING HAD ACCESS TO STRUCTURED OR CERTIFIED TRAINING.

FOR DOLE, A BASIC PRIORITY WILL BE TO STRENGTHEN THE DESIGN AND CONTENT OF OUR EXISTING WELFARE PROGRAMS SUCH AS THE DILP, TUPA AND AMP WHERE SKILLS ACQUISITION AND ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY TO ENABLE WORKERS AND ENTERPRISES TO ADAPT TO MORE MODERN FARMING METHODS WILL BE AN INTEGRAL PART.

ON THE MATTER OF SKILLS ACQUISITION, DOLE IS PREPARED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND ITS BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES (BFAR) IN SCALING UP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS FOR AQUACULTURE WORKERS. TOGETHER WITH TESDA AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS, WE WILL STRENGTHEN PATHWAYS FOR UPSKILLING AND ENSURE GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRAINING DELIVERY. WE WILL ALSO PROMOTE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING FOR EXPERIENCED AQUACULTURE WORKERS TO FORMALLY RECOGNIZE THE COMPETENCIES THEY HAVE GAINED OUTSIDE

FORMAL SCHOOLING THROUGH YEARS OF HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE, IN LINE WITH REPUBLIC ACT NO. 12124, OR THE EXPANDED TERTIARY EDUCATION EQUIVALENCY AND ACCREDITATION PROGRAM (ETEEAP) ACT. IN THIS REGARD, JUST TRANSITION OF WORKERS AND ENTERPRISES IN AQUACULTURE, PARTICULARLY IN THE SHRIMPS AND SEAWEEED INDUSTRY, IS NOT ABOUT GIVING THEM OTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH THEY CAN ENGAGE IN; IT IS ABOUT KEEPING THEM WITHIN THE

SECTOR BECAUSE IT IS A SECTOR THAT OFFERS PRODUCTIVE AND REMUNERATIVE EMPLOYMENT.

DOLE WILL ALSO CONTINUE TO PURSUE ITS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE SECTOR. WHETHER SHRIMPS AND SEAWEEED FARMS HAVE EMPLOYER- EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS OR OTHER WORK RELATIONSHIPS, DOLE CONTINUES TO WORK WITH THE INDUSTRY AND

THE COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY OPERATE BY PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND GUIDANCE, INCLUDING CAPACITY-BUILDING OF STAKEHOLDERS, TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY AND TO ENSURE SAFE AND HEALTHFUL CONDITIONS AND REASONABLE REMUNERATION IN THE SECTOR. WHERE LABOR INSPECTION IS AN APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION, DOLE IS CONTINUOUSLY UPDATING ITS INSPECTION PROTOCOLS TO CONSIDER THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION, SUCH AS OFFSHORE OPERATIONS, SMALL-SCALE PROCESSING, AND SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT.

CONTINUOUSLY STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION WITH AGENCIES LIKE THE DA AND BFA AS WELL AS NON-GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF OUR STRATEGY FOR THIS PURPOSE.

IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL PROTECTION, DOLE WILL CONTINUE TO BE A BRIDGE IN GETTING MORE WORKERS AND ENTERPRISES COVERED BY SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCIES SUCH AS SSS, PhilHealth, and PAG-IBIG. IN COLLABORATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT (DSWD) AND THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM (SSS), WE WILL EXPLORE SIMPLIFIED REGISTRATION AND CONTRIBUTORY SCHEMES FOR SMALL-SCALE AND SELF-EMPLOYED FISHERS

AND AQUACULTURE WORKERS. IN ADDITION, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL AGAINST CHILD LABOR (NCACL), CHAIRED BY DOLE, WILL CONTINUE TO COORDINATE WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS TO PREVENT AND ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR IN FISHING AND AQUACULTURE.

AS WE BEGIN TODAY'S DIALOGUE, I ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO ENGAGE WITH AN OPEN MIND AND A SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE. LET US USE THIS PLATFORM TO IDENTIFY CLEAR AND ACTIONABLE PRIORITIES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT, COORDINATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION IN THE

AQUACULTURE SECTOR. MEANINGFUL PROGRESS BEGINS WHEN WE ALIGN OUR EFFORTS TOWARD OUR VISION OF SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY GROWTH ROOTED IN DECENT WORK.

ONCE AGAIN, I THANK THE ILO, THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN, AND ALL OUR TRIPARTITE PARTNERS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS NATIONAL DIALOGUE.

MARAMING SALAMAT, AT MAGANDANG UMAGA SA ATING LAHAT.