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Headline: PH doing its part on climate change, developed nations need to step up

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IN his opening remarks for the opening of the Earth Day 2021 virtual conference held by the Climate Change Commission (CCC) on Thursday, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez 3rd said, "As I have said on many occasions, I am determined to set the Philippines as an example for all nations in setting the standards for mitigating the impact of climate change. I want us to be a world leader in this area through our ambition."

It is indeed an ambitious objective because as Dominguez, who is also the chairman-designate of the CCC, went on to explain, the Philippines has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 75 percent by 2030. The target is the Philippines' National Determined Contribution (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) under the Paris Agreement and is higher than the 70-percent reduction originally pledged by the country when that agreement was first signed in 2015.

At the time, the commitment made by then President Benigno Aquino 3rd was met with considerable criticism here, dismissed as empty political posturing, with Aquino accused of "showing off" before world leaders. Others pointed out that the ambitious pledge was not justified by the comparatively tiny contribution of the Philippines to the problem of harmful emissions.

Secretary Dominguez himself took note of this in his remarks, acknowledging that the Philippines, which accounts for 1.41 percent of the world population, only produces about 0.3 percent of global carbon emissions yet is among the highly vulnerable countries that bear the brunt of the consequences of global warming. By rights, the developed world that is responsible for the most damage to the global environment — countries like China and the United States and the European bloc — should be responsible for mitigating the impact of that damage on the Philippines and helping the country adapt to climate change.

However, the point that is really being made by the Philippines' outsized commitment to GHG reduction is that moral responsibility for climate change mitigation and adaptation has no dimension. Every country has the same responsibility to do all it can to contribute to the solution, especially if it intends to exercise its right to demand that others do their part. Thus, as Secretary Dominguez said, the Philippines can serve as an example.

In practical terms, the government is doing that in a variety of ways. The Department of Energy, in a refreshing change from the indifference of the previous administration, has made renewable energy development a key policy priority, for example. The Department of Transportation's initiatives to modernize public transportation vehicles addresses one of the biggest sources of GHG emissions in the country, after power generation. Secretary Dominguez also highlighted the pending legislation that would ban single-use plastics, which admittedly doesn't have much to do with harmful emissions but is probably the country's biggest source of solid waste, polluting both land and water.

These and other initiatives represent the part of the Philippines' GHG reduction commitment that is "unconditional," that the country is taking responsibility for with its own resources. That is the

equivalent of 2.71 percent of the 75-percent total GHG reduction; the remainder is “conditional,” contingent upon the support of climate finance, technologies and capacity development by developed countries, according to the terms of the Paris Agreement.

So far, however, the developed world has accomplished little in terms of support for developing countries like the Philippines that are bearing the brunt of climate change. The subject is energetically discussed, and the developed world has been busy creating funding facilities for the purpose — the World Bank, for instance, manages or is a funding partner in at least five of them — but the pace of the actual deployment of those funds has not matched the enthusiasm for inventing them; investment has certainly not kept up with the continuing degradation of the environment.

That needs to change, and the Philippines stands on the moral high ground to demand that it does. The country is doing what it should, and will do more. The rest of the world must do its part as well.