

# CONVERSATIONS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

## Viewing Climate Justice from the South Interview with Naderev Saño

*Philippine climate change negotiator Naderev Saño gained prominence by delivering two impassioned speeches in the United Nations about the North's inability to address issues of climate justice. In this edition of "Conversations of the Global South," Social Transformations Editor Lisandro E. Claudio (LC) talks to Saño (NS) about the complexities of climate change advocacy from the perspective of the Global South.*

**LC:** How did you become involved in climate justice issues?

**NS:** Before I joined government, I established the climate change program of the World Wildlife Fund in the Philippines. As an environmental NGO, WWF dealt with climate change in all its aspects, including climate justice issues as they relate to environmental integrity.

As a student, I was already an advocate of environmental justice and social justice in the context of climate justice. This is about exacting accountability from those who have benefited from the use of the global commons and urging them to take action to prevent the suffering of those who have contributed very little to the problem.

**LC:** How would you describe the position of the Philippine government on climate issues now?

**NS:** Because the Philippine government represents a country that is highly vulnerable to climate change, we always start from a position

of weakness. We demand a lot from those who are responsible for the climate change problem. We cannot afford to see the process collapse. If nothing happens in the negotiations, it will be detrimental to our interest.

The position of the Philippines is based on science. We must prevent catastrophic climate change and avert the climate crisis because it will pose a tremendous challenge to our economic development. Our position is also based on what is required by established agreements, and that revolves mainly around the Climate Change Convention and principles like the principle of historical responsibility and common but differentiated responsibility. These tell us that the countries that have developed because of the use of the environment and the atmosphere must be held accountable. The position of the Philippines is such that we demand accountability and responsibility for the actions of rich nations.

**LC:** In an ideal world, what climate policy should the United Nations (UN) agree on?

**NS:** The UN has actually established the policy already: the Climate Change Convention. The ultimate objective of the Convention is to prevent dangerous anthropogenic disruption of the climate system. This will be met when countries actually reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to stabilize the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. But the implementation of this policy has always been difficult. We need an ambitious, fair, and legally binding agreement to enhance the implementation of the convention and to prevent global warming from going beyond two degrees from the pre-industrial levels. We have set 2015 as the new deadline for that.

That is, by no means, a simple task because countries have narrow national interests, and it will be difficult to compel big countries to take on this commitment.

**LC:** Can you talk about the specifics of this policy?

**NS:** To prevent global warming from going beyond two degrees, the whole world must reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by the year 2020, and to 90% below 1990 levels by the year 2050. Although the science is rather clear, the policies

must follow. This will entail specific top-down targets and translate this into individual sovereign country targets. The targets for each country must add up to the top-down requirement by science, because if it doesn't, then we're just moving the goal post.

Another way of ensuring that the target is met is for the rich countries to provide financial resources and technology for developing countries like the Philippines. The agreement must include how much money should be mobilized and what kinds of technology should be transferred and diffused to these developing countries. Right now, technology is being sold to us.

We are demanding at least US\$100 billion by 2020 for this global transformation to take place. It's about transforming the global economy. That will only take place if environmental integrity is a priority for all countries and if financial resources are mobilized towards genuine sustainable development.

**LC:** Where will that US\$100 billion go?

**NS:** It will go to developing countries like the Philippines. We have to build resilience and put infrastructure and systems in place that will allow us to pursue cleaner sources and ways of development, including renewable energy and efficient energy.

**LC:** You delivered two emotional speeches in the UN talks. The first one was in Qatar, and the second one was in Warsaw. This year, you were prompted to declare a hunger strike.

**NS:** I never called it a hunger strike. I fasted.

**LC:** You fasted in Warsaw. What prompted that action?

**NS:** It was purely an act of conscience, an act of solidarity with many of our country-folk, who were struggling to find food in the aftermath of the typhoon. Among those people who were struggling to find food was my own brother, who was stuck in Tacloban.

**LC:** You're from Tacloban?

**NS:** Yes, my family. My family's hometown is Tacloban. My father hails from Leyte, but I was born and I grew up here in Manila. This

prompted the fasting, but it was also prompted by my frustration that climate change discussions in the United Nations Climate Change Conference have not been making any progress. It was a desperate attempt to push negotiators and world leaders who were in Warsaw to take drastic action. Both the emotional manner with which I delivered my speech and the fasting were not planned, but I thought these could help provide a human face to climate change.

**LC:** How was it received?

**NS:** I never imagined it would be received so well. People were crying with me in the plenary, and we got a standing ovation. It was unprecedented in the history of the climate change talks. We were embraced by people, and they shook our hands. The media hounded me all throughout those two weeks.

**LC:** You said the fast was partly because you were frustrated at what we refer to as the Global North. Are you comfortable with that term—Global North, Global South?

**NS:** It's a term we do use and accept as a way of categorizing the world.

**LC:** What do you think prevents countries from the Global North from legislating domestically and internationally more robust climate policies?

**NS:** I do struggle to understand what prevents them from taking progressive action. They say climate action will hinder their economic growth, but they also tell us that embracing green technologies will allow us to pursue sustainable development.

They also say they will become less competitive with emerging economies. That's a poor excuse because it would be naïve of us to think that economies are not connected to, or dependent on each other. We know that many economies in the Global North are now interdependent with many economies in the Global South.

Another excuse they give is that their constituents, especially their political masters, won't support climate action simply because they don't believe in the science. We hear this from the United States. If we can't get the country with the largest contribution to climate change to be part of the global solution, then, climate change will never be solved.

**LC:** This seems like something that's happening high up in the UN. For citizens in the Global South though, what can they do to promote climate justice?

**NS:** We must, even within our own countries, pursue environmental integrity, and minimize the impacts of climate change by building the resilience of our human systems and natural ecosystems. We owe it to ourselves to reduce our ecological footprint.

To ensure climate justice, we must promote respect for human rights. Climate change is affecting a lot of basic human rights, including the right to life, the right to food and safe water, the right to safe housing, the right to education, and the right to health. All of these are being impinged on by climate change. As nations in the Global South, we must ensure that these rights are protected.

We must also continue putting pressure on the North to keep their commitments, and hold them accountable to the Global South in the context of climate change and of global development. There is a bias towards neo-liberal economics, but this doesn't really benefit the Global South. This just drives the Global South deeper into poverty, and widens the chasm between the rich and the poor.