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Headline: Filipinos urged to join fight vs climate change

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Many Filipinos need a lifestyle change fast if the country is to do its part in the global effort to combat climate change, which affects third world countries like the Philippines the most.

The Climate Change Commission, an office attached to Malacañang, said even though most of the blame for global warming falls on the developed world, lavish lifestyles for Filipinos—or at least those who can afford it—have to end.

“We want our people to change their lifestyles. Yes, we didn’t contribute much (to carbon emissions), but ours is also on the rise,” Climate Change Commission Secretary Lucille Sering said Tuesday.

Sering pointed out in a briefing that the Philippines was one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change.

Sering’s pleas came amid the launch of a World Bank report this week that urged the government to hike its budget for climate change prevention-related projects to at least the equivalent of 2 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

The report, titled “Getting a Grip on Climate Change,” said 1.9 percent of the government’s 2013 budget was earmarked for projects that aim to combat climate change—translating to about 0.3 percent of GDP.

A related World Bank-commissioned survey released last week showed four out of five Filipinos have personally felt the effects of climate change, in the form of more intense typhoons and hotter summer temperatures.

The same survey showed that 38 percent of Filipinos knew little about what climate change was and what its causes are. It added that 14 percent of Filipinos did not know what climate change was at all.

What was more alarming was that the survey showed that about 63 percent, or nearly two in three Filipinos, said they had not done anything to combat climate change.

Sering said Filipinos could start with small steps such as conserving electricity at home, which also saves money. Major decisions such as buying new houses should also have the effects of climate change in mind.

“The properties you’re looking at, what happens to them during the rainy season?” Sering said, stressing that people should stop buying homes in low-lying areas that are prone to flooding.

In a statement, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the government recognized the importance of climate change prevention in crafting state policies and project planning.

"It is a phenomenon that aggravates the country's inherent vulnerability, and hampers or delays the country's achievement of our development goals committed both at the global and national levels," he said.

He cited a National Statistics Coordinating Board report that said damage to property due to typhoons reached P90 billion last year.

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About 27 percent of the damage affected agriculture; 67 percent in infrastructure and 6 percent private/commercial establishments. There were also approximately 1,000 reported casualties.