



**MESSAGE OF JUSTICE SECRETARY
VITALIANO N. AGUIRRE II**

**3RD INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON HUMAN
TRAFFICKING**

14 September 2017, 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

**The Ballroom,
New World Makati Hotel**

Her Excellency, Marion Derckx, the Ambassador of Netherlands to the Philippines and our very supportive partner in this event.

Your Excellencies, my fellow public servants and kindred souls in the fight against human trafficking, I bring you blessed tidings and fervent hopes of a trafficking free morning.

I stand before you today both honored and humbled by the recognition bestowed upon me to be your keynote speaker in this very noble and very timely activity, our **3rd INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING** or simply put, the 3rd Manila Dialogue.

Although this is the 3rd run of this event, please know that I am elated to be participating in my first official Manila Dialogue. It is not everyday that I am afforded the great opportunity to be with recognized champions of human dignity and freedom. I am truly grateful to be given this opportunity.

This early allow me to give all my solemn reassurance that while, compared to all of you, I maybe a novice in terms of legal knowledge in the area of human trafficking, I will match all of your enthusiasm, your desire and your efforts to fight and to totally eradicate this scourge of human trafficking.

As a practicing lawyer and as a person, I put great value on respecting human dignity. Respecting a person's dignity and value is one of the legacies of my humble upbringing in our small town of Mulanay, Quezon.

As the product of a middle class family raised by both public servant parents, my early years were indeed bereft of the material comforts that children of more affluent families can lay claim too.

However, and in retrospect I am thankful for it, there were an abundance of two things in the Aguirre household from as far as I can remember, prayers and respect.

My parents made sure that we know all our prayers by heart and that we respect everyone. Looking back, they were inheritances worth their weight in gold.

One cannot truly say that he believes in a Supreme Being and yet trample on the rights and on the dignity of his fellow humans who are supposed to be created in the image and likeness of this Supreme Being. To do so will make me disrespectful of the dogmas and the teachings I was raised on.

From the beginning I have always endeavored to treat everyone I encounter with respect befitting the dignity of a person. Verily, a soul is of more value than the whole world.

As a young lawyer, and even now as your steward in the Department of Justice, I have taken up the cudgels for society's little ones, the farmers, the fisherfolk, the laborers and all those who are lost, the least and the last.

There can be no selective appreciation in this area. Humans are humans and thus ought to be treated alike and equal. As Pope Francis puts it, *HUMAN DIGNITY IS THE SAME FOR ALL HUMAN BEINGS, WHEN I TRAMPLE UPON THE DIGNITY OF OTHERS, I TRAMPLE UPON MY OWN.*

This tender spot for the least of our brethren received an upgrade when, as the Secretary of Justice, I assumed the Chairmanship of the Inter Agency Council Against Trafficking last year. As I read through the reports of the several Anti-Trafficking task forces all over the country, I slowly began to grasp the enormity of human trafficking in our country as a national, as a regional and as an international evil.

Wars have been fought in the name of freedom, to end slavery and to restore the dignity of the human person, and yet after all the blood shed and the lives lost, people still sell people. Sadly, we are still at war.

Human Trafficking happens when people stop looking at men, women and children as human beings and treat them only as goods or chattels to be exploited and to be profited upon. Bereft of dignity and worth as a fellow human beings in the

eyes of the perpetrators, humans life suddenly shifts from being priceless to “at the right price”.

As Benjamin Franklin once said, *the unhappy man who has been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species.*

Trafficking must stop, it has to stop, there is no middle ground in dealing with the problem.

If we do not lift a finger to address the problem, we are equally guilty as the one committing it and we are equally debased as its victim.

Fortunately, there is a growing universal awareness that the problem of trafficking can be best addressed by the concerted efforts and by the effective collaboration of everyone concerned. Ending human trafficking is and should always be, our collective responsibility.

The 1st Manila Dialogue held on June 2015 recognized the pressing need for a comprehensive international approach to prevent and combat human trafficking. And since human trafficking is an ever-evolving crime, the 1st Manila Dialogue

required innovative actions to address the changing schemes of perpetrators. To formalize the commitments made during the dialogues, the Manila Declaration to Enhance International Cooperation in Human Trafficking was signed by delegates from foreign embassies and representatives from non-government organizations and government agencies.

The 2nd International Dialogue on Human Trafficking held on May 2016 built on the initial foundation laid during the initial run of the event.

Today, love is sweeter the third time around.

For today, we again convene all the signatories of the 2015 Manila Declaration and we will welcome the commitments to our efforts of additional anti-human trafficking stakeholders

The first was good, the second was better and hopefully, the third will be the best. That is how we fight human trafficking efforts wise, good, better, best, we never let it rest, until our good is better and our better is best!

The first was our coming together, the second was our keeping together and hopefully, this third edition will be the continuation of our working together.

Henry Ford said it well: *coming **together** is a beginning; keeping **together** is progress; **working together** is success.*

On behalf of the Department of Justice, we re-affirm to everyone our commitment to the eradication of Human Trafficking in the Philippines. And I believe that we are moving in the right direction as far as this goal is concerned. Our Tier 1 Ranking in the United States Trafficking in Persons report for two consecutive years is proof of that. However, more needs to be done and I know we can still do more.

I request everyone to join hands as we bring the fight to the criminals in such critical areas as forced labor and online child exploitation. Let us build on our earlier collaboration and let us capitalize on our earlier success.

I commend and thank everyone who stand with us today, please know that we also stand with you. We are in this together.

I also commend the dedication of all the men and women who are part of our technical working groups, namely, a. Household Service Workers and Tourist Workers; b. Online Exploitation of Children; and c. Seafarers and Fishers for your laudable efforts and commendable inputs in the meetings called to address the concerns in your respective areas.

Of course, this project will not be a success without the support of our friends from the Embassy of Netherlands in the Philippines headed by the dynamic Ambassador, her Excellency Marion Derckx, thank you very much, *veel dank!*

If there is any collaboration or project that we can work on together towards ending human trafficking faster and sooner, please know that my office is always open to you.

In closing, I exhort everyone to restore the dignity of the human person anywhere and everywhere.

Every person we save is a future we give. Let us end the cycle of exploitation and the degradation. Let us find inspiration in the words of the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, *Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves.*

Freedom is a gift, let us share it with everyone.

May the Almighty bless all our efforts.

Thank you and good morning.

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