

Headline: The greatest fight we will ever win

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FILIPINOS DON'T have the luxury of considering climate change a problem for future generations. Climate change is here, and the people of the Philippines see it every day.

The fingerprints of climate change mark the extreme weather that is taking an increasingly disastrous toll throughout Southeast Asia, including the recent decimation in Fiji because of Cyclone "Winston." This extreme weather not only threatens lives and causes untold billions of pesos in economic and infrastructure damage, but it also puts at risk the agricultural industry that is an important part of the Philippine economy. Climate change is not an abstract concept when ocean acidification—which is caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide dissolving into the water—jeopardizes the health of coral reefs and marine ecosystems that produce much of the animal protein that sustains millions of people.

And while many of these climate impacts are also being felt elsewhere in the world, Southeast Asia stands to bear their burden disproportionately: A recent report by the international medical journal, *The Lancet*, indicated that by 2050, half a million people could die from climate change-related impacts to agriculture and the human diet, with the greatest number of deaths in South and East Asia. Similarly, the combined effects of increasing heat and sea level rise might be enough to force a mass migration away from many low-lying island nations, including many parts of the Philippines.

The good news is that the world is finally waking up to the crisis at hand.

Last December, world leaders from around the globe, including those from the Philippines, convened at the United Nations' COP 21 climate conference in Paris to negotiate a historic agreement for all countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement gave the international community hope—hope that we will solve climate change and in doing so, protect our families and our livelihoods from food insecurity, increasing spread of infectious diseases, more extreme weather, and rising sea levels.

But now the hard work begins. The Paris Agreement is a critical and inspiring start—but countries cannot fulfill their commitments without concrete action. As one of the world's most vulnerable nations to the adverse effects of climate change, the Philippines is considered a moral leader on the issue and has been calling for swift, ambitious action at the international level for many years.

Not only has the Philippine government passed key legislation to expand renewable energy use, but it has also started to build the regulatory infrastructure necessary to institutionalize climate resilience and facilitate sustainable development, as exemplified by the Climate Change Act of 2009 and the National Action Plan on Climate Change of 2011. These and other measures will help build up the disaster-risk reduction and management capacity of local government units, as well as incorporate climate resiliency into city and land-use planning. They are also essential in helping the Philippines adapt to climate change.

Furthermore, the Philippines has proven to be fertile ground for pilot programs to increase resiliency to climate change and improve the efficacy of adaptation funding. And with continued and sustained collaboration and communication between development banks, government agencies, local government units, communities and nongovernmental organizations, such programs can be successfully scaled up and implemented, both here and around the world.

While all these measures by the national government and international organizations are welcome and additive to the efforts the Philippines is making in combating climate change, the real renewable resource fueling these actions comes from the political will of Filipinos themselves.

And it is in service of helping cultivate these individual leaders and community activists who are passionate about making a difference in their communities that former US vice president Al Gore and The Climate Reality Project are in Manila for the 31st Climate Reality Leadership Corps Training.

More than 700 citizens from the region—teachers, business owners, farmers and activists alike—will have the opportunity not only to learn from Gore and global and regional experts about the science of climate change and the cost of its impacts, but also to meet and organize with other Filipino activists committed to taking on the climate crisis and working to solve the greatest challenge of our time.

There remains more to be done, yet the Philippines is uniquely positioned to make a real difference globally in turning this existential threat into an opportunity.

It will take all of us to win this fight, but I am confident that the Philippines can continue to set an example for nations around the world, showing them what it means to be a nation committed to climate resilience, transitioning to a clean energy economy and securing a healthy and prosperous future for our generation and the generations to come.

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