

Duterte inaugurates solar panel factory



SANTO TOMAS, Batangas — President Rodrigo Duterte on Wednesday inaugurated the first Filipino-owned solar panel factory that would enable Filipino homes to cut their electricity bills by 30 percent.

Solar Philippines president Leandro Leviste said the solar factory in Santo Tomas, Batangas province, would produce 2.5 million panels a year, establishing the Philippines as a player in the global renewable energy revolution.

The solar panels (for example: [GOAL ZERO NOMAD 7](#)) will also be exported to the United States and the European Union, he said.

“We have an agreement with Chinese manufacturers that, instead of making the panels in China, they will be made here in the Philippines for export to the US and Europe,” Leviste told reporters.

“The Americans and Europeans prefer those ‘Made in the Philippines’ because the quality is better,” he added.

Leviste said Solar Philippines had submitted to the country's electric utilities an offer to replace many planned fossil fuel plants with solar farms that could produce 5,000 megawatts of electricity at lower costs.

Solar panel prices have fallen 90 percent over the last 10 years—50 percent in the last three years alone—prompting countries like China and India to source the majority of their future power from renewables.

“Electricity from coal plants costs around P5 to P6 per kilowatt but solar farms would cut that down to P2.99 per kilowatt. So, the charge for solar energy from solar farms is almost one-half,” Leviste said.

“Filipinos can save 30 percent on electricity, and the average family paying P3,000 will see their bill [drop] to P2,000 a month. And now with the latest batteries, entire towns can use solar energy for 24 hours a day,” he added.

For individual homes

Leviste said the Santo Tomas factory would also produce panels so that individual homes could have their own solar panels on their roofs.

“Before, these were only for SM or Robinsons malls but, because of this factory, all Filipinos who have an electricity bill of P1,000 to P3,000 a month can get a solar panel and pay it on installment,” he said.

Leviste said Solar Philippines had received 10,000 inquiries from people who were interested to buy solar panels.

“We started production in March for our projects with SM and solar farms in Tarlac and Mindoro. But with this grand launch, we will now offer these to the retail market,” he said.

“So, we can get rid of those fossil fuel plants and replace them with solar farms. The Philippines can save P200 billion every year or P1,000 per month per family,” he added.

Solar Philippines also announced during Wednesday's plant inauguration a new initiative that would help communities with poor electricity service to form their own “solar power associations” and benefit from low-cost 24/7 power.

“We don't measure our success in terms of profits or revenues, but our contribution toward the development of the Philippines. This factory will create 50,000 jobs for the solar industry, from manufacturing to installation, and show the world that Filipino ingenuity is second to none,” Leviste said.

Global leader

A statement from Solar Philippines said that by 2018, the Santo Tomas factory would manufacture panels that could produce 800 MW, “greater than the solar production capacity in the entire United States, making the Philippines a global leader in solar panel manufacturing.”

“Around the world, consumers are going solar because they see the renewable energy revolution has already arrived. We are optimistic that not only will Filipinos think the same, but also soon see that the Philippines can become the leader in this global energy transition,” Leviste said.