
The Philippines: last remaining forests under threat

The Philippines archipelago was once covered by dense tropical forests. Nowadays only 3% of them survive and even those are mostly degraded. Less than 1% of the former forest is still in a pristine state. Primary forests, left in only tiny patches, still exist in remote mountain regions on Palawan island, Mindoro and Mindanao and in the mountain range in northeastern Luzon called "Sierra Madre."

The destruction of forests in The Philippines has followed a similar pattern as that of other Southern countries. Part of the forest has been cut down by "kaingineros" (slash-and-burn farmers), but by far most of the forest destruction has been carried out legally by logging companies having close links with Government officials. Almost all wealthy and influential families achieved their wealth and influence by "legally" robbing timber on ancestral lands. Nowadays much of the remaining forests are controlled or owned by high-ranking Military. The shadow of the Marcos' Regime is still strong.

Now even those remaining patches of forest are threatened. The land of the Agta -the aboriginal people of the archipelago- is an example of the situation. Until a few decades ago, the Agta enjoyed an independent life as forest dwellers in a still intact rainforest located in the Sierra Madre, along the Pacific coast. But logging companies and the military took over their land step by step, and now the Agta are homeless and menaced by the invaders. "A certain colonel warned us that if we do not vacate our land, our tribe will be exterminated" said recently a spokesperson of the indigenous people.

An international campaign has been launched to halt this destruction. Those interested in expressing their concern and defending the Agta people and their forests can address the President of The Philippines, demanding a logging ban in the tribal Agta land:

President Estrada
Malacanang Palace
Manila, Philippines

Source: Friends of People Close to Nature