
Philippines: logging ban opposed by logger politicians

Nowadays only 3% of the once dense area of tropical forests that covered the territory of the Philippines is still standing. Most of them occupy reduced patches and have even suffered a severe process of degradation (see WRM Bulletin 27).

The government has done nothing to avoid this state of things. As a matter of fact it is now promoting further destruction. It has recently been announced that the proposed total logging ban will not be implemented. The authorities argue that the ban would result in a loss of revenues for the treasury estimated in US\$ 15 million annually, and drain on foreign exchange. Antonio Ceriles, Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said that part of this money is used to pay for wood imports, particularly from Malaysia. A total ban will likely aggravate illegal logging, he added.

The announcement drew criticism from environmental groups who are lobbying for a total logging ban. They claim that the government has a poor environmental policy as reflected by the accomplishment of its reforestation programme, which has reached only 60,000 to 70,000 hectares a year while deforestation rate exceed in 10 times this figure, reaching 743,000 hectares annually. The Philippine Organization of Forest Stewards expressed that the economic gains cannot offset any environmental and social degradation in the near future. Criticism is also heard from government officials. Horacio Morales, secretary of agrarian reform, deplored the fact that the government is doing very little to protect the remaining forests and forecasted that in case logging continues, all the country's forests will be gone by 2010. The Upland Assistance Committee, a federation of non-governmental organizations working with communities, considers that the main reason for the government's inability to implement forest conservation is that many politicians are into the logging business. Ceriles himself owns a logging company in Southern Philippines.

The logic behind the government's decision is unsustainable from an economic, social and environmental point of view. The value of forests as source of products and services is ignored, as well as the negative consequence of its accelerated loss. The money obtained at the forests' and local communities' expenses is in turn used to indirectly promote the destruction of neighbour countries' forest resources. Last but not least: to say that a total logging ban would enhance illegal logging reveals the ineffectiveness of controls performed by those who are supposedly in charge of taking care of the country's forest heritage. Not to mention the obscure connection between many politicians' private interests and logging.

Source: Environment News Service, 5/11/99, <http://www.ens.lycos.com> Comments by WRM International Secretariat.