

Headline: Asean plan on climate change is weak, Southeast Asian envi groups say

Byline: Alanah Torralba

Published Date: 06:23 PM November 14, 2017

Section: globalnation

Word Count: 4660

Content:

BONN, Germany—As world leaders gather in Manila, Philippines for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) summit, environmental groups are hitting the contradicting actions of the Southeast Asian nations in tackling climate change during the UN climate talks being held in Bonn, Germany.

"The Asean plan on climate change is weak. It goes against climate science," Wanun Permibul of civic organization Climate Watch Thailand said during an interview.

While the Asean has collectively called for more emission cuts across the region and climate resilience, approval of coal-fired plants is increasing, Permibul said. Southeast Asia currently hosts 15% of global coal expansion, according to a report by the End Coal advocacy organization, despite a growing trend in Europe and other parts of Asia of phasing out coal as a source of energy.

Building new coal-fired plants strikes a contradiction to the pledges made by Asean nations in accordance with the Paris Agreement, the environmental groups said.

Every member of the Asean has ratified the Paris Agreement, a global climate treaty that seeks to limit warming temperatures to well below 2°C by dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Government leaders and stakeholders are currently in Bonn, Germany to engage in meetings on crafting a rulebook for the implementation of the climate accord by 2020.

More coal plants in Southeast Asia

The Philippines has approved the building of at least 25 more new coal-fired plants in the coming years. President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly backed coal as a source of energy for the country, vouching for its reliability and low price.

"At this time, whoever is the president of the Philippines would always contend with coal. There's so much coal still that can be utilized by civilization for the next 50 to 70 years. And to be worrying about pollution, well, you just have to come to terms with it that in our time, in our generation, it is really what it is. There is nothing you can do about it," Duterte said during a groundbreaking ceremony for a coal-fired plant in Sarangani province in Mindanao.

"Thailand is highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change because of the Andaman Sea and its gulf. The government must develop its energy sector by seeking alternative renewable sources such as solar, wind and biomass," Permibul added.

Meanwhile, the Thai government approved the construction of an 800-megawatt power plant in the southern island of Krabi, a province known for its white sand beaches that attracts thousands of tourists every year.

Thai junta leader Prayuth Chan-o-cha said that the coal-fired plant will be beneficial to the communities, despite mounting opposition from local residents and civic society groups.

In Indonesia, Japanese firm Itochu Corp. is investing US \$400 million in two coal-fired power plants in South Kalimantan. Japanese firms have also made similar investments in coal-fired power plants in Cambodia.

Insignificant emitters but common responsibility

Despite the low emissions of Southeast Asian nations, environmental leaders stress that every country must do its share in reducing carbon emissions as well as protecting the rights and health of communities affected by the pollution caused by coal-fired plants.

"We may be an insignificant emitter but that does not mean we should continue what is causing the problem," Gerry Arances, executive director of the Center for Energy Ecology and Development.

Arances says that governments must consider for whom these power plants are providing energy. Energy generated by these dirty energy plants hardly reach those who need it the most, he added.

'Southeast Asian nations must uphold Paris Agreement'

The Thai government must engage stakeholders to prepare for climate negotiations, Permibul said. She criticized government leaders for failing to talk with civic society organizations prior to the ongoing high-level climate talks.

"We must build risk reduction programs and climate resilience," she said. She also called for industries to move to "greener" energy sources to promote development in a sustainable way.

Arances reiterated Permibul's call to Asean governments to promote renewable sources of energy instead of receiving more investments on coal, adding that mitigating climate change is of paramount importance for developing nations.

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.

"Climate change reminds us that everything is finite, especially ecology and nature. Humanity cannot be business as usual," he said. /je