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Headline: PH sees 'good' climate agreement despite difficulties

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PARIS — "I can smell, I can almost taste, touch the agreement."

That was Dean Tony La Viña's comment on Tuesday night at the sidelines of the ongoing climate change negotiations held in this city.

"We're nearly there and quite hopeful actually. And to say that on the second day of the final week is a big thing," the Philippine delegation spokesperson told Filipino reporters.

Filipino negotiators have been hard at work pushing for ambitious goals to be included in a legally binding agreement set to be signed at the end of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21).

He said the past climate negotiations felt like the delegates had no choice but to come to an agreement. "But this time around there is a feeling of people, this might actually be a good agreement," he said.

Nevertheless, La Viña admitted that "There's always the fear that you will not come up with something acceptable."

He said it would be very difficult for the Philippine delegation to leave Paris "without a reference for 1.5 and the decarbonization goal."

The Philippines, as the current chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), has been pushing for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a cap on the global temperature rise, by 1.5 degrees Celsius below pre-industrial levels.

La Viña said they are hoping that the ministers will finish the text on time as they have two more days to negotiate.

Asked what a "good agreement" looks like, La Viña said it should have a mention of the 1.5 degrees Celsius cap. Reiterating his earlier statements, he said it could be just a reference or having a goal of between 2 and 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"Having a reference to 1.5 as ultimately the goal that we must have in the next 20 years is really critical for the Philippines," he said, explaining that the 1.5 goal is a good "opening."

He said the inclusion of human rights and a five-year review would also be deemed a success.

"You'll have human rights at least in the preamble because we've never had human rights in the climate change agreement before this. There will be a 5-year or continuous cycle of review. That's a big thing," he explained.

"If the agreement says that we will strive to continue to increase ambition over the next 10 to 15 years I'm okay with that because the goal is decarbonisation by 2015," La Viña added, explaining that it will take years for nations to implement plans, enact laws and transform their economies.

La Viña repeatedly emphasized that the Philippines, despite its strong stand, is flexible.

"You know that we are not a country, with a tradition of standing up to other countries and say we don't like this, we will stop the agreement. We come from a country that is a good international actor," he said.

However, he explained that the flexibility is "not on the principles."

"Our principle will be the same, which is our country's interest to make sure that climate change is dealt with effectively. Our flexibility is with respect to how to get there and the language that we will have to get there," he said.

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He said they do not want an agreement that does not include major carbon emitters like China, India, US and Saudi Arabia.

"That means you have to meet them. I won't say necessarily half way but you have to meet them somewhere, pull them nearer to you," he said of the political negotiations.