

PH addressing looming water crisis, DENR chief assures UN

By Catherine S. Valente

THE Philippines is proactively addressing the looming water crisis brought about by climate change, Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga assured the United Nations during the UN 2023 Water Conference held in New York from March 22 to 24.

"Today, more than ever, there is a critical need for nexus governance, climate and disaster resilience, one that pursues a strategic balance between supply and consumption of water for health, food, energy, and environmental security," she said. "The Philippines is moving decisively in this direction."

Yulo-Loyzaga cited the creation of the Water Resource Management Office (WRMO) under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) "to achieve water security by integrating the functions of all agencies with water-related mandates."

The WRMO is aligned with new legislation, creating an apex body for comprehensive water resource management that will adopt an all-hazards and risk-informed integrated water resource management approach.

Yulo-Loyzaga said achieving adequate and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation services is at the core of sustainable development.

"All the plans and programs of the government to provide universal access to safe, sufficient, affordable, and sustainable water supply, sanitation, and hygiene will be completed by 2030," she said.

An integrated water management approach also ensures that local government units' water-related policies and actions are aligned with the Philippine Development Plan.

"We are establishing the national geospatial database for natural resources, including water, in order to achieve cross-cutting development goals, de-risked investments, and improve the water resource management down to the community level," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"It underpins our natural capital accounting programs and establishes the physical bases of the design of water-related social and infrastructure programs, which aim to ensure that no ecosystem or community is left behind," she added.

The Philippines ranks fourth among the countries in the world most affected by water-related disasters.

"Extreme rainfall events and prolonged periods of drought have impacted our food and energy supply. Between 2010 and 2019, damages incurred due to floods, droughts and storms have amounted to \$10 billion," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"Water stress and insecurity remain and disasters do move people into poverty. We are not alone. Climate-vulnerable developing countries are faced with similar crises," she added.

The Marcos administration, she said, is geared toward three major policy directions: the establishment of the WRMO; the building of the National Natural Geospatial Database, with water as a layer, in support of the natural capital accounting system; and advancing the Philippine Health Facility Development Plan 2020-2040, especially giving priority access to water, sanitation and hygiene in public health care facilities.

