

Welcome Remarks

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Good morning everyone!

First of all, on behalf of my organization, the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development, and the rest of the organizers of this Symposium, we would like to extend our appreciation and thanks, despite the relatively short notice, for attending this event and sharing your thoughts and opinions on many burning issues in the power sector in the country.

We are very grateful to be having the presence of our good Senator, Senator Loren Legarda, the vibrant undersecretary of the Department of Energy, Usec. Fuentebella, steamed leaders of the renewable energy industry, specifically in the solar companies who are here in this symposium, our speakers from the academe that despite their busy schedules. Of course, our colleagues who have come from different parts of the country – our brave LGUs who have heeded the call of their respective constituencies and have shown the way - thank you Mayor Luansing of Ozamis City and the representatives of other LGUs who are here. And last but not the least representatives of coal-affected communities who have travelled far just to be here in this Symposium – shout out to our colleagues from Mindanao, homeowners association representatives, sectoral organizations, the Catholic Church (thank you Fr. Edu Gariguez for joining us), and other CSO groups – magandang umaga po!

It was four years ago, when we first convened a broad gathering of groups and stakeholders in the power sector specifically the coal-affected communities from across the country, electric cooperatives, the academe, national organizations, and NGOs in Davao City, the Mayor then was now President Rodrigo Duterte. This gave birth to the Power for People Coalition, the broadest national formation working on the power sector with three major undertakings:

1. Confront the looming massive expansion of coal projects across the country – then it was only 15 coal plant projects with around 8GW capacity.
2. Transform the power sector that will be responsive to climate change;
3. Contribute significantly in addressing the long-standing problem of energy poverty and high prices of electricity in the country;

Back then, it was only the FIT mechanism that has been in place, among many other mechanisms under the Renewable Energy law.

Haiyan already happened and there was global and national impetus for clearer and urgent climate actions – including in the power sector.

Today, four years have past and many things have transpired.

1. We have the Paris Agreement in 2015 and ratified it last year, despite the many challenges faced. Much effort was put here from all walks of life, exerted to be able to achieve this, but

I'd like to personally convey to the efforts of our good Senator, Sen. Loren for leading the charge.

2. Opposition to more coal plants are everywhere. We can say that under the Power for People Coalition, all coal projects are being opposed by citizens and host communities across the country. But it is no longer only the people of host communities opposing, there are now 8 LGUs, who have come up with their respective decisions through resolutions and ordinances disallowing coal in their respective localities. Let us commend the LGU representatives who are here led by the City of Ozamis with their good Mayor, Hon. Girlet Luansing.
3. The Filipino people have managed to stop and delay more than 6GW of coal plants, including the delay of the 3.5GW of coal from 7 projects being questioned by consumers from the Greater Manila Area in the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC). Of course, there were some that got built still. But one thing is for sure, opposition to expensive and dirty energy is prevalent across the country.
4. Because of these delays and stoppage, along with legal actions, push from policy makers and renewable industry, as well as the push from enlightened officials in the power sector, we are now witnessing the lowest rate/price of RE since the inception of the law. P3.5/KWh for wind and P2.99/KWh for solar – coal is way higher compared to this.
5. More RE mechanisms are being implemented and will soon be implemented – Net Metering, Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard, Green Energy Options, and at last the competitive selective process (CSP) guidelines.
6. Divestment from coal and fossil fuels international have affected the coal industry – with the Norwegian pension Fund divesting away from the likes of DMCI/SMC and Aboitiz due to their coal projects, First Gen divesting from coal in 2015, and now AC Energy announcing that they will be selling more than USD1 Billion of their coal assets and will go 50-50 in their power portfolio by 2025. More banks now have RE portfolios – I would like to commend that likes of BDO who are here for pursuing their RE bank facilities. I just hope that their RE investments outstrip their coal investments in the coming years.

One can say that we are in a better position today – with new RE being more competitive. I can only remember when cellphones were sold everywhere and was already a major threat to landline phones in the 90s.

But the challenges remain, evolved, as finer points of contention from four years ago.

1. More coal plants still being pushed by other corporations and supporters.
2. Climate change is still very much a big problem – look at Japan. We will be commemorating the 5th year of Haiyan disaster. Are we more prepared?
7. Millions of Filipino are still without electricity access and tens of millions more bearing the brunt of ever increasing electricity prices. Meralco just announced last week the additional

P0.31/KWh increase in electricity rates due to production cost which is mainly due to fossil fuel plants, specifically coal.

Thus, that is why we are here today.

In this whole day, as we celebrate the 10 year of the Renewable Energy Law, we will try to attempt to start the discussion and discourse on critical issues faced by many stakeholders in the power sector – government, industry, CSOs, NGO, consumer groups, electric cooperatives, academic groups, faith groups and many others.

And let this Symposium be the start of a far more collaborative initiative from diverse stakeholders in the power sector in the country.

Lastly, we hope that we will have a very fruitful discussion..

..,and that at the end of the day we are all in one in pushing forward for a clean, affordable and safe energy in the country, for our homes, the people, environment and the climate.

Thank you very much.