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Headline: What didn't make the cut to Aquino's COP21 speech

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We write with regard to recent reportage on President Benigno Aquino III's speech at the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 climate convention. Aquino's three-minute speech failed to capture the harsh realities of the burgeoning climate crisis in the Philippines and the world at large. Failing to recognize the deep-seated problems of climate change means we will fail in the search for genuine solutions.

First off, Aquino failed to discuss how chronic vulnerability in underdeveloped countries is rooted in CO2lonialism and Globalization. The climate disruption we face today was driven by the 'benevolent' captain John Smiths and Adam Smiths who fed their addiction to fossil fuels, timber, minerals, cheap labor—the metaphorical Pocahontas.

The sad reality is that Aquino does not care about addressing the roots of the crisis. He is just happy with begging for climate financing crumbs. So far, barely \$10 billion have been committed by the big greenhouse gas-polluting countries of the target \$100-billion Green Climate Fund for the adaptation of vulnerable countries.

The Philippines has yet to be approved of any allocation. We have to toe the line to stay in line for the crumbs. These crumbs are grossly insufficient, as the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development estimates that vulnerable countries need more than \$1 trillion to adapt their economies to climate impacts.

Next, Aquino was deathly silent over the need to demand drastic, mandatory, and legally binding emissions cuts and climate reparations from US, China, and the other top 20 polluter countries. Aquino once again toed the polluters' line that from emissions cut pledges to climate financing pledges, everything must simply be voluntary and not mandatory.

There are plenty of motherhood buzzwords such as "climate justice," "global solidarity" and "fairness and equitability" peppered into the speech to appease both the people searching and the people skirting accountability.

Did Aquino fear that any hint of assertion of common but differentiated responsibilities will have the United States do another Kyoto Protocol and simply refuse to sign the upcoming Paris agreement? This mentality that a watered-down climate protocol is better than none at all is yet another scramble for morsels.

Lastly, Aquino's speech closed with deceitful "Pinoy pride" moments in responding to climate change. Aquino gushed over the National Greening Program, but it has been slammed for being corruption-ridden, for planting invasive exotic species, and for being used for land-grabbing of agricultural areas.

Aquino spoke of cracking down on illegal loggers, but did not disclose that, under his regime, there are millions of hectares of timber plantations feigning as forestry management agreements, large-scale mining tenements and vast agri-industrial plantations that have encroached into old-growth forests, farm lands, and ancestral lands of indigenous people.

Aquino played the Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) card, but was silent over the thousands of Yolanda survivors displaced when Aquino implemented no-dwelling zones instead of swiftly relocating them to decent, safe and livelihood-accessible sites. Aquino was silent over the widespread corruption over emergency shelter assistance fund, and instead prioritized big-business infrastructural projects, like the questionable tide embankment project in Leyte and various mining projects across Eastern Visayas region.

Aquino harped about our country pledge to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent. When we actually do the math and reconcile Aquino's commitment with our actual energy and carbon sink loss trajectories, as what scientific think-tank Climate Action Tracker did, it turns out that our emissions will likely double from 2000 to 2030.

As these realities have been pushed to the margins of Aquino's COP21 speech, so were the frontline communities who continue to suffer from the crisis-ridden socio-economic, political, and now even the climate, systems. It is high time that we, the people, break out from these margins.

— Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment

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26 Matulungin St., Central District, Diliman, QC