

'Biodiversity protection needed to prevent future pandemics'

Posted by Joan Russow
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MANILA, Philippines — Environment advocates are pushing for stronger biodiversity protection measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in the future.

Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, said the decline in biodiversity and ecosystems can result in the emergence of infectious diseases such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

While COVID-19 is attributed supposedly to consumption of wildlife that carry the virus, Lim noted that exposure to wildlife in general can result in transmission of illnesses.

"There's more exposure now to the wilderness areas, between people and wildlife," she told The Chiefs on Cignal TV's One News on Thursday night.

"It's not just the markets, not just the trade, but the encroaching of what used to be wildlife habitats, decreasing habitat areas," she added.

She cited deforestation and the continuing demand for development areas that provide an opportunity for more human contact with wild animals.

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“These past few decades, there have been a lot of interferences. If you poach them, then that’s already exposure to wild animals. If you deplete certain populations, there will be imbalance,” she added.

Lim said the current pandemic highlights the need to mainstream efforts to protect biodiversity to prevent future spread of illnesses.

“We need to instill that thinking to the public, to decision makers. It can’t just be left to the conservationists and to the environmentalists,” she said.

“Everyone now needs to be more conscious that their activities have an impact on the environment and wildlife,” she added.

The conservation expert recommended identification of habitat areas even in cities to minimize interaction between humans and wild animals.

She also called for stronger implementation of existing laws to prevent wildlife trafficking and protection of biodiversity hotspots in the country.

The Climate Change Commission earlier called for bolder and more coordinated global action on sustainable biodiversity management to avoid outbreaks of infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

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It noted studies linking the emergence of new viruses and infectious diseases to the destruction of natural biodiversity and ecosystems worldwide.

The climate body said it has been advocating for the development and implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation solutions that are promotive of sustainable forest management, coastal habitat conservation, integrated resource management and livelihood resilience.

It also pushed for the stricter implementation of the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001 and the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 to ensure the conservation of the country's biodiversity and mitigate the outbreak of public health emergencies.