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**OPENING REMARKS BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
AND U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III DURING THEIR MEETING**

[U.S. Department of Defense | 3 May 2023]

SEC. AUSTIN: Well, Mr. President, it's an honor to welcome you to the Pentagon. And it's great to see you again. We met in Manila in February, and just a few weeks ago, our countries held a third U.S.-Philippine 2+2 Ministerial*. That's a reminder of the enduring strength of our alliance and our shared commitment to advancing it even further.

We recently concluded the largest and most complex iteration ever of Exercise Balikatan. And it included more than 17,000 troops from the Philippines, the United States, and Australia, training side-by-side across air, land, sea, and for the first time, cyberspace.

And of course, Balikatan means shoulder to shoulder because that's how the United States and the Philippines have always worked together.

For decades, the Philippines has been an indispensable friend and ally to United States. Our alliance is rooted in our common democratic values, and it draws strength from the deep bonds between our peoples.

As I've said before Mr. President, we're more than allies, we're family and we share a common vision for free and open Indo-Pacific because a region governed by rules and rights helps provide security and prosperity for our two countries and for the whole region.

As President Biden has made clear, our commitment to the defense of the Philippines is ironclad. And let me tell you once again that our mutual defense treaty applies to armed attacks on our armed forces, Coast Guard vessels, public vessels, or aircraft in the Pacific including anywhere in the South China Sea.

So, make no mistake Mr. President, we will always have your back, in the South China Sea or elsewhere in the region.

Today, I look forward to discussing how we've made the alliance stronger, including the recent expansion of our Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement to four new sites across the Philippines.

I'd also like to talk about concluding our new bilateral defense guidelines and other ways that we can build on our progress.

So, Mr. President, we're grateful for your enduring commitment to modernizing and deepening our alliance.

Thanks again for making the trip, and we're especially delighted to have you here at the Pentagon, Mr. President. Welcome.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. It is a great pleasure and an honor to have been invited by your President and the government of the United States to come and visit in this official visit, with a background of the strengthening relationship between our two countries, strengthening what is already --- what already has begun, is a long-standing and very robust relationship that we have developed over the many years.

And the call of the times, unfortunately, is asking for us to meet these challenges --- new challenges that perhaps we have not faced before.

And that's why it is very important that these continuing exchanges that we have started, first with the visits of the Vice President, Secretary Blinken, yourself and the 2+2 Meetings that we have conducted last month.

And so, Mr. Secretary, I look forward to a very bright future between the Philippines and the United States, a future that is founded on the long experience and as you say, friendship and familial relationship because the people-to-people exchanges between our two countries have been ongoing at every level.

And it is our job, I believe now, to strengthen that and to build upon that. And I thank you for this opportunity.

SEC. AUSTIN: You're welcome, Mr. President.

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*[*from the U.S. Department of Defense website]*