

Headline: 'Climate injustice'

Byline: Neni Sta. Romana Cruz

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It does sound like a doomsday scenario. Humanity consumes 1.75 earths a year, using 75 percent more resources that can be replenished. The Philippines is the country most vulnerable to natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific as of 2018. And time is running out on us as we continue to abuse natural resources.

At a recent Season of Creation lecture series sponsored by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and Focolare, Richard B. Tantoco, president and chief operating officer of Energy Development Corp., sent out a distress call with those facts and figures. He stressed that "we are mortgaging the future we give our children if we do not take resolute action to alter the course we are on."

It was not too long ago when the call was for sustainability and corporate social responsibility. But sadly, times have radically changed, and those buzzwords are now inadequate.

While COVID-19 has disrupted our lives and now occupies much of the world's attention, it is really climate change that will be more vicious and more destructive in the coming years. Ultimately, it will also lead to further inequality among social classes. We are witnessing this in the frequency and increasing magnitude of typhoons the country is enduring. Think Ondoy in 2009, Yolanda in 2013, Urduja in 2017.

In the Global Risk Index of INFORM, a multi-stakeholder forum for developing quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters, the Philippines was shown to have the highest hazard risk in Asia in 2018, followed by Japan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and Indonesia. What makes the country and especially the poor most vulnerable? There's the natural hazard itself becoming more powerful with climate change; our poor institutional capacity to respond, and our poor infrastructure.

Tantoco described how climate change drives poverty. Consider these: The ones most affected are those who experience the disaster and do not have the resources or savings to resume normalcy in their lives again. Most likely, debts are incurred because of basic needs like food and medicine. Food and shelter are the expected priorities. Lamentably sacrificed is education, that great equalizer that gives the promise of a better life. As statistics reveal, college graduates earn 30 percent more at the beginning of their career than those with no degree. Yet only 23 percent of students finish college. What an impact a college degree can have on a family's poverty level — 2 percent, as against 42 percent for families with no college graduate.

This pattern is repeated again and again. "The suffering is amplified in the short term while inequality is multiplied in the long term," said Tantoco, who called the situation "climate injustice." Those sectors and countries generating the most carbon, contributing to climate change, are the least adversely affected by it, while those who do not have access to carbon-generating comforts are the most ravaged.

The world's target is to keep temperature rise to 1.5 Celsius by 2100. With this year's pandemic causing a slowdown in human and vehicular activities, an 8-percent reduction in carbon emissions is predicted. Tantoco put it in graphic terms: We would need a pandemic of COVID-19 magnitude every year until 2050 to achieve this target. Barring that horrific scenario, the world needs to reduce

carbon emissions by 6 percent each year.

We have not had a sterling record as far as carbon emissions from coal power plants are concerned. We have slid in the use of renewable energy from 40 percent to 25 percent, while our use of coal has increased from 50 percent to 75 percent. Where is our sense of accountability when our people are the most at risk from the impact of climate change?

What can ordinary citizens do to pursue a regenerative way of living? Tantoco's advice: Go beyond thinking of doing less harm, and think of doing more good. Elevate one's actions. If you hurt something, repair it. Take a hard look at our habits of consumption; consume only what you really need. And, just as important, extend a hand to those who have lost their jobs and are most vulnerable to the compounding disasters of the pandemic, social inequality, and natural disasters.

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Neni Sta. Romana Cruz ([email protected]) is founding director of the creative writing center, Write Things, and former chair of the National Book Development Board.

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