

# Confront environmental crisis, says GMA

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo called for a "committed individual response" from Filipinos to help confront the "crisis in the environment."

Mrs. Arroyo said climate change is "as critical, if not even more critical, as the need to solve the global financial crisis."

"In spite of all the efforts of government, there is still a need to ensure that every citizen should contribute in reducing carbon emissions," she said in a statement ahead of the global Earth Day celebration tomorrow.

The President is chair of the Presidential Task Force on Climate Change (PTCC).

Presidential Adviser on Global Warming and Climate Change Heherson Alvarez said Mrs. Arroyo is spearheading a week-long Earth Day celebration with the theme "Earth Survival: Climate Change Solutions."

"This year's theme reflects our earnest efforts to be part of the global movement in pushing for the reduction of carbon emissions to mitigate climate change," she said.

She will lead a special Ecology Mass on April 24 at 10 a.m. at the NBN-4 studio in Quezon City, followed by the awarding ceremonies for the Fr. Neri Satur Awards for Environment Heroism.

In Baguio City, environmentalists leading the observance of World Earth Day tomorrow are urging the government to halt destructive projects in the country.

Citing that the Philippines still remains as "the hottest of ecological hotspots being one of the countries which have the most devastated environment," Kalikas-

an PNE said the archipelago has one of the fastest biodiversity loss in the world that remains unchecked.

To qualify as an ecological hotspot, a region must meet two strict criteria: it must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular plants as endemics, and has lost at least 70 percent of its original habitat.

Clemente Bautista, national coordinator of Kalikasan PNE, said more than 50 percent of our biodiversity is endemic to the country and the country has lost more than 93 percent of its original habitat.

Environmental groups claim that based on records, legal commercial logging by foreign and local companies primarily caused the deforestation in the country while commercial mining projects are one of the major threats in environmentally critical areas such as watersheds and forests.

Even the Ecological Waste Coalition (EcoWaste) lamented the operation of dumpsites near environmentally-critical areas, which it said has been permitted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which is supposed to encourage the protection and preservation of the ecosystem.

Members of EcoWaste donned black veils and gathered in front of the DENR office along Visayas Avenue "to mourn" the failure of the government to curb threats to water safety.

Meantime, Sen. Loren Legarda pushed for the need for all countries to address the impact of disasters by reducing risks caused by climate changes around the world.

- With Artemio Dumlaog, Katherine Adraneda, Christina Mendez