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Filipino makes it to list of top climate crusaders

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by Marjaleen Ramos

A Filipino program leader for the United Nations Environmental Program made it to the list of people leading the insurance industry's response to climate change.

He leads the UN Environment Programme's Principles for Sustainable Insurance Initiative (PSI), the largest collaboration between the UN and the insurance industry.

Launched at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, the PSI is a global framework for the industry to address sustainability issues and to build resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities and economies.

With his career in the insurance industry and as an avid scuba diver, Bacani said he wanted to use his professional experience and passion for sustainability to tackle global sustainable development challenges without turning his back on his country.

"I'm from the Philippines, one of the most biologically diverse countries, and situated in the Coral Triangle—the global centre of marine biodiversity," Bacani said. "But the Philippines is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. I grew up in a country that was once one of the most prosperous nations in the Asia-Pacific, but then suffered from political instability, economic decline, human rights violations, social inequality, and environmental degradation for many years."

"In short, I had direct experiences with many sustainability issues," he added.

Bacani also leads activities supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Financial Stability Board's climate risk disclosure recommendations (TCFD).

He co-led the development of the first global sustainability guide for the insurance business, led the creation of the Insurance Industry Development Goals for Cities, forged the PSI's partnership with the world's inclusive insurance community, and co-led the creation of UNEP's Sustainable Insurance Forum for supervisors and regulators.

Bacani is involved in the InsuResilience Global Partnership, Vulnerable 20 Group of Finance Ministers, Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative, California Climate Insurance Working Group, Insurance Development Forum, and Microinsurance Network.

He also suggested two steps that the insurance industry needs to take to improve its response to climate change. “First, implement the TCFD recommendations across insurance and investment activities. Second, decarbonize insurance and investment portfolios and steer them in a way that they are aligned with the aims of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.”

Bacani decided to live car-free and mostly only walk to do errands to reduce his climate impact.

He said he only uses his bike when he goes to work, and only takes public transportation if walking or biking is impractical.

Bacani also said he lives in a small flat that uses renewable energy.

“My diet is mainly focused on grains, vegetables, fruits, and sustainable seafood. I use reusable bags for groceries and wear many clothes that I’ve had for years. I strive to reduce consumption and waste and recycle and upcycle as much as possible,” he said.

“Most recently, I upcycled some of my old jeans and they’ve now become my baby daughter’s very cool playmat!” he added.

Bacani said he is optimistic that the world can still avoid the worst effects of climate change.

“While the 2018 IPCC report highlights the rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C, it also means that we could still achieve that goal,” he said.

“But that window will not be open forever, and the clock is ticking. So we need real leadership, ambitious and urgent action, radical collaboration, and stubborn optimism at all levels of society,” he added.

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