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Headline: Marcos faces crucial nature, climate challenges

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If the state of the Philippine environment was a movie, we could already see that the ending will be tragic. As President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has taken the helm, he now has the job of driving the government's effort to change that grim ending.

The challenge of this decade is in addressing the “twin missiles” of nature loss and climate change that has our country in its crosshairs. This matters to us because our country is extraordinarily vulnerable. Our geography and demography make it so. Our country is an archipelago on the typhoon belt with many people living along the coasts. We are one of the top 17 most mega-diverse countries and the center of the Coral Triangle. We also have a large and young population and a high incidence of poverty and inequality.

The signs of nature loss and climate change are all around, but it seems more and more people are no longer alarmed about species going extinct, deforestation, decreasing fish catch, water scarcity, plastics in the food chain, and all the effects these have on us. Even the increasing number of intense typhoons that hit us every year is becoming unsurprising. Instead of becoming callous to these tragedies, we need to fight any growing indifference or distraction, and we must not accept defeat because our shared future is at stake.

There are a few opportunities I would like to share from the perspective of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Philippines, having worked in partnership with the government, the business and nongovernment organization sectors, and ordinary Filipinos concerned about our shared future.

During former president Rodrigo Duterte's term, our country made an ambitious pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75 percent by 2030 to meet the target of keeping the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Other government commitments made at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2021 were about ending deforestation by 2030, engaging farmers and fishers in sustainable production action projects, and implementing policies for a circular economy. The Philippine government was a strong voice at the UN Environment Assembly earlier in 2022, supporting the call for a global treaty to end plastic pollution. Our government supports the 30x30 Campaign for Nature, pledging to protect 30 percent of our land and sea by 2030 under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. These are all laudable commitments that have the potential for a huge positive impact for generations to come, but only if the Marcos administration sees these through to implementation.

Mr. Marcos heading the Department of Agriculture (DA) is an opportunity for him to work with the best technical experts, the business sector, and the farmers and fishers themselves. Our food systems are where issues of environment, finance and economy, health, innovation, social justice, and local governance all play out. We hope his handling of the DA will open the doors to more holistic solutions that will make our agriculture and fisheries systems more productive, sustainable, inclusive, just, and able to deliver Mr. Marcos' campaign promise of providing the food our population needs. We urgently call for better integration across government agencies in addressing these issues so that resources will go a long way and initiatives will not undermine each other.

Lastly, we strongly hope that Mr. Marcos will demonstrate courage in working with all sectors, prioritizing the most marginalized, and adopting the view that nature in the Philippines is a source of pride and national identity, and is what sustains present and future generations of Filipinos. We have already learned hard lessons of the past: causing nature to fail ends in disaster and not development. We all want the Philippines to succeed. Together we must #ChangeTheEnding.

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Katherine Custodio is the current executive director of WWF-Philippines.

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