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"Humankind has developed the ability to drive itself into extinction," Associate Justice Marvic Leonen told graduates of the University of the Philippines Baguio on Monday, as he warned them of a United Nations study about global temperature warming up further by 2040.

It seems that dire future is already upon us, with the Philippines at or near the center spot in particular. According to the Global Peace Index 2019, the Philippines ranks first among the nine countries, all in Asia, that are most vulnerable to multiple climate hazards such as cyclones, floods, tsunami, drought and rising sea levels. The study found that 47 percent of the country's population are in areas regularly visited by climate-induced disasters. Worse, poor communities invariably bear the brunt of the catastrophic effects of climate change.

The two-hour downpour early this week that immediately submerged parts of the metro in waist-deep floods was a harbinger of more severe weather. According to weather forecaster Pagasa (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), storms with a destructive impact similar to that of Tropical Storm "Ondoy" in 2009 may be expected this rainy season due to the effects of the El Niño phenomenon. Ondoy's six-hour rainfall—the equivalent of a month's worth of rains—reduced Metro Manila and 23 other provinces to a state of calamity, caused the deaths of 464 people and damage of some P11 billion, and sparked an outbreak of leptospirosis in affected areas.

El Niño itself has been driving up temperatures to dangerous levels, devastating crops, drying up dams and causing severe water shortages. In April, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said the dry weather has caused more than \$95 million worth of damage to agriculture, with a total of 164,672 farmers affected by the drought.

Environmental ruin is also aggravating the effects of climate change. In Metro Manila, the combination of concrete infrastructure that traps heat and vastly shrunk green spaces is proving to be a debilitating setup, as millions of residents endure increasingly hotter spells. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources estimates that of the 55,922 hectares of land in the National Capital Region, only 21 percent—or 12,152 hectares—remain as green space planted to trees. The rest have been eaten up by unabated commercial and residential development. Only two major green spaces remain, in fact—the La Mesa Ecopark in Quezon City, and the protected Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area.

The city of Manila suffers one of the biggest deficits, with only 140.4 hectares of green space in a total area of over 3,800 ha. New Mayor Isko Moreno appears to recognize the gravity of the situation; he has announced that destructive reclamations in Manila Bay will not be a priority, and has spared the city's last lung—Arrocero Park—from the ignominious fate of being turned into a gymnasium site, as former mayor Erap Estrada had planned.

President Duterte is right to call for greater accountability from developed countries who are the top contributors to climate change, while smaller and undeveloped nations suffer the most from its calamitous effects. "The cost is horrendous, especially for us in Southeast Asia: Displacement, destruction, and death. Real lives hang in the balance," Duterte told fellow Asean leaders at the

recent summit in Bangkok.

But even as the President is voicing concern about the issue, his administration's official position still appears to be that, as he declared during his visit to Japan in May, conferences on climate change are "a waste of time and money." Thus the recent announcement by Foreign Secretary Teddy Locsin banning trips to and participation in such conferences; "We'll just vote Yes to radical proposals. No more talk," he tweeted.

That isolationist stance is not helpful, warned Albay Rep. Joey Salceda. The Philippines gets a comprehensive overview of state-of-the-art climate change responses all over the world by touching base with global partners in these events, and restricting official participation in international discussions may cost Filipinos "the right and opportunity to articulate" their views on issues of "extreme importance."

Indeed, wouldn't it be more beneficial to work with and learn from other nations undergoing similar experiences, and get the international community to listen to the stories of those in the frontlines of the battle? According to experts, the Philippines is in a particularly precarious state; why make its position, then, even more vulnerable by isolating it this way, at the very moment when it needs all the help it can get?

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