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MANILA, Philippines — Environment Secretary Ramon Paje urged Filipinos on Wednesday to take part in the observance of “Earth Hour,” saying “an hour of voluntary darkness will help us tame climate change.”

Specifically, he urged Filipinos around the world to take part by switching off lights from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Saturday in support of the campaign to combat climate change, which has been blamed for extreme weather events such as Super Typhoon “Yolanda,” which ravaged Eastern Visayas in November.

Paje said the country’s experience with Yolanda (international name: Haiyan) should give Filipinos every reason to participate in the observance of Earth Hour.

“The overwhelming devastation wrought by Super Typhoon Yolanda serves to remind us that climate change is a serious issue that we can’t simply ignore,” he said in a press statement.

A global event like Earth Hour is “a valuable tool to raise awareness on climate change and environmental issues,” Paje added.

Considered the single largest, symbolic mass participation event in the world, Earth Hour is held every last Saturday of March on the initiative of the Washington-based environmental group World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF).

Those participating in Earth Hour will shut off all lights, appliances and electronics, in support of efforts to solve the problems related to climate change and global warming.

Since joining the event in 2009, the Philippines has consistently registered the biggest number of participating towns and cities, earning the distinction as an “Earth Hour Hero Country.”

This year, the country was chosen one of the beneficiaries of the first ever “Earth Hour Blue,” an international crowdfunding and crowdsourcing effort initiated by the WWF that aims to provide bancas or small fishing boats for Yolanda victims.

Through the project, coastal communities affected by the super typhoon will be provided with resources to build new and efficient non-motorized boats with fiberglass-reinforced plastic hulls. The construction of the first 60 boats is expected to be completed by mid-April.

Paje lauded the project for using earth-friendly technology that eliminates the use of wood sourced from forests.

“The project will leave no carbon footprint and will encourage fisher folk to engage in sustainable small-scale fishing,” he said.

Earth Hour was first launched in Sydney, Australia, in 2007, where some 2.2 million residents switched off lights and pledged their support to save the environment.

The trend soon caught on around the world. There are now more than 150 countries that actively observe Earth Hour every year.

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