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SENATE

P.S.R. No. 804

RECEIVED BY:

INTRODUCED BY SENATOR RISA HONTIVEROS

RESOLUTION

STRONGLY CONDEMNING THE MASSIVE CORAL HARVESTING AND DESTRUCTION DISCOVERED AT ROZUL REEF AND ESCODA SHOAL IN THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA AND CALLING ON THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION INTO THE SAME

WHEREAS, Article II of the 1987 Constitution declares that "[t]he maintenance of peace and order, the protection of life, liberty, and property, and the promotion of the general welfare are essential for the enjoyment by all the people of the blessings of democracy" and guarantees that "[t]he 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, Article XII, Section 16 thereof states that "[a]ll lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, fisheries, forests or timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources are owned by the State" and it "shall protect the nation's marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone, and reserve its use and enjoyment exclusively to Filipino citizens";

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court has explained that "the President of the Philippines, as the sole repository of executive power, is the guardian of the Philippine archipelago, including all the islands and waters embraced therein;"

WHEREAS, the Philippines is located at the apex of the Coral Triangle and is recognized as the epicenter of marine biodiversity, with the richest concentration of marine life on the planet; its waters are home to more than 500 species of coral, 800 species of seaweed, 981 species of algae, 1,200 species of decapod crustaceans, and nearly 1,800 species of reef fish; its coral reefs maintain vital ecosystems which sustain marine life, providing millions of Filipinos food and income;

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB), coral reefs in the West Philippine Sea comprise a significant portion of the country's total reef area;

WHEREAS, on September 14, 2023, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) expressed alarm at the "concerning resurgence" of Chinese swarming activity in Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda (Sabina) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, both within the country's exclusive economic zone; on September 15, 2023, AFP Western Command (WesCom) Chief Vice Adm. Alberto Carlos stated that as much as 40 Chinese militia vessels had been spotted in Rozul Reef: "Previous swarming incidents in the area have also been followed by reports of massive coral harvesting, further raising concerns about their harmful environmental impact";

WHEREAS, on September 17, 2023, AFP WesCom reported that Rozul Reef had indeed been plundered and massive coral harvesting had left a trail of destruction, with China as the likely culprit: 'Yung swarming areas nila, we pinpointed it. And then when they left, we sent out our divers to do another water survey... nakita namin na wala nang corals. Nasira na";

WHEREAS, on September 18, 2023, PCG Spokseperson Commodore Jay Tarriel confirmed reports of severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral reefs in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal: "The results of this survey were deeply concerning, as the marine ecosystem appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of any life forms... The destruction which may have possibly been caused by the Chinese maritime militia vessels is not only an ecological disaster but also threatens the livelihoods of our fishermen and the fragile ecosystems that depend on a healthy marine environment";

WHEREAS, AFP WesCom stated that ships from AFP, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources have been patrolling the area- but even their combined resources are sorely insufficient to secure the country's territorial waters;

WHEREAS, in 2019, University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute Deputy Director for Research Dr. Deo Onda estimated that the destruction of coral reefs caused by China's plunder of marine resources and reclamation activities cost the Philippines at least 33.1 Billion Pesos annually (18 Million Pesos per hectare damaged); the recent destruction wrought upon Rozul Reef and Escada Shoal only adds to the increasing damage caused by unlawful activities in the West Philippine Sea, for which reparations must be sought- as in the case of the United States of America's 87 Million-Peso compensation for the damage caused to Tubbataha Reef;

WHEREAS, the protection of the Philippines' marine life requires effectively securing its territorial integrity; the government cannot tolerate the continuing harms to the environment, economy, and security brought about by China's incursions, and must explore available recourses to hold China accountable- including a claim for damages to be filed with the Permanent of Court Arbitration;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED TO STRONGLY CONDEMN THE MASSIVE CORAL HARVESTING AND DESTRUCTION DISCOVERED AT ROZUL REEF AND ESCODA SHOAL IN THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA AND CALL ON THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION INTO THE SAME.

Adopted.


RISA HONTIVEROS
Senator