

SECRETARY EMMANUEL DE GUZMAN
Climate Change Commission

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

National Conference on Water Security

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SMX Convention Center

Esteemed colleagues in government, partners in the private sector, academe and civil society, DRRM Coordinators of the Department of Education, development partners, distinguished members of the National Panel of Technical Experts of the Climate Change Commission, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

Pursuant to law, the Climate Change Commission leads this year's observance of the Global Warming and Climate Change Consciousness Week. It is an opportunity we seize together key stakeholders and renew collectively our resolve to make a difference in our fight against climate change.

With the runaway global warming and increasing trend of climate risks, the climate challenge has become the most defining challenge of our time.

The science is unequivocal. Climate change is speeding up, moving faster than us. We need faster and bolder responses from all if we are to win this fight for human survival and security. We must rise up to the 1.5 Celsius climate challenge to survive and thrive together!

The recently published Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) affirms that half-degree warming can make unprecedented impacts in all aspects of society. And the critical sector of water is among the most affected.

Water is bound to become scarcer by mid-century. With either having less or excess of water due to weather extremes, we must manage the crises now and in the near future.

These realizations put Water Security as a primary concern among the seven thematic priorities of the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP).

As many of you are aware, several roundtable discussions were held last month. We are now conducting this National Conference on Water Security — a crucial step towards drafting a National Framework of Action (NFOA) on Climate Change for Water Security, which will be incorporated in the updating of our National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP).

This means ultimately that what we do today — what we discuss, how we harmonize our actions, the relationships we build — will have a crucial effect not only on policy, but on the nature and scope of Philippine climate action.

Water scarcity is now a growing concern for the Philippines. I am certain many of us here are aware of the numbers. Let me go through a few of the most striking ones:

The 2017 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey by the Philippine Statistics Authority stated that only 49% Filipinos use non-piped improved water sources, while there is still a proportion of 5% Filipinos using unimproved drinking water services.

This year, the National Economic and Development Authority presented that out of the 22.7 million families, 12.32% still have no access to safe water supply. Likewise, alarming is that 2.04% of the country's population have cases of unimproved sanitation and 4.23% have occurrences of open defecation.

In the latest count of DILG, under the Sagana at Ligtas na Tubig para sa Lahat (Salintubig) program, there are still 173 waterless barangays that need urgent interventions for water supply and access. Among the reported waterless communities, DILG has allotted an amount of PHP6.674 billion under its Sagana at Ligtas na Tubig para sa Lahat (Salintubig) program to be implemented across 15 regions in the country.

Philippines has lost 1.09 million hectares of tree cover from 2001 to 2017, which is equivalent to a 5.9% decrease since year 2000, which is a contributory factor to massive flooding in the lowlands and urban communities, according to a report by Global Forest Watch.

Philippines is 54th among all countries which were determined by the World Resources Institute (WRI) as highly water-stressed in sectors including agricultural, domestic and industrial, while Asian Development Bank ranks us 37th out of 48 countries on the national water security index — both clear indicators that with climate change, our rank can still reach a higher notch in terms of water stress and water insecurity.

Ironically, the Philippines, being a country surrounded by water, is projected to experience a "high" degree of water shortage in the year 2040, according to a report published by the World Resources Institute.

On the other hand, NWRB informed us during our Roundtable Discussions on Water Security that hydropower takes up most of the allocated water for non-consumptive use at 57.09%, while for consumptive use, irrigation takes the lead at 73.05%.

Nine (9) cities in the country were identified as water-stressed in the late 1990s, and other cities are still adding up to the list. The culprit — rapid urbanization and economic development.

We have 34 water-related government agencies. I am sure you have all experienced the headaches that this convulsion has caused.

Safe water and adequate sanitation are both necessary to achieve resiliency and sustainable development. Without it, poverty ensues; ecosystems are disrupted; and

agricultural water production and power generation losses pile up. The economy suffers.

Population growth, rapid urbanization, and climate change are all engaged in a dynamic that is applying greater and greater pressure on water resources, which are already strained to begin with.

This is our context today. The questions we all face: What must we do to bend the curve? What are the imperatives? As stakeholder, what actions can we commit to bring about the reforms we seek?

Now is the time to decide. There is an urgent need for transformative action.

Through this gathering, I hope we could set forth two core objectives:

First, to fast-track reforms in our water governance structure. With vast literature addressing this concern, re-structuring the water governance sector is a task that needs to be done ASAP. It is the most important underlying factor in adaptation implementation.

It is also the most important climate action in our National Climate Change Action Plan – that's why we provide these two days of dedicated discussion on water.

But restructuring should be coupled with a paradigm shift in thinking—we must now recognize the essence of the nexus or convergence approach that is informed by science, policy and social dynamics using the deep involvement of the whole-of-society.

This leads us to our second objective: to provide more room for enhanced policy-making, oversight, regulatory and management substructures at various levels and scales.

The roundtable discussions detailed specific actions, ranging from systematizing policy, technology, research and development interventions, rationalizing fund support, to improving knowledge management systems and information dissemination mechanisms. The discussions also highlighted the need to prioritize interventions to the still waterless communities, relocation and resettlement areas, and sustain inclusive planning processes with women, indigenous peoples (IPs) and other climate-vulnerable sectors.

There is also a premium on the crucial role of the academe and scientific community in complementing government efforts to solving water challenges.

All of these, then, should be anchored upon the 1.5°C agenda of the Paris Agreement, which is the foundation of our National Climate Change Action Plan. We cannot and will never grasp the essence of convergence if we maintain a mindset that compartmentalizes rather than reaches out. Lack of coordination leads us to conflicting policies and guidelines.

The concluded roundtable discussions, as well as this Conference, is an important step towards that direction. The partnership and convergence between the Climate Change Commission and the National Tripartite Steering Committee is also a vital way forward to propel actions in support of that vision for the water sector.

Climate change, ironically, has been moving faster than the glacial pace of our bureaucracy. However, I am confident: With the synergies that we are continuing to build, we can collectively, and I mean with one voice in this direction, step up our game. We can collectively find newer, more efficient, more creative, more united pathways for climate action.

In proactively acting on these imperatives, it is at this point that I urge all of you to take an active part in today's 2-part events on water security organized by the Climate Change Commission. This morning is all about how government and private sector leaders, including partners from the academe, articulate the nuances of water resource management in this time of climate change.

This afternoon, young scientists from the Philippine Science High School will take center stage in the inaugural National Climate Science Youth Congress, by sharing their ideas on water technologies that are viewed to secure the lives of Filipinos. This is our means of nurturing climate leaders of tomorrow.

I look forward to furthering these synergies, towards a more sustainable and water-secure Philippines.

Thank you at mabuhay po kayong lahat!