

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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MALACAÑANG INSIDER
HOSTED BY PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
(PCO) ASSISTANT SECRETARY JOEY VILLARAMA
WITH DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES
(DENR) MARIA ANTONIA YULO-LOYZAGA
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PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Current developments, presidential directives, accurate and reliable updates straight from the Palace. Sitting in for Daphne Oseña-Paez, I'm Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama for Malacañang Insider.

Strengthening the country's environmental resilience is on top of the national agenda under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s administration. Through science-based solutions, data-driven and socially, politically and culturally-sensitive environment and natural resource policies, we are on the path to building resilient communities.

To learn more about the climate mitigation and adaptation programs currently in the works, we are joined by the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga.

Madam Secretary, magandang araw po and thank you for joining us today.

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Good morning, Asec. Thank you very much for this invitation.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Ma'am, the media launch of the APMCDRR 2024 just happened, so can you please tell us more about that. I understand, we have just over a month to go in terms of working days before that happens in October. So, what are the key priorities and what can we expect from that?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Thank you. So, APMCDRR stands for Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. It's a biennial conference, meaning it happens every two years – the last one was in Brisbane, Australia and during that Brisbane, Australia conference, the Philippines was approached by the United Nations to ask whether we would be willing to host the next one.

The reason for that was they wanted to cite the fact that while the Philippines experiences a number of hazards, the Philippines has also been a model for strategic engagement across sectors, also bringing in local governments in these decision support systems for disaster risk reduction, and in partnerships between different sectors in the country as well as bilateral/multilateral partners.

So, this conference actually focuses on three things: Disaster risk financing; inclusion and inclusivity so basically gender equality issues, people who are excluded from the formal economies for example; and then, the third would be localization, the recognition that in fact between rural and urban and natural

environments – disaster risk takes different shapes and in fact has a different profile in each. Therefore, all our solutions need to be tailored to the different context that they are situated in.

The Asia-Pacific, as you know, is one if not the most disaster-prone region in the world. It's acknowledged to be such, but we are also recognized as the strongest regional economy and that is bound for growth all over the world. We also are home to more than 60% of the eight billion population in the world so recognition here is that despite the enormous challenges of hazards that are occurring, we do have a way for us to bring down our exposure, we do have a way for us to bring down vulnerability and build capacity to become a resilient region.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Who would have known po, Secretary, that iyong ating worst experiences in terms of disasters and hazards 'no would be a source of the best practices that we can share in the Asia-Pacific region. So, let's stick to Asia-Pacific. Recently, the President of Singapore was here and there was an agreement signed in terms of, I understand, carbon credits. Can we expound on that further?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: So, the President of Singapore was here and among the number of agreements signed – one of which was also on health care workers – was this MOU basically to work together on what we call Article 6 of the Paris Agreement and that really is an agreement that allows for countries to work together to bring down their greenhouse gas emissions. One country would then be able to absorb or avoid those emissions and the other country would be able to offset whatever it is producing against that particular country's inventory.

So, the Philippines for example, we contribute less than one percent, of course, in the global greenhouse gas inventory but we are a country that, of course, use considerable challenges in terms of our own emissions principally from energy, from transportation, we have agriculture industry, but of course, solid waste is also a source. In Singapore, however, because they are heavily industrialized country, they do have a higher amount of emission and therefore they seek to offset this somehow as well as bring down their emissions actively; they would like to accelerate. They are compliant to what will be the targets to 2030 and 2050.

And so, they are seeking for cooperation with different countries who do have the capacity to absorb carbon – and one of those countries is actually the Philippines. So, here, their interest is in voluntary cooperation between our two nations to see how we may both address our emission's reduction efforts by, in fact, looking at structuring a kind of carbon credit rating system in order for them to meet their targets but also recognizing the need for the Philippines to bring down its own.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Is this the first such agreement with another country?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: We have a similar agreement, I would say in principle, with the country of Japan, and here there's a little bit more work that has been already ongoing. We do have a private corporation that is wanting to structure a forest project for carbon credits and here, they're wanting to in fact make that a government-to-government agreement as well.

And so, the one with Singapore though, is also quite exciting because we are also wanting to take advantage of the knowledge and technology and scientific know-how of a country like Singapore.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: So, the DENR Geospatial Database Office's initiatives were highlighted. Could you share more about these initiatives and how they are helping manage the Philippines' water resources and what future plans are in place for the GDO?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Well, the GDO, as you may know was created just under this administration. So, our first aim and the first project we brought to our President's attention was the need to basically measure what we treasure – and that means, we need to establish a single database, geospatial database of our country's natural resources, so that includes water.

And so, the Singaporean President, President Tharman is also one of the leaders in terms of the global movement to actually preserve water and make sure that there's water security for all. And, he became interested in the way we use geospatial technology to actually map out our resources and how we interface with different government departments in terms of optimizing those resources for the use of different communities.

So, I happen to have met him during a Temasek event earlier this year and I explained to him that we are using space technology to actually manage our natural resources and he got interested specifically in water. So, what we did show him at the lunch that we hosted was how we are proposing to work and talks are ongoing with the DPWH for example for water impoundment as well as multiple uses, flood control as well, with the DOE for the identification of potential hydropower, and of course, how we work together with the Forest Management Bureau in terms of targeted reforestation in order for us to actually build our forest cover but also ensure that water security is also in place.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: You mentioned water management, flood control, energy generation. So, how do you envision that this MOU aligns or impacts existing presidential directives?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Well, the MOU is basically focused on the carbon credit situation, so the more relevant layer would be the forest layer for us. And, we also explained that we are updating our forest cover, and of course, analyzing what sort of forest cover we have because there are open forests there, close forests, and their air has been classified as forest [unclear] that need forest cover.

We are a country that has 30 million hectares of land – 15 million of which are classified as forest lands. However, in our last accounting, only 7 million, just over 7 million are actually covered by forest. So, we have 8 million hectares to go in terms of wanting to reforest our country to the state that it was when we first began to be cognizant of the fact that we need our forest for national economic growth.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sec., in relation to the hosting by the Philippines of the Loss and Damage Board, how is that coming along especially in terms of legislation? Kasi, in order for that to happen, kailangan pong magkaroon ng batas.

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes. So, here, we're very grateful, first of all, for the opportunity to be able to host the Loss and Damage Board. And, what we need to understand is how that brings the Philippines to center stage in terms of this very, very long fought battle to have loss and damage recognized by developed countries in terms of how the vulnerability of developing countries actually is a result of really events that have been not of their own causing.

So, the Loss and Damage Fund Board requires legislation because we actually need to imbue it with privileges and immunities as a legal entity. And therefore, we had to go to Congress and we had to go to the Senate, so I'm very happy to report that in Congress were almost done with third and final reading and the same in the Senate as well.

So, what will happen now, is possibly they will converge in two bicam and hopefully we will get that passage very soon, after which we had to agree with the UN FCCC and the Board on the host country agreement and once that's done, we will be effectively the host of the Loss and Damage Fund Board.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Thank you very much, Sec. Up next, aalamin natin ang mga inisyatibo at programa ng DENR kaugnay ng climate action at sustainability at kahalagahan ng pagbabawas ng carbon footprints. Stay tuned, we'll be right back.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: And we're back, you're still watching Malacañang Insider with Secretary Maria Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga. Climate related risks demands a new approach and can you tell, Sec., about more strategies of the agencies especially now with the effects of the upcoming La Niña phenomenon?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Okay, the first thing I think maybe I'd like to share is that for the first time the country has actually three documents that we are very proud of, if you will 'no. The first one is we have, of course, our greenhouse gas inventory which is currently being updated. The second document that we have now in terms of guiding policy is the nationally determined contribution's implementation plan, what is that? That's basically a plan that involves a framework and the database approach towards reducing our emissions by sector. In the NDC Implementation Planner or the NDCIP, we take stock of which sectors are actually causing our emissions to happen.

Principally, in this country it's the energy sector and of course transport and fuels, but we do have emission from the agriculture sector from industry and from solid waste as I said earlier. So, in terms of strategy to bring down those emissions are what we called climate mitigation, we actually need to address the way we use fuels, the way actually plant rice because a lot of the methane comes from the way we use wet and dry rice growing and the way we manage solid waste because methane comes from that as well.

And of course, at the end of the day, industry and its consumption of energy and its use of materials would be also one those principal contributors. So, NDCIP actually provide us with a framework and an estimate of what it would cause for us to actually move towards a low carbon future.

The third document that we have is called the National Adaptation Plan and what that also does is it looks at several hazards that are related to climate among which, you actually have mentioned La Niña and how that enhance or affected by climate change. It looks at sea level rise, it looks at intense rainfall, it looks at intense wind for example, it looks at tropical cyclones and its impact on different sector and identifies what we need to do in terms of investment, whether it's a nature-based or structural solutions or social programs in order for us to become more resilient to impacts of climate change at these points.

Taken together, these are a combination of strategies that we need to put forward in terms of interjecting in all the different mandates of the different government a climate resilience approach. That's actually happening now because we are climate tagging our investments now and we're also working on so called convergence budget. Specifically, for example in the area of water, we all know that the Philippines is not lacking in terms of supply, it just lacks supply sometimes where we need it most or whatever we don't need it, there is an over abundant. So, it's either flood or drought. And on occasion, we hit the sweet spot and we're able to supply of course the whole of NCR during the time of El Niño.

Now, that we are expecting La Niña we need to expect that there be more intense rains and where that compound are disaster risks. It's really where we need to focus our own attentions at this point and in terms of our investment as well. One of them is what we call climate resilient infrastructure, that need not just be physical in terms of the engineering, that can be a combination what we call gray and green engineering. So, we used both nature-based and the combination of those structural interventions in order to balance water supply where we need most and also deliver it where presumably before there was no water to be had.

One example, many of our island barangays do not have water. Water dissolutions, we need to understand what rainfall they get, whether they have stream that are live, in that case we need to provide filtration. Whether they have water or not also we determine in weather desalination is the only option.

But right now, we have many barangays all over the country that actually have to go by bangka everyday back and forth, and pay multiple of times what water would actually cost in order for them to have water to drink. So, all of these combined with the science and technology associated now with climate risk management, need to be part of our DNA in terms of country as far as—we need managing disaster risk for our own Philippine development.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sec., we have been talking about climate resilience, reducing the carbon print, green technology. So, I understand DENR has a banner program called the National Greening Program, of course, this is a convergence initiative of DA, DAR and DENR. So, can tell us more about that and how this will help in all what we have talked about?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Well, NGP actually started in 2011 and it was supposed to be a ten-year program. So, basically NGP, as we know it as the original conceptualization, I knew it, has already somehow wind down. However, there are what we call NGP sites, okay, that are still active, some of

which are also called graduated sites wherein the forest cover still intact, these are all managed by people's organization.

Why this is important? Forest plays a critical role in soil erosion control; they play critical role in absorbing carbon. They also play a critical role in absorptive capacity of the soil in terms of recharging our aquifers, where we need to take stock is where we should be actually targeting our reforestation efforts. And now look at scale, what do I mean? When we work with people's organization, we are of course reliant of the capacity of this organization to rollout this forest programs.

Whereas, when we first started, our hazard profile may have been somewhat different. Today, in terms of impact, we know climate risk are actually growing and so what we need to do is to establish targeted geographically reforestation but also in terms of scale, begin to think in what we are calling industrial scale. We need to be able to rapidly accelerate reforestation in this country in those critical areas wherein the functions that we actually derived from forest are most needed.

And here, of course flooding, flood control is one them, soil erosion because siltation actually is also contributory to flooding and of course affects our agriculture practices as well.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: DENR and PhilSA launched the nationwide mangrove mapping initiative, how was this initiative in this collaborative effort, contributed to our mangrove conservation.

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Okay. So, I mentioned earlier that we had just over 7 million in terms of forest cover. Actually, it's about 7.2 and the .2 there is approximately our mangrove cover. As you know, the Philippines has 36,000 kilometers more or less of coastal areas and we're looking at coastlines really as the first line of defense in terms of storm surge. But also, they serve a function in terms of the way our fisheries actually are part of the livelihood of our communities, and of course, part of our food security.

And so, the mangrove mapping that was done with PhilSA was a combination of citizen-science because we had a lot of confirmation and documentation done by communities, by NGOs, by universities. We also had artificial intelligence in the interpretation of what was being sent by way of the imagery on the ground; and of course, satellite imagery that PhilSA has processed.

Where this is going to help us, is we need to actually identify where those critical areas where mangroves are more resilient, what species are these, and how do they contribute to the local livelihoods of people and the local disaster risk reduction efforts as well where something is working and where are there gaps. In terms of mangroves themselves overall, we know there is need for infrastructure for example, for ports, for different types of landings for our vessels, et cetera.

We do need to make space for these natural barriers. So, at the end of the day, these are part of one single huge ecosystem. And, when we envision the role of the DENR, we think about ridge which is to mountain, to reef and to shelf actually. And so, mangroves play an integral role in balancing those ecologies and unless we can actually help to conserve them, we may lose in fact species, we may lose

the food security that they actually supply and we will lose the coastal protection that they actually provide to our communities in terms of times of extreme weather and storm surge.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Madam Secretary, do we have upcoming initiatives related to climate action and sustainability na dapat pang asahan ng publiko?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes. Maybe I'll address the sustainability issue first and I'd like to highlight that we did pass The Extended Producers' Responsibility Law. And, what that does is it helps us move closer to what we're calling a circular economy. What that means is basically what we are generating by way of product that and by way of waste we are able to consume and repurpose in order for us not to put any of these resources to waste.

In terms of the Extended Producers' Responsibility Law, it now requires corporations, what we call obliged enterprises, to actually collect the packaging that they actually use in their production. And, what difference that makes is really the fact that it used to be local governments alone that had that burden. Of course, DENR, tagasalo kami 'di ba, whatever local governments are not able to collect, DENR is having to pick up 'no from the different waterways and our areas leading to the ocean.

So, with the EPR, corporations are now responsible. They must collect up to 80% by 2028 of their packaging material and we will audit this yearly 'no. So, we have about 900 or so corporations that have registered now and so in terms of the sustainability specifically regarding the production and consumption and the packaging that goes along with it, we've made great strides in terms of engaging those that actually generate whatever you find that will have been thrown away and not repurpose into our rivers and waterways 'no, and some of which are in our ocean, let's face it 'no.

So, secondly, in terms of upcoming activities – the Asia-Pacific Ministerial is very important for us, disaster risk reduction is a part of our daily life and therefore it should be part of our DNA. Resilience should be part of all of our government mandates and departments, and the President is very cognizant of that and that's why he decided to actually accept the invitation to host the conference.

Coming up, there is a convention on biodiversity which also we are playing a very big role on. As you know, the Philippines is one of the most mega-diverse countries in the world. We have over 52,000 species, about half of which are not found anywhere else in the world. Sadly, around 2,000 of which are other critically endangered or threatened or vulnerable. So, we do have a responsibility to eliminate what we would call the possibility of extinction of these species and therefore a very pointed programs are necessary in order to protect the species that are critically endangered in the country.

So, CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), what we call CBD COP 16 is another biennial conference that will be held this year in Columbia. After that, there will be... of course COP 29 for the climate negotiation and that will be in Baku, Azerbaijan. So, we have this very important two Conference of the Parties; in between, in September there will be the UN General Assembly and the Philippines is once again, of course, also in a very important role here as a developing country that is on the way to achieving its SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).

There is a particularly important treaty agreement which is also making its way through our legislature now called the BBNJ or the High Seas Treaty and the BBNJ is basically Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions. We need to commit to actually protecting biodiversity in our oceans beyond our own national jurisdiction in order for the oceans to be enjoyed and profited from in some cases, but also, for it to deliver the climate regulatory functions it actually delivers for the whole world.

Oceans absorb most of the heat on the planet and if we are not able to actually manage our climate change impacts, we will lose biodiversity and the food chains as well as everything else that depends on our oceans' functioning well will affect food security, energy security and water security for all.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Ang bigat pala ng mandate and responsibility talaga ng DENR, Madam Secretary, kasi when people talk about DENR, they just tend to think conservation, environmental protection. But based on what we have discussed, it encompasses and affects even the smallest aspect of our daily lives.

So, thank you very much for all the work you have been doing and you will continue to do, Secretary Loyzaga.

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Thank you so much too.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sustainability, stewardship and resilience – let us all think of ways to sustainably develop our country's natural resources. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has given emphasis on environmental resilience and the shared responsibility to care for our environment. This cannot be done by the government alone. It needs the help of every Filipino to mobilize our capacities and resources to preserve, conserve and manage our environment.

We bring you in-depth views of the latest issues and regular Palace updates. Sitting in for Daphne Oseña-Paez, this is Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama for Malacañang Insider. Have a good day.

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