


FOURTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)

SENATE
P.S.R. No. 416 RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY,
IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ALLEGED IMPENDING ENVIRONMENTAL
DISASTER IN THE CORDILLERA ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 16 provides that, "The State shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature";

WHEREAS, watersheds in the Cordillera Administrative Region are reportedly courting an environmental disaster and the government is being urged to launch a major rescue operation to stop the further decline in the region's forest cover and water resources;

WHEREAS, according to Regional Director Samuel Peñafiel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), forest fires, timber poaching and the conversion of forest lands to agriculture areas has been eating up an average of 1,735 hectares yearly as of 2006; the situation is critical since even mossy forests have not been spared;

WHEREAS, Mr. Moises Bai, chief of DENR's Forest Conservation Division, emphasized that the rate of forest loss is very high in the region; forest resources are classified into three types namely dipterocarp, pine and mossy forests, which serve as the home base of resources rich in biodiversity and natural ecosystem

WHEREAS, National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Cordillera manager Abraham Akilit also stated that the major portions of watersheds are being converted into vegetable gardens while inland rivers and streams drawn from the watersheds are also seriously threatened by siltation;

WHEREAS, NIA expressed their alarm because the region's four major river systems namely Chico, Agno, Bued and Abra, have been serving up less and less water the past few years due to the decline of forest cover; these river systems feed the waterways of the Ilocos, Cagayan Valley and Central Luzon;

WHEREAS, according to Dr. William Dar, chair of the United Nations Subcommittee on Desertification, the symptoms of desertification, which has made water scarce in other countries, were already present in the Cordillera;

WHEREAS, Dar, who is also the director general of the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics, further added that the region's expanding vegetable farms might bring in more problems as the ecosystem would be greatly disturbed by the use of chemical farm inputs; on the other hand, the loss of forest covers, would also destroy biodiversity that would cut short the life of watersheds that are critical water sources;

WHEREAS, according to Ifugao Gov. Teodoro Baguilat Jr., despite the government's awareness of the grave danger confronting the watersheds, its bid to save them has been "lukewarm" and not aggressive; the government has been very slow in releasing the shares of the provinces from the national wealth taxes and there seems to be no effort to redefine host communities in hydropower plants projects to include upland communities;

WHEREAS, the DENR and NIA dismissed as hogwash the governor's claims that efforts to rescue the watersheds were slow or that these emanated from a tepid policy; these two government agencies claimed that it had deployed its resources to save the watersheds;

WHEREAS, for the last five years, the Cordillera had a reported reforestation rate of 1,284.88 ha a year or a recovery rate of 903.8 ha compared to the rate of forest loss;

WHEREAS, Cawilan said that aside from an intensive forest protection program, the DENR executed 76 memorandums of agreements with various stakeholders for the management of forest lands;

WHEREAS, last year, DENR launched the P12.25-million Integrated Watershed Management and Sustainable Development Project; this year, the project would target the rehabilitation of three critical watersheds – Chico, Abulog and Upper Magat – concentrating on reforestation, agro-forestry and the assisted natural regeneration (ANR) project;

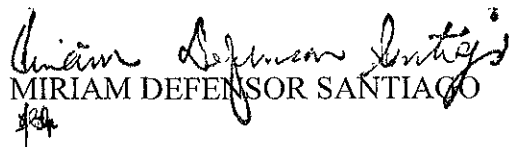
WHEREAS, the department's Green Philippines Project, had planted 5,573,383 seedlings in the region, covering 2,893 hectares and 171.2 kilometers of roadsides; the government has also partnered with the international community to save the forests, like the Department of Agriculture's link with the Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resources Management project;

WHEREAS, a collaborated effort must be done by the various stakeholders to prevent the mossy forests from being destroyed by enterprising individuals who want to enrich themselves at the expense of the environment;

WHEREAS, it would also be advantageous to the environment if the department would implement Baguilat's suggested programs such as identification and inventory of critical watersheds, adoption of traditional forest management systems into the reforestation programs of the DENR and the implementation of biological diversity in tree planting that would intercrop forest trees with coffee, rattan, bamboo and provision for wildlife;

WHEREFORE, be it hereby resolved by the Philippine Senate, to direct the proper Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the alleged impending environmental disaster in the Cordillera Administrative Region.

Adopted,


MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

/fldp