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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte      AP Photo/Bullit Marquez

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After calling it “stupid” and “absurd,” President Duterte on Monday announced he has decided to honor the Paris Agreement on climate change, the international covenant which he feared would only stunt the country’s economic progress.

Addressing a group of journalists in Malacañang, the President said he had a change of heart on the issue after majority of the members of his Cabinet voted to uphold the treaty adopted by the Philippines and nearly 200 other countries during the 21st Conference of Parties held in France last year.

“After so much debate, I will sign the climate change agreement,” Mr. Duterte said before swearing in the newly elected officers of the National Press Club.

“It was a unanimous vote, except for one or two [who opposed it]. I was one of those... [But] since it’s a Cabinet decision, I would go along with it and sign it,” he said.

Mr. Duterte had previously said he “will not honor” the proposed restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions, arguing that such “limitations” could stymie the country’s industrialization.

The President said Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. also vehemently opposed the climate change pact, but eventually gave in after hearing the arguments of other Cabinet members during their meeting which lasted for several hours.

The Chief Executive, however, did not hide his reservations about the international treaty, pointing out that the agreement did not explicitly mention any sanction against countries which would fail to comply with it.

“As for me, I’m not really comfortable with it,” he said. “Even in the matter of contributing the money to a common fund. Read again because it does not say about payment of damages that you will incur in a storm or a typhoon like [Supertyphoon] ‘Yolanda.’”

He also argued that economically superior nations would only try to “force upon” the developing countries like the Philippines, the stringent measures contained in the Paris covenant.

“If you will read the treaty, it’s binding. But there is no sanction. So that if it is a low country in terms of economic level, the big ones will always force upon you to do it,” he said.

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