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Headline: Stronger response to climate change sought

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President Rodrigo Duterte called on countries to strengthen their response to the threat of climate change.

"The same urgency needed to fight Covid-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is needed to address the climate crisis," Duterte said in his first speech before the United Nations General Assembly.

The President said the global challenge has worsened existing inequalities and vulnerabilities from within and between nations.

"Peoples in developing countries like the Philippines suffer the most. We cannot afford to suffer more," he said.

The President urged countries to make good their commitment to fight climate change as called for under the Paris Agreement.

"The Philippines joined the Paris Agreement to fight climate change. We call on all parties, especially those who have not made good their commitment to fight climate change, to honor the same," he said.

"We call on all parties to strengthen communities and peoples for preparedness and resilience. We are talking about mankind on Earth, our one and only home."

The pact aims to keep global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius (C) above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 C.

Reacting to the President's speech, the environmental watchdog Greenpeace Southeast Asia-Philippines on Wednesday renewed calls for him to declare a "climate emergency" policy.

Greenpeace Country Director Lea Guerrero said the President must issue an executive order to put climate action at the center of all policy decision-making from local to national level.

"This will ensure the Philippines' rapid and just transition to a low-carbon pathway through the phaseout of coal and fossil fuel investments," Guerrero said in a statement.

Guerrero stressed that "the declaration must also be a call for climate justice and hold big polluters — fossil fuel and cement companies — accountable for their role in driving climate change which has placed millions of Filipinos in vulnerable situations with loss of lives, homes and livelihoods."

In July 2017, the Senate voted unanimously to ratify the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and joined 133 other parties representing more than 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Philippines is considered to be one of the countries most vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. In a 2019 report of environmental think tank Germanwatch, the Philippines was fourth on the list of countries most affected by extraordinary catastrophes from 1998 to 2017.

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