



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

National Inquiry on the Impact of Climate Change
on the Human Rights of the Filipino People

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PRESS RELEASE

PHL at the forefront of seeking climate justice with CHR's landmark inquiry on the effects of climate change to human rights

QUEZON CITY—The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) held the first public hearing probing the alleged responsibility of major fossil-fuel companies or so-called “carbon majors” to climate change and how this impacts the human rights of Filipinos.

A first in the world, this is considered a landmark inquiry casting the issue of Climate Change within the human rights framework. In his opening remarks, CHR Chairperson Jose Luis Martin “Chito” Gascon said that it is no wonder that the Philippines is at the forefront of seeking to address the climate issue given that Filipinos is among those who have suffered most from it.

“Among those who are suffering the most from the effects of climate change is the Philippines. Nowhere has it been more dramatically demonstrated than in November of 2013, when our country was visited by Typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda,” Chairperson Gascon said.

Impact of climate change on vulnerable sectors

Petitioners comprising of victims of calamities and human rights groups testified during the hearing to share stories and give accounts of how climate change has impacted their lives and livelihood.

Rica Diamzon Cahilig, a 20-year-old student belonging to the Ayta Ambala indigenous group in Bataan, shared with grief how the impact of climate change has depleted the forest, which they consider as their home and primary source of basic needs like food, water, and medicine.

“Nasira na ang gubat na tinuturing naming tahanan at pinagkukunan ng tubig, pagkain, at maging medisina”, she lamented.

Considering that Philippines is an agricultural country, among those who most bear the brunt of climate change are the farmers. Felix Pascua Jr., a farmer, lamented how climate change worsened their plight and pushed them further into poverty.

“Kaming magbubukid na lumilikha ng pagkain ng bansa, pero kaming mambubukid ang nawawalan ng pagkain, pati na rin ang aming bukid”, he said.

Science to inform policy discussions on climate change

Among those who stood as resource persons are concerned scientists and experts on climate change and weather trends. Professor Gerry Bagtasa, an atmospheric scientist and professor of environmental science and meteorology at the University of the Philippines, presented the climate change phenomenon and how it affects the environment and people.

“The temperature is overly increasing. If it becomes warm, there will be more rain. The sea level is also a problem. The melting of the ice on land causes a problem. Philippines has the highest number of sea level rise from the rest of the world”, he explained.

Ms. Rosalina de Guzman, Assistant Chief of the Weather Services of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), presented the climate trends and projections in the Philippines. She stressed that Philippines is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and ranks 3rd in the world index.

“There is an increased frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall. The Philippines also has the most number of tropical cyclones. During El Niño, the cyclones intensify”, she explained.

Through Skype webcast, Director Peter C. Frumhoff of the Union of Concerned Scientists based in the United States, presented his findings on his recent study on carbon dioxide. He also gave his opinion in dealing with the climate change issue from a scientist’s perspective towards informing policy discussion.

“We should plan for a world free from carbon pollution and renounce climate disinformation. Companies and businesses must pay their fair share of climate damage”, he opined to conclude his presentation.

PHL at forefront of climate justice through the national inquiry

The CHR’s inquiry on climate change started in the first part of 2016. This is in accordance with its mandate to investigate and monitor all matters concerning the rights of its citizens especially those who belong to the marginalized and vulnerable sectors

Commissioner Roberto Eugenio T. Cadiz, chair of the said national inquiry, described the method of inquiry as global, inclusive, and dialogical rather than adversarial.

“Key stakeholders, including those from other territorial jurisdictions, have been encouraged to participate in this process. The method of inquiry shall be more dialogic, rather than adversarial, without, however, sacrificing due process of law”, Commissioner Cadiz explained.

Among the resource persons of the petitioner is Attorney Lisa Anne Hamilton, Director of Climate and Energy Program. She highlighted that human rights laws provide that States have an obligation when it comes to climate issues and it is duty-bound to protect citizens from third parties such as companies.

“Human rights norms clarify that States should respond to climate change. Human rights law imposes wide-ranging obligations upon States to protect individual from infringements by third parties, including corporations”, she stressed.

In conclusion to the first public hearing, Executive Director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia Yeb Saño manifested his faith in the Commission for trying to find the resolution in the huge challenge of climate change.

“I trust in and have huge faith in the Commission despite the current state of our institutions in this country. We have faith in the ability of the Commission to prove that there are courts of justice rather than just courts of law. I also trust in the ability of humanity to find a solution in the climate crisis”, Saño heartedly expressed.

Through the inquiry, the CHR seeks to determine liability issue against companies that are not domiciled in the Philippines on the basis of trans-boundary effects of their business operations, to understand the business activities of so-called “Carbon Majors” with respect to their alleged impact on climate change, and to gather baseline scientific data and other information on climate change. ###