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Headline: PH environment advocates ask Japan: 'Say sayonara to coal'

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Environmental advocates and members of people's movements have asked Japan to stop its push for coal in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) region.

In a march to the Japanese embassy on Wednesday, the groups denounced Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's promotion of the so-called "clean coal" to power Asean nations' growing economies, claiming that Japanese coal companies are riding on Asean nations' drive to economic expansion by peddling coal-sourced power as the fuel for their growth.

According to Center for Energy, Ecology and Development Legal Research Officer Atty. Avril De Torres, Japanese company Marubeni Corporation, along with South Korea's Korea Electric Company (KEPCO), has signed concession contracts to build a new 1,200MW coal-fired power plant in Vietnam a few days ahead of the East Asia Summit.

De Torres said the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) was also expected to provide a loan that would cover 60 percent of the debt financing for the coal project.

She also cited Japan as the biggest public financier of the Asian coal power plan — leading other major countries such as China, Korea, and Germany. "Despite Southeast Asia's high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, Japan persists in its push for more coal in Asia," said De Torres.

Sanlakas Secretary-General Atty. Aaron Pedrosa slammed Japan's "clean coal" push, claiming it was mired with lies about the true impact of coal.

"Coal cannot be scrubbed clean of the destruction that it causes to people and the environment," said Pedrosa.

He denounced "clean coal" as a false alternative to traditional coal, stating that "clean coal" technologies have proven too expensive and have not lived up to their purpose of lessening coal's carbon emissions.

"Far from being a tool of development, any and all coal expansion within the region ensures profit only for the few coal companies, and traps climate-vulnerable regions like Southeast Asia into further poverty and climate change-induced suffering," he added.

According to Pedrosa, the energy demand of Southeast Asia's economic development must not be met through the use of dirty fossil fuel energy, given the economic losses that coal's environmental impacts entail.

"Whatever semblance of growth Southeast Asia currently enjoys will be undone by the climate change effects of continuous fossil fuel burning," said Pedrosa.

De Torres stated that severe global warming caused by the increase in coal burning significantly affects the region whose large proportion of the population and economic activity are concentrated

along the coastlines and whose livelihood depends heavily on agriculture.

“Projections of climate change-caused economic losses in Southeast Asia include a decline up to 50 percent of rice yield potential by 2100 and a loss of 6.7 percent of combined gross domestic product (GDP) each year by 2100,” said De Torres.

Pedrosa claimed that Japan’s coal push is regressive and must stop. “If a technologically advanced society like Japan truly cared for the development of the Southeast Asian peoples, it must divest from all support from coal and put its money on sustainable and accessible sources of energy like renewables,” stated Pedrosa.

De Torres cited renewable energy’s steady trend of decline in costs, claiming the increasing viability of renewables as the next energy source after an obsolete coal.

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“Southeast Asia is ripe with renewable energy sources, like solar and hydro, which most of its people have easier access to. Compared to a coal-backed economy, development that is founded on clean and sustainable energy is development that is sustainable and resilient,” he said. /asu