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THE Asia Energy Conference held in Kuala Lumpur this week took an unexpected and unfortunate turn. Oil giants, including the head of the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries) cartel, declared that expansion of their industry to meet what they say is a skyrocketing demand for oil in the region should take precedence over action to combat climate change and as far as their own plans are concerned, it will.

While balancing energy security and climate security is a delicate challenge, the stubborn and paternalistic position taken by the oil industry is self-serving, destructive and insulting. The best response to it by our government and our regional partners is to remain committed to their energy transition strategies and prove the petroleum industry wrong.

In his opening remarks at the conference, OPEC Secretary-General Haithan Al Ghais made it clear where the oil industry stands. "Every data-based forecast that I have seen shows that oil is irreplaceable for the foreseeable future," Al Ghais said. OPEC's forecast that oil will represent the largest share of the global energy mix by 2045 at 29 percent "will require a massive energy expansion," he added. OPEC forecasts that this would involve about a 14-percent increase in oil production, from an average of 88.3 million barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2021 to about 100.6 million per day.

Al Ghais' views were echoed by Saudi Arabian state oil producer Saudi Aramco, whose President and Chief Executive Officer Amin Nasser pointed to continued healthy demand for oil from developing countries. Oil demand growth is at more than 2 million barrels per day, which is "high by historical standards," he said.

Nasser also expressed skepticism about "whether the currently popular energy transition narrative adequately reflects Asia's interests." He added, "Existing transition policies rightly attempt to address environmental sustainability, but the equally critical issues of energy security and affordability are underemphasized."

OPEC's Al Ghais and the head of Malaysia's national oil company Petronas, Muhammad Taufik, also bewailed the difficulty in attracting investment and financing to the oil industry. "Chronic underinvestment" in the oil industry is putting the entire world energy system at risk, Al Ghais said, adding, "Talk of no new investments in oil projects will only lead to energy chaos. We need energy clarity, not energy chaos."

Petronas' Taufik claimed that fossil fuel companies are being seen as "the root cause of all evil when it comes to emissions reduction," and that his company had been denied financing by banks for carbon capture and storage projects, on the grounds that these efforts are regarded as the industry's "excuse to legitimize continuing the production of fossil fuels."

The oil industry, quite frankly, has no credibility to comment on climate change. Not when it has been well-documented that it knew, based on its own research and with an impressive degree of accuracy, the global warming impact of its industry as early as the mid-1960s, and then spent the next 50 years actively trying to suppress that information. It is also rather offensive for oil industry

leaders to be speaking to regional policymakers as if they are children who are unaware of the need to balance availability, affordability and sustainability of energy supplies.

Our government has a solid energy transition plan, which is codified in the Philippine Energy Plan 2022-2040. It is probably not a flawless plan, and it should not be exempted from revision along the way, but as it is, it adequately takes into account the need to transition to more sustainable energy in a way that does not compromise economic growth. In fact, the energy transition is correctly regarded as a driver of growth and not the economic burden it is claimed to be by the oil industry.

As we said at the outset, the best response to the oil industry's continued efforts to preserve their excessive profits at the expense of everyone else and the very planet we all share is to pursue our own sensible energy transition strategy to support our partner nations' own transitions to whatever extent possible, and to keep up the effort in the years to come. Let the oil industry's market determine its business for a change, not the other way around.