

Revisiting Logging in Samar

“MY FATHER settled in Gamay, Northern Samar in 1946. Back then, he remembers, not even the heaviest rains would cause the rivers to swell. Then in the early 70s, San Jose Timber Corporation (SJTC) started logging in the area. Since then, flashfloods and swollen rivers had become common,” recounts Attorney Venir Cuyco, a native of Gamay. “These floods would bring with them timber and felled trees,” he added.

This sentiment was prompted by the recent news that on August 15, 2005, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Michael Defensor has allowed SJTC (which is incidentally owned by Senator Juan Ponce Enrile) to resume commercial logging in Samar.

The SJTC began its commercial logging operations in Samar in 1967 by virtue of Timber Licensing Agreement (TLA) No. 118. This TLA allowed SJTC to operate within 95,770 hectares of timber concession in the Samar island

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for 25 years, or until 1992. It was renewed in 1982, for a period extending until June 30, 2007.

On February 8, 1989, former President Corazon Aquino imposed a moratorium on all logging activities in Samar after

flashfloods in January 1989 affected various provinces and municipalities, killed hundreds of people, destroyed some P100M worth of crops, and resulted in widespread famine.

Subsequent presidents also seemingly recognized the

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importance of Samar forests. In February 20, 1996, President Fidel Ramos declared Samar's remaining forests as forest reserves through Presidential Proclamation No. 774. For her part, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Presidential Proclamation No. 442 on August 13, 2003, which laid the foundation for declaring 333,000 hectares of Samar forests as the Samar Island Natural Park (SINP).

After typhoons killed thousands and devastated the provinces of Quezon, Aurora and Nueva Ecija during the last quarter of 2004, President Arroyo reiterated her anti-logging stance by suspending the issuance of new logging permits.

All these were disregarded by then DENR Secretary Defensor when he decided to lift the logging moratorium and granted SJTC permit to resume logging in the area.

Howls of Protest

This DENR decision put into spotlight the significance of Samar in the country's ecological map. Environmental groups, people's organizations, non-government organizations and the church protested the lifting of the logging moratorium in the island of Samar.

Environmental groups asserted that the forests in Samar island are one of the few remaining old forest covers in the Philippines and is home to diverse flora and fauna. Environmentalists wanted to preserve the Samar forests, said to be the only healthy ones in the country.

The SINP is the habitat of 900 species of flowering plants, 197 species of birds, and 39 species of mammals. The presence of endangered species in the SINP was validated by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). According to them, Samar forest is one of the 200 Eco Regions in the world known for its wildlife and biodiversity. Twelve of the world's trees nearing extinction are found here. Its nine endemic bird species include the Philippine Eagle, one of the rarest eagles in the world, which was reported to be first spotted in 1896 in Paranas, Samar.

Environmental groups argued that resumption of

logging in the area will cause extreme ecological imbalance and further threaten the biodiversity in the area.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), a UN agency, also threatened to pull out of the second phase of their \$12M Samar Island Biodiversity Project (SIBP) if the recent DENR decision will be implemented. It was precisely the SIBP that gave the impetus for Presidential Proclamation 442 declaring the SINP. The SIBP 2nd Phase would have given way to the creation of parks, administrative offices and local government unit capability building in management of the nature park.

The logging concessions of SJTC are situated in the heart of the SINP. In fact, it has been reported that 90% of the TLA is inside the nature park.

Meanwhile, for the Catholic church and other organizations, this has become an emotional issue. They said that the moratorium on logging in the area was a major victory for environmentalists and the people of Samar, as it put premium on the lives and livelihood of Samareños. They planned to organize a massive protest caravan on December 5, 2005 to dramatize the effects of logging in Samar.



Turnaround

Secretary Defensor remained adamant and stood by his decision granting the resumption of logging of SJTC in Samar. He argued that the moratorium has lapsed on May 30, 1989 as prescribed in the order. However, the previous

DENR secretaries have continuously denied requests of SJTC to resume operations in the area. According to Secretary Defensor, the government has erred in the continued implementation of the logging moratorium.

He advised the protesters to



test the legality of the order he signed and bring their grievances to the proper courts.

He also denied that the logging permit was a patronage benefit for Enrile. Environmentalists are linking this logging concession with Defensor's confirmation as DENR secretary by the Commission on Appointments, where Senator Enrile is a member.

Enrile, for his part, was unfazed by the protests. According to him, SJTC would harvest trees selectively; only those trees which are at least 70cms. in diameter would be harvested. Aside from this, he argued, the SJTC operations provide employment and economic opportunities to Samar's populace.

However, after a two-hour meeting with seven bishops in Tacloban City, and under the threat of a massive protest caravan, Secretary Defensor backed down. He promised the bishops that the logging will not push through. This decision effectively cancelled the caravan scheduled on December 5, 2005.

Myopic Views and Personal Interests

"The present debate on the issue of resumption of logging in the Samar Island best exhibits that our leaders have myopic views - they only look at their personal interests. Of course people will say that logging has employed many people in Samar, including my relatives. It has stirred economic activity in the area. But we should look at the long-term effects of logging on the environment and the people," said Attorney Cuyco.

He added that had political leaders listened, they should have enacted the Total Log Ban Bill introduced by former Senator Orlando Mercado in 1997.

The biggest donor of grants in the country, the European Union, agrees with this observation. A major finding of a study they initiated which evaluated the root causes of the environmental problems in the country is that "politicians and businessmen are often behind the poaching, over fishing and logging in the country."

"Had SJTC not entered



Samar in the first place, there would have been no floods in 1989 that killed Samaritans and resulted in famine," added Atty. Cuyco.

And we do not need studies to believe that. We only need to remember Ormoc, and most recently, Quezon and Aurora.

Too many have died for the follies and personal interests of some people.

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Alamin ang invong mga KARAPATAN



ANO ANG ATING MGA KARAPATAN BILANG MAMIMILI?

A. Itinatakda ng batas na ang "warranty" ng mga produkto ay dapat na:

- 1) nakasulat ang mga kondisyon nito sa malinaw at madaling maintindihang lenggwahe;
- 2) nakasulat kung kanino nakapangalan ang warranty;
- 3) nakasaad kung anong produkto o anong parte ng produkto ang sakop nito;
- 4) nakasulat kung ano ang gagawin ng pinagbilhan kung ang produkto ay nasira at kung sino ang gagastos sa pagpapaayos;
- 5) nakasaad kung ano ang dapat gawin ng nakabili para masakop ng warranty ang biniling produkto; at
- 6) malinaw na nagsasaad ng panahon o petsa kung hanggang kailan ang produkto ay sakop ng warranty.

B. Sa paglalagay ng "label" o tatak sa mga produkto, maging lokal o "imported," dapat ay nakasaad o nakasulat:

- 1) ang tama at nakarehistrong pangalan ng mga ito
- 2) ang tama at nakarehistrong 'trademark'
- 3) ang nakarehistrong pangalan ng negosyo o kumpanya
- 4) ang address ng gumawa, nag-import, at nagre-package ng produkto
- 5) ang pagkagawa at mga aktibong sangkap
- 6) ang netong laman ng produkto sa timbang o bilang
- 7) ang bansa kung saan ginawa kung "imported"
- 8) kung ang produkto ay ginawa, inangat, o nire-package sa ilalim ng isang lisensya o kaphahintulutan, dapat banggitin ito

K. Dagdag na kailangan sa "label" ng mga pagkain:

- 1) kung kelan ang "expiration date" ng produkto
- 2) kung ang produkto ay "fully processed," "semi-processed," pwede nang kainin, pwede nang iluto, o mga sangkap at "mixture" lamang
- 3) ang "nutritional value" ng mga ito
- 4) kung ang ginamit na sangkap ay "natural or synthetic"

D. Dagdag na kailangan sa "label" ng mga gamot:

- 1) "expiry or expiration date"
- 2) kung ito ay maaaring maka-irita o maging "irritant"
- 3) mga pag-iingat na kailangan bago inumin at mga "contra-indications" o posibleng side effects.

(Halaw sa "Consumer Act of the Philippines," R.A. 7394)