

Headline: Earth Day in face of climate change scourge

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Organized on the initiative of Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin in 1970 or 45 years ago, countries of the world have since united to celebrate Earth Day, as a way of expressing their commitment and reminding their people of the critical need to protect the abundance and promote the beauty of the Earth.

Today, however, Earth Day is observed by all 194 countries to remind the world of the imperative to save Mother Earth from an ultimate disaster: climate change. This is an impossible mission until mankind reduces and finally removes carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) from the atmosphere.

Since 200 years ago, when man started to use machines, we have been burning fossil fuels—coal and oil—to produce electricity for our development and comfort. The process of producing electricity has produced CO₂, methane, black carbon, and other GHGs which last for at least 150 years in the atmosphere.

From the report of the United Nations science body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is now a concentration of 3,100 billion metric tons of GHGs in the atmosphere and this has brought about the overheating of the Earth to 1.3 degrees Celsius higher than before the industrial revolution. This overheating of the Earth is the cause of the melting of glaciers in the North Pole and the South Pole, the rising of the oceans, and the more severe and more frequent typhoons and storms, along with the widespread vector-borne diseases—dengue and malaria—of which there is currently an alarming increase in the number of cases in the Philippines.

Unless we reduce CO₂ the heating will continue and, if it reaches 2 degrees Celsius mankind cannot stop it anymore. An overheated Earth will see the gradual death of corals and reduction of fish life—the principal source of protein for the human brain. It could mean the gradual destruction of human civilization.

Earth Day must be a consciousness awakening to protect life, to reduce CO₂, to reduce the overheating of the Earth.

To avoid climate catastrophes, governments, communities and individuals must all join hands to reduce CO₂. Rapid carbon cuts are the only way to stop the severe impacts of climate change.

We reduce CO₂ by using more clean and renewable sources of energy. We reduce GHGs by managing our garbage, by reducing wasteful and excessive consumption, by managing our excessive lifestyle. Governments should promote a dramatic policy shift in using alternative fuels systematically.

Earth Day must be a celebration to protect human life and to save future generations from the destructive impacts of climate change due to the overheating of the Earth.

Earth Day must be a day to raise consciousness to save Mother Earth!

—HEHERSON T. ALVAREZ, commissioner, Climate Change Commission

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