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Headline: PH execs won't attend climate meets abroad

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Manila will no longer send officials to attend climate change conferences that will require delegates to travel by plane and will restrict its participation to the conferences via the internet.

"Following (President) Duterte's answer to UN's plea for yet another stronger stand against climate change—which he branded as more hot air—I am rejecting all official participation in climate change conferences requiring air travel," Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. announced on Twitter on Wednesday.

"We'll just vote yes to radical proposals. No more talk," he added.

Locsin's statement was strongly criticized by some environmental groups, including one coalition that called his new policy "arrogant, self-righteous, myopic and misplaced."

Not the solution

"To hear the Duterte government completely abandon its responsibility to fight for the interests and well-being of the people of the Philippines in the international arena in the face of a global crisis requiring urgent global solutions, is deeply disturbing," said the coalition, which includes the Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, Alyansa Tigil Mina, Sanlakas and Oriang Women's Movement.

The Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED) expressed disappointment over Locsin's decision.

CEED said it "shares the frustrations of the government" regarding the failures of the negotiations to exact accountability and take action on climate change but the solution was not to reduce Manila's involvement.

Denial in crafting solutions

"Refusing attendance to climate negotiations denies the Filipino people participation in crafting solutions," CEED said in a statement.

It said the country was in a unique position to present the voice of vulnerable nations, and if the Philippines did not speak out at climate talks, these would be dominated by "rich, industrialized economies," which could interpret Manila's absence as a license to escape accountability.

Reacting to the criticisms, Locsin on Thursday clarified his statement, again on Twitter, saying the country would not send officials to "chitchat."

"We just vote without talking. A Nauru UN conference in New York said that using air travel to talk about climate change makes the climate worse. (We'll just do it via the internet.) Clean communication," he said.

Citing “UN experts,” he said the government’s climate arguments and proposals, not the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), were “the strongest.”

“So who will make and propose them now? We will—on the internet as UN Conference urged. (No more) traveling faces. But NGOs are free to come and go at their own expense,” Locsin said.

Participating in the conferences via the internet “spares the planet from more jet travels that wreck the environment.”

“That was the conclusion of a Nauru sponsored conference I attended as UN rep. An entire world summit was done online. Awesome,” he added.

Duterte remarks in Japan

In his latest remarks on climate change, which he made at the 25th Nikkei International Conference on the Future of Asia last week, President Duterte called for greater accountability among developed nations who contribute to global pollution.

Duterte also said the destruction caused by natural disasters “is more painful for developing nations and for the poorest of the poor.”

Paris Agreement

In 2017, Duterte signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which urged nations to slash their emission of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, and keep the global average temperature increases to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius.

Under the pact, the Philippines promised to cut carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2030, even if the country is not a major greenhouse gas emitter.

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Duterte had said the accord favored industrialized countries.