

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: PH and ambitious climate actions

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Published Date: 04:02 AM August 30, 2021

Section: opinion

Word Count: 765

Content:

Climate experts have once again confirmed what we already know and what Filipinos are already experiencing firsthand: Without concrete climate action, floods, rains, heatwaves, and drought will keep worsening.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment Report warns that global temperatures may reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2030 or even earlier. The unprecedented heatwaves and wildfires, heavy rains and floods, dying seas, melting polar ice, and collapsing ecosystems happening globally are a reminder of how far into the danger zone we are in.

For the Philippines, this means Filipinos will continue to bear the brunt of the impacts of the climate crisis, despite being among the least responsible for global carbon emissions. Filipinos will experience more super typhoons like Supertyphoon "Yolanda," severe droughts, and rising sea levels that worsen the food, water, ocean, and biodiversity crises, as well as impinge on their rights to life, health, livelihood, and homes.

But amid these looming "death threats," experts say staying within 1.5 degrees

Celsius is still achievable—but only through rapid emissions cuts that will halve global carbon emissions by 2030 and bring them to zero by 2050.

The Philippine government needs to treat the IPCC's latest report as a signal to implement stronger climate action through policies that will mandate corporations to end dependence on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive practices.

Fortunately, the Philippines is in a good position to make this happen.

The Declaration of Climate Emergency passed as a resolution by the House of Representatives last year can be followed through by ensuring that climate action is treated as a central policy of the state. The Philippines, through the Commission on Human Rights, also undertook the world's first Climate Change and Human Rights Inquiry to look into the accountability of major carbon-producing companies for human rights harms arising from the climate crisis.

The moratorium on greenfield coal plants can do much to slow down the expansion of coal energy, though we have yet to see concrete policies from the Department of Energy (DOE) to ensure the massive uptake and utilization of renewable energy and halt plans to support nuclear or fossil gas expansion.

But with the turmoil brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, should climate action be a government priority? We need to realize that a green and just recovery from the pandemic must include efforts to climate-proof our critical systems.

One thing the government can do now is to align the country's Nationally Determined Contributions with climate science by enhancing the unconditional emissions reduction targets. The DOE must create exclusion policies for both coal and fossil gas power starting this year. The Department of Transportation can also aim for higher emissions reduction through a comprehensive program to reduce vehicles on the road through a network of efficient and low-carbon transport and greenways within and across cities that encourage active and micro-mobility.

Transforming carbon-intensive systems such as energy is not only doable but is also good for the economy. Greening our industries can generate more jobs and, more importantly, mainstream climate-resilient business models.

If the government's recovery efforts include canceling all new coal-fired power plants, speeding up the shift to clean energy, holding fossil fuel companies accountable, and directing public and private entities to align their business models with the global climate goals, this can give way to economic activities that will be more resilient to future shocks.

A swift transition to renewable energy holds promise in terms of addressing unemployment in the country. Studies and real-life experience have shown that renewable energy facilities employ more people than fossil fuel plants during construction and operation. Renewable energy, which is now cheaper than coal, will also reduce electricity costs and eliminate economic losses from health hazards associated with coal burning. Concrete actions should also be taken to protect the most climate-vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture. With worsening climate conditions, farmers will continue to suffer billions' worth of agricultural damage, while fisherfolk will continue to deal with harder livelihood situations.

The biggest gain from ambitious climate action is climate justice. By holding the world's biggest polluters accountable, we become a step closer to shaping a Philippines where communities are protected, livelihoods are intact, and the youth are allowed to dream big for their future.

But unless the government takes urgent and drastic actions, these will remain nothing more than a pipe dream.

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