

HEADLINES

Climate advocates among first to cheer new US president

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[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:48 AM January 22, 2021

MANILA, Philippines — Climate groups on Thursday welcomed newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden’s move to reenter the Paris Agreement, but stressed that the United States must make up for its historical role in the climate crisis.

Among the flurry of executive orders that Biden signed after taking office was one to bring back the United States to the historic climate deal, which Washington left last year under the Trump administration.

In his inauguration speech on Wednesday (Thursday in Manila), the 78-year-old Biden emphasized the urgent need for climate action, saying “a cry for survival comes from the planet itself.”

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres praised the move and committed to closely work with Biden and other leaders to respond to the climate emergency.

“But there is a very long way to go,” Guterres said in a statement. “The climate crisis continues to worsen and time is running out.”

The United States is the second largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world, after China.

President Duterte sent his “warmest greetings” and “best wishes” to Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, expressing hopes that Manila and Washington would continue their “long-standing partnership.”

“America has once again shown us how deep its roots in democracy are, it has always been an exemplar to the world and today it has reassured the world that its people remain committed to peaceful electoral transitions and the noble principle of representative democracy,” presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said at a press conference on Thursday.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III on Thursday said Biden’s inaugural speech “bodes well for a return to openness in international trade and investment, which will undoubtedly redound to our mutual benefit.”

Multilateralism

Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump, had promoted protectionism to keep jobs at home as opposed to multilateralism, which Biden was expected to espouse, the chair of Ateneo de Manila University economics department, said during an online seminar on Thursday.

Luis Dumlao noted that economic recovery in the United States would augur well for the Philippines as Manila had long enjoyed a trade surplus with Washington.

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Beyond renewing the United States’ commitment to the Paris deal, the country should also deliver climate justice and recognize its contributions to the climate crisis, climate activists said.

“Rejoining the Paris Agreement is the floor, not the ceiling, for the Biden administration on climate,” said Janet Redman, climate campaign director of Greenpeace USA. “Phasing out fossil fuels and initiating a just transition to renewable energy is our best chance to avoid climate chaos,” she added.

Local environmental group Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment said Biden must acknowledge the United States’ role in ecological crises and support a “Global People’s Green New Deal.”

“This [deal] should function as an unconditional just compensation mechanism to aid the recovery of the Philippines from the accumulated damage brought about by the

COVID-19 pandemic and climate change-amplified typhoon and flood disasters from Supertyphoon ‘Yolanda’ (international name: Haiyan) to Typhoon ‘Ulysses’ (Vamco),” the group said in a statement.

Foreign policy

In the House of Representatives, Ako Bicol Rep. Alfredo Garbin Jr. said that with Biden taking over the US leadership, the Philippines could expect “better foreign policy moves in foreign aid, bilateral diplomacy, regional security, climate change, immigration and international trade and investments in particular.”

“We need better US policy and presence in the international waters of Southeast Asia and East Asia. The US should ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, so it will stand on solid ground in terms of their policies and actions to ensure freedom of navigation, regional security and geopolitical stability,” Garbin said in a statement.

Agusan del Norte Rep. Lawrence Fortun said the proenvironment and global trade agenda of Biden would be good for the Philippines.

“We will welcome more US investments in Mindanao and more American business partners for Mindanaoan entrepreneurs,” he said in a statement. —***WITH REPORTS FROM JEROME ANING, BEN O. DE VERA AND NESTOR CORRALES***

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