

**ASEAN Regional Conference of Senior Officials on Sharing of Good Practices in
Social Protection for Women in Enterprise Development**
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Welcome and Opening Remarks

REMEDIOS I. RIKKEN
Chairperson, PCW

Distinguished delegates from all the ASEAN Member States
Undersecretary Florita Villar, our Keynote Speaker and champion of social protection in the
Philippines
Dr. Stefan Matthias Hell, the Team Leader of the Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument
or READI, our partner in this Conference,
Our representative from the ASEAN Secretariat, Ms. Rodora Babaran, Director for Socio
Cultural Cooperation Directorate
Colleagues from government
Friends from the NGOs and private sector
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

We warmly welcome all of you to the Philippines and to this ASEAN Conference on Sharing of Good Practices in Social Protection for Women in Enterprise Development. Social protection, especially for the most vulnerable groups, like poor women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, is gaining an increasing importance due to changes in the economic, political and natural environment in Asia and the world. Despite economic growth in ASEAN countries like the Philippines, poverty is still at a critical level, and unemployment remains high. Climate change and national disasters and persistent political instability in some countries imperil lives and livelihoods, requiring essential protective mechanisms to prevent those who are affected from losing their means of sustenance or from sliding into deeper poverty.

From the ASEAN viewpoint, social protection is a basic human right. All those in need should have equitable access to social protection that is rights-based, needs-based, life cycle approach and covering essential services. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection issued in 2013 considers it an investment in people, and its implementation should be based, among others, on promotion of social justice, non-discrimination, gender equality and social inclusiveness.

From the economic perspective, social protection is an important economic safety net. The ASCC Blueprint (2009-2015) highlights the need for “social safety and protection from the negative impacts of integration and globalization” and aims to do this by “improving the quality, coverage and sustainability of social protection and increasing the capacity of social risk management.

ASEAN economic integration envisages the free-flow of economic goods and services among the ASEAN countries within a competitive and market driven environment. The capability of women entrepreneurs to become competitive and stay afloat within this environment depends to a large extent on their capacities for business management, product development, financing, marketing, among others. Social protection for their enterprises, particularly within an ever-changing economic, political and natural environment would boost their capacity for managing risks and vulnerabilities within this environment.

The ASEAN Declaration serves as a framework for formulating strategies and mechanisms for socially protecting the vulnerable groups, including women entrepreneurs and their enterprises. It is therefore our objective, in accordance with the Declaration and under this present Conference of Sharing Good Practices on Social Protection for Women in Enterprise Development, to come up with policy and program recommendations to socially protect women's enterprises and the women entrepreneurs themselves. Let us examine the different provisions of the ASEAN Declaration which could serve as entry points for our proposals, and let us look into our experiences and programs and see which ones could be adopted by other countries and which ones could be improved so that they support women entrepreneurs' needs.

It is very timely that ASEAN is calling an inter-sectoral consultation on the development of a plan of action for the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection on December 8-9 in Cambodia. Our recommendations should find their way into that work plan, so that the protection of women's enterprises could be considered in the crafting of strategies, policies and programs at national and regional level, to implement the Declaration. Maybe some of you would participate in that inter-sectoral consultation. Coming from this Conference, we hope that you would carry this agenda forward, so that our discussions here would be reflected in the action plan.

Before I close, on behalf of the ASEAN Committee on Women and the Philippine Government, I would like to thank READI or the Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument, whose Team Leader is here with us today, Dr. Stefan Matthias Hell, for their generous support and assistance to this Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a very productive discussion in these two days.

Mabuhay!