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Headline: PH eyes submission of climate commitment next month

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WITH 22 countries already submitting their climate commitments ahead of the highly-anticipated Conference of Parties (COP) in Paris, the Philippines is expected to follow suit a couple of weeks from now.

"We hope to be able to submit it in, latest, September or, earliest, end of August," Secretary Lucille Sering told INQUIRER.net.

Sering, who is the vice chairperson of the Climate Change Commission (CCC), said last week that they are already in the "last stages of consultations" for the country's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).

The INDCs are among the documents that should be submitted in preparation of a new climate agreement, which is expected to be concluded during the 21st United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP in December. The INDCs detail each country's plan on how to help lower carbon emissions and secure a climate-resilient future for the world.

"Our main challenge remains on the data that are available. This has to be linked to the economy," Sering said.

She explained that the CCC and other concerned agencies are working with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in determining economic projections, especially concerning energy sources.

"We have initial numbers already being prepared. We just cannot divulge it," she added.

Among the agencies involved in the consultations are the Department of Energy, Department of Transportation and Communications, Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture.

Sering said they will also hold consultations with the civil society and a "high-level private sector engagement" for companies that will be affected "if there will be some commitments in terms of (the) reduction of (carbon) emission."

Asked if they have shown President Benigno Aquino III the initial plan, she said, "He's surprised. Because we've been saying that we may be the most vulnerable but we are not a major emitter and it showed."

Sering said the government has to consider sustainable development, as well as the fact that the country is known for having the most expensive electricity rate in Asia.

“Our ultimate objective is to be a contributor in terms of the reduction of emissions and we will try to identify at what point do we really transition, at what year,” she said.

During the Regional Forum on Climate Change held in Thailand last month, Zelda Soriano of Greenpeace told Filipino journalists that consultations of the Philippine government seemed inadequate. She added that the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations should pursue fair and ambitious INDCs because they cannot “afford their current development path.”

Sering said that the government will have to do the computations and later open the consultations to the civil society.

“Once we’re done then we open up to them in all full transparency and then they can say what they think of the numbers, what they think of the process. I hope they can offer solutions because we’re very open to constructive criticism,” she said.

Of the 22 countries that submitted their INDCs, only four come from Asia (China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore) and one from the Asean (Singapore).

The Philippines has become the poster boy of climate change-vulnerable countries, especially after Supertyphoon Yolanda (international name: Haiyan) devastated the country in 2013.

It was also in Manila that French President Francois Hollande launched the Call to Action on Climate Change.

During the said event, Hollande and Aquino called for urgent action that will address climate change “seriously, efficiently, and equitably.”

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They called for “financial and technological solidarity” and for developed and developing countries to assist poor nations as they transition into “resilient territories and low-carbon economies.”

In December, France will host the COP in a bid to reach a legally-binding agreement that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 22 INDCs, which include that of the United States, the European Union and China, cover 56.4 percent of global emissions, according to the Paris Contributions Map of the Open Climate Network. The number, however, is small when compared to the total of 196 parties to the UNFCCC.