

21 AUGUST 2022, SUNDAY



DENR

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BRINGING THE SCIENCE BACK: DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga

By PHILIP CU UNJIENG

There's a palpable sense of anticipation and excitement as newly installed Department of the Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Ma. Antonia 'Toni' Yulo-Loyzaga begins her series of deep dives with the various divisions, bureaus and attached agencies of the ▶7



Scan the QR code to watch the video online.



DENR SECRETARY MA. ANTONIA 'TONI' YULO-LOYZAGA (Noel Pabalate)

department. Anticipation, because Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga brings a wealth of administrative experience and solid connections to the scientific community; and excitement, because her work on sustainability, resilience, and climate change means she's one with the DENR staff and personnel in 'speaking their language'.

Tasked with governing and supervising the exploration, development, utilization, and conservation of our country's natural resources; there's always been a double-edged sword element to running this department, a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' aspect. From the description of its tasks alone, this would be evident. Are you primarily conservationist or regulator - and if regulator, how hard do you proverbially 'apply the brakes' in the name of preservation and protection? And take note that from mining to protecting biodiversity sites and national parks, to air pollution from cars, and air and water pollution from industries, these will all fall under the purview of the DENR.

During the recent SONA of President Bongbong Marcos, mention was made of ramping up the mining industry as part of the plan for our post-pandemic recovery. So

Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga will be playing a crucial role in ensuring a scenario of 'responsible' ramping up will be achieved - balancing between the build up of mining operations and business development on one side, while our abiotic resources are still protected, and that the poor and economically-challenged communities aren't sacrificed in the name of development, on the other side.

Unlike other Departments where the benchmark for success may be more easily defined (for example, increasing exponentially the number of foreign visitors if you're heading the Department of Tourism); the DENR will always be more of a high-wire act of balancing interests, while juggling several balls at the same time - with the results and parameters for 'a good job done' occupying grey areas



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subject to interpretation, depending on which side of the fence you're sitting on.

To her credit, Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga has a mother lode of experience that will hold her in good stead as she charts the course for the DENR. She was the chairperson of the International Advisory Board of the Manila Observatory, where she served as former executive director from 2007-2016. During this period, she was appointed to the Department of Science and Technology's committee on space technology applications and to the UNESCO National Commission's committee on science and technology. She was President of the Philippine Disaster Resilience Council - a science and technology based public-private partnership aimed at the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Climate Agreement.

She sat on the senior advisory board of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Command Center and General Staff College; and was recognized for her contributions to the Philippine military's emergency disaster response operations during Typhoon Haiyan. She holds an M.A. in Govern-

ment, International Relations from Georgetown University. And she can trace back to the early 2000's her participating in a Disaster Management and Poverty Study, this avid passion for linking science-based research and data, with decision-making and policy formulation.

And yes, Toni is married to that Chito Loyzaga, who all basketball and Ginebra fans of a certain age will remember fondly. Toni and Chito have three children, two daughters, sandwiching their son, Joaquin. Joaquin was with Toni during this interview; and thanks to him, we have some personal insights on our new DENR Secretary.

He was half-joking when he said that work-life balance has never been an issue in the family, as it's always been about work; recalling how so many dinner conversations would be about climate change and resilience - to the point where they actually enforced a temporary ban on those topics cropping up during dinner. Proud, he mentioned how the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree, as the eldest has a post-graduate degree in Geography and Security, Joaquin has a post-graduate degree in urban planning, and the 'bunso' is completing her Masters in Psychology and Sociology/Media. After spending years working with the EBCDA, and then private practice, Joaquin has now joined the DENR.

Regarding the deep dives with the DENR attached agencies, Sec. Toni had to first say how impressed she was with the giving and dedicated women and men at the Department, and how technically capable they are. What she's now hoping to establish is a single lens approach to the



DENR Secretary Ma. Antonia 'Toni' Yulo-Loyzaga with son Joaquin (Noel Pabalate)



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issues - whether it be climate risk, the ecosystem of forests and coastal areas, issues pertaining to ocean and land management, and on to ownership and use of land resources. She's well aware that the real question will be which use has primacy, how to bring about development in a sustainable way, and to be always conscious of, and vigilant about, who or what is in harm's way.

We both accept that this is all easier said than done. In the doing, it's data and research that she would like to rule, so that any decisions made are informed. So we can deal with 'the plausible, and not just the possible.' Where the data, such as climate models, are constantly updated. For example, Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga offers coastal ecosystems and how so many important cities and urban centers in our country are coastal. How will the rise in sea levels impact these concentrations of our population? So many are dependent on these cities, and she points to the movement of people from Samar and Masbate to Bataan, and forming seaside communities, as a trend we should be conscious about, and plan for - how leadership has to deal with these movements.

Sec. Toni Yulo-Loyzaga is the first to say she's not an expert in mining. But pooling together the academe and the practical, she's putting a DENR advisory council together. An Australian study refers to the Philippines as presently the fifth most mineralized country in the world, so there's a lot of potential for development there; but the challenge is how to do this with the triple R mantra of Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Regeneration in place. That is the challenge.

Speaking of triple R's, it comes up again as we speak about ecosystem analysis vis-a-vis political boundaries. The DENR approach would be to consider ridge, river, reef in data gathering and understanding watershed movement and impact. But if you

chart the course of a river, it will make incursions across several LGU's (i.e. political boundaries), and the concern of one LGU may not necessarily be that of the next LGU. For Sec. Toni Yulo-Loyzaga this will be another one of the practical applications of the single lens focus that hopefully, the DENR can promote, and possibly, take the lead on. (There's a third triple R, that of Waste Management, and it's mantra of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.)

On issues where Science has to blend with politics or big business, this is where the experience she brings to the table can pay off. Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga is set on making Science inclusive, infusing it into policy-making. It's now being brought into an arena where context is everything; and primary here is using reliable, current data, understanding it, and then letting it work for us. For Sec. Toni, it's about making decisions and policy for the here and now, without losing sight of how it will impact the future, and the legacy we leave for future generations.

On the lighter side, I close by asking if she's met Toni Gonzaga and whether they've laughed about how social media mistakenly thought it was Ms. Gonzaga (and not Loyzaga) who was appointed to head the DENR. Sec. Toni was unaware of this confusion; and Joaquin starts laughing, explaining to his mother that it did trend on social media, but that thankfully, she was oblivious to this.

There's a mountain of tasks up ahead for Sec. Toni Yulo-Loyzaga; but given her track record of successfully working with both the public and private sectors, and putting them together in one table, and arriving at a consensus - we can be very assured of her conviction, capabilities, and acumen. Her success is linked with the success of the nation in forging a responsible path to development, recovery, resilience, and sustainability.



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Unified mitigation strategies to 'climate-proof' PH

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources has unified its mitigation measures to make the country climate-resilient, Malacañang said on Saturday.

"The Department of Environment and Natural Resources merges risk and climate change mitigation strategies to conform 'climate-proofing' to priority projects of the agency," Press Secretary Trixie Cruz-Angeles said in an online post.

Environment and Natural Resources Sec. Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga

recently directed the implementation of policies and programs that are based on science and evidence, Cruz-Angeles said.

She said Yulo-Loyzaga's order was to carry out "practical" climate change adaptation mechanisms to attain a more climate-resilient Philippines.

She said the DENR's priority programs that would integrate the "climate-proofing approach" include the Enhanced National Greening Program; Clean Air; Intensified Forest Protection and Anti-Illegal Logging; Geo-

Hazard Groundwater Assessment and Responsible Mining; and Manila Bay Cleanup.

The ENGP aims to rehabilitate denuded forestlands, as well as maintain and protect existing forests, while the Clean Air program is in line with the implementation of Republic Act 8749 or the Clean Air Act, which aims to achieve and maintain healthy air.

The DENR is also intensifying forest protection and the anti-illegal logging campaign to reduce the number of illegal logging hotspots.



2 major info systems will improve accounting of PH natural resources

By JEL E. SANTOS

Data sharing and accounting of the country's natural resources will be improved by two major information systems that will be established by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones said the agency requires a geospatial system to manage its readily available data, which can be useful in the implementation of government projects.

According to the DENR official, the system will aid the government's reforestation program, the use of geohazard maps, the conduct of mining operations, the monitoring of industry compliance with environmental regulations, land administration, and the

supervision of protected areas.

In addition, Leones said that the DENR anticipates that the database will improve decision-making and collaboration with other government agencies.

"If we can establish this database where all the information is already there, decision-making will be easier and we will be able to discern overlaps in our programs," he said.

"Once we're done with this, we can already collaborate with the database of other agencies."

Leones provided examples of how the database can benefit other government agencies.

"For example, the database will enable the identification of geohazard risks which can inform the planning of the Department of Education and the Department of Public Works and Highways (e.g. where schools and

roads can be constructed)."

There is a need to account for and conduct a valuation of the country's environmental and natural resources, he added.

According to Leones, DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga's top priority is to account for, and value the country's natural resources.

"If we can do that, we will be able to identify our priority initiatives with these resources."

The Philippines is one of the world's 18 mega-biodiverse countries, according to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The DENR noted that the country ranks fifth in terms of plant species and retains five percent of the world's flora.

The Philippine Statistics Authority said that the country is one of the most mineral-endowed in the world.



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DENR to establish geospatial system

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is in need to establish a geospatial system to manage its readily available data which can be useful in the implementation of government projects.

According to Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas Leones, this information system also strengthens the data sharing and accounting of the country's natural resources.

"The prime concern of our Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga is that we need to account and put value to our natural resources. If we can do that, we will be able to identify our priority initiatives with these resources," Leones said.

The Philippines as per Convention on Biological Diversity, is one of the 18 mega-biodiverse countries in the world.

It ranks fifth in the number of plant species and maintains five percent of the world's flora.

The Philippine Statistics Authority also said that the country is one of the world's most richly endowed in terms of mineral resources

On August 15, Leones emphasized the need for the agency to establish a geospatial system which he said will be helpful in the government's reforestation program and application of geohazard maps.

Joel dela Torre



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Our native trees, our heritage

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

MEMBERS of the Baguio City Council are stepping up deliberations to protect some of the city's century-old trees and other tree species that are deemed important due to their ecological, historical or cultural value as "heritage" trees.

They include rare trees or those adjacent to water source, spring or well, and whose cutting or destruction will disrupt or destroy the water source.

Known as the city of pines, Baguio City's unbridled development has led to the "massacre" of trees, including its very own pine trees. The proposed measure seeks to prevent the extinction of the city's all-important trees, the country's heritage.

Massive deforestation

WITH half of the country's total land area of 30 million hectares classified as "forest land," it is no surprise that the Philippines is rich in biological diversity.

Forest ecosystems play a key role in tackling climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and by offering natural defense against extreme weather events.

They also provide ecosystem services to the people and keep our natural resources intact.

However, massive conversion of forest lands for other purposes like agriculture, commercial, industrial and residential uses have led to deforestation.

Besides land conversion, illegal logging for timber, wood and for firewood or charcoal production, contribute to deforestation.

Destructive development projects like mining are also being blamed for deforestation.

Sadly, only half of the country's so-called forest lands are left actually forested.

Important ecological roles

THE Asean Centre for Biodiversity

(ACB) said native trees play important ecological roles to the ecosystem.

They can be important food sources of many faunal, or animal species.

"Some wild animals—such as deer, wild pigs, fruit bats, nectar bats, rodents, birds, monitor lizards and insects—are highly dependent on their leaves, fruits, flowers and nectar in order to survive," ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim told the BusinessMirror via email on August 16.

Stronger, better

UNLIKE nonnative trees, indigenous, or native trees, have evolved to adapt to local environmental conditions, along with other biological entities in that area "so they have inherent defense mechanisms against indigenous pests and diseases."

Native trees also require less water because they have evolved and withstand conditions where they naturally grow, unlike nonnative trees that can suck too much water from a particular ecosystem.

Nonnative trees can also become invasive.

"Some nonnative trees could spread quickly and prevent other native plants from growing, displacing them from their natural environment," Lim added.

Biodiversity loss

THE massive deforestation around the world is being blamed for biodiversity loss.

According to experts, about 50 to 100 species of animals are being lost each day. This leads to the extinction of animals and plants on a massive scale.

The Philippines has two important measures that seeks to prevent deforestation and biodiversity loss.

Executive Orders 23 and 26 signed by former President Benigno S. Aquino declared a moratorium on the cutting of trees in natural forests and establish the National Greening Program (NGP).

This led to the current massive tree-

planting activities that require the use of native trees as planting materials.

Private sector support

DUE to its limited resources, the government is banking on the help and support of the private sector to implement the NGP.

The Energy Development Corp. (EDC) of the Lopez Group of Companies is taking the lead in one of the country's biggest private-sector led reforestation initiatives.

Launched in 2008 as part of the EDC's commitment to protect and con-

serve the environment, not only in its areas of operations but also in other parts of the country, the Binhi Program has engaged 88 forest communities to restore forests within the company's geothermal reservations and other watersheds and protected areas.

As of 2022, EDC Binhi has planted more than 6.5 million seedlings to restore over 10,000 hectares of open and denuded areas.

Beyond traditional tree planting

"THE Binhi Program goes beyond traditional tree-planting activities.



Through the years, EDC Binhi has consistently worked with the DENR [Department of Environment and Natural Resources], local communities, and other stakeholders to ensure proper site-species matching and high survival rates, prioritize native trees and benefit local communities," said Forester Nino Gibe, EDC Watershed Management Officer.

Despite the pandemic since 2020, EDC's Binhi established 661 hectares of new Binhi plantations in Bacon-Manito (Bac-Man) geothermal power plant in the Bicol region, Negros Oriental, Ilocos Norte and Pantabangan, Gibe told the BUSINESSMIRROR via e-mail on August 1.

"EDC Binhi also completed the maintenance of 2,192 hectares of existing plantations in Bac-Man, Negros, Mount Apo and Leyte," he added.

Saving native trees

GIBE said that through EDC Binhi Program, they seek to save the country's native trees from extinction.

The program, he said, is focused on indigenous forest trees. Through its science-based approach and strong partnerships with the academe, local governments and local communities, the program has successfully updated 45 of its 96 priority tree species in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

"EDC Binhi had completed the global tree assessment for 800 Philippine endemic tree species with 794 already published in the [IUCN] Red List of threatened species, including 45 Binhi priority species, last December 2020," Gibe added.

Moreover, he said the company is ensuring that there is proper coordination among the various stakeholders involved, from the inventory of the rescued tree species to the documentation of the remaining threatened tree species.

Greening legacy

ACCORDING to EDC, the Binhi Program is a greening legacy, specifically

with the use of native tree species which are now vanishing.

"There is no or only a limited [number of] organizations which advocates for the use of our very own Philippine native trees. It's only ideal and practical to invest in the Binhi Program since those native trees are typhoon resilient, highly valuable and economically important species and promote local biodiversity," he said.

Based on the study of the Botanic Gardens Conservation International, about 47 percent of the Philippine native tree species are threatened to extinction due to urbanization development and habitat loss due to agriculture.

Supporting institutional initiatives

GREGG YAN, founder of the Best Alternatives Campaign, told the BusinessMirror that the best way to help reforest denuded tracts of the country is to support institutional initiatives which have proven that they actually have the capacity to plant and take care of trees.

"As much as possible, planted trees should be native to the country and even to the particular areas where they will be planted, though fruit-bearing trees are sometimes acceptable to give people practical incentives to take care of the planted trees over the coming decades," Yan said via Messenger on August 15.

"Proven large-scale initiatives include GForest and the initiatives of the [EDC]," he added.

"But we need not look so far to find places for our native trees. Just look at your backyard and imagine how beautiful it will be with full-grown trees which hail from our beloved country. Not only will native trees provide us with food and shade: they shall attract birds, bees, butterflies and other forms of life which colored our neighborhoods before nature was overtaken by development," Yan said.



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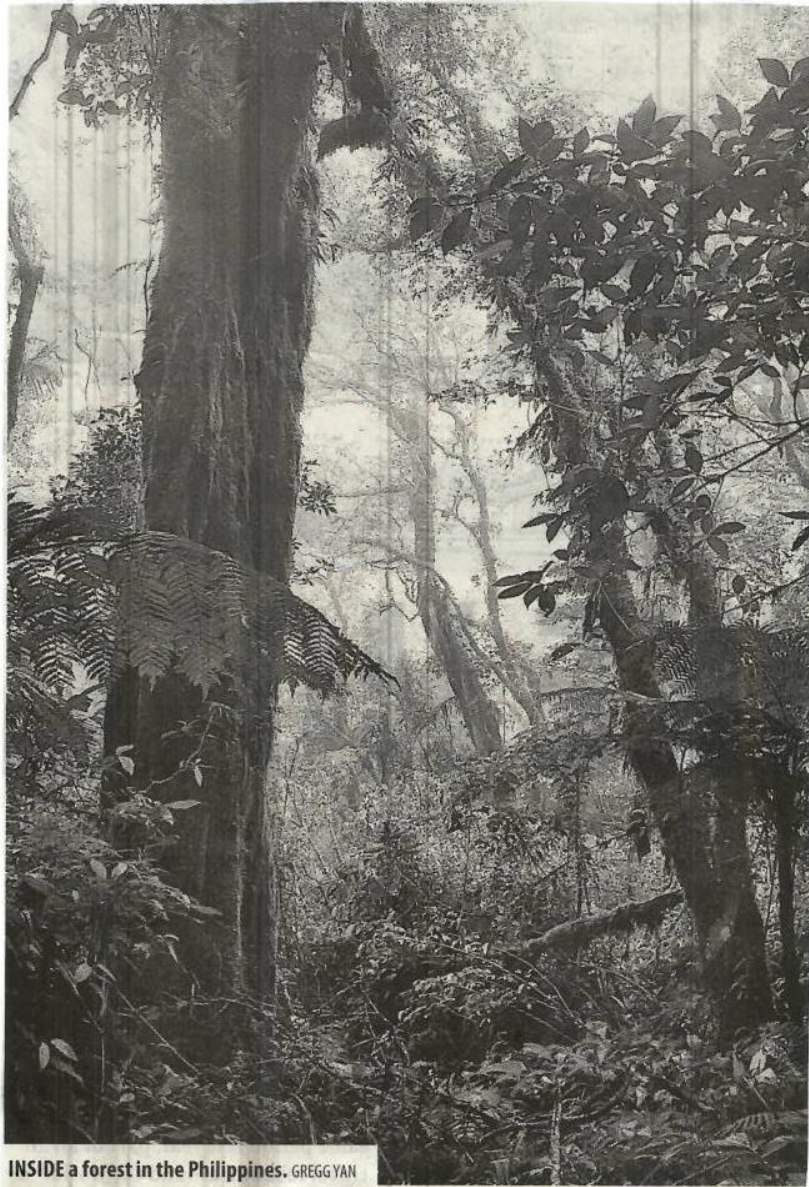
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INSIDE a forest in the Philippines. GREGG YAN



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House panel pledges okay this month of Marcos priority bills **By Jester Manalastas**

THE House Committee on Ways and Means vowed to pass this month some priority legislative measure of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.

Among them, according to committee chair Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, are the Ease of Paying Taxes; Single use Plastic Tax; Value Added Tax on foreign digital service providers and others.

"We will try to finish all PBBM's and DOF's priority bills this month. Hopefully, by next week, the House tax panel is done with everything, so we can proceed with our own tax measures as well as the administrative and oversight matters," Salceda said.

The Ease of Paying Taxes Act will reduce documentary requirements, allow taxpayers to file their returns in any revenue district office, and remove the annual taxpayer registration fee. It will also institute a taxpayer bill of rights and designate a taxpayer advocate office.

"The bill aims to simplify tax filing and payment, and address burdensome tax compliance which affects our small and medium enterprises and turns off our investors. We hope that this could reduce the tax gap, estimated to be P909 billion in 2018," Salceda said of the Ease of Paying Taxes Act.

"The EOPT seeks to segment taxpayers, to simplify the

forms and requirements for small taxpayers; allow filing and paying of taxes to be portable; harmonize the documentation for substantiating VAT credits; and institutionalize a Taxpayer's Bill of Rights," he added.

The House tax panel also approved the VAT on nonresident digital service providers. The measure seeks to level the playing field between traditional and digital businesses by clarifying the imposition of value-added tax (VAT) on DSPs.

"The measure also aims to strengthen tax compliance through simplified invoicing and registration requirements for VAT-registered nonresident

DSPs. It follows House Bill No. 7425, which was approved on Third and Final reading in the 18th Congress, under the authorship and sponsorship of Rep. Sharon S. Garin and this representation," Salceda said. The panel also approved the P20-excise tax per kilogram of single-use plastics.

The measure "seeks to impose an excise tax of Twenty Pesos (P20.00) for every kilogram of plastic bag removed from the place of production or released from the custody of the Bureau of Customs. The allocation of the proceeds, which is estimated at P1 billion per year, will be used for the implementation of the solid waste management."



Maintain engagement to enhance sea ties

BY LADE KABAGANI

Cooperation and a strong relationship must exist between the Philippines and China in terms of pushing sustainable maritime management for the fishery sector.

In a media forum on Saturday afternoon, experts said both countries must consider developing mechanisms for the marine environment, fishery management and maritime security.

Dr. Ming Junchao, a research fellow of the Chinese Academy of Fishery and Sciences, said there is a need for both countries to agree on cooperation mechanisms "that will promote" the fishery sector.

The Philippines-China BCM was created in 2016 following the state visit of former President Rodrigo Duterte to China.

While the prevailing impact of the pandemic was one of the reasons for the slow progress of maritime talks between China and the Philippines, Jungchao believed that resistance to the pursuit of bilateral cooperation, specific on marine and maritime industry should speed up the negotiation process.

Meanwhile, Dr. Yan Yan, director of the Research Center of Ocean Law and Policy in the National Institute for South China Sea, has expressed high hopes that China and the Philippines will continue strengthening and enhancing their Bilateral Consultation Mechanism.

The Philippines-China BCM was created in 2016 following the state visit of former President Rodrigo Duterte to China, and serves as a venue for both countries to keep regular dialogues in pursuit of stable development of their bilateral relations on specific concerns.

Yan noted that by improving the BCM, it is possible to set up systematic mechanisms for the marine environment, fishery management, and maritime security between both countries.

"I personally think that the Chinese Foreign Ministry has wanted to continue this mechanism at the government-level (taking) an umbrella mechanism that can hold the working meetings and committees that can pave the way for future bilateral maritime cooperation," Yan said.

The two countries have previously discussed ways to expand exchanges on maritime search and rescue and joint development.

"I think that maybe the new president, may need some time to consider how to arrange the future BCMS but I personally have confidence in the new government to continue the mechanism," she added.

Better ways to keep on track

Professor Bobby Tuazon, a public policy expert at the Center for People Empowerment in Governance, said greater cooperation between the Philippines and China on the fishery sector and marine environment requires strengthening people-to-people exchanges rather than relying on state-to-state relations.

"Because these are permanent and they last longer," Tuazon said referring to the case of the government's succession "from one president to the next and one policy to another."

"We can unite and agree on how to consolidate our cooperation to push forward policy proposals and press the government to act," he added.

Tuazon, expressing disappointment at the government's slow actions, said the vibrant number of civil society organizations in the Philippines can help the government to do its job.

He said more than 50,000 non-government organizations nationwide can rescue the government's failed responsibilities.

"It is quite frustrating but you know actions start in some realities. It is when we realize the truth of internal political conditions in the Philippines that we will be able to plan something and do something," he added.



Reconciliation between humanity, nature

My generation was very stupid. My generation declared war on nature – with climate change, with the loss of biodiversity, with pollution. Nature is striking back. Striking back with storms, with desertification with floods, with disasters that are making life very difficult for many people around the world and causing many victims.

Your generation has an important task to make peace with nature. And what we are going to do today must be a gesture of that new attitude to make peace with nature.

I want to tell you my story with trees.

My grandfather, maternal grandfather's family



SECRETARY
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UNITED NATIONS
ANTONIO GUTERRES

I'm happy
that I have a
sister olive
tree that
will be there
much longer
after I die.

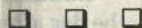
name was Oliveira. In Portuguese it means "olive tree." I inherited that family name. I'm called Oliveira Guterres, my two family names. And one day, my grandfather came with me to a small field and showed me a small olive tree. I was a boy – a small boy – and he told me, "I planted this olive tree the day you were born, and I want you for all your life to respect trees and remember that you have a sister tree. This tree should be a symbol of your own life."

I must say, I was very happy to know this because in my country, we have olive trees with more than 1,000 years, so I don't intend to live a

thousand years. But I'm happy that I have a sister olive tree that will be there much longer after I die.

So, one billion trees in Mongolia will make an enormous difference in relation to climate change, in relation to biodiversity, in relation to desertification. It will be the symbol of reconciliation between humanity and nature, because only with harmony between humanity and nature there will be a future for this planet.

Your
generation
has an
important
task to make
peace with
nature.



United Nations Secretary-General
Antonio Guterres' remarks at the One
Billion Tree campaign planting event
in Mongolia.