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Speech of Secretary Gregory Domingo
[Delivered at Makati Shangri-la on December 8, 2014]

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa, our Economic Planning Minister Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, APEC Senior Officials, distinguished speakers, members of the diplomatic corps, other members of the Philippine Government. I am glad that everyone is here this morning given the news that there is an incoming storm.

When the Philippines hosted APEC in 1996, the leaders launched the Manila Action Plan for APEC (MAPA).

MAPA specified the first steps of an evolving process toward achieving the Bogor Goals of progressive and comprehensive trade and investment liberalization by 2010 for developed economies and 2020 for developing economies.

MAPA includes initiatives that address concerns on improving market access, both tariff and non-tariff measures; enhancing market access in services; providing an open investment regime; reducing the cost of doing business; building an open and efficient infrastructure sector; and strengthening economic and technical cooperation.

In the recently concluded APEC leaders' meeting in Beijing, the leaders also endorsed an extensive array of measures to build on APEC's work on trade and investment liberalization and on facilitation and economic cooperation. The list of issues in this symposium reflects the breadth of the interests that we share in the APEC region.

It also reminds us of how far APEC has come since the last time the Philippines hosted the APEC meetings in 1996.

Hence, we are looking forward to hosting the Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT), APEC Women and the Economy, and the SME Ministerial Meeting, as well as other equally important sectoral ministerial meetings in the Philippines in 2015.

As incoming chair, the Philippines welcomes your cooperation and support to strengthen APEC and to continue to promote it as a forum that provides practical, relevant and results-oriented initiatives to fulfill our common goals of development, prosperity and progress.

I hope that the discussions in this symposium and informal meeting will provide the appropriate background for the 2015 theme of inclusive growth.

While we will continue to look at issues as such the FTAAP, Bali Package of the WTO, ITA, and environmental goods, the chairmanship of the Philippines for the APEC 2015 MRT and SME Ministerial Meeting will put special emphasis on the SME agenda.

Why is the SME agenda important?

From our perspective, the SME agenda is very critical, not only to APEC, but also to the forward movement of global trade in general. SMEs is one of the strongest voices opposing global trade as they hardly feel the benefits. Many of the SMEs see the influx of goods and services into their own markets but find it very cumbersome and difficult to take advantage of the free trade agreements because of the cumbersome rules and procedures.

There are different types of SMEs but the two most important ones are the global value chain SMEs and the cottage industry SMEs. The global value chain SMEs have merited some discussion in other trade fora such as the ASEAN and the APEC. However, the cottage industry SMEs are more important to discuss.

These are the smaller SMEs that may include some micro-enterprises. These are the small business people who have one, two, three, four, five-person type of operations. Some of them produce very good quality products mainly in food processing, handicrafts, furniture, production of small

handcrafted items and they are able to produce very good quality products. These businesses are the ones who need the most help.

For global value chain SMEs, we need a different kind of intervention compared to the cottage industry SMEs. I hope that we can keep that in mind as we move forward in developing action plans for SMEs.

We welcome the support of economies for initiatives that focus on trade facilitation for SMEs as market access is lacking. We would like to emphasize the trade facilitation agenda and these will include upgrades in customs and rules of origin administration and establishment of an institutional support system for SMEs.

We are counting on all senior officials to make APEC the “incubator” for active and dynamic SMEs and be enablers in providing SMEs wider access to opportunities for inclusive growth and their integration into the global value chain.

In addition, hosting and chairing the 2015 APEC Women and the Economy will be a vital event for the Philippines as we welcome new landmark initiatives from the United States and Japan to further advance the women’s economic empowerment agenda.

The Philippines encourages all APEC fora to consider incorporating the gender perspective into their working group to foster synergies within and across the APEC region.

In sum, I wish all of you a dynamic and enlightening discussion today as a first step towards producing significant results that will ensure the success of APEC 2015.

We have set important visions for APEC and the time for action starts now!

Thank you very much and have a good day!