

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)



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SENATE

P. S. R. No. 742

RECEIVED BY: *f*

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE, TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE REPORTED NEED TO PREVENT THE EXPANSION OF VEGETABLE GARDENS OVER PROTECTED AREAS OF MOUNT STO. TOMAS, WHICH COULD LEAD TO FOREST DESTRUCTION AND THE POISONING OF NEARBY WATER SOURCES

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 16 provides: "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, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* on 16 June 2014 reported that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) was alarmed over the expansion of vegetable gardens over the protected areas of Mount Sto. Tomas;

WHEREAS, the DENR is reportedly looking into the impact of gardens planted with salad vegetables that have sprouted over the years around the Mount Santo Tomas watershed in Tuba town;

WHEREAS, the DENR allegedly charged a congressman and three contractors with violation of environmental laws for their alleged role in building an illegal road into the portion of the watershed near Mount Cabuyao in Tuba;

WHEREAS, it was reported that loosened soil dumped from the roadwork had contaminated a creek and three spring sources that serve a section of Baguio City and Tuba;

WHEREAS, the report claimed that the DENR, however, has not yet completed an inventory of gardens near the watershed that also pose a threat to the water sources since these farms may use commercial fertilizers;

WHEREAS, Octavio Cuanso, acting Benguet provincial environment and natural resources officer reportedly said that the agency still had to conduct a survey on the ground to determine how wide the vegetable gardens have grown within the watershed but claimed that at the moment, the forest was still wider than the gardens;

WHEREAS, the report said that according to Cuanso, vegetable expansion has become a threat not just to Sto. Tomas but to other forest lands in the province;

WHEREAS, according to the report, Benguet province supplies most of the vegetable needs of Metro Manila; thus, according to Cuanso, it is difficult to just tell farmers to stop because they need to eat and feed their families;

WHEREAS, the garden expansion has reportedly affected Mount Pulag National Park, the Upper Agno watershed reservation, the Lower Agno watershed reservation, the Benguet portions of the Mount Data forest reservation and the central Cordillera mountain range;

WHEREAS, Cuanso reportedly said that at present, Mt. Pulag was in greater danger because recently discovered vegetable intrusions and “kaingin” (slash-and-burn) operations have eaten away 10 hectares of Pulag’s natural forest line;

WHEREAS, Cuanso also reportedly said that a government task force had discovered that the expansions were highly mechanized;


WHEREAS, the report also claimed that three farmers, whose gardens are within the boundary of Bokod and Kabayan towns in Benguet, are facing charges for forest intrusion; Mt. Pulag straddles several towns, but the most severe cases of forest destruction have been taking place near Bokod and Kabayan;

WHEREAS, Cuanso also allegedly said that farmers need to come up with alternative sources of livelihood and that the Department of Agriculture may have farming technology that could help farmers increase their production without expanding their gardens into the forest;

WHEREAS, the said agencies should look into ways to address the needs of the indigenous communities within the reservations and, at the same time, protect the forest;

WHEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PHILIPPINE SENATE, to direct the proper Senate committee, to conduct an inquiry in aid of legislation, on the reported need to prevent the expansion of vegetable gardens over protected areas of Mount Sto. Tomas, which could lead to forest destruction and the poisoning of nearby water sources.

Adopted,

over

MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

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