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All around the world, governments are taking similar drastic measures to fight COVID-19. It is a wonder, therefore, why governments are not acting with the same urgency against a threat that is as equally threatening as (if not more dangerous than) COVID-19: climate change.

Just as COVID-19 brought with it daily mortality statistics, climate change has been bringing calamities that are putting humanity on the brink of extinction. Sea levels are steadily rising, submerging coastal communities such as those in northern Metro Manila and its bayside. Supertyphoons are the new “normal” in the tropics (especially the Philippines), while wildfires are intensified in countries like Brazil, Indonesia, and Australia. Entire species of animals are disappearing. Those that are clinging to survival are resorting to cannibalism.

All in all, just as COVID-19 is a crisis, climate change is an even bigger crisis. It has been happening since the Industrial Revolution, and is getting worse with every single day of inaction.

Yet, the climate crisis is not addressed with the same urgent response given to COVID-19. World leaders have been brushing it off. In fact, in the Philippines, the Duterte administration continues to approve coal plants, mining operations, and the exploitation of our marine biodiversity. The 25th UN Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP25, was put to waste by the stalling and empty talk of world leaders. All these are happening simply because governments are careful not to stand in the way of capitalists who parasitically boost their profits at the expense of our natural resources.

This is the very essence of climate justice: Climate change is not an isolated problem. As with the COVID-19 health crisis, it goes hand in hand with and is amplified by the deep-rooted structural problem of social inequality. Political leaders and the richest in society have been ignoring climate change for decades. On the other hand, it only took a few months before world leaders resorted to desperate measures to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. Only after famous personalities had been infected were such measures executed, and leaders realized that they were not immune from the crisis.

However, even the response to COVID-19 is not as flawless as leaders are claiming. Particularly in the Philippines, Mr. Duterte resorted to fear-mongering and heightened military presence instead of providing wider access to testing and health services. Many workers are still forced to travel and go to work despite the threat of spreading the infection, simply because missing a day's work could mean not receiving their wages and being unable to provide for their families.

It is thus clear: Social inequality is the underlying problem beneath both the present COVID-19 health crisis and the longstanding problem of climate change.

We call on the government to take responsibility for the environmental degradation around us and declare a climate emergency. At the same time, corporations that operate environmentally hazardous activities must be held accountable, and a just transition to safe and renewable energy must be initiated.

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