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Headline: Palace urges Filipinos, gov't agencies to join global lights-out event

Byline: Norman Bordadora

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MANILA, Philippines—As the country struggles with the high cost and short supply of electricity that has resulted in intermittent brownouts in Mindanao, Malacañang on Friday called on Filipinos to switch their lights off for an hour between 8:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Saturday to join the global observance of Earth Hour.

"We certainly encourage everyone to participate in Earth Hour to be part of the global awareness on the use of energy and (the need to preserve) our environment," said Edwin Lacierda, President Benigno Aquino's spokesperson, in Friday's news briefing.

Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa, Jr. similarly directed all government agencies, government-owned and -controlled corporations as well as local government units to turn off their lights during the scheduled time in a memorandum issued early this month. Ochoa also called on government workers across the country to be involved in three simultaneous switch-off rites in Makati, Cebu and Davao "to help ensure a broader reach of the campaign."

Earth Hour is a worldwide event organized by the Switzerland-based charitable trust World Wide Fund for Nature. Initiated in 2007, the activity, held every last Saturday of March, encourages households and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour to raise awareness about the need to take action on climate change.

Malacañang said this would be the fifth time that the Philippines is participating in Earth Hour, which was first staged in Sydney, Australia in 2007 when at least 2.2 million individuals and more than 2,000 businesses turned off their lights to support the campaign. In 2008, the Philippines joined Earth Hour, during which power consumption in Metro Manila dropped by 16 percent and by about 56 MW in Luzon, according to data from the Philippine Electricity Market Corp.

In 2009, as more cities around the country joined the campaign, power use dipped by more than 600 MW. By 2010, the energy-saving event had grown to engage hundreds of millions of people in 4,616 cities and 128 countries and territories. Last year, over 5,200 cities and towns in 135 countries worldwide switched off their lights for Earth Hour.

Ochoa called on government agencies and local government units to organize their own Earth Hour event in their homes, communities and localities to show their appreciation for nature and support for the environment. He likewise directed them to promote Earth Hour 2012 on their official websites, community newsletters and blogs.

"The government agencies and LGUs play an important role in the environmental conservation campaign since it has the resources to help expand the reach of the campaign and step up the battle against global warming and other forms of environmental degradation to ensure that effective actions are being undertaken towards a sustainable future for the next generations," Ochoa said.

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