

Headline: Warnings for Earth Day

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Is climate change for real? Donald Trump has always maintained that it isn't, and now that he's president of the United States, among his first acts was to dismantle the policies his predecessor Barack Obama had put in place to help mitigate its effects. He clamped down on environmental research, ordered the easing of restrictions on carbon emissions as well as mining and drilling, pulled the plug on public funding for climate-change-related projects, and according to a report by Independent UK, "instructed federal officials to abandon the practice of factoring in the impact of climate change — what is dubbed 'the social cost of carbon'—in their policymaking decisions."

In countries like the Solomon Islands, however, the threat of rising seas is all too real, belying claims by Trump and other deniers that climate change is a "hoax." Five of the islands have already disappeared under the waters.

The Philippines faces the same daunting scenario, perhaps even worse. An October 2015 Science Daily report said water levels around the Philippines "are rising at a rate almost three times the global average due partly to the influence of the trade winds pushing ocean currents."

That means "more than 167,000 hectares of coastland—about 0.6 percent of the country's total area—are projected to go underwater in the Philippines, especially in low-lying island communities, according to research by the University of the Philippines."

Another UP report has warned that with the rise in sea levels, "coastal cities of Metro Manila such as the Camanava area (Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas and Valenzuela) are faced with the possibility of having several, if not huge portions, of their communities submerged."

The consequences of other environmental challenges besetting the metropolis are all too evident now: overcrowding, perennial flooding, land subsidence from overpumping of groundwater, coastal erosion.

In 2013, Fernando Siringan of UP Diliman's Marine Science Institute warned that Metro Manila's coastal areas are sinking as fast as three-and-a-half inches every year.

Is the government listening to scientists like Siringan and his colleagues? Were scientists consulted, for instance, in the grandiose project just announced by the city of Manila—a new Chinese-funded central business district that would be built on 407 hectares of reclaimed land?

In 2013, scientist Kelvin Rodolfo pointed out the "lethal risks" of such vast reclamation projects on Manila Bay, among them "that the coastal areas targeted for reclamation experience typhoon surges up to four meters high." The rapid and extensive flooding that engulfed Roxas Boulevard and other Manila environs during Tropical Storm "Ondoy" and Typhoon "Pedring" should serve as a warning that the Manila coastline is under increasingly greater strain due not only to climate change but also to the unmitigated alterations being done to the environment.

On April 22, Earth Day, Filipino scientists are joining their colleagues from around the world in a landmark "March for Science." While the American science community is denouncing Trump's dismissal and repression of scientific consensus, their local counterparts are calling on the

Philippine government to give more importance to science as an essential tool in crafting public policies with direct bearing on the health and wellbeing of citizens—a “pro-people, pro-environment science and technology geared toward national development,” as Feny Cosico of the group Agham put it.

Science workers are by nature deliberate, methodical, collected; that the international community of scientists is now roused to take to the streets to defend their work and its central importance in policymaking and people's lives is an unprecedented event. Governments that neglect—or worse, undermine—science for political ends do their citizens a grave disservice.

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