

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

FOURTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 620
[filed June 3, 2008/ 6:15pm]

Introduced by: Bayan Muna Reps. Teodoro A. Casiño and Satur Ocampo,
Gabriela Reps. Luzviminda Ilagan and Liza Maza

RESOLUTION

URGING THE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE ENTRY OF THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL OIL COMPANY-ENERGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (PNOC-EDC) GEOTHERMAL PROJECT INTO THE MOUNT KANLAON NATURAL PARK THAT WILL IRREVERSIBLY DAMAGE THE REMAINING FRAGILE BIODIVERSITY OF NEGROS AND ADVERSELY IMPACT THE LIVES OF PEOPLE IN NEGROS OCCIDENTAL

WHEREAS, the entry of the Philippine National Oil Company-Energy Development Corporation (PNOC-EDC) geothermal project into the buffer zone of the Mount Kanlaon Natural Park (MKNP) is causing a lot of conflict, confusion and distress to the local people of Negros Occidental;

WHEREAS, Mt. Kanlaon is a protected area included in the Top Ten Priority Sites for Conservation of the Philippine government as the island of Negros has a remaining 39,630 hectares (4.77%) of forest cover based on 1989 Swedish Space Agency satellite data. This is however way below the 40 percent forest cover needed to maintain a balanced ecosystem on the island;

WHEREAS, Mt. Kanlaon has been categorized by Republic Act 9154 as a natural park because it is an important watershed of Northern and Central Negros. This is the headwater catchment of three major river systems namely: Bago, Nahatin and Binalbagan, which supply irrigation water to 158,500 hectares or one-fifth of the Negros Occidental's entire land area;

WHEREAS, the Bago watershed has a total land area of 61,926 hectares located within the Mt. Kanlaon Natural Park and portions of the Northern Negros Natural Park which is the lifeblood of the cities of Bago, San Carlos, and Talisay, and the towns of Calatrava, Don Salvador Benedicto and Murcia. These are all protected under Presidential Proclamation No. 604;

WHEREAS, in 1998, the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) drafted a bill to declare Mt. Kanlaon as a natural park – elevating it from national park status to a natural park – due to the significant biodiversity of the area. The said bill was then endorsed in 1999 to Congress;

WHEREAS, the PNOC-EDC allegedly harnessed its powerful connections and massive resources within the executive and legislative branches of the government to mount an aggressive policy lobby to arrive at Republic Act 9154 that is tailor-fit for the PNOC-EDC designs on Mount Kanlaon, contrary to the PAMB original proposal;

WHEREAS, the passage of RA 9154 instead of being hailed as a landmark environmental measure since it was the first ever natural park law after the enactment of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) law in 1992, was instead greeted with dismay, indignation and widespread protests. Newly-installed Catholic Bishop Vicente Navarra of the Bacolod Diocese issued a pastoral letter against the law and the PNOC-EDC project, and this was followed by a massive protest rally at the Bacolod City Plaza in late August 2001;

WHEREAS, the protests subsided when then PNOC-EDC chair Sergio Apostol issued a statement in early September 2001 that they will no longer enter the buffer zone;

WHEREAS, seven years later, Apostol's statement proved to be a barefaced lie. On May 21, 2008, the Negros Occidental Sanguniang Panlalawigan endorsed and concurred to the entry of PNOC-EDC into the (MKNP) buffer zone. The said concurrence is based on the issuance of a tree cutting permit from DENR Sec. Lito Atienza as recommended by DENR Regional Director Lormilyn Claudio and DOE Sec. Angelo Reyes. The SP approved the said project even after environment groups and NGOs shared that PNOC-EDC's project will have an irreversible impact to the ecosystem;

WHEREAS, Negros experienced frequent brownouts weeks before the SP endorsement. These brownouts appear to have been done deliberately to condition the public that there is indeed a power crisis that PNOC-EDC capitalized on. During the visit of DOE Sec. Reyes last May 7 for an energy briefing, he mentioned that there is a power crisis in Negros but he was later scolded by Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, saying that there was no power crisis in Negros;

WHEREAS, if the PNOC-EDC projected is allowed to proceed, this will counter the drive spearheaded by the Provincial Government to turn Negros into an Organic Food Bowl in the region and Southeast Asia. The plan to convert Negros farmlands into organic farms will certainly be affected by the project because the remaining forest cover plays a crucial role in water and soil conservation – two important factors that are vital in achieving sustainable and organic agriculture;

WHEREAS, protecting and conserving the remaining forest cover is vital in sustaining agriculture in Negros because it helps not only in water conservation but it also prevents soil erosion. The Environment Management Bureau reported in 1990 that because of forest denudation, 22 of the country's provinces were already badly eroded, including Negros Occidental. It is also estimated that deforestation-induced erosion has reached 100,000 hectares every year;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that the Committee on Ecology conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the entry of the Philippine National Oil Company-Energy Development Corporation Geothermal Project into the Mount Kanlaon Natural Park that will irreversibly damage the remaining fragile biodiversity of Negros and adversely impact the lives of the people in Negros Occidental.

Adopted,

TEODORO A. CASIÑO
Bayan Muna Party-List

SATUR C. OCAMPO
Bayan Muna Party-List

LUZVIMINDA C. ILAGAN
Gabriela Women's Party

LIZA L. MAZA
Gabriela Women's Party