

**Statement of Richard Buangan**  
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**Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia,**  
**The Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy**  
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Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Romney, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is my honor to speak with you about the importance of addressing climate change in the Indo-Pacific. I am here to testify on behalf of the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP), which works closely with the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, the Office of Global Change in the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, and interagency partners such as USAID to tackle the climate crisis in the region.

The Indo-Pacific region is a critical focus for U.S. climate policy and strategy. It is home to the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases and some of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. The Indo-Pacific is also the fastest-growing region on the planet, with more than half of the world's population and nearly as much of global GDP. It is the nexus of global economic growth and recovery. The Indo-Pacific faces intensifying geostrategic competition among major powers including the United States and the People's Republic of China, as well as shifting power dynamics among India, Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. It is home to five of our seven alliance partners, seven of the world's largest militaries, and at least a third of all the world's military personnel.

For these reasons, the Indo-Pacific is a top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration, and our strategy for engaging the region on climate is very much aligned with our broader national security and strategic interests. U.S. efforts to foster economic prosperity, uphold security, and revitalize alliances in the Indo-Pacific region are deeply integrated with our climate strategy.

**Economic Prosperity:** U.S. economic prosperity is inextricably linked to the Indo-Pacific region. The United States conducted \$1.75 trillion in two-way trade with Indo-Pacific countries in 2020, and cumulative investment between the United States and partners in the region at the end of 2019 stood at approximately \$1.9 trillion. In 2020, U.S. exports to the region accounted for approximately 28.8 percent of total U.S. exports, and imports accounted for 40.4 percent of total U.S. imports. The well-being of the American people and those in the region is tied together, and the climate crisis threatens our shared economic prosperity. Climate change poses risks to property, infrastructure, human health, agricultural systems, and labor productivity – all critical to ensuring our people prosper. Inclusive opportunity and prosperity built on strong commitments to address environmental and climate challenges will be integral to addressing the climate crisis and ensuring the economic security of the United States.

The Indo-Pacific has the fastest growing energy use in the world, and it is projected to grow 60 percent by 2040. A critical challenge will be how Indo-Pacific economies transition from an over-reliance on fossil fuels to clean energy while sustaining the region's dynamic economic growth trajectory. The right government policy decisions will be critical if the world is to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and a global net zero future by 2050.

In order to help Indo-Pacific partners meet their growing demand for energy, promote economic prosperity, and support our climate goals, the State Department, in coordination with our

interagency partners, is sharpening the focus of our foreign assistance programs. For example, the Asia Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (Asia EDGE) initiative is a whole-of-government effort to expand sustainable and secure energy markets throughout the Indo-Pacific. We are enhancing this program to support renewable energy development, energy efficiency, and advanced energy technology and policy. The Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN) similarly aims to advance the development of sustainable, transparent, and quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region and can also advance our climate goals through a greater focus on climate-smart infrastructure. The U.S.- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Smart Cities Partnership also aims to promote sustainable solutions in transportation and renewable energy and is strengthening its focus to address sub-national climate challenges.

**Upholding Security:** Our approach to climate change has lasting implications for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. As noted in this year's report to Congress on Indo-Pacific Climate Security, "geo-political and strategic competition—coupled with evolving economies, booming populations and urbanization, strong reliance on natural resources and capital, and impacts from climate change pose security risks with the potential to destabilize the region. Climate change has the potential to cause a significant and prolonged disruption to the ecosystems, infrastructure, and economies that support stable and prosperous societies in the Indo-Pacific."

At least ninety-four million people in the Indo-Pacific region were affected by climate-related disasters in 2019. Adverse impacts include more frequent and intense droughts, ocean acidification, increasingly severe cyclones, changes in the monsoon cycle, extended heat waves, catastrophic wildfires, devastating flooding and landslides, increased water insecurity, and rising sea levels. Pacific Island nations, many of them close partners of the United States, are threatened by rising sea levels and more severe tropical cyclones. In the vulnerable Mekong region and the resource-rich South China Sea, changing climate could lead to disruption of historic food-stocks, shortages of water, and climate-related migration.

In order to prepare for and respond to the security threats posed by climate change, the State Department is engaging vulnerable partners in the region to increase their resilience. One program, the Mekong Water Data Initiative, promotes good governance of transboundary water resources and timely sharing of essential data to improve hydrological and climate forecasting to mitigate impacts of severe floods and droughts. Announced by President Biden in March, the Small and Less Populous Island Economies Initiative will support climate initiatives, sustainable energy development, natural disaster response and resilience, and other critical environmental and sustainability issues.

**Restoring Alliances:** Finally, I would like to talk about the importance of restoring our alliances and how that relates to climate change. President Biden and Secretary Blinken have made clear that our network of alliances and partnerships is our greatest strategic asset. They enable us to combine our strengths to advance shared interests and deter common threats. Addressing the climate crisis in partnership with others can serve to restore our alliances in the region, and in turn, restoring our alliances will allow us to better address the climate crisis.

In order to achieve this, the State Department is engaging at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral level. On the bilateral level, I would like to highlight the important work the U.S. interagency has done with Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Administration is particularly

enthusiastic about how we have broadened and deepened our cooperation with these allies beyond our traditional security agenda, and climate change has been a bright example. We are working closely with both countries on climate technology innovation.

I would also like to point to our partners in the Pacific. Addressing climate change is the single most important issue for Pacific Island Countries, who are critical partners for deterrence of adversaries and defense of the U.S. homeland. Pacific Island Countries have been instrumental advocates for ambitious global climate action. We are elevating our engagement with Pacific Island countries to enhance their ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change and build resilience, from investing in early warning systems to managing coastal resources. The Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs continues to work closely with the interagency and engage our partners in the Pacific and plans to use bureau funds to support climate adaptation and projects for the Pacific islands.

In coordination with the National Security Council and our interagency colleagues, we are expanding Quadrilateral consultations with Australia, India, and Japan (“the Quad”) to incorporate discussions on climate ambition, clean energy transitions, and climate adaptation. We also work closely with multilateral organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to address climate and energy issues. By engaging with others on climate adaptation and mitigation, we forge links between our peoples.

Climate can also be an area where our interests align with the People’s Republic of China. China is the world’s largest emitter, and we cannot successfully address the climate challenge without significant additional action by China. Although the climate crisis is a critical global challenge, requiring increased and urgent action by all, the world is looking particularly to the actions the PRC will take in the near term, to the long-term goals it sets, and – importantly – to the plans it puts forward to achieve those goals. We will continue to engage with China as we address the climate crisis. All countries, including the United States and China, must raise their ambitions on the road to COP26 in Glasgow.

In summary, responding to the climate crisis is critical for our national security interests, our leadership standing in the region, and the long-term stability and prosperity of our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. Moving forward, EAP will continue to seek ways to incorporate climate goals into our regional policies and programming.

Now, I would like to give the floor to my colleague Jonathan Pershing from the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. He will further explain U.S. climate strategy in the region.