

Forum on Climate Change for the Province of Palawan
The Legend Hotel, Puerto Princesa City
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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The Role of Palawan Biosphere Reserve in Climate Change

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Congressman Alvarez, Congressman Mitra, Vice Governor
Ponce De Leon;

To our distinguished speakers:

- Dr. Rosa T. Perez, Awardee of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize as one of the four Filipino Members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- Mr. Jose Ma. Lorenzo Tan, President of the World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines
- Atty Gerthie Mayo Anda, from the NGO, and
- Mr. Romeo B. Dorado, OIC-Executive Director of the PCSD Staff

Palawan leaders and representatives from the different sectors who are our partners in the pursuance of Sustainable Development...

A pleasant afternoon!

Before anything else, I would like to greet you a Happy SEP Day!

It is a long way since June 19, 1992 and now we are Celebrating the 17th Year of the SEP for Palawan. Much have been said and done in the course of our journey to attain sustainable development for our province and for our people. From mining to livefish to communal forest rhetorics and actions, generated common, as well as discordant views and stances. These only indicate that people's participation is well and alive in our province and the business of sustainable development is oftentimes not a simple matter. In the end however, what is important is that, everyone is given the opportunity to be heard and be able to influence whatever decision we have to make.

This afternoon, we are holding a forum aptly titled '**Forum on Climate Change for the Province of Palawan** with the underlying theme, **Defining the Role of Palawan Biosphere Reserve in Mitigating and Adapting to the effects of Climate Change**'. As we will understand later on in this gathering, and without further elaboration I should say, that climate change is the single issue at hand that can challenge our society, our economy and even our country's present state of affairs. We face the risk of sea-level rise that may threaten our coasts and the lives of coastal communities. The warming of our oceans

may endanger our marine life and benthic communities, and the changing weather patterns may impinge on our food production and the resurgence of new strains of diseases like the flu virus H1N1 with the resultant adverse impact on the economy and the society as a whole. . These are just some of the threats that we can visualise clearly in our minds. Amidst all the debates on climate change taking centre stage, Palawan remains to be one of the most vulnerable areas, being an island province and considered as the last frontier of the Philippines in environmental protection and conservation.

Conversely, there is another matter perhaps not everybody is in the know. Nationally and globally, our province is recognized to be home to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park which is the Philippine's Official entry in the New 7 Wonders of Nature and the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park, the lone marine park in the country.

World Heritage Sites are specific sites that aim to conserve places of specific importance to the common heritage of humankind. As it is, world heritage sites like protected areas, are prone to isolation. To reduce landscape fragmentation of this kind and to enhance further protection of important sites and landscapes, the entire province of Palawan has been declared Man and the Biosphere Reserve since March 27, 1990 under UNESCO's Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB).

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This declaration gave Palawan the international recognition as an area that promotes and demonstrates the vital symbiotic relationship between humans and its biosphere.

The important and distinct characteristic of the Palawan Biosphere Reserve among other declared biosphere reserves in the world is that, its goals and strategies for actions are deeply embedded into the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act or the SEP. The SEP Act provided the basis for the Philippine Government to apply the concept and therefore the needed governmental support.

Managing Palawan Biosphere Reserve is not without challenge. Palawan is a popular tourist destination with its almost pristine environment and interesting culture. Although beneficial for the economy, the upsurge in the number of tourists has caused pressure in the ecosystems especially in the coastal zone.

The population growth of Palawan is the highest in the Philippines at 3.64% mainly caused by in-migration. A greater number of people will be demanding for more resources and will ask more land to farm in the future. The rapid population growth does not only add pressure to the environment, but it also impacts on social infrastructures that the provincial government has invested upon.

Despite the increase in environmental law enforcers, uncontrolled hunting/or poaching of wildlife, illegal logging

and illegal fishing continue due to poverty, lack of awareness and participation at the community level.

Our mangrove forests have become vulnerable to debarking activities by merchants coming from other places.

The growth of mining applications and activities in Palawan could have been a big boost to the economy of the province. However, economic benefits have yet to join the mainstream economy of the province. Companies must still learn to meet specified criteria so that mining activities should have minimal impacts on the forests of Palawan. For these, I declared a moratorium on small scale mining on November 18, 2008 that covers the entire province of Palawan.

We are starting to feel the impact of intensive chemical fertilisation in our agricultural lands that aids in the nutrification of our water bodies and slowly acidifying our fields. Without caution, we no longer enjoy our delicious tahong and other bivalves during summer seasons due to red algal bloom and the produce in the fields have somewhat diminished.

The increasing use of fossil fuel to run electricity in the entire province at an increasing cost is a complete irony that the Malampaya gas and Galoc oil are being extracted offshore of Palawan and yet the cost of electricity in this province is the highest in Southeast Asia. This condition does not only violate the principle in the system of Payment for Ecosystem Services, it also destroys the confidence of would-be investors in this province.

With the issue of climate change staring us in the eye, being an island province, we realised that the effect of climate change will be more profound in Palawan.

As the Governor of the province and as the current Chairman of PCSD, these things have remained heavy in my heart; because these issues continue to threaten the level of diversity of our biotic communities and their integrity. It could jeopardize as well, whatever gains we have achieved in managing Palawan Biosphere Reserve.

In February of last year, I was fortunate enough to attend the 3rd World Conference on Biosphere Reserves in Madrid, Spain organized by the UNESCO.

During the conference, I realised that the issues I have carried in my heart are not isolated to Palawan. I have learned that other UNESCO Member States are also beset with the increasing loss of biodiversity within the biosphere reserve through anthropogenic causes and through the effects of climate change.

Efforts on research and monitoring are focused on the trade-offs and achieving balance between human responsibility to maintain nature and conserve biodiversity on the one hand, and on the other hand, the need to use natural resources for enhancing social and economic well-being of people.

A key output of the conference is the Madrid Action Plan for Biosphere Reserve for 2008 to 2013. Highlighted in the action

plan is the need to address sustainable development issues of poverty and inequality in the context of (1) Accelerated loss of biological and cultural diversity with unexpected consequences that impact the ability of ecosystems to continue to provide services critical for human wellbeing;(2) Rapid urbanization; and (3) Climate Change, the single most important issue of our time. Furthermore, the action plan put forward the challenge to Biosphere Reserves to be key learning sites for sustainable development giving emphasis to the role of the stakeholder communities as active participants, the academe and the scientific community to provide information, and the political leaders through good governance in an environment of cooperation and partnership.

This afternoon we are holding this forum in recognition of the importance of the Climate Change issue and the urgent call for all of us here in Palawan to act as part of the global community. We have invited our distinguished speakers Dr. Rosa T. Perez, formerly from Pag Asa, Mr. Lory Tan from the business and NGO, Atty. Gerthie Anda from the NGO sector, and Mr. Romy Dorado from the government, to lead us in our discussion on climate change, the challenges we face and the possible actions we can contribute.

Biosphere reserves can spur efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. For our part, the PCSD believes, and I think everyone would agree, that we have been implementing key initiatives in our province related to combating climate change even before the issue of climate change was formally

recognized worldwide. The implementation of the ECAN zoning, for one, has its significant contribution to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, a key green house gas that contributes to climate change, though the establishment and maintenance of protection forests designated as core zones. The strengthening of the resiliency of our ecosystems though biodiversity conservation is being done through the establishment of protected areas in the terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the implementation of the wildlife act. However, the advent of the climate change issue call for more focused and clear actions:

§ I would like to see a provincial body organised that will initiate discussions, organise researches and plan adaptation and mitigation measures relative to climate change;

§ I am directing the PCSDS to formulate a provincial ECAN map that shall be endorsed by the Provincial Board. It should shore up a cohesive land use planning for the sustainable development of Palawan.

§ We should protect and maintain our forest cover of 46% and establish forests for municipalities where there is non-existent.

§ We should target to establish at least 25% of each of our coral reef, seagrass beds, estuarine and beach areas as

strictly protected “no-take” replenishment zone OR core zone to ensure long term sustainable supply of fisheries.

§ Our mangrove forests, Palawan’s first line of defence against the effect of climate change, should be strictly protected with the more decisive implementation of Presidential Proclamation 2152 especially by the local government units.

§ Researches and monitoring of climate and hydrology, of sea level rise and the composition of flora and fauna in important ecosystem should be more given emphasis and information should be used in proactive planning. A research on alternative use of energy in the province should also be given importance.

§ Decaying wastes are also major source of harmful gases that contribute to climate change, as Chairman of the Provincial Solid Waste Management, I am directing the PCSDS together with the DENR, to review the status of the implementation of the Provincial Solid Wastes Management Plan.

§ To minimise the use of chemical fertilisers in our agricultural lands, I am directing the Provincial Agriculture and the Municipal Government Units to formulate a sustainable agricultural program for the province of Palawan that emphasises on organic farming

§ The program for the education of communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change should be created and implemented at the soonest time possible.

However, our previous work centred largely on mitigating climate change that shows we need to do more on the urgent task of implementing adaptation measures.

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The drafting of an agenda on what next steps to pursue for us to combat climate change is most appropriate output of our forum upon which I put everyone now to task. I wish you all an enlightened and productive afternoon.

Matamang salamat ÿ mayad nga adlao canindong tanan!