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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. AT THE 2024 NATIONAL NUTRITION AWARDING CEREMONY

[Delivered at the Crowne Plaza Manila Galleria, Quezon City| 07 March 2025]

Thank you very much, Secretary Ted Herbosa, for your kind introduction. *[Please be seated.]*

The members of the Cabinet who are present with us here this morning; the officers and employees of the National Nutrition Council led by Assistant Secretary Azucena Milana-Dayanghirang; the awardees of the National Nutrition Awards – the very reason why we are all here this morning; my fellow workers in government; other distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is clear that the strength of a nation lies in the well-being of its people. A healthy citizenry, fueled by proper nutrition, forms the foundation of a productive and prosperous society

We are constantly reminded that we must be mindful of the food that we consume and the environment that we surround ourselves with. However, we do not always take time to recognize the passionate individuals who are dedicated to our shared mission of building a healthier nation.

This occasion is very timely as we are zeroing in on healthcare and nutrition strategies that would sustain our country's development. I am therefore delighted to join you in the 2024 National Nutrition Awarding Ceremony.

Today, we honor and we celebrate the outstanding achievements of 23 local government units and five Local Nutrition Focal Points for their exceptional efforts in improving the nutrition situation in their places, in their areas.

Congratulations to all the awardees! *[applause]* This is a moment for reflection, recognition, and renewed determination in our pursuit of a stronger and healthier *Bagong Pilipinas*.

While we have made significant progress, it cannot be denied the Philippines continues to face complex nutritional challenges.

Malnutrition exists at alarming levels across different stages of life throughout our country. And this has multifarious effects. It has wrought deleterious effects on the cognitive development and the future of our children. It has contributed to our children falling behind in their education.

We just had a meeting with the Second Congressional Commission on Education or EDCOM 2 a few days ago. And that study found most students are already two to three years behind curriculum expectations by the time they reach Grade 3. Therefore, it's very, very clear it's never too early because the effects are – the effects of malnutrition, stunting, start at a very young age. And after a certain age, maybe around eight years old, they are very difficult to reverse, if actually possible. And that is what the study has given us. And this and other findings have made a significant impact on our social and economic development as a nation.

We are taking urgent, decisive, and multisectoral action to address the problem.

In line with our commitment to addressing malnutrition, we have launched several key government programs.

We have, first of all, changed the policy wherein we have moved, shifted – not changed but shifted the policy of the Department of Health where we are trying to improve our services in terms of the preventive phase of healthcare. And the curative phase, of course, I think is very clear. But the preventive phase, and that includes nutrition.

Furthermore, even in the Department of Agriculture, we have stopped talking about simply food supply. We have now started talking about nutrition. It is not sufficient that we have this – that we have enough – everything to eat. If the family, especially the child, are not still eating the right things. And that is why we have a program with DSWD that addresses that problem.

And that problem we have – we have done a program for the First 1,000 Days of a pregnant mother. There is first – before that, even the pregnant mother is already attended to, and then for the next two and a half years.

After that, we have feeding programs in school, we have feeding programs that allow – that make sure... Mayroon tayong bagong sistema ngayon pagka 'yung – binibigyan natin na kasama sa feeding program mayroon silang booklet at parang sinasabi sa bawat linggo ito 'yung dapat na makuha kayong carbohydrates, pero dapat mayroon din kayong gulay na ganito, dapat mayroon din kayong... So, 'pag inubos mo na 'yung isa, kailangan 'yun na lang 'yung natitirang kukunin niyo. That way, we somehow balance.

So, nutrition is the key. And that is why this is such an important event because we have seen the initiatives of the local governments.

Noong 2023, nilagdaan ng inyong lingkod ang Executive Order No. 44 upang maipatupad ang Walang Gutom 2027. Iyon 'yung programang sinasabi ko na nutritional ang iniisip, hindi lamang food supply.

Ito ay may Food Stamp Program. Layon ng programang ito na masuportahan ang mga mahihirap na pamilya sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng P3,000 monthly food credit kada sambahayan upang ipambili ng masusustansyang pagkain sa mga stalls ng KADIWA at mga awtorisadong tindahan. Kapalit ng tulong na ito ang pagdalo nila sa mga sesyon patungkol sa nutrisyon at mga aktibidad sa pagsulong ng trabaho.

Itong taon naman nilawakan natin ang saklaw ng Pantawid [Pamilyang] Pilipino Program o 4Ps. Mamamahagi tayo ng tatlong daan at [limampung pisong] (PhP350) bawat buwan sa mahigit 68,000 mga 4Ps households na may buntis o batang may edad na zero hanggang dalawang taong gulang. Layon nito na matugunan ang malnutrisyon sa mga bata na nasa ilalim ng 4Ps program.

These efforts align with the goals of the Philippine Development Plan, which sets a target of achieving zero hunger by 2028 as part of our commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth.

But the National Government is not alone in this fight. Through the support and corresponding efforts of our local governments, and their chief executives, we can achieve more and cover more ground in this fight that we have started.

Last Tuesday, we had an in-depth discussion on the need to address stunting and nutritional issues so we can strengthen our children's foundation and allow them to succeed in their education and in their later life.

I have directed the DILG to ensure that healthcare and nutrition are included as a priority indicator in our Seal of Good Local Governance. *[applause]*

We are looking again at the criteria that -- as being examined when granting the Seal of Local [Governance] and I insisted that healthcare be part of that: healthcare in terms of nutrition, healthcare in terms of vaccination, in terms of access to health services. These are the things that are very, very important. We really must take to heart the very painful lessons of the pandemic.

Huwag natin... Nahirapan tayong lahat sa pandemya. Lahat tayo -- we have all suffered losses to our families, of our loved ones. And so, let not that pain that we suffered through go to waste. Let us use that and learn the lessons of the pandemic and build up our healthcare system, build up our nutritional system. It's the only way to go.

This ensures that a whole-of-nation approach is pursued as we go towards our goal of promoting the health and nutrition of future Filipino generations.

I, once again, urge all local chief executives: commit to providing your counterpart investments in nutrition, especially for nutritionally at-risk pregnant mothers, for the First 1,000 Days of Life of children and beyond.

It is essential that adequate health and nutrition interventions are integrated into the Annual Investment Plan of each local government unit.

Investing in human capital is the key to securing our nation's future. Therefore, let us intensify our commitment to breaking the cycle of intergenerational malnutrition by looking after the welfare of our people—especially pregnant women, mothers, and their children.

To our awardees, once again, we commend your dedication, your initiatives, and commitment to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

Let the best practices that you have introduced in your respective communities inspire others to create a ripple effect that will move our -- towards the countryside, towards a healthier future.

Lalo niyo pang paigtingin ang inyong mga magagandang gawain para masugpo ang problema natin sa malnutrisyon.

Mga kababayan, ang pagkakaroon ng sapat na nutrisyon ay hindi lamang nakukuha sa pagkain nang tama, kundi pati rin sa pagsigurong mayroon tayong malinis na kapaligiran, ligtas na komunidad, at matiwasay na pamumuhay

Patuloy tayong magtulungan at pairalin ang disiplina sa lahat ng oras upang makamit natin ang isang tunay na mapayapa, malusog, at masaganang Bagong Pilipinas.

Once again, congratulations to all the awardees!

Mabuhay kayong lahat. Mabuhay ang Bagong Pilipinas!

Maraming salamat po! [applause]

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