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Headline: PH, 40 other countries vow to end coal use by 2030

Byline: Krixia Subingsubing

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MANILA, Philippines — More than 40 countries, including the Philippines, have signed a pledge to end use of coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel, by 2030, as part of their broader commitments to curb the single biggest source of planet-warming emissions worldwide.

But while the summit heralded the pledge as a signal for the “end of coal,” several nations that are also the biggest coal emitters were also noticeably absent from the pledge, including the United States, China, India and Australia.

The pact was signed on Thursday at the 26th session of the Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, which is seen as the “best and last moment” to shore up international commitment to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep the planet from warming beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In signing the accord, the countries acknowledged that coal “is the single biggest cause of global temperature increases, and the reason why they must accelerate an energy transition to meet their shared goals under the 2015 Paris Agreement.”

Even so, for environmental and climate activists, the coal use pledge still “falls spectacularly short of what the moment requires.”

“An agreement that only tackles coal doesn’t even solve half the problem,” said Murray Worthy, campaign leader of Global Witness. “The science is absolutely clear, all fossil fuels must be phased out if we’re to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.”

“A truly ambitious agreement on energy to put the world on course for 1.5 degrees Celsius would be a phaseout of coal, oil and gas. This is a small step forward when what was needed was a giant leap,” he added.

Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi signed on behalf of the Philippines, while only five subnationals, including Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo signed.

Among others, the four-clause pact seeks to rapidly scale up clean energy; scale up technologies and policies for energy transition; cease the issuance of permits and construction of new coal-fired power plants; and strengthen domestic and international efforts to provide a just transition from coal power.

“We recognize that while significant progress has been made to realize our shared vision, our task is not yet complete, and we call on others to join us as we redouble our efforts to accelerate the global energy transition over the coming years,” the pledge read.

Cusi only signed Clauses 1 and 4 (clean energy and just transition from coal), and did not agree to the clause that would end permits and support for coal plants.

“We are saddened by the half-baked position of the Department of Energy,” environmental group Aksyon Klima said in a statement. “The agreement should have been a leverage and instrument to demand financing for energy transition toward greenhouse gas emissions avoidance.”

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