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Headline: Romualdez vows to lead House in tackling water woes before El Niño worsens

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House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Photo from his Facebook page)

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MANILA, Philippines — Speaker Martin Romualdez on Sunday vowed to lead the House of Representatives in finding solutions to the country's water woes, amid forecasts of a strong El Niño weather pattern over the next six months.

He said he expected House deliberations on the government's P5.768-trillion budget for 2024 to focus on solving the problems of the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), which reported that nearly half of the country's 532 water districts were wasting a third of their water supply.

"Patching up this water systems losses means more water for all at a time when El Niño remains a very serious threat to our daily convenience and food production," Romualdez said.

Two weeks ago, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration reported an increased likelihood of below-normal rainfall because of El Niño, which is expected to persist until the first quarter of 2024.

While the weather pattern is still weak and the southwest monsoon is expected to bring increased rainfall, El Niño is forecast to strengthen toward the end of the year until the dry season next year.

"The ongoing deliberations of the House committee on appropriations, chaired by Rep. Zaldy Co, is the perfect opportunity to explore solutions, including the rehabilitation of water supply systems and modernizing LWUA," Romualdez said.

Romualdez said he met on Aug. 7 with LWUA chairperson Ronnie Ong, who sought the lower chamber's assistance in reducing, if not totally eliminating, the nearly 30 percent annual water system losses of almost half of the 532 water districts in the country.

Based on LWUA data the, water districts, which serve areas outside Metro Manila, yield an average nonrevenue water (NRW) rate of 29.34 percent, which translates to an annual water loss of some 488 million cubic meters—over half the capacity of Angat Dam which supplies water to Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

The LWUA said that there were at least 244 water districts with NRW rates exceeding 21 percent, including at least 20 water districts that have NRW rates ranging from 48 percent to 71 percent.

The speaker further assured: "We shall direct all congressmen to commit to the President's call to conserve water by closely working with LWUA and addressing the wastage of water in their respective water districts."

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. emphasized efforts to attain water security amid an impending El Niño event in his July 24 second State of the Nation Address and ordered government offices to enforce national water conservation measures.

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