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Allow me first to thank the Australian Government and its partners for organizing this Climate Change Adaptation Workshop. It is certainly an honor to be part of this important initiative.

In a survey conducted by the Nielsen Company and the Oxford University Institute of Climate Change in late 2009, the Philippines registered the highest level of concern for climate change among 54 countries surveyed. 78 percent of Filipino respondents said they were very concerned about climate change.

Four years hence, that concern is no longer an abstract understanding of climate change. Over the past years, our people have experienced climate change and its worst impacts, with thousands of lives and properties lost. Today, we confront climate change as one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of our time.

Is climate change a concern shared by a majority of the world's population?

A 2013 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that more than half or 54 percent of the 39 countries surveyed consider climate change as a top global threat.¹

Has this majority opinion resulted to anything in terms of policies and action?

Let me share with you our country's long and arduous journey in this regard.

Since my first term in 1998 in the Senate, my advocacy has been consistent and clear – protect our environment, adapt to climate change and mitigate its impacts. It has never been an easy task as people viewed climate change then as an abstract issue best reserved for experts and the scientists.

In 2008, as part of my commitment to the 2008 Manila Call for Action, I filed a resolution recommending the creation of a

¹ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/24/climate-change-and-financial-instability-seen-as-top-global-threats/>

standing committee on climate change in the Senate. By then, more people were willing to listen. In December of the same year, the Senate Committee on Climate Change was formed. It was a major milestone resulting from a slow process of interest-building, engagement, and action.

Gradually, climate change became a part of local dialogue. The solutions, however, did not come automatically. It had to take typhoon Ketsana (Ondoy) for Filipinos to realize that climate change is not just a scientific and environmental issue, but an all encompassing threat to us, our aspirations, and to future generations.

The massive loss of lives and the inundation of Metropolitan Manila opened the eyes of the government and the public that climate change is no longer a threat, but a challenge we all need to take seriously.

In less than thirty days after Ondoy, the Philippine Climate Change Act was passed, creating the Climate Change Commission. It is chaired by no less than the President of the Philippines, and mainstreams climate change adaptation in

various phases of policy formulation. This is, however, not a silver bullet that promised to solve our climate change worries.

The passage of the Climate Change Act was followed by the enactment of the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. The order of business was no longer responding to disasters, but rather that of reducing risks and building resiliency of communities. It was a shift in policy that required not only resources, but more importantly, the joint efforts of the national government and the local government units, together with partner stakeholders.

These two measures were hailed by the UNISDR as among the world's best laws on disaster resilience. How then can these laws motivate and deliver sustainable urban planning that will translate to effective disaster risk reduction?

In the Philippines, there are five major factors that contribute to the country's vulnerability to natural hazards. These are: ecosystems decline, exposure of economic assets, poverty, rapid growth of cities, and climate change.

These vulnerabilities can be addressed through the upgrading and enforcement of building standards, risk-sensitive urban planning and investment, stronger social protection, promoting measures that advance economic and business resilience, and engaging communities in efforts to achieve resilience.

Where do we start?

The urgency of the situation requires that we undertake initiatives simultaneously and in parallel with other related efforts.

Appropriations for climate change programs have been increasing at an average of 26 percent yearly since 2009, outpacing the growth of the national budget, which has been growing at around 6 percent. The enacted budget of 2014 provides more funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in disaster-stricken areas. Thirteen (13) billion pesos has been allocated for the Calamity Fund, which is now known as the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Fund. Another 20 billion pesos has been provided for under the Rehabilitation

Reconstruction Program while another 80 billion pesos will go to reconstruction projects under the Unprogrammed Fund.

How then do we reduce risks given that resources, albeit limited, are made available now more than ever?

My answer is, let us not just rebuild. Let us not just build better, but build stronger, using the best standards in light of the natural and man-made hazards we face today.

In light of this need, I am pushing for an environmental audit that will measure the level of compliance with the country's environmental laws. Where policy is lacking or absent, I will introduce them.

I also wish to emphasize that building resilience cannot happen without the support and cooperation of the people on the ground. Our officials, the community members, and our partners cannot only be involved. They need to lead.

In saying this, let me share with you some outstanding stories of disaster risk reduction initiatives that have been led by the communities.

The Camotes Island in Cebu, a tropical paradise blessed with sugary white sand and pristine, crystal clear waters, has become a model for disaster risk reduction and management, with one of its municipalities, the town of San Francisco, winning the 2011 United Nations Sasakawa award for Disaster Risk Reduction.

With the goal of sustainability for their farming and fishing communities, the townsfolk established the Purok system as a way to build capacity for local action. This traditional method of self-organization within villages helped communities to understand and develop the discipline needed in proper waste management and disaster prevention. It also encouraged voluntary contribution to a fund for emergency preparedness and responsiveness.

The residents are vigilant in implementing segregation at source—strictly enforcing their no trash segregation - no collection policy, recycling, composting and the collection of

payment for carbon taxes, which are based on the amount of domestic waste produced from day to day.

Camotes Island's program is considered, among neighboring provinces, as an example of building resilience through good governance.

In the Province of Surigao del Norte, the third class municipality of Hinatuan has been implementing an effective Solid Waste Management program since 2008.

Led by their mayor, the townspeople of Hinatuan cleaned clogged canals, cleaned their surroundings and seawater, as well as regulated plastic use.

Four years after, proper waste disposal is now a way of life for the people in this town. Compost, which is a by-product of processing waste, also encouraged households to grow backyard gardens resulting in improved food security.

Meanwhile, the municipality of Saint Bernard in Southern Leyte is an example of building back better communities.

In 2006, a landslide in the area of Guinsaigon killed more than 1,000 people, including 246 elementary schoolchildren. It was a tragedy that revealed not only the community's vulnerability but also its absence of disaster prevention program.

The people of Saint Bernard refuse to see a repeat of such disaster, thus treading on the path of disaster resilience. The municipal government mainstreamed DRR by incorporating preparedness and resilience in its development programs.

With the help of foreign organizations, the LGU developed a multi-hazard early warning system and a simple and cost-effective public address system that was adopted in 17 villages. Vital information now reaches all households.

These initiatives were recognized by the UN when it awarded Saint Bernard with a Letter of Merit during the 2013 Sasakawa Award ceremonies of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva.

These success stories encourage us to not wait for the next disaster to strike. Doing nothing is not an option. Acting now, through pro-active local leadership, in tandem with the community, is the best option. The national government, for its part, will also have to stand by and actively support capacity building efforts at the local level.

Local governments need to prioritize resilience as part of their sustainable development agenda. Paying attention to protection will improve environmental, social and economic conditions, including combating the future variables of climate change.

A secure community will breed a prosperous community. Hospitals, schools, bridges, public markets, and other public facilities need to be built with just one word in mind -- Resilience.

We also need the support of the business sector. Businesses need to make plans with the general population in mind. A massively decimated market will not allow businesses to thrive. It is therefore in the private sector's best interest to strengthen its support to climate action and DRR initiatives; support adaptation measures that help build assets and strengthen the resilience of

communities; and help finance mitigation activities and buttress adaptation measures.

In closing, I wish to stress that disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation must be closely linked to development—the kind of development that does not create new risks, but rather, build secure and resilient communities.

We should all remember. Poverty breeds disaster vulnerability. Those who have less in life are faced with the greatest risks. Thus, as disasters become more prevalent, the greater is the responsibility of government to extend social protection to the country's poor. Disaster risk reduction is social justice in action.

The tragedies that communities and nations face create the context for learning and growing. It is these disasters that make us resilient. It is our shared memory of death, loss and survival that should drive us to build a resilient future and a safer Earth.

Thank you.