

Paris Agreement is no panacea

By BusinessMirror Editorial, January 16, 2017

Senate President Aquilino L. Pimentel III said last week he sees the Senate ratifying the Paris Agreement within six months, to concur with President Duterte's commitment to sign the pact that seeks to limit global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius, mainly by burning less gas, coal and oil.

The Philippines's ratification of the Paris Agreement would bind the country into cutting its greenhouse-gas emissions by 70 percent by 2030.

Duterte initially had second thoughts about signing the Paris Agreement, arguing that big polluters, like the United States, China and other European Union countries, should be the first to cut their carbon emissions. But we welcome the President's change of heart and the Senate's expression of support for the climate pact. The Philippines, after all, is a leader of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), an international partnership of highly vulnerable nations. Countries composing the CVF, including some of our Southeast Asian neighbors, are among the first to be affected by climate change and the last to recover from disasters caused by extreme weather events.

Ondoy, Pepeng, Yolanda, Pablo and Sendong—these are just some of the deadliest tropical storms that hit the Philippines in recent years, causing thousands of deaths and billions in damage. We need no further proof, obviously, being a perennial climate-change victim ourselves, that reducing carbon emissions is necessary. And signing on to the Paris Agreement can only strengthen our leadership in voicing the concerns of vulnerable nations on the impact of climate change.

But while the Paris Agreement can lay the groundwork for meaningful, collective action, make no mistake, it is no panacea. Avoiding the most catastrophic effects of climate change will require more than the actions of countries and their governments. It will also require the concrete actions of individuals, their communities, workplaces and various organizations.

Long before the Paris Agreement became a byword, we already had citizens trying to cut carbon pollution on their own, taking responsibility through lifestyle changes, whether by ditching their cars in favor of bicycles, installing solar rooftops, switching to LED bulbs, planting trees, recycling water and waste, or some other simple steps that matter.

A few local governments have made similar commendable commitments.

The Provincial Board of Ilocos Norte last year passed a resolution seeking to make the province the first to phase out coal use and become a total renewable-energy consumer. Since 2010, local government initiatives have paved the way for Ilocos Norte to have a 264-megawatt installed wind-energy capacity, hosting the wind farms of the Energy Development Corp. (EDC) in Burgos, Northern Luzon; UPC Asia Corp. in Caparispisan; and Northwind Power and Development Corp. in Bangui. With other solar and hydropower projects under way, the province is seen generating 50 percent of its power requirement from clean energy in the near future.

Negros Occidental hosts six solar-power facilities, with a total generation capacity of 341.5 MW, according to the Negros Occidental Investment Promotions Center-Public Information Section. The province also has six major river systems—Himogaan, Sicaba, Malugo, Bago, Binalbagan and Ilog-Hilabangan—which can be tapped for run-of-the-river hydroelectricity with an estimated capacity of 200 MW.

Cities, communities and schools have joined hands with the private sector to launch their own initiatives in climate-change mitigation.

A 1.03-MW solar-rooftop system was installed last week by EDC in Gaisano Capital's mall in La Paz District, Iloilo City. The largest in the province, the solar rooftop can supply up to 50 percent of the mall's daytime load.

Since June last year, the 658-hectare campus of Central Luzon State University, the oldest and largest state university in Region 3, has been getting all its electricity from an EDC geothermal-power station in Bicol.

Bike-friendly infrastructure have been built in various parts of Metro Manila to promote bicycle riding as an alternative means of transport. There are also bike-sharing or rental projects, like the ones in the tourist districts of Malate and Intramuros, in Bonifacio Global City (BGC) and on the Diliman campus of the University of Philippines. Sure, our cities are not as bike-friendly as Amsterdam or Copenhagen but the efforts are still encouraging.

The use of electric vehicles is growing in Philippine cities. We can now see electric jeepneys and tricycles plying our streets. They are being used as shuttles in Philippine tourist destinations, like Boracay, Davao and Surigao, and in central business districts, particularly in BGC and in Legaspi and Salcedo villages in Makati. A number of universities and private companies, like the Manila Electric Co., Filinvest, the Ateneo de Manila University and De La Salle University, have fleets of e-jeepneys going around their compounds and campuses.

All these individual actions matter as much as the nation's commitment to the Paris Agreement. And they only show that Filipinos on their own can do a lot and have done a lot of things to cut their own carbon footprints and create a greener, healthier place to live. What more if we do it together.