

Headline: Fine weather

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As I write this, early in the morning (well, early for me, at least) the sky is slate gray, the wind is picking up, and a slight rain is falling. Is this the harbinger of more torrential rains and howling winds that, weather experts say, are but the side effects of the visit of Typhoon "Nona" in this Christmas season?

The effects of the weather disturbance may so far be mild and benign for us in Metro Manila, but in Albay, Sorsogon and nearby provinces, the winds have been whipping up trees, tearing off roofs, and threatening storm surges. Though shifts in weather patterns have been taking place for many years now, we have yet to get used to what is now being called the "new normal." Time was when as early as October, presaged, according to Nick Joaquin, by the "La Naval" procession in Intramuros, the city could feel the onset of cool "Christmas weather." We woke up to chilly mornings and wore sweaters when on the streets caroling or shopping. Most of all, we never feared rains, which struck in May or June, but rarely lasted till the cooler "ber" months.

But here we are, well into the Christmas season (into the Christmas countdown, even) and bracing for a powerful typhoon. As P-Noy recently noted, in the past few years, major weather disturbances have been occurring around December, which meant an unsettling and upsetting Yuletide for many, but especially for victims and survivors.

We are caught in the middle of climate change, which so many others, conservative politicians, leaders and policymakers among them, deny even exists. But if they refuse to attach a name to what's happening, that doesn't mean we aren't feeling the effects. And the effects, as experts have pointed out, are being felt mainly by countries and peoples who have little to do with the state of the atmosphere that is, in turn, influencing the climate and its impacts on our lives.

The Philippines is among the countries affected by climate change, as the unseasonal weather patterns demonstrate—drought in the "rainy" season, typhoons in the cool, dry times. And we join a host of countries that, despite the fact that we contribute but a small portion of the greenhouse gases emanating from power plants and factory smoke stacks in more developed countries, suffer disproportionately from phenomena like typhoons, floods, drought, landslides and the disappearance of entire species.

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And yet, there is jubilation in the air. An international NGO that helped to organize civil society participation in the recent Paris Conference of Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change hails the resulting agreement as "a landmark goal that can save everything we love!"

The goal, as stated by Avaaz, a global climate change organizer, is no less than "net-zero human emissions," which it defines as "a balancing of what we release into the air and what is taken out." Clean energy, the group says, "will be the best, cheapest and most effective way to keep their (lawmakers') promise."

Going into COP21, says Avaaz, “everyone expected failure,” with so-called experts saying that “people don’t care about climate change.” But the environmental activists said they “knew better.” Since 2007—in Bali, in Copenhagen, and at the G7 Summits—Avaaz has been working to build consensus on a united, effective, realistic and measurable way to alleviate the effects of climate change, if not reverse it entirely.

Among the ways the movement sought to influence the process, despite the many setbacks: protests at the various summits, candlelight vigils in the wake of the Japan nuclear disaster, and circulating a petition around the world that earned 1.5 million signatures to save the Amazon.

In 2014, on the eve of a huge climate march in New York before a critical UN climate summit, the group gathered 400,000 people in the city and another 300,000 across the globe. The marchers called for the adoption of clean energy policies, and weeks later the United States and China “signed a landmark agreement to reduce emissions.” Said the group: “The political momentum on climate had changed.”

This year, using the momentum from the marches, the group focused its attention on the richest economies. By building political pressure and funding opinion polls and hard-hitting ads on “calling out countries blocking climate progress,” Avaaz succeeded in getting G7 leaders to say “goodbye to fossil fuels by committing to phase out carbon pollution over the course of this century.”

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In Paris, in the face of the terrorist attacks that turned the City of Light into a virtual garrison state during the COP21, the “Avaazers” drew on their stores of creativity to stage alternative protests.

Among these was the “incredible installation” of over 22,000 shoes “symbolizing all the protesters who couldn’t march.” The absent marchers’ shoes were even joined by shoes donated by Pope Francis and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, lending the installation a touch of solemnity and a sense of the great import of the talks taking place.

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The organizers admit that “we have decades of work ahead of us to live up to the promise of this moment.” Among the items on the agenda for the future: pressuring “rich countries to give more money to developing countries so they can skip coal altogether” (attention, Aquino administration!); “pushing governments everywhere to keep the planet’s warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius so island-nations can survive (again, the Philippines among them), and “most importantly, [making] sure all governments keep the promises they made” in Paris.