

Opening Remarks
of the Secretary of National Defense

**Joint Press Conference on the Visit of
US Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter**

14 April 2016

Secretary Jose Rene Almendras,

Secretary Ashton B. Carter,

Members of the press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The year 2016 promises to be a particularly productive year for PH-US defense relations. We began this year with the 2nd PH-US Two-Plus-Two Ministerial Consultations in January 2016 in Washington DC. The regular

convening of such consultations, which allow our countries' defense and foreign affairs secretaries to discuss security, political, economic, and other aspects of our bilateral relations, reflect the way our longstanding alliance has evolved from military-to-military cooperation to high-level policy discussions.

The visit of Secretary Carter enables us to build on the productive discussions we had since that meeting. While our senior and working level officials and planners have been discussing the details of how to operationalize our shared guidance into tangible outcomes through the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) and the Mutual Defense Board-Security

Engagement Board (MDB-SEB), our ministerial-level discussions provide policy guidance and ensure that our endeavors are implemented effectively. We need to further enhance our security partnership to address common security concerns for our mutual benefit.

It was also in the same month or April when we signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014. With the Supreme Court's decision regarding its constitutionality, we are currently focused on ensuring that the implementation of EDCA will further deepen the PH-US alliance while enabling us to build a credible defense

posture. Our planners are working on identifying the technical requirements for the selected sites where Agreed Locations could be developed. We are optimistic that EDCA would significantly contribute to our efforts in enhancing the interoperability between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the US Pacific Command (PACOM) by developing the facilities that could be used for approved PH-US activities.

Secretary Carter's visit also coincides with the conduct of the biggest PH-US military exercise, Balikatan, which continues to enable our armed forces to train together for addressing both traditional and

non-traditional security concerns to include territorial defense, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR). Also, it allows us to further enhance multilateral security cooperation with other regional partners as well as other security agencies by having observers as well as participants in humanitarian components of the exercise. We also continue to remind our planners that our activities should be of high value and great impact.

Further to our robust cooperation on training, we recently began the conduct of joint patrols as we continue to explore going beyond training towards PH-US joint

operations. In particular, we conducted such joint patrols as part of our Passing Exercises (PASSEX). Our planners are examining ways on how to make such patrols as part of our regular activities. We believe that such operations will help us fulfill our priority to develop our maritime security and maritime domain awareness (MDA) capabilities, which are currently on top of our agenda.

In addition to joint activities, we are also working on projects that are focused on attaining our goals on developing a credible defense posture and maritime security and MDA capabilities. As we continue to utilize Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Excess

Defense Articles (EDA) grants, we are also working on the identification of priority projects under the new Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) for FY 2017 while ensuring that the estimated USD 42 million worth of allocations for the Philippines out of the USD 50 million for five Southeast Asian countries for FY 2016 will be utilized optimally.

After nearly 65 years, Philippine and US security interests have become increasingly intertwined as our alliance continues to deepen. As such, the Department of National Defense and its bureaus will continue to work closely with our counterparts to ensure that

our defense and military relations continue to contribute to our overall bilateral partnership as well as to regional security. We believe that a capable defense establishment will not only enable us to perform our national mandate but will also help us do our part in the maintenance of peace and stability beyond our borders.

Thank you.