

DATE :

14 MAY 2019

DAY :

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IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1800

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



PAGE



UPPER
LOWER



PAGE 1
STORY



BANNER
STORY



EDITORIAL



CARTOON

14 MAY 2019

DATE

Nations agree to regulate exports of plastic wastes

SOME 180 nations around the world agreed last Friday to regulate the export of plastic wastes in a new United Nations accord. Some 1,400 representatives approved the agreement after 12 days of discussion in Geneva, Switzerland. With the new agreement, developing nations may now refuse plastic waste dumping, Executive Secretary Rolph Payet of the UN Environmental Program said.

“For far too long, developed countries like the United States and Canada have been exporting their mixed toxic plastic wastes to developing Asian countries, claiming it would be recycled in the receiving country. Much of this contaminated mixed waste cannot be recycled and is instead dumped or burned or finds its way into the ocean,” IPEN science advisor Sara Brosche said. IPEN is a global network committed to achieving a toxic-free future where chemical production, use, and disposal does not harm people and the environment.

The new UN accord comes at a time when the Philippines and Canada are in the middle of a garbage dispute that has been raging since 2013. From that year up to 2015, some 69 shipping containers of household trash, including kitchen scraps and baby diapers, came from Canada labeled as plastic scraps for recycling.

In 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau cited legal problems in the way of a settlement of the problem. By 2017, however, Prime Minister Trudeau had softened, saying

it was “theoretically possible for Canada to do something.” Under pressure from President Duterte, the Canadian government finally agreed to take back the trash by May 15.

The Philippines has also been at the center of the world plastics problem. In 2015, scientists estimated that 275 million metric tons of plastics had been dumped in the world’s oceans, with China as the leading dumping country, followed by Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. Increasing numbers of whales and other sea animals have been found dead on many beaches, their stomachs full of plastics.

The problem with plastics is that most are not biodegradable. They do not decay like wood, paper, cloth, or leather. Thus they could last up to 450 years, filling up landfills, floating in vast masses in oceans and lakes, and consumed by whales and other sea animals in search of food. Of special concern are so-called single-use plastics, such as soft drinks straws and stirrers, bottles, bags, packaging for medicine, etc.

The Geneva agreement last Friday is only the first step, according to those who have long been concerned with the problem of plastic wastes. It only included plastics in an established agreement against hazardous exports, the Basel Convention of 1989.

Eventually, according to IPEN, a comprehensive treaty will have to be drawn up and agreed upon to tackle the global problem of plastics, whether in local use or in exports.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Strategic Communication Initiatives Service

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

6
PAGE

UPPER
LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

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TITLE: _____

PAGE 1/ _____

DATE _____

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EDITORIAL

Nagkasundo ang mga bansa na kontrolin ang pagluluwas ng mga basurang plastik

NASA 180 bansa sa mundo ang nagkasundo-sundo nitong Biyernes na kokontrolin ang pagluluwas ng mga basurang plastic sa isang bagong kasunduan sa United Nations. May 1,400 kinatawan ang nag-apruba sa kasunduan matapos ang 12 araw ng talakayan sa Geneva, Switzerland. Dahil sa bagong kasunduan, maaari na ngayong tanggihan ng mahihirap na bansa ang pagtatapon ng mga basurang plastic, ayon kay UN Environmental Program Secretary Rolph Payet.

"Far too long, developed countries like the United States and Canada have been exporting their mixed toxic plastic wastes to developing Asian countries, claiming it would be recycled in the receiving country. Much of this contaminated mixed waste cannot be recycled and instead dumped or burned or finds its way into the ocean," sabi ni Sara Brosche, science advisor ng IPEN. Ang IPEN ay isang pandaigdigang institusyon na nagpupursige para sa isang mundong toxic-free kung saan ang produksiyon, paggamit, at pagtatapon ng kemikal ay hindi nakapeperhuwisyo sa sangkatauhan at sa kalikasan.

Nilagdaan ang bagong kasunduan sa UN sa panahon na ang Pilipinas at Canada ay nasa kalagitnaan ng alitan sa basura, na nagsimula noon pang 2013. Simula sa taong iyon hanggang 2015, may 69 na shipping containers ng mga basura mula sa kabahayan, kabilang ang mga nagmula sa kusina at mga diaper ng sanggol, ay nanggaling sa Canada, at tinukoy bilang mga basurang plastik na maaaring i-recycle.

Noong 2015, tinukoy ni Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ang mga problemang legal sa paraan ng pagresolba sa problema. Gayunman, pagsapit ng 2017, nagbago ng isip ni Prime Minister Trudeau at sinabing "theoretically possible for Canada to do something". Dahil sa matinding pressure ni Pangulong Duterte, kalaunan ay pumayag na ang gobyerno ng Canada na bawiin ang mga basura sa Mayo 15.

Ang Pilipinas ay dati na ring napagitna sa pandaigdigang suliranin sa basura. Noong 2015, tinaya ng mga siyentista na 275 metriko tonelada ng plastik ang itinambak sa mga karagatan sa mundo, at China ang nangunguna sa pagtatapon ng basura sa karagatan, kasunod ang Indonesia, Pilipinas, Vietnam, at Sri Lanka. Patuloy namang nadadagdagan ang mga balyena at iba pang nilalang sa dagat na natatagpuang patay sa maraming baybayin, at nadidiskubring ang kanilang mga tiyan ay puno ng plastic.

Ang problema sa mga plastic, karamihan sa mga ito ay hindi biodegradable, o hindi nabubulok. Hindi nabubulok o naglalaho ang mga ito tulad ng kahoy, papel, tela, o leather. Kaya naman nananatili ang mga ito nang hanggang 450 taon, tumatambak sa mga landfill, samasamang lumulutang sa mga dagat at lawa, at nakakain ng mga balyena at iba pang nilalang sa tubig na naghahanap ng makakain. Partikular na nakaalarma ang mga plastik na isang gamitan lang, gaya ng mga softdrinks straws at stirrer, bote, bag, packaging ng gamot, at iba pa.

Ang kasunduan sa Geneva na nilagdaan nitong Biyernes ay unang hakbang pa lang, ayon sa matatagal nang nagresolba sa problema ng basura sa plastic. Saklaw lang nito ang mga plastik na tinukoy sa naunang kasunduan laban sa mga mapanganib na exports, ang Basel Convention of 1989.

Sa hinaharap, ayon sa IPEN, kailangang buuin at pagkasunduan ang isang komprehensibong tratado upang matalakay ang pandaigdigang problema sa plastik, sa lokal man na paggamit o sa pag-e-export ng mga ito.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES SERVICE

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MERRY-GO-ROUND

Winning mayor should clean up the once Pearl of the Orient



By **FLORO L. MERCENE**

BY the time this column appears, Manilaños would already have an idea who would be elected mayor of Manila.

A pre-election survey conducted by the Filipino-Chinese Independent Business Coalition (FCIBC), the same firm that predicted Erap would win by a slim margin over Alfredo Lim in 2016, had the two-time mayor and his running mate, former representative Amado Bagatsing, winning over their rivals.

Whoever will make it to head Manila, their new mandate requires them to heed the call of practically every right thinking Filipino to clean-up the once Pearl of the Orient.

Maybe all MM mayors have adopted the formula of former Pasay City mayor Pablo Cuneta of taking care of all informal settlers in their domain, which made him Pasay City chief executive for 40 years, and Erap is no exception.

It is from this group that the mayors depend instant support, such as participating in rallies, massing in large numbers or going to the polls. This support is seldom or not expected from the residents of gated subdivisions.

During elections, informal settlers could be counted to go out in large volume to vote for the mayor who allowed them to live under bridges, or wherever there is available space, and also to engage in small business to survive.

However, this soft-globe treatments seems to have emboldened them to the point that now, it becomes increasingly difficult to relocate them.

The case in point is the estimated 40,000 informal settlers identified by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). They are said to be the main source of garbage and wastewater that pollute the Bay, along with industrial sources.

A fresh mandate should give Erap – or whoever is favored by the voters – the opportunity to clean up our beloved city before it is too late.



Trusted Since 1938

The Manila Times

B1
PAGE

UPPER
LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BRIEF
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

14 MAY 2019

DATE

Plastic is suddenly in vogue

PLASTIC suddenly seems to be in fashion.

Last week – coincidentally just a few days after the Philippines announced it had come to terms with Canada for the return of several dozen containers of smuggled trash sent from the latter more than five years ago – most forms of plastic and mixed plastic waste were added to the Basel Convention, meaning that their trade can be restricted by receiving countries.

The new pact, which was signed by 187 countries, applies the restrictions to every form of plastic and mixed waste except



ROUGH
TRADE

**BEN
KRITZ**

for polypropylene, polyethylene, and polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which are the easiest kinds of plastic to recycle.

The US, the world's biggest producer and consumer of plastic, is not a signatory to the Basel Convention, which has made it the target of bitter and probably well-deserved criticism. However,

► **Kritz B3**

than once), but the current intense interest in reducing the risk of the planet choking to death on plastic waste may provide an opportunity for the Philippines. Developing a large-scale recycling and reprocessing industry is already a necessity for dealing with the amount of waste generated domestically, and it would not be too far a leap beyond that to create an industry that would be a sustainable export destination. Processing recyclable plastics, e-waste, and even low-value refuse suitable only for use in waste-to-energy systems can all be done with current technology without posing grave risks to the environment, and at a profit. With the new restrictions that are being imposed by other countries, a virtually limitless supply of raw materials is assured.

In order for the opportunity to bear fruit, however, the country needs to move past the "not in my backyard" mentality that dictates much of its approach to environ-

mental policy. While that is not always a bad perspective, it stymies development that would produce better results. For instance, the blanket prohibition against waste incinerators is preventing the development of controlled incineration and waste-to-energy options. That might be tolerable, if the ban was not completely mocked by the virtual non-enforcement of the Clean Air Act and the blind eye turned to the open burning of trash. Likewise, resistance to the development and expansion of landfills – which is obviously not a desirable option, but is still better than doing nothing – encourages open dumping.

The Philippines has often presented itself as the victim of the rest of the world's bad habits, but the new global focus on plastic pollution is at least a partial response to the country's lament. A more proactive approach than "victimhood" is now called for.

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■ KRITZ FROM B1

Plastic is suddenly in vogue

it will still be obliged to abide by it as its exports of plastic waste can be refused by destination countries.

The US has been exporting most of its plastic waste to China and Malaysia, but both of those countries have already initiated bans on waste imports. Other countries in South and Southeast Asia are following suit; Thailand and Vietnam have recently begun to crack down on waste imports, Indonesia is reportedly considering it, and the Philippines is being urged to do so by various environmental advocates.

Even though the Basel Convention does not actually confer any new authority to control waste imports for any of its signatories, it is a worthwhile symbolic measure. It stigmatizes excessive reliance on plastics as well as waste exports. From a practical point of view, it

will force countries to apply greater effort toward developing better waste management within their own borders.

That, however, will present serious problems for countries like the Philippines for two different reasons. This country has an enormous appetite for plastics, and thanks to geography, is among the top five sources of plastic pollution in the oceans. Solid waste management and recycling services are woefully inadequate, but the extent of the industry as it creates a large number of informal livelihoods. Reducing plastic use to a degree that has a noticeable impact on the amount of waste the country generates will require lifestyle changes that are probably beyond the grasp of most of the population. And developing environmentally sustainable

waste management and recycling infrastructure will eliminate tens of thousands of lower-class jobs.

If the Philippines follows the lead of neighboring countries and bans waste imports, which seems likely, it will prevent repeats of problems like Canada's wayward trash, or other smuggled shipments of waste that have turned up in other ports across the country, but it will still leave a huge domestic waste management challenge. And it is not necessarily one that the Philippines can solve at its leisure; with global attention focused on the issue of plastic waste, the country's dubious reputation as a large-scale ocean polluter is going to become more than an embarrassment.

The idea has already been raised by more than one commentator (and by this one more



One million species will disappear—if we let them

By The Editors

Bloomberg Opinion

WHEN the findings of a landmark UN report on biodiversity came out last week, the headlines ran the gamut from depressing to apocalyptic. One million species face extinction, readers were told. Almost a third of the world's reef-forming coral species, more than a third of its marine mammals and 40 percent of its amphibian species could die out. And that's just the number of species. Some 70 percent of all coral reefs could be affected

by mass bleaching induced by climate change—in a scenario that isn't even the worst case. These grim findings were all important and worthy of attention, of course. But amid the gloom, a major point of the report went largely unnoticed: It doesn't have to be this way.

Take agriculture, for example. Current farming practices have caused land degradation and species decline which, in turn, threaten the crops themselves. Problems with bees and other pollinators alone put roughly \$600 billion in global crop output at risk, the report notes. Cultivating just a few varieties of crops and animals in mass

quantities has led to a decline in genetic diversity which, in turn, makes crops more vulnerable to disease and climate change. If nothing changes, more species will disappear—and a lot more people could be going hungry. And yet, the same report offered a host of ideas to keep this from becoming reality. Farmers can grow a wider array of crops, adopt practices that enhance soil quality and change how they deal with pests. Shoppers can support local farms, cut back on meat and eat healthier diets. Regulators can support food-labeling efforts; industry and non-government organizations can promote

sustainability certification schemes. And developed countries can take a hard look at the \$100 billion in agricultural subsidies they hand out each year.

Or consider the oceans. Overfishing and pollution are rife, the report says. If current trends hold, the total mass of fish in the sea could fall by as much as 25 percent by midcentury, endangering a major source of protein for the developing world. Marine animals already have enough problems: Plastic pollution in the ocean has risen 40 percent since 1980, affecting more than two-thirds of all sea turtles and nearly half of marine birds.