

**THE UNABATED RAPE AND DESTRUCTION OF  
OUR FORESTS MUST BE STOPPED NOW, LEST  
NATURE'S WRATH WILL CONTINUE TO HOUND  
AND PUNISH US FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS**

(Privilege Speech by Sen. Alfredo S. Lim)

December 8, 2004

Mr. President, I rise on a question of personal privilege.

Once, I stood and shared with you a dream foreboding violent deaths of political figures associated with corruption whose identities I failed to vividly recall. It was horrible and terrifying because it was bloody, brutal, barbaric and brought to light man's vicious instinct to kill.

Later, I stood again, no longer sharing a vision but a reality that had caused alarm in the wake of incessant and blatant assassinations by unknown assailants perpetrated against the hapless and helpless victims.

But the reality after I made that privilege speech had turned from bad to worse; from a crime against an individual to a crime against our helpless countrymen, nature that God gave us, and the future generation.

This time, I stand before you, Mr. President, no longer sharing a dream nor litanizing specific deaths committed with the use of man-made lethal weapons, but by the massive deaths and damage to properties of colossal proportion.

Yes, the wanton rape and destruction of our forests, especially along the Sierra Madre ranges, caused the loss of more than a thousand lives, damage and loss of properties to the tune of more than a billion pesos, and brought grief and sorrow to thousands of hapless victims of that unforgivable human mischief.

Last week, typhoon Winnie struck Luzon and some parts of the Visayas causing many deaths in the

provinces of Aurora and Quezon and inflicting heavy damage to properties, agriculture, and infrastructures in the provinces of Aurora, Quezon, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Bulacan and some parts of Bicol and Northern Luzon.

Some irresponsible DENR officials were quick to blame Mother Nature and point to it as the cause of the tragic deaths and destruction.

I can not accept such finger-pointing because you and I know that God would not have done this to our country.

God is inimitable, infallible and impeccable. While we are His mere creatures, He had gifted us with all the blessings, graces and everything for our wholesome and worthwhile living, that He expected to be reciprocated, with our moral and upright living.

On the other hand, when man no longer respects but scorns Him, turns to immorality and forgets that he is only a mere creature, God justly brings upon mankind catastrophes as punishment, similar to what was done to the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah who perished by fire, or those who perished through floods, leaving alive only men and animals on board Noah's Ark.

Let us not blame God for every horrifying tragedy befalling us, as we often do, because He certainly abhors authoring disasters, unless of course we have become sinners of equal, if not superior footing, than those punished in the biblical accounts I mentioned, which, of course I am not prepared to accept.

I don't think God would have wished to happen the water-full of fury at its extremes; of the merciless nature's wrath; of the intolerable sight of hundreds and thousands of people forlorn, desolate, abandoned and

yelling for futile help, shouting prayers, helplessly asking, in desperation for and absence of hope, where God was!

Men and women, strong and weak, old and young, infants and aged ones, fled for survival from the rolling rocks and stones, from the cascading mud and water from up-stream, succumbing to the rushing flood and perishing like their helpless and animals and pet.

The floods and landslides were ruthless. The killer mud, rocks and stones with rains falling in torrent, randomly claimed lives, strewing mangled bodies, mostly of innocent children who can no longer be the future hope of our nation, whose crimson blood were washed down and who sadly, can no longer be witnesses to another tragedy of men, greedy for money, fame and political power.

In the aftermath, we see the incontrovertible physical evidence of what caused the carnage: rolling logs freshly cut from hundred year old trees, together with slabs strewn all over the low-lying areas, where they ended up after having been carried by the waters, sophisticated logging equipment like chain saws and cutters, all messengers of death, and plunderers of forest wealth.

The heavy rains and howling winds attacked the helpless, barren and denuded Sierra Madre ranges, causing its weakened soil to erode and the illegally cut logs to follow suit, rolling down the slopes uncontrollably instantly killing and seriously injuring defenseless and unwary residents and destroying, sturdy houses and buildings as well as concrete bridges in its path.

It is saddening that Luzon was rampaged, greatly hitting the provinces of Aurora and Quezon, its

denuded and enraged Sierra Madre ranges, sparing no less the provinces of Bulacan and Nueva Ecija.

We ascribe the untimely and sacrificial deaths of 630, injuries of 373 and the still unaccounted victims or still missing of 607 to typhoon Winnie.

Let us face it: the tragedy in Quezon, Aurora and Nueva Ecija, are man-made.

Yes, man-made because of the unscrupulous and evil acts of illegal loggers, *kaingineros* and corrupt officials who failed to preserve and take care of our forests; and of course, the indifference and silence of the great many of our countrymen in allowing, the unabated rape and destruction of our forests.

When shall we stop man-made disasters? When can we say no to our self-interest and greed for self-gratification? Shall we continue to allow the slaughter

of our countrymen, whom God had vivified on the face of the earth? Shall we allow ourselves to be part of the annihilation of nature and mankind, whether actively or passively?

Beyond cavil, the widespread ecological mayhem was horrible and tragic, surpassing all crimes. Its statistics dwarfs the pernicious drug menace and renders less dangerous lethal weapons because, as we now realize, chain saws used for felling trees appear to be the most destructive instrument, man had ever invented.

Yes, chain saws are used for logging, legal or otherwise. Ironically, timber-cutting is not only allowed but licensed for decades, giving the loggers the freedom to destroy and denude forests. More likely than not, licenses are obtained in consideration of huge election or campaign funds.



Logging of all sorts had been going on in the Provinces of Quezon and Aurora without let-up and with impunity.

Laws penalizing illegal logging had been violated brazenly and fearlessly.

Illegal loggers had been emboldened to continue with their nefarious killing of our vital forests. I am sure, they are not alone in their illegal acts. They must be coddled, protected and defended with zest by those who share from the blood money and loot they derive, from that profitable but immoral venture.

Money was easy from freshly cut hardwood. It was irresistible to barrio folks, some of whom banished in their man-made mishap. Even the poor aborigines or natives inhabiting the forested area are susceptible to temptation of “easy money”. Thus, the carabao loggers commenced business selling hot logs to “financing”

sawmill proprietors or logging magnate, licensed or not.

Illegal loggers are nothing but a myth. A poor man can not sustain the expenses of tree cutting. It has to be financed by an investor, and the moneyed so-called legal loggers.

Only the legal concessionaires exploiting the illegal loggers, can take advantage of the power of their money, abuse the poverty-stricken inhabitants in the area, who have no choice but to allow themselves, to be exploited for money.

I can not understand how logs could be felled in the open, cut to sizes with high-speed sawmills, transported to the exporters and end-users and **disappear that fast**. Without any public official or peace officer noticing them.

Logs are not commodities easy to carry, to handle or to transport without the aid of numerous workers and sophisticated equipment. Yet, it seems nobody noticed the operations going on for several decades.

Public officials and private individuals involved in illegal logging must be punished, even under our generous penal laws for the time-being, and made to answer for the damage wrought on our country and people.

Mr. President, P.D. No. 705, otherwise known as the Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines, issued by Pres. Marcos in 1975, provides a relatively light penalty for illegal logging.

Under Sec. 68, illegal logging is considered only as a qualified theft and punishable under Arts. 309 and 310 of the Revised Penal Code. Under Sec. 69, kaingin is penalized by imprisonment of from 2 to 4 years.

Under Sec. 79, sale of illegally cut logs or wood products is penalized by a fine of P200.00 or a total value of the invoice.

Noticeably, there is no penalty for any personnel of the Bureau of Forestry or the DENR involved in the commission of illegal logging or who conspire with illegal loggers.

It is high time Mr. President we must make illegal logging a heinous crime with a proviso that, regardless of connections and influence and place of commission, the perpetrators shall be prosecuted in any Courts in Metro-Manila to prevent harassment of witnesses and insure continuous watch, of the developments in the cases.

Whether public officials or private individuals, those found guilty shall be equally meted the supreme penalty of death.

Words are not enough to assuage the grief of the surviving relatives of those, who perished and wounds sustained by those injured. Money is not sufficient to compensate the loss of lives and properties. And, prayers, while spiritually gratifying, are nonetheless too merciful to comfort the victims and their relatives, because more than money, sympathy and prayers, they need justice, that is, the prosecution and imprisonment of the culprits.

Let us, therefore, flush out illegal loggers so we can vindicate the loss of lives and properties of the helpless victims, through giving them real justice.

Mr. President, because of the gravity of the tragedy that struck us in the wake of typhoons Winnie and Yoyong, I urge this August body to conduct a thorough investigation in order that appropriate legislation can be made by the appropriate Committees to end once and for all, the illegal logging activities in

this country and ensure a better future for the coming generations.

Thank you.