

**AN APPEAL FROM MULTI-SECTORAL INDUSTRIES ENCOURAGING
EMPLOYEES TO RETURN TO THE WORK PLACE
(March 21, 2022)**

We, a multi-sectoral group from various industries, welcome the return to the workplace of major segments of the Philippine economy as a significant step towards the country's journey to post-pandemic normalcy.

Two years of the COVID 19 pandemic have drastically curtailed economic activity in our country's business districts and other commercial centers leading to a -9.6% of GDP contraction in 2020. Consequently, the revival of business activity in general, and key economic centers in particular, are now viewed as a key milestone towards recovery. This position is shared by government and the private sector, especially the micro, small and medium enterprise segment (MSME) which has retained only a fraction of the 5.38 million jobs nationwide it generated in 2019. All the aforementioned have asked their employees to return to their places of work.

We are pleased and relieved that with the vaccination rate in Metro Manila now at 70.4% and nationwide at 57.1% and with new COVID cases at a very low 598 cases nationwide as of March 17, we now enjoy our Current Alert Level 1. This allows free interzonal and intrazonal travel regardless of age and comorbidities. Moreover, all establishments may now operate on site at full capacity provided they comply with minimum public health standards.

We now look forward to heightened business activity which will benefit the entire nation and spur its return to economic wellness. The path to recovery, we aver, begins with the presence in the business and commercial centers of our country's workers.

Following the boost in vaccination rates in November last year, we saw the increase of mall foot traffic to as high as 63% of its pre-Covid figure and fast food traffic count at 78% of its

2019 numbers. MRT ridership today is at 243,845 or 69% of its 2019 figure over the same period. Economic momentum has been established and we are now within easier reach of the prosperity we all enjoyed in 2019. We encourage the public to now venture out of their homes while still maintaining safety protocols.

As employees return to the business centers, it is also hoped that confidence nationwide will improve and help restore industries displaced by the pandemic. At least 1.1 million tourism workers were adversely affected by the pandemic.

Other studies estimate that the year 2020 alone, our first pandemic year, negatively impacted 423,075 construction workers or 10% of the figure employed in 2019; 464,841 accommodation and food service employees or 24% of those employed in 2019; 492,067 transportation and storage workers or 14% of those employed in 2019.

We note that Typhoon Odette last December showed many firms that WFH arrangements are not for all and were meant to be temporary. Without the backup systems in the work place needed for uninterrupted operations, many companies in Cebu and along the path of Typhoon Odette reported significant losses due to power and water outages.

Fully occupied business districts and commercial centers indeed represent a welcome and collective milestone for the country. ###

Signed by:

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