

PR: Legarda: Ensure implementation of Clean Air Act, new WHO air pollution standards – 23 September 2021
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Loren Legarda <information@lorenlegarda.com.ph>
 Bcc: bulacan@deped.gov.ph

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OFFICE OF HON. LOREN LEGARDA
 Representative, Lone District of Antique
www.lorenlegarda.com.ph

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 Pls. Refer to: Kristine Sheree Mangunay
 0917-843-1934

Legarda: Ensure implementation of Clean Air Act, new WHO air pollution standards

MANILA, 23 September 2021 – Three-term Senator and Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda welcomed the World Health Organization's (WHO) release yesterday of new outdoor air pollution standards and called for a stronger implementation of the Philippine Clean Air Act (Republic Act No. 8749), which she authored and helped enact into law over two decades ago.

Legarda said air pollution "is a global and national public health concern to which has been attributed millions of premature deaths around the world." Millions more people today are exposed to higher levels of pollution from a growing number of pollution sources. The Philippines is ranked 70 in IQAir's 2020 list of world's most polluted countries.

"Air pollution is literally a question of life and death, with serious impacts on cardiovascular and respiratory health. Our pandemic-defined setting and the aerosols-borne reality of the Delta variant should remind us today to pay far greater attention to this issue," said Legarda, representative of the lone district of Antique.

Legarda said implementation of the law continues to be a major challenge. "The country's ambient air quality standards for harmful pollutants such as sulfur dioxide (SO_x), nitrous oxide (NO₂), and particulate matter (PM₁₀) have not been updated since the implementation of the Clean Air Act way back in 1999. This is certainly unacceptable. The current standards for these pollutants are still based on the values set in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Clean Air Act, all of which fail to meet the 2005 WHO guidelines, much less the upcoming 2021 issuance."

"I call on the joint oversight committee on the Clean Air Act to work with think tanks and other expert groups on a comparative study to show if the country is on track or not to beat air pollution and discover what else needs to be done," she added.

Legarda challenged the public to demand that their officials decisively improve the lot of Filipino households struggling with poor health, unstable livelihoods, and an increasingly uncertain future.

"This must be a wakeup call to the executive and to all seeking elective posts next year. It's a harsh reminder that we are still very far from finishing the job in terms of securing a healthier future for all. We must consider our actions today as legacy acts, because however acute the ecological and social crisis is that we are confronting together at present, the opportunity to leave behind the polluting, destructive, and inequitable past is growing just as fast. We must be on the right side of history," she said.

"We need inspirational leadership, we need decisiveness, but more than mere macho boldness, we need caring leadership that sees the high value of establishing resilience at the heart of the country's climate and pandemic action agenda," Legarda added.

From smog hanging over cities to smoke inside the home, air pollution poses a major threat to health and climate. The combined effects of ambient (outdoor) and household air pollution cause about seven million premature deaths every year, largely as a result of increased mortality from stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and acute respiratory infections.

WHO estimated that 4.2 million premature deaths occurred worldwide in 2016 as a result of outdoor air pollution, 915 of which were in low- and middle-income regions, while 3.8 million premature deaths occurred in the same year that it attributed to household air pollution, or indoor smoke due to dirty cookstoves and fuels.###

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ZENIA G. MOSTOLES, Ed.D., CESO V
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