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Headline: Climate change/chance: The time is now

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A Chinese proverb says: "When the wind of change blows, some will build walls and others will build windmills."

The world today faces such a wind of change—enormous change. Climate change is the most formidable challenge of our century. Global temperatures are gradually increasing. Each of the past three decades has been warmer than any preceding decade since records began in 1850. The frequency of extreme weather events increases as a result. Typhoon "Yolanda" was probably the consequence of a world where temperatures have increased by less than 1 degree C. Science tells us this is just a glimpse of what is to come. We are effectively on track to a 4-degree-C increase by the end of the century if we fail to take action—a scenario for which no amount of preparation can prepare us.

In December, 196 countries will gather in Paris for the 21st Conference of the Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) to shape a global agreement that will curb greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change. Their objective is to keep emissions in check so that global temperatures stay within +2 degrees C above preindustrial levels by the end of the century.

The countries of the European Union are ready to continue their leading role. The European story shows that climate protection and economic expansion can be mutually reinforcing: The EU economy grew by 50 percent since 1990 with a simultaneous 20-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Like the Philippines, the EU agreed to put forward its own contribution to global climate mitigation efforts. The target of the EU's 28 member-states is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2030 (compared to 1990). Additional legally binding commitments include an increase in the use of renewable energy and ambitious energy efficiency targets—at least 27-percent energy savings by 2030. Our long-term goal is to decarbonize our economies, to make our economies and our economic growth independent from burning fossil fuels.

Europe believes in solidarity, too. In 2013 alone, the EU and its member-states contributed 9.5 billion euros (about \$12 billion) in climate finance to developing countries. The EU and its member-states are also the largest contributors to the Green Climate Fund, which was created to support developing countries' efforts to counter the effects of climate disruption.

All countries are expected to contribute their share to achieve this objective. The days of the old Kyoto Protocol where industrialized countries could mitigate climate change alone are over. Recent studies show that half of accumulated greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution have originated from developing countries. The EU, the world's largest economy, emits only about 10 percent of global emissions. China alone has become the world's largest emitter, with 30 percent of the total. The effort to reduce carbon emissions will have to be shared among all, while ensuring that the contribution of each country is ambitious, fair and reflects national circumstances.

The Philippines can play a significant role during the conference and can influence the final outcome. The onset of Yolanda shortly before the UN Conference on Climate Change in Warsaw exposed to the world not only the vulnerability of the Philippines but also its resilience, its ability to

stand back up and have its voice heard in international forums. The Philippines chairs the Climate Vulnerable Forum and is actively engaged in UN climate bodies such as the Green Climate Fund. It has the capacity to inspire other nations.

The state visit of French President François Hollande to the Philippines last February was a success and confirmed the leading role of the Philippines in the eyes of the host nation. The “Manila Call to Action on Climate Change” was launched jointly by President Hollande and President Aquino as an appeal for the international community to conclude an ambitious, universal and legally binding agreement on climate during COP21 in December. The Philippines has an unprecedented opportunity to lead by example and to make a difference in Paris.

There is a lot that the Philippines can bring to the table. It currently has relatively low levels of carbon emissions due to its being a global powerhouse in geothermal energy as well as many hydroelectric projects. Its innovative feed-in-tariff policy and recent increase in the installation target for solar energy can build upon this. However, the Philippines stands at a crossroads. Business as usual will likely see a major expansion of coal-fired power generation which would lead to a sharp rise in emissions. Less carbon-intensive form of energy will be required to play a full role in ambitious action against climate change.

Many of the solutions are opportunities. Cleaner energy and higher fuel standards improve air quality and reduce health impacts. Energy efficiency can reduce consumers’ bills. Recycling can reduce waste and turn the waste that is unavoidable into energy. Efficient public transport makes people’s lives better. All of these things are sensible policies that help ordinary people as well as business. And all of them have the additional benefit of reducing emissions.

Europe and the Philippines share the same aspiration and a joint commitment to fight climate change. In December, we will negotiate a global agreement with a common objective in mind. This objective is achievable if we all commit to ambitious actions. Together, we have a chance to reduce the harmful impacts of climate change. We cannot afford to wait. The time is now!

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