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SENATE
P. S. R. No. 1477

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY,
IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE CONTINUOUS APPROVAL AND
OPERATION OF COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS DESPITE THEIR MASSIVE
ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH RISKS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 16 mandates: "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, Republic Act No. 9729 also known as the Climate Change Act of 2009 provides: "[...] The State adopts the ultimate objective of the Convention which is the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system which should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner [...]"

WHEREAS, despite the enactment of R.A. No. 9729, at least nine new coal-fired power plants were built in various parts of the country for this year alone;

WHEREAS, in a 26 October 2009 article in Bulatlat.com, the approval of the coal-fired power plants, which have been identified as one of the dirtiest power-generation methods, undermines the recently enacted law;

WHEREAS, according to geologist Ric Saturay of the Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC), coal-fired power plants are considered to be convenient because they are the cheapest source of energy but these pose considerable environmental and health risks for communities near the power plant since the ashes, which are the power plant's solid waste, have higher toxic concentration than unburned coals;

WHEREAS, since coal is carbon-based, it will release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which in turn will contribute to *global warming* and, consequently, climate change;

WHEREAS, in La Paz, Iloilo, communities are concerned with how a coal-fired power plant ran by the Global Business Power Corporation would affect a community just 500 meters away from it;

WHEREAS, based on an environmental investigation mission last September 14 to 15 in Iloilo, the CEC learned that the power plant plans to dispose its ash wastes into what used to be a fish pond; the waste could contaminate the ground water and even the marine life in the Jaro River and Iloilo Strait since the power plant is located near these bodies of water;

WHEREAS, the company claims that the ash pond will have a dense lining to prevent leakage but in other countries, such as the United States, ash wastes are disposed of in a sanitary landfill since a landfill has more sophisticated facilities that can mitigate leakage but it is also more expensive;

WHEREAS, it appears that the company is not committed to the best practices for coal-waste disposal to ensure the safety of the immediate community since the company did not study the capabilities of the ash pond and the leakage rate in case of a leak;

WHEREAS, there was no analysis on the hazards posed to those who would be affected by the toxic wastes, no data on the nearest water wells where people get their water supply, the marine ecosystem near the power plant that would be disrupted and how sensitive they are to changes in temperature;

WHEREAS, the mission also found that approval of the project had been allegedly easy, with requirements for such documents as the Environmental Compliant Certificate rather lax and no building permit was even required;

WHEREAS, coal-fired power plants require a generous amount of water to cool down their machines and the slightest change in temperature in a marine area could cause coral bleaching, change in migration patterns of marine organisms and even their spawning behavior; these would be further aggravated by the water released from the power plant that was used to cool it down would be dumped into this area;

WHEREAS, the project proponents have downplayed these effects on communities and the marine life in areas near the power plant in Iloilo and instead of explaining the hazards of the power plant, the mostly poor residents were offered work, not knowing that aside from the marine ecosystem, they are the most affected by the power plant;

WHEREAS, the hazardous chemicals coming from the plant could expose residents to cancer risks due to arsenic, a component of ash waste;

WHEREAS, the government's refusal to take the lead in developing the energy sector, with the aim of finding alternative renewable energy sources is particularly alarming especially since the government entrusts this obligation to private companies, which are motivated by profit;

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 continuous approval and operation of coal-fired power plants despite their massive environmental and health risks for local communities.

Adopted,


MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

/dpm