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Dear President Duterte and the Filipino people:

With wind speed of 315 kph, Supertyphoon “Yolanda” caused destruction in the Visayas when the global temperature was 0.8°C. At 1.5°C, the wind speed could be twice as strong — maybe 600 kph. With such a speed, one could be in Manila from Legazpi which is 600 km away in just one hour! Will any structure be left untoppled with a 600 kph typhoon? God forbid!

The scientists of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the United States and the Met Office of the United Kingdom have predicted that in nine years’ time or year 2026, the global temperature would be reaching 1.5°C.

While almost all the governments around the world have signed up in the 2015 Paris Agreement, concrete actions have not been as fast and for most people, the response has been slow — “business as usual” — perhaps due to ignorance, selfish interests or simply inertia.

For us, Filipinos, we cannot simply wait for what would happen in the next nine years. The Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries due to global warming. Yolanda has etched that in our consciousness.

The earthquake in Mexico, the hurricane in Puerto Rico and many more are enough signs to urgently respond to the call of Pope Francis for “ecological conversion.”

The action of 100 million Filipinos, individually and collectively, can contribute a lot to reverse global warming. But time is precious and we have to plan now to make our country carbon negative like Bhutan.

Under your leadership, Mr. President, let us make the environment our first priority. We should start with a 360-degree paradigm shift from our present world view that treated the environment simply as a resource to be exploited. The indigenous people experienced the earth as a mother that gave life and in turn, they took good care of the earth and lived simply using the earth’s resources with moderation. A symbiotic relationship indeed! Similarly, St. Francis of Assisi even called the earth sister and mother, the sun as brother, and water as sister.

Influenced by that world view of indigenous people who kept the forests intact for centuries, we should automatically embrace a simple lifestyle, too. This would also mean controlling our appetite for unlimited consumption. Imagine how much electricity and water can be conserved when 100 million Filipinos become ecologically conscious.

We have to aggressively promote conservation of our forests and protect biodiversity of which we are so much blessed with but, unfortunately, we are losing our native species very fast and depleting the resources that belong to future generations of Filipinos.

The government with its vast resources has to make the environment its first priority and promote conservation of forests and biodiversity in our mountains and seas. It has to close coal plants in due time, put an end to open-pit mining immediately and invest on renewable energies.

The review of environmental laws and their strict implementation are needed while the “build, build, build” policy has to be reduced drastically to what is just necessary. What is the use of spending billions of pesos to build structures that can be wiped out in a few hours with a supertyphoon?

The mainstream and social media, schools, churches and organizations have to be involved in creating a paradigm shift among the 100 million Filipinos so that they get involved in whatever way each one can to protect the environment. We should create a groundswell of eco warriors to secure our one and only country.

Again, Mr. President, make the environment the first priority of your government and convince the Asean countries to do the same.

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