

Headline: Dear Mr. President, we simply can't waste any more time

Byline: Viking Logarta

Published Date: 01:38 AM September 14, 2016

Section: opinion

Word Count: 5508

Content:

WE WERE concerned and confused when we first read reports that you were not keen on the Philippines' commitment under the Paris Agreement. Concerned because any abnegation of country commitments, under any administration, is and should be a serious matter. Confused because we respect and acknowledge your love of country and Filipinos, and the position on climate change seems to contradict that. Then, in your State of the Nation Address, you pledged that climate change will be a priority in your administration.

The most recent studies from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration indicate that 2016 will be the warmest year of record since scientific global temperature tracking began in 1880. Last year was also the hottest on record, after 2014.

Thus, we simply cannot afford to procrastinate any further on climate action. You yourself have admitted the effects on these changes on our countrymen in terms of incomes forgone, time wasted, and, most of all, lives lost.

First of all, the country still needs to join the Paris Agreement via Senate ratification. The Senate will require a clarification of what the agencies under the previous administration actually committed to. Nothing has actually been set in stone as of this writing except a commitment to submit to a process that entails reduction targets of greenhouse gases by 2030 based on a country-by-country baseline.

By law, you are the chair of the Climate Change Commission, and nothing can and will move without your leadership and due diligence.

Your administration thus faces tremendous challenges in formulating and ascertaining what we can commit to without sacrificing social and economic development goals. For this to happen, your Cabinet needs to get its act together. The agencies are the Climate Change Commission, National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Energy, Department of Finance, and Department of Environment and Natural Resources. These departments often have cross-purposes, and it would require real creativity and decisiveness to whip them toward a common goal.

The Paris Agreement imposes no legal and economic penalties for noncompliance. The game is called name-and-shame or, alternatively, name-and-encourage. Since the United Nations Framework on Climate Change was established in 1992, it has had few successes. The Paris Agreement is by far the most promising, and the Philippines, one of the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, should do its utmost to make it succeed. It is a matter of self-interest.

The Philippines has led the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) since December 2014, and its leadership was instrumental in pushing the most ambitious reduction targets so that the global temperature increase between 1880 and 2100 would not exceed 1.5 degrees Centigrade. This is why we have the gratitude of the more than 40 countries under the CVF as we turn over the baton to Ethiopia.

Mr. President, we agree with you that the developed countries should bear the main responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that the developing countries like ours should be permitted to develop to at least the level of per capita incomes prevailing for the former. That is what the Paris Agreement actually entails, and that is what climate activists refer to when they say climate justice.

That said, Mr. President, there are many policies and programs the country can actually undertake to spur our country's development, with reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as a secondary but inevitable consequence. Those are called win-win measures.

To name a few, in the energy sector, many renewable energy technologies and projects are already viable and competitive but are hindered by the power of entrenched interests of the oligarchy. Many renewable energy (RE) developers cry that anti-competitive machinations by oligarchs, through the current regulatory regime, are blocking their projects. We will prove to you that RE projects do not at all hinder, but instead enable, well-rounded national development.

In the transport sector, there are many measures that can be implemented to reduce time wasted in travel and the attendant toxic air pollution that kills thousands of our countrymen every year.

In land use and forestry, many reforestation and afforestation projects can be implemented to create jobs, reduce poverty, and at the same time reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Any reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that imply a cost on our growth will have to be paid for by the developed countries. You can count on us to make the developed countries pay for those costs, because you are right. We are not to blame for the problem. They are. However, to wallow in our being victims does not help to solve the problem.

The country's contribution to the solution of the global warming problem is not hinged solely on economic prerogatives. It is also based on compelling moral arguments.

We trust that your commitment to the Filipino is also a commitment to all human life. We trust that that commitment to the Filipino means the Philippines must be a responsible global citizen.

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.

Viking Logarta is an energy economist and currently the energy policy advisor of the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities, one of the Philippines' leading organizations analyzing national and global climate-energy policies.