

Headline: President Hollande, commitment must be made now

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French President François Hollande's visit to Manila is seen as "doubly historic." This is the first time that a French head of state is visiting the Philippines, and with climate change as his main agenda to drum up support from 195 countries to reach an agreement and take climate action before the 21st United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP21) is held in Paris in December.

The intention of President Hollande's visit is well and good: to show to the rest of the world that climate change is real and happening in vulnerable countries like the Philippines, which is now being perceived globally as the poster child for the impacts of climate change.

It's noteworthy that only last January, His Holiness Pope Francis visited the Philippines to be in solidarity with the survivors of Super typhoon "Yolanda" and to highlight how climate change has brought about injustice to the economically poor and marginalized, those who have contributed very little to the current climate crisis but are now suffering its terrible effects.

While global leaders are at loggerheads over who should take the lead in tackling climate change, more and more disasters are occurring in different parts of the world. Stories of hope and resiliency are inspiring and admirable, but should not be accepted as the new normal. As our very own President Aquino puts it: "We refuse to be condemned to a vicious cycle of destruction and reconstruction." Rightly so, because it is deplorable and unjust not to shine the spotlight on those accountable for these misfortunes—the big corporate polluters and their respective governments that allow them to treat the planet's atmosphere like a sewer.

In seeking fair, ambitious and binding climate action from other countries, we must look at how Mr. Hollande is securing climate action on the domestic front, where walking the talk on climate and energy policies seems to be lacking.

For almost three years now, Mr. Hollande's government has been discussing a law on energy transition, which has yet to be passed. The climate energy policy currently being reviewed by the French Senate clearly lacks the ambition required to address the climate crisis, with greenhouse-gas reduction planned at only 40 percent by 2030 and 75 percent by 2050, against 1990 levels. Most of all, it provides no real foundation for the swift development and implementation of renewable energies (only 32 percent by 2030).

Also, Mr. Hollande's government did away with the "eco-tax" on high-polluting road transports. And the carbon price is still very low at 7 euros per ton of carbon dioxide emitted in France, with almost no impact on the stakeholders' decision-making. (Studies show that a carbon price will have an impact on economies starting at around 35 euros per ton of carbon dioxide emitted.)

COP21—under the French presidency—must not be the arena to promote false solutions made in France, such as nuclear energy, diverting efforts from real, renewable and clean solutions.

By making the Philippines his first stop, Mr. Hollande has taken the right step. His next move should be to call on world leaders and heads of governments for a show of leadership and strong political will to move the world away from dangerous climate change. Paris must send that commitment—at

home and overseas—that the world is on its way to phasing out coal, leaving most fossil fuels in the ground, transitioning to 100-percent renewable energy, and meeting the true needs of the vulnerable countries and communities for the present and future generations.

Commitment from 195 countries is a tall order, but it has to start somewhere; otherwise, we will fall victim to the paralysis that plagues climate negotiations in taking climate action. World leaders must agree to subject themselves to drastic emissions cuts immediately and commit to championing a future without climate change and its deadly effects.

Let Paris be remembered not as a time when world leaders again turned their backs on the most vulnerable and kowtowed to the interests of the big fossil fuel companies. Climate justice must be served in Paris because we Filipinos refuse to accept an “altered way of life” of extreme weather events. Citizens and netizens should hold their leaders to account to ensure that our children will experience and enjoy a planet in equilibrium, because commitment must happen now!

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