



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE
ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LA SEGURIDAD SOCIAL
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALE SICHERHEIT

**Opening Address of Corazon de la Paz-Bernardo
President of the International Social Security Association
on the occasion of the Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and the Pacific
Manila, 21–23 October 2009**

Your Excellency, Mr. Noli de Castro, the Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines

Attorney Winston Garcia, President and General Manager of the Government Service Insurance System, and Chairman of the Philippine Social Security Association

Chairman Thelmo Cunanan of the Philippine Social Security Commission

Secretary Romulo Neri, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Social Security System of the Philippines

Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky, Secretary General of the ISSA

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a privilege for me to be here today and to welcome you all on this truly historic occasion, the first Regional Social Security Forum being organized by the International Social Security Association in Asia and the Pacific. The impressive attendance at this event is clear proof that social security and the challenges confronting it are at the forefront of priorities in this region, which is a most auspicious beginning to this Forum. Mother nature has once again challenged the strength of the social security system in many parts of this region, but from what we can see, the response from the social security administrations involved has been clear, proactive and exemplary.

Your Excellency, Mr. Vice President,

May I say at the outset, what a great honour you have bestowed on the International Social Security Association and on the delegates participating in this Regional Forum by your presence at this inaugural ceremony. Through this very significant gesture, you have demonstrated to ISSA member organizations throughout the region the importance that the Government of the Republic of the Philippines places on the development of social security for the protection of the entire population of our country.

Your Excellency,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express, on behalf of the International Social Security Association, our sincerest gratitude to you and to your government for having generously agreed to host this event in Manila. And our very special congratulations and thanks to the member organizations of the Philippine Social Security Association for organizing this first Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and the Pacific. Specifically, I would like to express our gratitude to the member organizations of the Philippine Social Security Association: the Armed Forces of the Philippines–Retirement and Separation Benefits System; the Employees' Compensation Commission; the Government Service Insurance System; the Home Development Mutual Fund; the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office; the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation and the Social Security System. With the close

collaboration of all of the member organizations and under the leadership of Attorney Winston Garcia, the National Organizing Committee has worked relentlessly for several months to make this Forum a spectacular event for the ISSA, and for Asia and the Pacific.

This Regional Social Security Forum has a very special significance for the ISSA since it is the first of this new model of events to be held in Asia and the Pacific, my region. The format adopted replicates at the regional level the World Social Security Forum, which is organized once in every three years and brings together representatives from the Association's world wide membership. Many of you will recall that the first World Social Security Forum held in Moscow in 2007 was attended by over 1000 delegates from 126 countries who met in the Russian Federation to discuss a wide range of global social security challenges and the dynamic ways in which social security institutions were providing an effective response. Mark your calendars: our next World Social Security Forum *rendez-vous* is 2010 in Cape Town, 29 November to 4 December 2010.

Importantly, the ISSA's world wide membership underlined that there was a need for a similar type of meeting at the regional level, which would provide a platform to examine the most urgent specific concerns being faced by social security schemes both nationally and regionally. In response to this request, Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky and his Secretariat developed this new type of meeting, a Regional Social Security Forum, which will focus on those topics which administrators and directors on each continent selected as the priority areas for their region. Therefore you, Chief Executive Officers from member organizations in Asia and the Pacific, have had a direct role in formulating the agenda of this Forum.

Our agenda is made up of challenges that are at the crux of achieving dynamic social security in a very diverse region. As a framework for the discussions during the next three days a report on Social Security Developments and Trends in Asia and the Pacific will be presented. Through an analysis of what has been happening in the field of social security in this region, the ISSA Secretary General will share with you the most pertinent issues which have been identified, he will highlight how schemes in Asia and the Pacific have reacted in recent years and in particular what is the future path being traced. This session will therefore provide the general context for this Forum.

Subsequently, delegates will concentrate on a key issue for all social security institutions: Governance and the social security reform process. As reforms are often implemented with improvements in governance, what are the effective strategies and practices that facilitate the success of the reform process? We will discuss standards, and performance benchmarks, the link between governance and the reform process, and, the need for: responsive IT architecture, systems of internal controls, and most of all, competent and dynamic staff. We will also look at governance lessons in terms of risks and opportunities to extend social security coverage, to manage funds and investments, and to enhance the reform process despite an adverse environment.

We will then examine the imperatives of health care coverage. In Asia and the Pacific, as national health care programmes seek to extend access to larger segments of the population, there is a trend towards pluralistic approaches and diverse institutional and financing methods. Policy makers and health care administrators are exploring how to link and integrate different methods in order to effectively extend social security coverage.

A central element of our programme will be the discussion on pension coverage and demographic ageing. While there are a few countries in this region that are already facing the impact of demographic ageing, on the main, the population age structure for Asia and the Pacific is relatively young. But, the need to extend pension coverage is an urgent priority. Why is it an urgent priority? The reasons are compelling: In this region- poverty and rural conditions persist in many countries; the two most populous countries and the top three migrant-sending countries are in Asia; more

workers are finding jobs in the informal sector; because more of the poor are women. Policy makers are discussing the affordability of introducing non-contributory schemes or contribution matching schemes to boost efforts in this area. Our discussion will be practical and focused on lessons learned, good practices and the feasibility of proposed alternatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your participation at this Regional Forum underlines that you share our view that social security is needed now more than ever. The recent economic and financial crisis and the rash of natural disasters are harsh reminders of how important social security is in peoples' lives.

I am confident that forward-looking social security administrations in this region can in this difficult context be a key to extending social security and thereby contribute to strengthening social and economic development in Asia and the Pacific.

My confidence stems from the many reports of the ISSA that show that many social security institutions have anticipated changes and have proactively innovated new approaches. The Good Practice Award results, which you will learn about tonight, attest to this. Social security protection is needed in all societies, and it is also an important element of the global development policy discussions.

Important progress has been made, for example, through the implementation of universal old-age pensions, the establishment of social health insurance schemes or improvements in administration. But many challenges related to governance, socio-economic developments, labour markets and the availability of funds remain.

Social security administrators must therefore continue and strengthen efforts to adapt to existing and new challenges and take on a leading role in promoting the extension of social security coverage in our countries.

The International Social Security Association is ready to support you in this important task. Our Association can achieve this by facilitating exchanges and support between the social security organizations that constitute the ISSA's membership.

It was over 80 years ago that the ISSA took root – with a very important role played by the International Labour Office – with the goal of helping its members to make administrative improvements to their social security schemes. Today the ISSA has over 340 member organizations in 148 countries around the world. In Asia and the Pacific the ISSA has 65 members representing 31 countries and we are very pleased to welcome to this Forum our member organizations representing 24 countries.

The ISSA has a strong tradition of collaboration, knowledge production and sharing, and its activities have evolved during the decades to respond to the changing needs of its members. Today we are constantly, through the work of the Technical Commissions, the Regional Networks, the Social Security Observatory, and the Special Task force on the Extension of Coverage developing our collective knowledge on social security administration.

The ISSA's vision of Dynamic Social Security guides us in our actions. This vision promotes accessible and sustainable social security programmes that not only provide protection, encourage prevention, and support rehabilitation but that also contribute to social and economic development.

The effective transfer of ISSA's knowledge to our members can assist them in playing the much needed role of being drivers towards Dynamic Social Security in our countries through achieving excellence in administration and promoting the extension of social security coverage.

Let me add a few words about my own country. It is important to say that the Philippine social security schemes are actively responding to the recent calamities, and have been at the forefront of providing support to the people who are in urgent need of food and shelter, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend our social security organizations for their actions.

As the first ISSA President from this region – and the first non-European and the first woman President – I understand the challenges that you have to cope with in your everyday life of administering a social security scheme and in trying to convince other actors of the importance of social security. Our task is not easy, but this gathering here demonstrates that we share this responsibility with many friends and colleagues in neighboring countries. This creates a huge potential for cooperation and exchange – two of the main objectives of our Association.

This Regional Social Security Forum will provide invaluable opportunities for interaction, exchange and sharing – of information, experiences, new challenges and new thinking - amongst governments, social security administrations and other stakeholders on ways towards Dynamic Social Security in Asia and the Pacific.

It will also be an occasion to send the clear message to decision-makers in this region that social security is essential to economic and social development.

I wish you the very best of success for this Regional Social Security Forum. The people in your countries are counting on you.