

Headline: The 'harsh realities' that didn't make it to P-Noy's COP21 speech

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This is in reaction to President Aquino's speech at the United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP21 in Paris. Sadly, it failed to capture the harsh realities of the worsening climate crisis threatening the Philippines—and the world, for that matter. Our failure to recognize the deeply rooted causes of climate change means we will fail in the search for genuine solutions.

First off, Mr. Aquino failed to discuss how chronic vulnerability in underdeveloped countries is rooted in "CO2lonialism" and globalization. The climate disruption we face today was driven by the "benevolent" John Smiths and Adam Smiths who fed their addiction to fossil fuels, timber, minerals and cheap labor—the metaphorical Pocahontas.

The sadder reality is that Mr. Aquino does not care about addressing the roots of the crisis. He is happy enough to beg for climate financing "crumbs." But so far, of the \$100 billion being targeted to be raised for the Green Climate Fund for the adaptation measures of vulnerable countries, barely \$10 billion has been committed by the biggest GHG (greenhouse gas) polluter-countries.

And the Philippines has yet to be allotted a share of the fund. Moreover, to stay in line for the crumbs, we have to toe the line. Yet, these crumbs are grossly insufficient; the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development estimates that vulnerable countries need more than \$1 trillion to adapt their economies to climate impacts.

Secondly, Mr. Aquino's speech was deathly silent over the need to demand drastic, mandatory and legally binding emissions cuts and climate reparations from the United States, China, and the other top 20 polluter-countries. The President once again toed the polluters' line that from emissions cuts to climate financing contributions, everything must simply be voluntary (read: pledged), not mandatory.

In that speech we heard a lot of motherhood buzzwords such as "climate justice," "global solidarity," and "fairness and equitability"—all of which were merely meant to appease the people searching for and the people skirting accountability.

Did Mr. Aquino fear that any hint of assertion of common but differentiated responsibilities will prompt the United States into refusing to sign the upcoming Paris agreement and doing another Kyoto Protocol? This mentality that a watered-down climate protocol is better than none at all is yet another manifestation that the President would be content even just to join the scramble for morsels.

Mr. Aquino's speech closed with a citation of "Pinoy pride moments" occasioned by the Philippines' response to climate change. The President gushed over the National Greening Program which has been slammed for being corruption-ridden, for planting invasive exotic species, and for being used for land-grabbing of agricultural areas.

Mr. Aquino spoke of cracking down on illegal loggers, but did not disclose that under his regime, there are millions of hectares of timber plantations that have encroached into old-growth forests, farm lands and the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples under the false color of forestry management agreements, large-scale mining tenements, and vast agri-industrial plantations.

Mr. Aquino also played the Supertyphoon “Yolanda” (international name: Haiyan) card, but was silent about the thousands of Yolanda survivors displaced when the Aquino administration implemented no-dwelling zones without swiftly relocating them to decent, safe and livelihood-accessible sites; about the widespread plunder of emergency shelter assistance funds—even as he prioritized infrastructure projects that favored big business more, like the questionable tide embankment project in Leyte and various mining projects across Eastern Visayas.

Mr. Aquino harped about our country’s pledge to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent. The fact is, when we do the math on Mr. Aquino’s commitment and reconcile it with our actual energy and “carbon sink loss” trajectories—as the scientific think-tank Climate

Action Tracker has done—it turns out that our emissions in 2000 will likely double by 2030.

But these realities have been pushed to the margins by Mr. Aquino’s COP21 speech; so were the frontline communities that continue to suffer from the crisis-ridden socioeconomic, political, and now even the climate, systems. It is high time we, the people, broke out from these margins.

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