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Our planet is now home to 7 billion people. We have lived several ages, periods and dynasties. Now is The Age of Overshoot, which tells us that “limitless growth is straining the Earth’s carrying capacity, depleting natural capital and outpacing the biosphere’s capacity to renew itself and support life.”

Experts struggle with the enormity of having 7 billion people on the planet and warn that it’s not a number we should underestimate. John Bongaarts, vice president of the New York-based Population Council, said that every billion people we add makes life more difficult for everybody that’s already here. This is certainly not the case for the 140 people in the world who are all together worth \$7 billion, according to Forbes Magazine, 2011.

Already we are faced with hunger, scarcity and strife. Forty-one percent of the world’s population (some 2.3 billion people) live in water-stressed areas. About 1.2 billion people worldwide drink polluted water, and 6,000 children die every day from it. Six years ago, the United Nations projected that there might be 50 million climate refugees by 2010. In recent years, however, we have witnessed more extreme weather events that have left scores of people displaced and impoverished. Critics say that the 50 million climate refugees may be a conservative figure, and as the population increases incrementally with the extreme weather events, we expect a surge in climate refugees. The next dilemma will be what to do and where to relocate them. In the Philippines, we have faced the wrath of typhoons (“Ondoy” and “Pedring”) that have claimed hundreds of lives and P23 billion in damage to infrastructure and agriculture. This is just a taste of the grim future we face. As we struggle to develop and advance, we are faced with déjà vus, battling the damage and chaos left behind by extreme weather events.

As we develop, our leaders should leapfrog over the same mistakes with which Western industrialization and excessive consumerism have brought us to the brink of environmental catastrophe. Rather, they should espouse a paradigm shift and seek assistance of the developed countries to assist developing countries with low carbon initiatives, leaving the planet more sustainable and better-off than when we first set foot on it.

—ANNA ABAD,

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