

FOR
March 13, 2026

IMMEDIATE

RELEASE

Stronger Canada–PH partnership gains urgency amid global uncertainty – experts

With negotiations underway for a potential free trade agreement (FTA) and global supply chains facing mounting geopolitical risks, Philippine and Canadian experts on Friday called for stronger bilateral cooperation on economic security, emerging technologies, and resilient trade systems.

On Friday, international think tank Stratbase Institute and the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) staged a public conference in Makati City where they discussed how to strengthen the two countries' relations and expand cooperation in strategic sectors.

David Hartman, Canada's ambassador to the Philippines, highlighted the importance of the ongoing Canada-Philippines FTA talks, which, once signed, would be the Philippines' first such agreement with a North American country.

He said that both the Philippines and Canada “have set an ambitious timeline to conclude these negotiations this calendar year, and Canada remains fully committed to achieving that goal.”

“Modern trade agreements are far more than about just reducing tariffs. They create stable and predictable frameworks that help economies diversify supply chains [and] strengthen investment confidence,” he said in his keynote address. “In a time of global uncertainty, these qualities are essential.”

Echoing his sentiments, Stratbase Institute President Victor Andres “Dindo” Manhit emphasized that strengthening resilience “requires cooperation among like-minded partners” including Canada and called for strategic engagement that looks beyond immediate political timelines to generate long-term investments and jobs.

Manhit highlighted that public sentiment in the Philippines strongly supported partnerships with trusted countries. Surveys conducted by Pulse Asia Research Inc. and commissioned by the Stratbase Group have consistently shown that Filipinos value cooperation with countries that share democratic values and longstanding ties with the Philippines.

Among these partners, Canada has repeatedly ranked as one of the most trusted.

“The challenge is: how do we protect ourselves from these geopolitical and asymmetric challenges? We have our friends. We have to track who our friends are, who do we trust,” he said. “I’ve always argued that we are a geostrategic nation not only in defense – imagine if we can bring this into a strong partnership with like-minded countries.”

Vina Nadjibulla, APF Canada vice president for research and strategy, stressed that both countries “have much to gain by working more closely together” especially on three key priorities: strengthening resilient supply chains, advancing cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, and expanding the policy frameworks that support secure trade and investment.

“At a time of growing global uncertainty, strengthening this partnership has never been more important. The Philippines has emerged as an anchor partner for Canada in the region and there is a real opportunity now to deepen our economic and security cooperation in ways that deliver concrete benefits for both countries,” she said.

She noted that Canada’s strengths lay in energy resources, critical minerals and advanced technologies while the Philippines offered a dynamic and rapidly growing economy, a young and highly skilled workforce, and a strategic location at the heart of Southeast Asia.

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About Stratbase Institute

The Stratbase Institute an independent, international strategic research organization focused on providing policy alternatives to improve Philippine governance and regional security. It actively hosts forums on maritime security, economic policy, and digital connectivity, often collaborating with diplomatic, government, and private sectors.

About the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada)

The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening Canada's engagement with Asia and deepening Asia's connection to Canada. Headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, and with its Asia Regional Office based in Singapore, APF Canada serves as a bridge between Canadian and Asian governments, businesses, and academic institutions to advance inclusive growth, resilient partnerships, and innovation across the Indo-Pacific.

Through cutting-edge policy research, strategic convenings, and targeted programs in trade, sustainability, climate action, and regional cooperation, APF Canada works to enhance economic relations, foster people-to-people connections between Asia and Canada.

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