



Green State of Nature Address

Title Last Thursday, the Green Convergence for Safe Food and Healthy Environment, a loose coalition of networks and NGOs, held its third Green State of Nature Address (SONA). We were very appreciative that DENR Secretary Ramon Paje stayed the entire day to hear out our long complaints, urgent pleas and sturdy arguments particularly on forestry issues and mining. He wowed the audience with his comprehensive knowledge of environmental issues, familiarity with the bureaucracy and sincerity in making good PNoy's promise of a transparent and honest government. So different from former DENR secretaries who were almost all politicians (read: full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?) who were fond of declaring motherhood statements, we are very hopeful that finally this administration will bring about significant change for our ravaged environment. The green SONA started with a description of the Philippines being a megadiversity paradise, a superstar of sorts when it comes to the variety of unique plants and animals. We outlined the major environmental problems that have wreaked havoc on our life support systems such as deforestation and degradation of our coastal ecosystems, destructive modern agricultural practices and worsening pollution. The environmental problems have resulted mainly from applying inappropriate technologies as well as social, economic and political context of these applications. The previous administration's paradigm of development is based on extracting resources and manipulating nature beyond what is sustainable. This paradigm flowed from government's heavy reliance on the foreign capital investment of transnational corporations (TNCs) to spur and finance national development that has resulted in a bias for foreign interests that have unfortunately ravaged our natural resources. This bias is concretely manifested in such decisions as the following: the Mining Act of 1995; the signing and ratification of the mega-bilateral treaty, the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement; the promotion of GMO products and genetic engineering, which primarily benefit TNCs; leasing large tracts of land for the food and biofuel needs of foreign nationals; plans to tap foreign companies for the proposed rehabilitation of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP); and moves to amend certain economic provisions of the Philippine Constitution to allow foreign ownership of natural resources and agricultural lands. If we continue to subscribe to this paradigm the problem of poverty and the widening gap between the rich and the poor can only worsen. We then presented a road map for the new administration that calls for the restoration of our forests particularly passing the Forest Resources Bill. It will, among others, use the functional definition of forest; ensure protection of all natural forests, involve LGUs in forest management and implement as a priority the restoration of forests that will use native tree species. Furthermore, President Noy's administration should review all controversial and questionable mining project applications; revoke EO 270-A or the National Policy on Revitalizing Mining in the Philippines; pass the Philippine Mineral Resources Act which is more protective not only of the environment, but also of people and of indigenous cultures. As President Noy has promised, the government must now impose a moratorium on new mining applications while it reviews pending mining applications. A shift completely, albeit gradually, to non carbon-based renewable and clean energy should be done. We should move from

exploring coal and petroleum to developing the potentials of wind geothermal and solar power, which are more than sufficient to meet the country's energy needs. Biofuels programs should not prejudice agricultural areas and forestlands. Furthermore, applications for coal-fired thermal plants need to be stopped and the revival of the BNPP, nuclear energy development option and other future proposals for nuclear power plants must be rejected. We should abandon plans to construct large dams such as the Laiban Dam and encourage the more sustainable and more economical small community hydro plants. We need to develop a comprehensive electronic (e-waste) policy framework and implementation plan. It is time that the Philippines ratify the Basel Ban Amendment, which prohibits all forms of toxic waste dumping from rich countries like Japan. Natural and sustainable agriculture should be propagated and abandon the program of the previous administration, which aimed to make the Philippines a major user and exporter of GMO products. Today, some enlightened LGUs have banned GMOs and have gone organic, namely, Negros, Mindoro and Bohol. We should enact laws for regulating, testing, labeling, and planting GMOs and even more urgently, ban them from the Philippines. Economic and socio cultural human rights must be protected by ensuring compensation and remediation is given to victims of corporate environmental disasters (eg Petron oil spill, Marinduque mines tailing spill) and stopping the militarization of rural communities affected by mining, logging and other development projects. Finally, since we believe in President Noy's resolve to extirpate corruption in government, a program that will address graft and corruption as well as promote environmental justice in the natural resources sector should be developed. The anti-corruption program should involve civil society in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all projects related to this issue. Secretary Paje promised to host the next dialogue with NGOs next month. We look forward to the continued discussions and open communication lines. by Anabelle Plantilla