

Headline: A crucial campaign

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The two-day state visit of French President François Hollande is a historic occasion not only because he is the first French head of state to visit Manila since the Philippines and France established diplomatic relations in 1947. It is doubly significant for its *raison d'être*: Hollande is in town to secure the Philippines' commitment to climate change protocols that are up for discussion in COP21, or the 21st annual session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which Paris is hosting in December.

Not the usual strengthening of political or economic ties—though that, too, was in the agenda: On Thursday, the first day of Hollande's visit, three bilateral agreements were immediately signed, covering enhanced partnerships between the two countries in the areas of education, tourism and marine protection.

But the main subject was global warming and climate change. Hollande announced that he had offered a 50-million-euro loan to President Aquino to help the Philippine government undertake "prevention and reconstruction actions in response to natural disasters resulting from the effects of climate change or from other causes." That announcement was contained in a document called the Manila Call to Action on Climate Change, a joint declaration by the two leaders that appealed to "the international community to conclude a universal, equitable and ambitious climate deal ... to preserve our planet as a livable place for future generations."

Why did Hollande have to travel halfway around the globe to rope the Philippines into his campaign for greater international cooperation on the issue of global warming? The Philippines itself has a minuscule contribution to the steep rise in global greenhouse gas emissions that are being blamed for the spike in temperatures across the planet, which in turn is seen to be spawning erratic climate and weather patterns that have led to more monstrous storms, longer droughts, famine in some parts and severe flooding in others.

According to 2011 data from the US Union of Concerned Scientists, the top 10 countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions are China, the United States, Russia, India, Japan, Germany, Iran, South Korea, Canada and Saudi Arabia. Combined, these countries' emissions of heat-trapping gases are said to amount to more than 60 percent of the world's total. France's contribution to the pie is about 1.07 percent. The Philippines' is even smaller, at 0.24 percent.

What Hollande's visit partly seeks to highlight is the particularly lopsided position in which small countries like the Philippines find themselves in the climate change debate. While they contribute marginally to the toxic global environment that now threatens the planet, they end up bearing the disproportionate brunt of its disastrous effects. The rise in water levels as a result of global warming is threatening to submerge tiny island-nations like Fiji and Maldives; warmer ocean temperatures, on the other hand, are generating ever-deadlier storms such as Supertyphoon "Yolanda/Haiyan," the strongest storm to hit land in history, which devastated a wide swath of Central Philippines.

Being in the frontline of such ominous environmental developments, the Philippines is correct to take active part in the campaign for the international community to assume greater responsibility in cutting greenhouse gas emissions to a safer, more sustainable level. France is leading the campaign partly out of old-fashioned Gallic pride; Hollande wants the Paris conference he will host to produce something tangible and enforceable, following the agreement among 196 countries in

COP20 in Lima in December 2014 to finally sign a universal climate agreement the next time they meet.

The goal of COP21 10 months from now is to elicit commitments from all country-signatories to work together to stabilize carbon dioxide emissions and keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. That threshold is critical. Longtime environmental advocate Sen. Loren Legarda warns that "a 2-degree Celsius rise in temperatures would mean the possible extinction of one-third of the planet's species, which could trigger an ecological disaster for all."

France is among the enlightened countries trying to transform itself into a green economy by aiming to halve its fossil fuel consumption by year 2050. We can learn from France's example, and benefit from joining hands with it in this crucial campaign.

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