Human Rights and Climate Change

Your Excellency Minister Manuel Gonzalez Sanz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica,

Your Excellency, Minister Abdul Hassan Mahmud Ali, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh,

Your Excellency Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, President of the Mary Robinson Foundation and Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on Climate Change,

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, let me thank Amb. Elayne Whyte for the warm welcome. Our breakfast session today will not be possible without the hard work and dedication of Costa Rica. As the former chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, Costa Rica set the bar high for the Philippines when we took over the chairmanship during the Climate Change Conference in Lima in December last year.

Since Maldives and other partner countries took the initiative in the early years of the Human Rights Council to raise the subject of the adverse impact of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, the Council has risen to the challenge with the adoption of successive resolutions that helped draw attention to the need for urgent collective action.

This call to action grows louder and stronger. For countries like the Philippines and other members of the CVF that are most prone to extreme incidence of floods, typhoons or droughts, inaction can never be an option. The time to act is now.

Many of you are aware of the special interest that the Philippines has both on human rights and climate change. Not only does the Philippines lose 5% of its GDP every year to natural disasters, but the loss of life is a tragedy that can never be truly quantified.

Vulnerable countries are doubly challenged in fulfilling the right to life, food, water and sanitation, shelter, health, and other fundamental rights of their people, including their right to development. There is glaring irony in the report of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights that “many of the least developed countries and small island states, which have contributed least to global greenhouse gas emissions, will be worst affected by global warming.”

The Climate Vulnerable Forum is a group of countries numbering 20 at this time, that have banded together to foster cooperation on, and raise
awareness about the adverse effects of climate change on the very survival of our people. It is not a negotiating bloc.

As current Chair of the CVF, the Philippines will build on the achievements of Costa Rica and the past chairs of the Forum and endeavour to further increase its profile and visibility. Among the priorities of the Philippines during its chairmanship are:

1. **The strengthening of linkages with the finance sector, in particular through the meeting of the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers of Climate-Vulnerable Countries (V20), as laid out in the Costa Rican Action Plan.** The meeting is envisioned to find innovative ways of financing climate change initiatives;

2. **The development of the capacities of CVF country experts to deal with climate change, with the support of international experts like the World Meteorological Organization.** There is a need to further promote the role and tap the expertise of local academia in coming up with solutions that are specific and relevant to the needs of their respective localities;

3. **Further cross-sectoral engagement of various intergovernmental bodies in Geneva, including the UN Environment Program.** The MOU-signing between the CVF and IOM in November 2013, which aimed to increase the capacities of communities to deal with migration and displacement, serves as a starting point for exploring potential arrangements with other agencies; and

4. **Articulating the advocacies of the CVF in other related forums, such as for instance in ongoing discussions on disaster risk reduction.** Secretary Mary Ann Lucille Sering, the head of the Philippine Climate Change Commission, will herself be part of the Philippine delegation to the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction that will be held in Sendai, Japan from 14 to 18 March 2015.

The intersection between human rights and climate change requires immediate and deliberate attention. It is not enough that it is on the table: we need to further explore this intersection, define it and understand its implications. We need to encourage more delegations to discuss it with greater candor; dissect the opportunities it offers and the challenges it presents; and ensure healthy and informed interaction among experts from various sectors.

Finally, allow me to raise an issue that I, as a woman, find very important. I attended the opening of the **Conference on the Gender Dimensions of Weather and Climate Services** organized by the World Meteorological Organization in November 2014. As a vulnerable country, the Philippines takes disaster risk reduction very seriously – and this includes ensuring that
the vulnerable sectors within these vulnerable populations do not only receive the attention they need but are given important role in the formulation and implementation of DRR programs. I am glad to note the recommendations put forward by the Conference, which includes the development of gender-sensitive programs in all relevant sectors of governance.

I look forward to a fruitful and constructive discussion this morning as we explore the nexus between human rights and climate change.

Thank you very much.