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RP biggest victim of climate change – Filipino NASA physicist

by TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The Philippines is very vulnerable to climate change and its diverse species will be the first to be wiped out if the temperature warms up, a US-based Filipino physicist said September 12.

“The Philippines is not emitting a lot of carbon dioxide, but it’s going to be the biggest victim of climate change,” Dr. Josefino Comiso said in a briefing organized by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

Comiso, a senior scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) who has made studies on climate change, said the country is very vulnerable to a warming climate because it’s home to a high diversity of species.

“A lot of these species are very vulnerable to even a slight change in temperature,” he later told reporters. “If you change the temperature by even a fraction of a degree to 1 degree, a lot of species could disappear.”

He further explained: “In the Philippines, there’s more diversity. If you lose 10 percent of them, we’re talking of thousands of species.”

Comiso, a contributing author to the report on climate change of Nobel winner Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, is in Manila for a visit to share his knowledge with the academe under the DOST’s “Balik-Scientist Program.”

The physicist said that the country’s coral reefs, home to algae and hundreds of species of fish, are under immediate threat from a warming of ocean temperature, and bleaching.

“There’s actually a symbiotic relationship within the coral reefs in the fact that you have algae residing in the reefs. And it’s these algae that are producing the beautiful colors in the coral reefs,” he

said.

And coral bleaching could change all that, he said.

“When the reefs experience a slight change, even less than a degree of temperature, this would expel the algae,” he said, pointing out that this would impact on food supply because fish feed on algae.

Six countries, including the Philippines, contain over half of the world’s reefs. Together with Indonesia, the Philippines has a high diversity of coral reefs, studies show.

Only 4 to 5 percent of the 27,000 sq km of the country’s coral reefs are in excellent condition.

A wide range of plant and animal species are also under threat from a warming climate, while humans will become more vulnerable to diseases, according to Comiso.

“As the temperature in the country warms up, you can start breeding some harmful insects. Like for example the mosquitoes might become a lot more abundant, and you know for sure, mosquitoes can have a lot of impact on the health of population,” he said.

Comiso echoed observations by climate experts that the Philippines was vulnerable to a rise in sea level and stronger storms as an offshoot of global warming.

“We’ve been having longer and heavier rainfall in the previous years. That may be associated with global warming as well because we know that SST (sea surface temperature) has been on the rise,” he said.

“If you have a warmer ocean, you get more evaporation. You also get stronger typhoons in the process,” he added. ■

Agriculture chief wants rice farms to go organic

MANILA – Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap wants 10 percent of the country’s 1.87 million hectares of rice farms nationwide to go organic as one of the government’s roadmaps to address poverty and hunger.

At the recent kickoff of the Go Organic! Movement in Quezon City, Yap gave his full support to the advocacy of various environmentalist groups, local government units and the academe to promote organic farming to help solve the country’s food crisis.

“What we want to show to the public is that we have an extension program in place in partnership with the local governments, academe and the non-government and farmers’ organizations. We are set to roll out the program by the dry crop season,” Yap was quoted by the movement as saying.

Various groups led by Alaminos City Mayor Hernani Braganza of Pangasinan recently launched the Go Organic! Move-

ment to promote organic farming at the PRRM office in Quezon City. The groups include the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Paragos-Pilipinas, Centro Saka Inc., La Liga Policy Institute, SRI-Pilipinas, Education for Life Foundation, University of the Philippines-Los Baños, Philippine Greens and Earth Day Network.

“I, myself, am a believer of organic agriculture. We are all converts. We are willing to accept the program to increase food productivity and farmers’ income. I am happy to be here,” Yap said.

Yap, according to the Go Organic Movement, disclosed that he had signed a special order creating a task force headed by Agriculture Undersecretary for Special Concerns Berna Romulo-Puyat to finalize the partnership agreement to incorporate organic farming under the government’s FIELDS program next month.

He noted a 30 percent drop in chemical fertilizer use due to price increases.

“I want to see an increased income of all farmers nationwide. But we have a big problem when the prices of fertilizers rose high. For that reason, the President ordered an increased production through FIELDS,” he said.

“This is where organic farming comes in. And we look forward to a fruitful partnership with the Go Organic! Movement for the successful transformation of our rice farms to organic farms.”

Yap also discussed plans to hold a nationwide rice festival culminating on Oct. 16 – World Food Day – as a means to promote organic farming to local governments and Filipino farmers.

Former senator Helena Benitez, honorary chairperson of PRRM, also expressed her full support for Go Organic! (Inquirer.net)

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