

Headline: PH to push for extension of treaty on reducing greenhouse gases

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Climate Change Commission vice chair and executive director Mary Ann Lucille Sering.
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MANILA, Philippines—The Philippines will push for a five-year extension of the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that binds developed nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions, at the next round of climate change talks in Doha, Qatar beginning on Monday.

Climate Change Commission vice chair and executive director Mary Ann Lucille Sering said the Philippines would seek a shorter term for the second commitment period than that of the European Union, which is proposing an eight-year extension of the pact.

"We don't want a lock-in period that's too long because we still don't know how the review of greenhouse gas emissions will bear out," she told reporters after a briefing in Quezon City on Friday.

"The position of the EU, one of biggest supporters of a second commitment period, is it wants eight years. We'll see how the negotiations work out," she added.

Sering said the "crucial and very controversial" Kyoto pact extension would be at the center of talks at the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 8th COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol from November 26-Dec.ember 7.

The country's push is borne out of fears that the gap between global carbon emissions and the commitments by government to cut greenhouse gases (GHG) may be widening.

"The gap between GHG cuts that governments have committed and the cuts that scientists say are crucial has already widened," said CCC commissioner Heherson Alvarez, a former senator and environment secretary, and a member of the Philippine delegation to Doha.

"If we are to save the world from the impacts of climate change such as wildfires, flooding, drought, sea level rise, and other recent extreme weather events, that gap must be narrowed," he said.

Alvarez cited the United Nations Environment Program's 2012 Emissions Gap Report released recently pointing to a possible "emissions gap" in 2020 between emission levels consistent with temperature limits and expected emissions resulting from the pledges by government.

"According to the report, there is now one-fifth more carbon in the atmosphere than there was in 2000, and the current pledges to cut emissions may not be enough to bridge the gap," he said.

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 and went into force in 2005, with most industrialized nations agreeing to legally-binding commitments to curb greenhouse gas emissions, which are

blamed for global warming.

But only the European Union and several smaller economies have shown willingness to sign up for a second round of pledges

“If this [Kyoto Protocol] doesn’t get extended, the carbon markets will really go down. Now it’s down to 1 euro from a high of 15 euro per ton [of greenhouse gas emissions],” Sering said.

The adoption of the Kyoto protocol has led to the emergence of carbon markets, in which carbon is given an economic value and traded between nations and companies.

The United States, though a signatory of the Kyoto pact, never ratified it, and Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol last year.

But Sering said there was still hope for the Kyoto Protocol to get an extension as Australia has shown willingness to commit to a second commitment period.

“We’re very confident that since Australia indicated its willingness – and Australia usually goes with the Japan and US – there will be some positive results for a second commitment period,” she said.

The Philippines, she added, was preparing its own greenhouse gas inventory, “so we can have an idea of how we can join this initiative.”

“It’s still up in the air, but the fact that it’s being explored is a positive sign,” Sering said.

The United States, she said, “will never ratify the Kyoto Protocol.”

But she said what happened with Hurricane Sandy and the reelection of Obama was something she found “really interesting.”

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“After Sandy and his [US President Barack Obama’s] reelection... we don’t know how this will translate in the Doha negotiations,” Sering said.