



November 11, 2015

**HON. JANETTE P. LORETO GARIN, MD, MBA-H**

Secretary of Health  
Republic of the Philippines

Dear **Secretary Garin**:

We are representatives from various health sector organizations in the Philippines deeply concerned with the state of our global climate and its impacts on the health of Filipinos.

**We write to you today to call the attention of the Department of Health to the continued expansion of the use of coal for energy generation in the Philippines, which will have grave impacts on both climate and human health.** As of May 2015, the Philippines has 17 operating coal plants (30 units), and 29 more (59 units) have already been approved for construction until 2020.

It is already established in scientific literature, particularly in the reports of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that coal and other fossil fuels are the leading drivers of anthropogenic climate change. The British medical journal *The Lancet* already declared in 2009 that **climate change is “the biggest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”** Being ranked first among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world by the Climate Risk Index in 2015, the Philippines is already experiencing both the obvious and subtle health effects of climate change, from morbidity and mortality due to natural disasters to changing patterns of spread of infectious diseases, among others.

Because the health sector will bear the brunt of climate change, it is therefore our utmost responsibility to not just treat the symptoms but also to address the “causes of the causes,” one of which is our addiction to coal. Health should be considered in energy and climate policy, and while the Climate Change Act of 2009, the National Framework Strategy on Climate Change 2010-2022, and the DOH Administrative Order No. 005 S. 2012 all recognize the importance of health in climate adaptation, it is vital to also articulate the public health case for climate mitigation, particularly the much-needed energy transformation.

Last June, *The Lancet* again concluded that **“tackling climate change could also be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”** It specifically called for the **“rapid phase out of coal from the global energy mix,”** which will not only mitigate climate change but also result in a wide range of public health co-benefits such as reduction in cardiovascular and respiratory diseases brought about by air pollution. This is also echoed in the 2015 Kolkata Call to Action of the World Federation of Public Health Associations, which

advocated for “**a rapid phase out of coal for electricity production and greater investment in renewable energy technologies as a significant investment in global health and healthy communities.**” These calls from the global health community are indeed timely and relevant, with the passing of a resolution on air pollution and health at the 68<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly last May, and now that the world’s governments are preparing for a new climate treaty that will be defined during the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of Parties (COP 21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to be held this December in Paris.

Because of this planetary and public health crisis, we humbly ask the Department of Health to:

- Make a clear statement calling for the **phase out of coal and transition to renewable energy in the Philippines** coming from a public health perspective;
- Actively and meaningfully **engage with other agencies** such as the Climate Change Commission (CCC), Department of Energy (DOE), and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in order to highlight the public health arguments for climate mitigation and energy transformation, in accordance with the “Health in All Policies” approach promoted by the WHO;
- Generate **local evidence on the health impacts of coal** especially to communities hosting coal-fired power plants, because such evidence is essential for influencing energy policy;
- Estimate the **health costs of coal** as well as the **benefits of renewable energy** (ex. in terms of lives saved, diseases averted, PhilHealth savings, etc.) which will also be useful in further strengthening our Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) for reducing greenhouse gases submitted by the CCC to the UNFCCC last October 1, 2015, and;
- Institutionalize the conduct of **health impact assessments (HIA)**, alongside environmental impact assessments (EIA) required by DENR, as part of the process for the approval of future energy projects.

This year, Health Care Without Harm-Asia, the convener of this network, launched the **Healthy Energy Initiative**, which seeks to mobilize the health sector to play a central role in advocating for a move away from fossil fuel-based power generation—particularly coal—and toward clean, renewable healthy energy alternatives. As a result, we have forged a broad coalition of health sector organizations, all advocating for climate action and healthy energy. Recommendations laid out in this letter emerged from several roundtable discussions attended by health sector leaders, including DOH Undersecretary Vicente Belizario, Assistant Secretary Paulyn Jean Rosell-Ubial and Dr. Cecile Magturo of the Climate Change Unit.

Attached with this letter is the **Paris Platform for Healthy Energy**, which represents the views of health sector organizations and leaders from around the world committed to a transition to clean, renewable, healthy energy in order to protect public health, and which we therefore endorse.

Each time our health is affected by climate-related disasters, the world lends a helping hand to help us recover and rebuild anew. Now, it is time for the Philippine health sector, with the leadership of the Department of Health, to actively advocate for the phase out of coal and the transition to healthy renewable energy – for the protection of the global climate and the Filipinos’ health.

We look forward to your soonest action and response. Thank you very much.

For a healthy Filipino people and healthy planet,

**CONG. LEAH PAQUIZ**

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Hon. Paulyn Jean B. Rosell-Ubial, MD, MPH, Assistant Secretary of Health  
Dr. Irma L. Asuncion, Director, Disease Prevention and Control Bureau  
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