

Philippines: 'Mindanao power crisis not yet over'

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DAVAO CITY - Around 150 delegates from different local consumer groups as well as electric cooperatives and local government units gathered here Friday and vowed to actively pursue people's solutions to the power crisis that has stricken Mindanao through vigorous advocacy and direct people's actions.

Dubbed "Mindanao Consumer Summit: Mindanaoans' Response to the Power Crisis," the event was spearheaded by the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), with support from PALAG-Mindanao, People's Action against Corruption, Tropical Institute of Climate Studies and Ateneo de Davao University Center for Renewable Energy and Alternative Technologies. The gathering took place on the day Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Jose Rene Almendras issued an announcement of the end to brownouts in Mindanao after the completion of repairs on the Pulangi hydroelectric plant.

"The power crisis in Mindanao is far from over," said acting FDC president Manjette Lopez, adding that there is the continuing misery of blackouts in most regions in Mindanao.

"In fact, Summit delegates from the Regions 9, 10, 11, 12 and CARAGA disputed this irresponsible statement from Secretary Almendras, revealing continuing daily blackouts running for as long as 6 to 8 hours each day," said Lopez.

Access to electricity and poverty

FDC board member Maitet Diokno, citing government data, pointed out that around 6 Million households in Mindanao do not have access to electricity, 42% of which are children.

"The prevailing dominance of the corporate private sector in the power industry will further diminish the chances of these communities ever having access to electricity simply because investing in these communities would not be profitable," Diokno said.

She added that government, on the other hand, is entrusted with the responsibility to provide for such communities whether or not the margins of profit are not viable.

Technical manipulation

Engineer Nestor Degoma, PALAG-Mindanao chairperson, alleged that there is an on-going technical manipulation of ensuring proper dispatch of electricity to the grid based on the nominations made coming from the plant managers themselves.

"One of them told us that they nominated a higher degree of plant capacity but was only told to generate lower capacity based on the systems control coming from the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines," he said.

Manifesto

In a manifesto, participants of the Mindanao Consumer Summit declared that they envision reliable, affordable and renewable energy in a system that is participatory and democratic, and urged the government to take heed of the Summit's resolutions towards realizing this vision.

In the immediate, they are urging the government to:

- Stop the sale of assets of National Power Corporation (Napocor);
- Be transparent in providing stakeholders results of technical audit and latest data of all declared generating capacity in Mindanao, and up-to-date status of on-grid transmission lines;
- Dispatch and optimize operating capabilities of all generating units;
- Improve and rehabilitate immediately all units of Agus-Pulangi hydroelectric power plants, and stop allowing the intentional decay of said power plants to pave the way for private sector take over and the introduction of costly climate change-inducing power plants such as coal;
- Dredge silted parts of and implement watershed reforestation and development projects to promote sustained water flow in Agus and Pulangi rivers;
- Provide a clear program for the demand-side management for all consumer classes;
- Ensure genuine consumer representation at the Energy Regulatory Commission, Napocor, and Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation; and,
- Set up a multisectoral commission, with strong representation from consumer groups, to take on oversight functions.

Further, for the strategic development of the power industry in Mindanao, they are urging the government to:

- Conduct a review of EPIRA towards overhauling the law;
- Conduct a democratic and participatory planning and demand-side management to come up with a Mindanao Energy Plan in 20 to 30 year plan using the framework that signals the transition to clean energy;
- Implement Mindanao-wide integrated resource assessment;
- Implement the socialized feed-in tariffs (SoFIT) to immediately encourage more RE investments and make sure that these are carried out in a more equitable and just manner, consistent with the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities: those who emit more, must pay more for the transition to clean energy;
- Encourage embedded mini-hydro project among the distribution utilities; and,
- Develop renewable energy sources to be led by the government instead of over reliance on private investors.

FDC's Lopez said that the people of Mindanao must continue to be vigilant, especially in the current turns of events.

"Mindanaoans must remain vigilant. We are pretty sure that pro-privatization government officials and corporate private sector are now mulling over new tactics to get around the overwhelming

sentiment of the people of Mindanao against the sale of Agus-Pulangi," she stressed.

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http://fdc.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=596:mindanao-power-crisis-not-yet-over&catid=37:advocacy-on-power&Itemid=88