

Headline: More work to be done

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For four years — from 2009 to 2012 — the Philippines topped global participation records when it came to observing Earth Hour, that international campaign urging people and businesses to turn off lights and electrical appliances for an hour toward the end of March. The gesture is seen as a symbol of individual and collective commitment to save the planet from the devastating effects of climate change.

The lights-off event that started in Sydney in 2007 has since taken root in more than 7,000 cities and towns across 172 countries.

So enthusiastic was the Philippines' previous response to this worldwide movement that it earned the title "Earth Hour Hero Country."

But then came this year's campaign, with the Philippines' dispiriting numbers reflecting an interest that seems to be waning and support that appears to be flagging. Well, one can deduce that in Luzon, because elsewhere in the Visayas and Mindanao, the response has remained encouraging.

Compare the numbers: In 2009, the Philippines saved about 600 megawatt-hours of electricity during this annual event—a significant increase from the 2008 figure of 78 MW saved in power consumption in Metro Manila alone (the figure in Luzon in 2008 was 102 MW saved). One MW is enough to power 1,000 homes.

In 2010, 1,067 towns and cities all over the country and over 15 million Filipinos participated in Earth Hour. And in 2012, the Philippines managed to mobilize 1,671 provinces, cities and municipalities, easily clinching the "Hero Country" title for the fourth straight year.

On this year's Earth Hour on March 25, according to data from National Grid Corp., the maximum load in the country's power grid was reduced by only 165 MW, or 4 percent lower than the 172-MW decrease observed in 2016.

Meanwhile, in the Visayas grid, the reduction of 44 MW this year was an improvement over last year's 29.8 MW trimmed from usual usage.

The best Earth Day 2017 participants were in Mindanao, where a reduction of 44 MW was posted, a figure more than seven times the 6 MW saved last year.

So, what gives? Why this lackluster response from Luzon, where the capital and the national leadership are, and which does not exactly lack for resources and means to drum up support for and interest in this event?

Could it be that there is too much going on, with the ruckus of politics drowning out the Earth Day campaign? Or is advocacy fatigue setting in? With no end to the outrageous acts and provocative language by an administration appearing to be deaf to reason, people seem to be pulled in all directions by various causes and issues that need to be urgently addressed.

But the cause of the planet's survival is as urgent, and nowhere should the fervor be as crucial as in our country, one of the most vulnerable to climate change.

Given the overwhelming devastation wrought by Supertyphoon "Yolanda" in 2013, Earth Hour serves as a valuable tool to raise awareness of climate change, as well as a grim reminder of how environmental neglect impacts on our very survival.

In fact, the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change that President Duterte eventually signed on Feb. 28 after initial hesitation is a very timely push to act globally before it is too late. The historic pact will cap greenhouse gas emissions that come from fossil fuels, pursue the global development of renewable energy, and aid climate-vulnerable countries in mitigating the harmful effects of climate change.

As Earth Hour advocates keep warning everyone, the wanton use of energy, most of which are derived from fossil fuels, exposes all to the prospects of global warming, deforestation, air, water and soil pollution, drought, desertification, and disastrous floods.

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Let's not forget: The symbolic one-hour lights out is about taking steps toward a change in personal behavior, and about taking responsibility for daily choices that have a dramatic effect on the world we live in. There's more work to be done. More than ever, it's time to pull together.