

Headline: Aquino to deliver 3-minute speech at Paris summit

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Filipino negotiators at the climate change summit in Paris are expecting “long nights and very long days” next week as nations, especially the most vulnerable to global warming, push for the adoption of a legally binding agreement to contain the rise in global temperature.

President Benigno Aquino III will deliver a three-minute speech that highlights Philippine response to the impact of climate change and campaign for the inclusion of human rights, the vulnerability of indigenous peoples and gender issues in the Paris agreement.

Mr. Aquino will also deliver the keynote remarks at the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) high-level event on the sidelines of the COP 21.

The Philippines chairs the CVF, which consists of countries perceived to be most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The President will join more than 100 other heads of state at the Leaders' Meeting of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on Nov. 30.

READ: Aquino to attend climate change summit in Paris

‘Bedrock principle’

The Philippines has successfully lobbied for human rights to be a “bedrock principle” of the Paris agreement at the Bonn Climate Change Conference in October.

The three issues are in the preamble and purpose of the draft agreement but “some of the language” pertaining to them are still “bracketed,” which means these would have to be negotiated at the summit talks, said Climate Change Commission Deputy Executive Director Joyceline Goco.

Goco said there was still a leveling off when it came to “terminologies because different groups, like developing countries, have different interpretations” of terms.

Goco said the Philippines campaigned for the inclusion of the human rights aspect of climate change because it highlighted the vulnerability of humans to the impact of global warming, especially those in poor communities with low “adaptive capacity.”

Goco is optimistic that the world will reach a consensus in Paris, saying that the French government is determined to have an agreement.

She believes that the leaders' event was scheduled at the summit opening “so that there could be some guidance already from the heads of state [and] some leveling off by that time.”

At the Copenhagen summit in 2009, Goco recalled that the leaders' event was held on the last day.

"They spoke after the parties had already negotiated. That was the only time there was guidance from the leaders," Goco said.

Emmanuel de Guzman, a member of the Climate Change Commission and head of the Philippine negotiating delegation at the summit, could not overemphasize the importance for nations to finally reach a legally binding agreement after several failures in the past.

"This [summit] is a defining moment in our history because this agreement will essentially define the fate of humanity and our home planet ... It is basic human issue. It is about survival," De Guzman said.

Scientists said the changing weather patterns, fiercer typhoons, and other natural disasters were indicative that the globe was getting warmer and actions must be taken to cope with the phenomenon.

PH poster boy of COP 21

Since Super typhoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan) two years ago left more than 6,000 people dead and obliterated towns, the Philippines has become the "poster boy" of COP 21.

READ: 'Yolanda' death toll at 6,033—NDRRMC / Latest 'Yolanda' death toll hits 6,166

De Guzman said the Philippines would participate in all the topics up for negotiation—adaptation, mitigation, finance, loss and damage, technology development and transfer, capacity building, transparency and other legal issues.

"We are an important player [at the summit] because we are the face of climate vulnerability," he said.

Mr. Aquino leaves for Paris on Nov. 29.

"The leaders' event of the COP 21 is the most important event for this conference. It will be a capstone opportunity for the President to highlight its climate change accomplishments and to support the crafting of a new climate change agreement that is effective and equitable and that most especially will help the climate vulnerable communities," said Maria Cleofe Natividad, assistant secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

On Dec. 1, Mr. Aquino will meet with French, Irish and Japanese companies "to pursue further trade and investment cooperation and have discussions on cooperation on health," Natividad said.

In the afternoon of the same day, the President will fly to Rome to have an official meeting with Italian President Sergio Mattarella. Mr. Aquino is also likely to meet with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

Bilateral talks between Mr. Aquino and Mattarella aim to improve the trade and investment partnership of the Philippines and Italy.

The leaders will witness the signing of the air services agreement that would pave the way for direct commercial flights between Manila and Rome.

“The other issues and topics that could be discussed would be the Italian government participation in the Mindanao peace process through the Italian assistance to the Agrarian Reform Community Development Support Program as well as the Philippines-Italy Debt for Development Swap Program,” Natividad said.

She said the “highlight” of the President’s visit to Rome would be meeting the Filipino community, comprised of some 171,000 Filipino workers.

Meeting with Pope

The President’s six-day European trip would be capped by a meeting with Pope Francis on Dec. 4, a reciprocal visit following the papal visit to the Philippines in January.

“The Pope’s visit, as we are all very much witness to, has greatly contributed to the Filipino spiritual renewal, and has provided great comfort and hope to the many grieving Filipinos. So, this is an opportunity for the President to thank the Pope, as well as also to discuss with His Holiness the construction and rehabilitation efforts in Tacloban, of which the Pope has shown much keen interest,” Natividad said.

There are some 3,000 Filipino religious, such as priests and nuns, in the Vatican and the President is set to meet with some of them.

The President will also witness the unveiling and the blessing of a mosaic sculpture of Our Lady of Peñafrancia at the Vatican.

Mr. Aquino is expected to be back in Manila on Dec. 5.

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