

POSITION OF SENATOR PANFILO M. LACSON

GREEN ELECTORAL INITIATIVE:

The Philippines ranked 125th out of 144 countries in the 2005 Environmental Sustainability Index with the Environmental Governance receiving negative 0.15 indicator value. We are not only the most corrupt country in Asia, we are also the worst in the protection of our environment.

This clearly shows the way the administration is managing the country's natural resources and conserving the environment.

Our constitution declares as a matter of policy that the state shall protect and conserve the environment.

This was interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean that the present generation is responsible to protect and conserve the environment under the doctrine of inter-generational responsibility.

We do not own the environment. We just borrowed it from the future generation of the country.

The present generation must therefore preserve the same for the future generation.

A. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

1. Will you support a moratorium on proposed coal-fired power plants and the transition of existing ones to renewable energy sources as a means to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions and help in the international effort to contain global warming? Will you also support a moratorium on other greenhouse gas emitting sources such as "sanitary" landfills, "waste-to-energy", cement kilns, etc?

Answer:

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a joint, 193-nation effort of the United Nations and the world Meteorological Organization, foresees a steady rise in temperatures and sea levels for centuries because of human-caused global warming. It was reported that warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising sea level."

The United Nations has said that, global warming is "very likely" caused mostly by human activity – in particular carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels – and not merely natural processes of Earth and its atmosphere.

The Kyoto Protocol which mandates the reduction of green house gas emission of first world country is a milestone in the fight against global warming.

The Philippines must do its share in the reduction of greenhouse gases.

This can be done by banning old right-hand drive vehicles from abroad which are reported to consume a lot of fuels and are no longer environment friendly.

The government must likewise implement a strategy to promote renewable energy like wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power.

The government must start to phase out coal fired power plants and those that rely heavily of fossil fuels.

Congress must pass a law that will give incentives to companies that will invest in renewable energy.

2. Will you support a strong renewable energy legislation with high and binding renewable energy targets that will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and assure genuine energy security for the country's future?

Answer:

Yes, I will support a strong renewable energy legislation based on a sound and sustainable energy plan that will include all non-traditional energy sources. The energy plan should include an actuarial projection of the energy requirements of the country vis-à-vis the impact of population growth in each area.

3. What legislative measures (Le. demand side management, market incentives, Integrated Resource Planning) will you initiate to mainstream energy efficiency in the country?

Answer:

Congress must pass a law that will give incentives to companies that will invest in renewable energy.

B. WATER

1. Are you willing to commit a specific percentage of your Countryside Development Fund (CDF) for the development of septage and sewerage management, treatment and infrastructure?

Answer:

For the past years, I have waived my CDF as I believe I will continue to do so.

2. The pollution of our sources for clean water (e.g., freshwater, groundwater) is exacerbating the water crisis, with the prospects of severe water shortages in the future looming large. What legislative measures would you propose to ensure stricter protection of our aquifers (groundwater), as well as providing stiffer penalties to polluters of water sources?

Answer:

The water crisis is here. It is no longer looming. According to the National Statistics Office, 32% of Filipinos still get their water from doubtful quality and source. The water crisis is the result of poor management and graft and corruption. The National Government is allotting only 0.56% of the national budget to water services and flood control.

Imposing penalties is not the sole answer to address the water crisis. We already have enough laws on that matter. What is needed is for government to address the core issues on why pollutive practices such as direct waste dumping is still prevalent.

3. What steps will you undertake to ensure people's fair access to water and guard against monopoly?

Answer:

As a legislator, I shall support efforts to review government's policy on the privatization of water distribution systems and also the performance of local water utility boards to ensure fair access to the resources.

C. SOLID WASTE

1. The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (R.A. 9003) mandates the closure (of all dumps and the establishment of Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) or ecology center in every barangay or cluster of barangays. Six years after the law took effect, the country remains littered with more than 1,000 open and controlled dumps. To date, only 1,723 MRFs or ecology centers exist in the country's 120,000 barangays. What legislative action will you take to ensure the effective implementation of RA 9003?

Answer:

The Solid Waste Management Act provides that all open and controlled dumps must be closed by February 16, 2006. Despite this however, only a handful of NGOs were able to comply with this deadline. The usual reason for non-compliance is the lack of funds.

The establishment of a Material Recovery Facility in every Barangay is the key to solve the garbage problem of the country. An effective MRF can reduce residual waste to up to 90% with the remaining 10% going to the dump. It is likewise a good way to earn from garbage.

Congress must pass a law to mandate extended producer's liability so that manufacturing companies will be compelled to buy-back the waste they produce and dispose of it properly that will further reduce the 10% that goes to the dump.

Payatas dumpsite continues to operate as an open dump despite the prohibition under the Solid Waste Management Act.

2. Thousands of families subsist by collecting discards from bins and dumps. R.A. 9003 barely responds to the waste pickers' socio-economic, health and other needs. How do you plan to plug this legislative loophole in RA 9003 so that waste pickers, including itinerant and dump based waste pickers will be recognized as integral players in the ecological and safe management of discards?

Answer:

I shall file a resolution in the Senate for the Congressional Oversight Committee on Solid Waste conduct a thorough review of the Solid Waste Management Act, with the end in view of proposing the necessary amendments.

3. Will you support legislative measures that will compel companies to phase out toxic substances in their products, in packaging and in production systems as well as institute take back systems for their end of life products (e.g., computer waste etc.)?

Answer:

I will support legislative measures that will push for phase out toxic substances in products, packaging and production systems. A resolution calling for a current inventory of these substances proliferating in the market to be undertaken by the agencies concerned can provide the empirical data to determine the extent of the influx to our economy.

4. Do you support banning certain types of plastics and disposables which contribute to our worsening waste problems? What are your views regarding slapping a kind of "sin" tax on disposable plastics packaging, taking into account that citizens and taxpayers are currently shouldering the costs of disposal of these types of waste materials?

Answer:

A progressive sin tax may be imposed not only on plastics but also on other environmental regressive practices.

D. TOXIC WASTE TRADE & JPEPA

1. Malacanang has submitted the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) to the Senate for ratification. Considering the concerns raised by different sectors over the absence of democratic consultation and participation of civil society, and also regarding the toxic and nuclear waste trade, and other exploitative provisions under the proposed treaty, will you vote to reject or ratify JPEPA? Why?

Answer:

The most controversial provision of the JPEPA regarding the environment is the authority given to Japan to export to our country their toxic and hazardous wastes. This is in violation of the Basel Convention which prohibits the trans-boundary movement of toxic and hazardous waste from a first world country to third world countries.

Sec. Mike Defensor as secretary of DENR wrote DTI a letter stating that the provision in the JPEPA allowing the shipment of hazardous and toxic waste to our country is in violation of the Basel Convention. However, Incumbent Secretary Angelo Reyes allowed the same subject to compliance to certain conditions.

Whether or not Japan complies with these conditions, it will not negate the fact that it is still in violation of the Basel Convention and Republic Act 6969 or the Toxic and Hazardous Waste Act.

Japan has a long line of record for violating the Basel Convention. These violations were fully documented by the Basel Action Network. Japan keeps on dumping hazardous and toxic wastes in China and African countries.

The Senate should not ratify JPEPA.

2. Parties to the Basel Convention adopted in 1995 the Basel Ban Amendment which prohibits the transboundary movements of hazardous waste from developed to developing countries for any purpose. The Philippines is a party to the Basel Convention but is yet to ratify the Basel Ban Amendment. Will you initiate and support the ratification of the Basel Ban Amendment in the 14th Congress, and work to amend RA 6969 which contains a loophole that allows toxic and hazardous wastes to be sent to the Philippines for "economic reasons"?

Answer:

Yes. I shall support the ratification of the Basel Ban Amendment.

3. The dumping of post consumer goods from developed to poorer countries containing toxic wastes, such as electronic waste, are becoming a global concern. There are efforts underway in the developed world, particularly in Europe to hold manufacturers of these products responsible for the take-back and proper recycling of their products at its end-of-life. Will you support legislative measures that will hold manufacturers accountable for their products at end-of-life?

Answer:

I shall introduce a bill otherwise known as the Extended Producers Liability Act which will require producer's buy back and proper disposal of the packaging of their products.

E. GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs) (10 pts)

1. What steps will you take to protect the country's biodiversity and public health from the contamination and unpredictable adverse effects of the release and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture and food?

Answer:

Greenpeace has protested the authority given by the National Food Authority for the importation and sale in the Philippines of Uncle Sam's Texas Long Grain Rice which was tested to be positive for unapproved and illegal GMOs. The protest resulted in the pull-out in the market of the said rice.

Rice is the country's most important staple food. It is imperative for the government to protect rice as part of the food security of the Philippines.

Some say that genetic engineering is an unnecessary technology and that it poses risk to the environment as well as to the health of the people. Some however maintain that it is not safe and is necessary. There should be an absolute ban on products found to be containing unapproved or illegal GMOs.

Labeling of products containing GMO is the crucial first step in the regulation of these products. I intend to introduce a bill in the Senate to regulate the proper labeling of GMOs.

Consumers must be given an informed choice of the products they are purchasing.

2. Despite widespread rejection of genetically modified (GM) rice in markets worldwide, illegal genetically modified rice is being sold in Philippine supermarkets and approval for the use of another GM rice strain for food, feed and processing is currently pending at the Bureau of Plant Industry. Do you support the introduction and commercialization of GM rice in the country?

Answer:

No. Labeling of products containing GMO is the crucial first step in the regulation of these products. I intend to introduce a bill in the Senate to regulate the proper labeling of GMOs.

Consumers must be given an informed choice of the products they are purchasing.

3. Would you support the mandatory labeling of all products containing GM organisms sold in the Philippines?

Answer:

Yes I will support mandatory labeling of all products containing GM organisms sold in the Philippines. Consumers should have the right information so that they may be able to make informed decisions. Governments agencies such as DA and DTI should be able to provide accurate and balance information to consumers as regards GMO's (just like the labeling in cigarettes and alcohol sold to the public including warnings in its advertisements).

SUSTAINABLE & ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

1. Will you support a legislation that will remove subsidies to synthetic farm inputs as well as measures that would significantly reduce the use of pesticides and agricultural chemicals in the country? Will you support that these subsidies be re-channeled to the promotion of organic agriculture practices?

Answer:

I will initiate filing of a resolution that will carefully look into the impact of programs of government particularly the Dept of Agriculture in its distribution of pesticide and agricultural chemicals. More specifically, questions on impact on the productivity of farmers as a result of these subsidies should be established as there are equally contentious issues in the mechanisms by which these subsidies are distributed. In my trips around the country, constituents have informed me that productivity impact directly related to food subsidies has not been established. While I am not against as a matter of policy with subsidies, the long-term impact of this strategy has to be evaluated to establish whether such intervention is actually helping improve the lives of farmers in the long-term. Fund support should definitely be given to promotion of organic agriculture practices as we recognize that the transition may take years to realize.

2. Will you support a legislation that will shift the DA's policy orientation from chemically based and synthetic agriculture towards the development of sustainable and organic agriculture as defined by Executive Order 481 or the Promotion and Development of Organic Agriculture in the Philippines? "

Answer:

Yes, specifically in the area of fiscal support in the National Govt Appropriation. While there is a policy statement by the executive as contained in EO 481, without the budgetary support (with corresponding line item budget specified), this may just end up as a policy statement and no concrete programs are initiated and implemented in the grassroots.

G. LOGGING

1. What measures would you propose to advance community-based forest management and enforcement of laws against illegal logging? Do you agree that natural forests should be kept free from commercial logging or conversion into other uses?

Answer:

Illegal logging must be stopped and should not be tolerated. We must encourage in the Senate the debate on total log ban. I am for a Total Log Ban

2. Will you support a five year moratorium on commercial logging to allow our forests to regenerate and while our communities are trained to do community-based forest management and in monitoring their respective areas?

Answer:

Yes. The government is spending hundreds of millions of pesos in reforestation projects. Despite this, the country's forest cover did not drastically improve because the cutting of trees continues. Congress must pass the Sustainable Forest Management Act which will encourage private sector participation in the reforestation of the government. The government must admit that it cannot by itself undertake the reforestation of our forests.

H. MINING

1. What legislative measures will you initiate to make mining companies accountable in the acute and long term impacts caused by their activities on public health and the environment?

Answer:

Despite the projection of US\$840 Billion in mineral deposits, only a small fraction thereof will remain in the country because of the provision of the Mining Act giving foreigners 100% control of a mining concession in the guise of Foreign Technical Assistance Agreement.

The Philippine Mining Act of 1995 allows full repatriation of income and investment thus foreign companies can leave with all their investment and earnings from mining after the exploitation of country's mineral resources.

The government approved 228 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements none of which was reported to Congress as mandated by the Philippine Mining Act.

A review of the Philippine Mining Act should be made especially on the provision allowing foreign participation in the mining industry and the full repatriation of income and investment.

2. Will you support a community-based, environment-friendly small scale mining legislation?

Answer:

Yes, but subject to the conditions that, certain limits on the number of minerals to extracted must be made.

3. How do you intend to uphold the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) and National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) especially in the context of the said laws' outstanding conflicts and inconsistencies with provisions to the Mining Act?

Answer:

In any case of conflict between the aforementioned laws, the same should be resolved in favor of the rights of our indigenous brothers and sisters and the protection and promotion of the environment. The proper amendment to the Mining Act should be filed on this manner.

I. AIR POLLUTION

1. Air pollution remains a serious threat to public health. What legislative step will you initiate to make the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 more effective? Would you support a ban on the importation of dirty, second-hand diesel engine?

Answer:

Yes. I support efforts to ban old right-hand drive vehicles from abroad which are reported to consume a lot of fuels and are no longer environment friendly.

2. What legislative measures will you propose that would mainstream the production and use of clean fuels, increase motor efficiency and reduce fuel consumption?

Answer:

The Philippines is quite advance in Environmental Legislation compared to other countries. Our laws are at par with European environmental laws. The problem however, as always is the Executive Department, which has a bad record of implementing these laws. We have more than 200 laws on the environment, and yet these laws are being implemented poorly

J. YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL TRACK RECORD

1. Please enumerate and describe your earlier and existing initiative(s) in the environmental field (not necessarily in the legislative area) including sponsoring, voting, history in congress with respect to environmental bills, environmental programs implemented, benefits for the environment, etc. Please include your party platform in the environment, if any.

Answer:

He was a signatory to the R.A. 9637, Biofuel Act (directing the use of biofuels, establishing the biofuel program, appropriating funds therefor) and co-author of R.A. 9175, Chain-saw Act (Regulating the ownership, possession, sale , importation and use of chainsaws, penalizing violations thereof).