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Philippines

**In memory of the murdered
environment, in memory of the
murdered people:
environmental destruction in
Mindanao at its worse**

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The tragedy that had ravaged the areas in many areas of Northern Mindanao during the flashfloods that hit Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City last December 17, 2011 and the landslide in Pantukan Compostela Valley last January 5, 2012 are more than enough of a wake up call for everyone. The government may have responded through different reliefs and aids for the victims but still a very vital reality had been bypassed. The hows and whys of the people are answered through a generic explanation safe enough to justify the incident. It is because of the tropical storm Sendong that passes through the area of Mindanao with heavy rain-falls and the unexpected rise of the water levels in the rivers-great enough to consume all the houses near the river banks, created new pathways and submerged deep the areas that is before haven't experienced flooding. Therefore, it was an unexpected fate that caught everybody unprepared.

A disaster

The deaths of thousands and the destruction of people prompted the government to investigate why such a "weak storm" had caused massive destruction on the lives and properties of the people. Task force Sendong was created to investigate the presence of thousands of cut logs along the shores of Iligan city. These logs have caused the killing of many people and destroyed thousands of houses and properties during the flashflood. These logs are traced to come from a Makati based logging company in Manila. Now government officials are starting to pin point on who is to be held responsible to this incident. Whose term and whose administration allowed the logging operations of logging companies.

Murder

Philippines according to the 1995 Philippine Forestry Statistics comprise a land area of 30 million ha., wherein 53% is a forest land. Forestry had played a vital role in the socio economic development of the country but due to deforestation in late 1980s, it had depleted. The increasing deforestation in the Philippines was attributed to the ineffectiveness of our forest laws and its enforcements. No wonder why a Makati based Logging Company operating in the Lanao del Sur Province after the total log ban declaration, was still able to operate clandestinely and openly and there is not only a single Logging company that operates in the Philippines, in Mindanao-there are numbers of them not including yet the foreign companies applying for Mining in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao.

The issue of logging in the Lanao provinces can never be an isolated case, in fact almost all provinces in Mindanao have logging operations and Mining operations. To name a few, almost the entire area of CARAGA province have logging operations and even open pit mining operations, in Zamboanga Peninsula wherein mining companies have started drilling holes in the Ancestral Lands of the Indigenous Peoples. In Mt. Diwata, Compostela Valley which a number of Mining operations for gold recently has a landslide which killed more than 20 people and about 100 were still missing. The incident in Compostela was just few weeks after the incident in Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro City. Another tragedy that happened while Iligan and Cagayan de Oro City were still in the process of rehabilitations. Moreover, this government has encouraged foreign investors through the Public-Private partnership program, to invest in the Philippines and most of these investments evolved around mining, crop conversions, and land conversions.

The wrath of nature is its own way of crying as she had been continuously murdered. And the deaths of thousands of people can never be just considered as part of the collateral damage-it is murder. It is murder perpetrated by national and multi-national companies backed up by government line agencies through its policies. They have murdered our environment; they have murdered our people and they will continue to murder our future unless we the people of Mindanao and other parts of the country should act upon this by exposing the rotten system that brought catastrophe on the lives of the majority poor victims. We didn't cut trees and yet we have paid the price. Thousands of lives had been taken away by our negligence, how many more?

Never again.

January 6, 2012.

Iligan City, Mindanao