

'We are almost out of time on climate change'

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Climate change means the alteration of the world's climate that we humans are causing through fossil fuel burning, clearing forests and other practices that increase the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere.

Our ecosystems, agriculture, livelihoods and settlements are very dependent on the climate.

The problem now is global temperatures have risen rapidly over the last few decades with strong evidence of increases in average global air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising average sea levels.

Climate change will affect all countries, but people in developing countries, like the Philippines, are more likely to suffer the most. Many of them depend on climate-sensitive livelihoods, such as agriculture, and have little or no means to cope with climate change, owing to low savings, no property

insurance and poor access to public services. Climate change is expected to reduce already low incomes, and increase illness and death rates in many countries.

Five years ago, in December 2015, during the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) which gathered heads of states and government representatives in Paris, France, history was made. They came up with a legally binding agreement for reducing GHG emissions to limit the global temperature rise, and to show their commitment to care for our common home, planet Earth, and for all of humanity.

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The Paris Agreement was born due to the continuous warming of our climate system, which is changing unprecedentedly over decades and to the millennia. With the Philippines as one of its signatories, the agreement is a landmark international framework for global action, which aims to limit global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperature levels; enhance adaptive capacity and climate resilience; and ensure financing for climate-resilient and low carbon development.

The goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages was intrinsically linked to loss and damage. The higher

our global temperature limit, the hotter our world gets, thereby delivering more severe impacts of climate change.

The IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5oC

The release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius in 2018 gave the latest assessment of the scientific understanding of climate change. The report reflects the consensus of a broad community of stakeholders and holds to IPCC's highly regarded standards for scientific integrity.

The report is focused on the risks presented by — and the challenges of avoiding — a warming of 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. It gives policymakers and practitioners the information they need to make decisions that tackle climate change while considering the local context and people's needs.

The release of the report affirms the Philippines' call for greater urgency and ambition in implementing the Paris Agreement. It strengthens the Philippine leadership stand and policy advocacy on the pursuit of the global warming threshold and long-term temperature goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

As climate science informs national policy and global action, it also fortifies the moral foundation on which we call for greater resolve and unequivocal solidarity to do more and faster to make our one planet safer and our future more secure.

The report gave us insights on what awaits us if we remain complacent to the recurring impacts of climate change. According to the report, global warming is likely to reach 1.5 degrees Celsius between 2030 and 2052.

This increase will result in drastic changes in weather patterns, such as warming of extreme temperatures; increase in frequency, intensity, and duration of floods; and increase in frequency and intensity of droughts.

It is projected to shift the ranges of many marine species to higher latitudes, as well as increase the amount of damage to many ecosystems, drive the loss of coastal resources, and reduce the productivity of fisheries and aquaculture.

The level of ocean acidification due to increasing carbon dioxide concentrations associated with global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius is projected to amplify the adverse effects of warming, impacting the growth, development, calcification and survival, and thus the abundance of a broad range of species. Coral reefs, for example, are projected to decline by a further 70 to 90 percent at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Climate change is projected to be a poverty multiplier, which means that its impacts are expected to make the poor poorer and the total number of people living in poverty greater.

The IPCC Special Report shows that the world is not on track to reach the goal of the Paris Agreement to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

World expected to hit 1.5°C by 2024

However, the recent report released by the World Meteorological Organization or WMO alerted the world that we are swiftly nearing the 1.5-degree mark. Based on their projections, the world is expected to reach the 1.5-degree Celsius temperature threshold by 2024. This is far more alarming than the forecast of the recent report that we will reach the benchmark between 2030 to 2052.

The new annual prediction also stated that the annual mean global temperature is likely to be at least 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels from 1850-1900 in each of the coming five years (2020-2024), and there is a 20-percent chance that it will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius in at least one year.

Furthermore, the report emphasized that there's a 70-percent chance that the 1.5-degree mark will be exceeded in a single month between 2020 and 2024. The five-year period is expected to see annual average temperatures that are 0.91 to 1.59 degree Celsius higher than pre-industrial averages.

While a new annual high might be followed by several years with lower average temperatures, breaking that threshold would be seen as further evidence that international efforts to curb climate change are futile.

One message is very clear: "We are almost out of time on climate change." We are seeing the windows of opportunities closing right in front of our eyes.

If business-as-usual were to continue, vulnerable countries, those who are contributing less to the global carbon emissions like the Philippines, are bound to suffer the most from the impacts of climate change.

We need to immediately re-strategize and urgently align our current and future plans and actions to contribute to the global call for climate action. We need to put forward stronger adaptation and mitigation measures to ensure that all Filipinos will survive and thrive in these challenging times.

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