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**COMMUNICATION**

by

**Ms Cheloy VELICARIA-GARAFIL**  
**Secretary General of the House of Representatives of the Philippines**

on

**“Ensuring the Safety of the MPs and Parliamentary Staff”**

**Geneva Session  
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Honorable Dr. José Pedro Montero, President of the ASGP;  
Fellow Secretaries-General and Parliamentary representatives;  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of the Philippines, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to this esteemed assembly. It is both an honor and a privilege to stand among fellow custodians of parliamentary democracy—those who labor quietly yet resolutely to ensure our institutions remain resilient, responsive, and rooted in public trust.

As Secretaries General, we are entrusted with safeguarding the integrity of legislative processes, preserving institutional memory, and upholding the principles of transparency, efficiency, and accountability. These responsibilities become even more critical when confronted with threats that can compromise the very heart of parliamentary democracy.

This year's theme, "*Ensuring the Safety of MPs and Parliamentary Staff*", is both timely and essential. It reflects our shared commitment to guarantee a secure environment for our Members of Parliament and our parliamentary staff.

We recognize that safety is not merely a logistical necessity—it is a solemn duty to uphold the dignity of our parliament. Only within a secure environment can Members of Parliament carry out their legislative and oversight functions freely and effectively. Likewise, when adequately protected, our parliamentary staff are empowered to perform their essential duties with confidence, professionalism, and unwavering resolve.

Threats to safety are multifaceted—ranging from terrorism and political violence to cyberattacks, civil unrest, and even health crises such as pandemics. Thus, there is a need for holistic approach to address these challenges – one that safeguards our parliaments physically, digitally, procedurally, and psychologically.

In the Philippines, we have demonstrated institutional adaptability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the House of Representatives swiftly recalibrated its operations. On 23 March 2020, we convened the nation's first hybrid virtual session, ensuring legislative continuity while observing public health protocols. This milestone affirmed that even in crisis, the legislature must—and can—remain functional and accountable.

Today, the House of Representatives maintains a comprehensive security framework to safeguard Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff. At its core is the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms, which maintains order across the session hall, galleries, offices, and premises—whether during plenary sessions, committee meetings, or other official activities. It is also responsible for enforcing House Rules, protecting lives, securing property, and maintaining the safety of all personnel and guests.

We recognize the urgent need to reinforce physical security—not only to deter external threats, but also to uphold public confidence in Congress as a safe and dignified institution. In response, the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms has spearheaded key initiatives to boost the operational capacity of the Legislative Security Bureau and fortify security across the House of Representatives complex.

Foremost among these is the establishment of the House of Representatives Operations Center (HROC), equipped with over 400 CCTV cameras for 24/7 surveillance, monitoring, and rapid communication.

Access control systems have been upgraded to include biometric identification, metal detectors, and an Automated Visitor Management System to regulate entry to the premises.

Furthermore, the House also inaugurated its first Custodial Center—a secure, four-door detention facility with a 16-person capacity—designed to uphold both safety and the rights of those in custody.

In the digital domain, cybersecurity has been reinforced following a cyberattack on the House website in October 2023. Enhanced protocols aligned with the National Cybersecurity Plan now protect sensitive systems and ensure data privacy compliance.

Importantly, these safety measures are implemented without compromising transparency. Through regular risk assessments, anti-terrorism drills, and security audits, the House remains vigilant and well-prepared to fulfill its mandate of serving the Filipino people.

Equally vital is health security. During the pandemic, the House launched the CongVax Program to facilitate contact tracing and deliver safe, efficient COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Medical and Dental Service continues to provide regular immunizations, including pneumonia, flu, and HPV shots, to support staff well-being. Complementing these efforts, blood pressure monitoring stations have been installed across all buildings to uphold occupational health standards and reinforce pandemic preparedness.

Together, these measures not only safeguard our workplace from immediate threats but also strengthen its resilience against future crises.

The safety of Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff is essential to the stability of democratic institutions. By protecting those who serve, we help ensure that democratic processes remain uninterrupted, credible, and responsive to the people they represent.

Colleagues, while our parliaments differ in form and context, our mission is shared. Gatherings such as this allow us to exchange best practices, reaffirm

solidarity, and renew our commitment to professionalism, inclusivity, and institutional excellence.

I look forward to continued dialogue, confident that our collaboration will mark another milestone in advancing partnerships and deepening our shared pursuit of democratic service.

Let us move forward with unified resolve—to safeguard the Members and staff who serve with dedication, so they may continue to uphold and protect the people we represent.

Mabuhay, and maraming salamat po.