

Green Electoral Initiative – Response from Sonia Roco

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.?**

I will definitely support the smooth transition of existing coal-fired power plants to renewable energy sources. To address the issue of supply, a selective moratorium on all fossil-based power plants can be successfully had only in the presence of alternative energy sources.

This should not be a problem for the country given that we have vast reserves of clean, renewable energy. Even the prospects of harnessing wind energy for the Philippines looks to be a very promising alternative. It would also be helpful if government can tap into community-based organizations and cooperatives to come up with small-scale to medium-scale energy production alternatives.

Should the transition to these renewable energy sources take more than 5 years, it would be advisable for the government including the Senate to follow the advise of former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern in his paper. He has suggested for governments to compel and mandate power companies to "sequester" the carbon that goes up in smoke by pumping it underground. It is good to reiterate that this is just a stopgap measure and palliative that should pave the way to the country's transition to renewable energy sources. But it is a necessary palliative nonetheless.

The issue of climate change is real, dangerous and costly. The Philippines should be at the forefront in the international debate and discussion of global change given that we are a country struck by storms and typhoons every year. The changing and aberrant trends in the environment have caused nature to wreak unwarranted havoc to coastal areas and storm-prone countries like ours. So the clamor for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions should be stronger and louder from our end.

The damage that abnormal storms cause was something that I personally saw when I visited typhoon Reming victims last year. My husband's region (Bicol) is always wrought with storms and typhoons year in and year out. There is more correlation to typhoons and climate changes than meets the eye. The threat of climate change is no longer a looming threat. It has caused both imminent and real danger to our citizens and properties. The battle against greenhouse gas emissions should be sustained and a moratorium on other greenhouse gas emitting sources is also a sensible step in the right direction – something that I will personally and officially support.

- 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 ensure genuine energy security for the country's future?**

Yes. While Congress was quick enough to railroad the inhuman Human Security Act during its special session last February 19, it has failed to give the Renewable Energy Bill even the slightest glance. The RE bill has taken several years to initiate committee-level discussion and now it is still pending. It is indeed disappointing for Congress to pass up on this landmark legislation during its special session when it could have been an opportune time to prove to the world that our leaders are sincere in the green crusade for a low-carbon economy.

Allow me to repeat - the issue of climate change is real, dangerous and costly. Every month or year that we lose in having this bill ratified mean outstanding costs – both qualitative and quantitative – to our ecology and economy. As a signatory to and having ratified the Kyoto protocol, our government is morally and duty-bound to ensure that we support this effort with tangible legislations and action plans.

A global consensus is slowly building up to protect the environment and explore renewable energy targets. The Philippines should do its share and even more so, should lead the clamor for developed countries to take the lead, being the major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

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

Legislative measures for demand side management are actually stipulated in RA 9136 (Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001). The Executive should be vigilant in the administration and monitoring of the annual Power Development Program that provides for the administration of energy efficiency programs expected from Power Distribution Utilities.

- Careful review of the application of national franchise of Distribution Utilities vis-à-vis their periodic energy efficiency measures that they impose upon the end-consumers.
- Explore the insertion of amendments and/or revisions to RA 9136 (Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001). While the supply side of energy management was discussed and provided for at length, the demand side aspect has to be indicated more clearly – with accountabilities and general direction more vividly defined and described.
- Introduce incentives to both end users and distribution companies who have successfully mainstreamed energy efficiency programs.
- Consolidate divided efforts at market-side energy efficiency into one cohesive Integrated Resource Planning program by tapping into different initiatives from government departments, NGOs and private sector.

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?

Yes. An efficient, effective and environment-friendly septage and sewerage management, treatment and infrastructure will do well to improve and safeguard the health and well being of our denizens. While it may be overly ambitious to replicate the technology and infrastructure for septage and sewerage of advanced countries, the Philippines can initiate tailor-fitted treatment and infrastructure for this. We should continue to support a low-cost but effective and decentralized sewerage strategy.

On top of the allocation from my CDF, we will be actively involved in helping guarantee the support of the national government on these areas in compliance to Article 1 Section 7 and Section 8 of RA 9275 or Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004, stated in part:

“Such program shall include a priority listing of sewerage, septage and combined sewerage-septage projects for LGUs based on population density and growth, degradation of water resources, topography, geology, vegetation, program/projects for the rehabilitation of existing facilities and such other factors that the Secretary may deem relevant to the protection of water quality. On the basis of such national listing, the national government may allot, on an annual basis, funds for the construction and rehabilitation of required facilities.”

We will help ensure that this will be given its due attention as Congress ratifies the annual national budget.

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?

For a country seeped and surrounded all over by bodies of water, it is a lamentable fact that the looming threat of severe water shortages in the future is slowly becoming real. Water rationing is even in our midst already as we fall prey to phenomenon such as El Niño.

The civil liability and penal provisions stipulated on pollution of water sources are clearly indicated in Chapter 5 Sections 27-29 of RA 9275 or Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004. The law actually explicitly identifies fines for violators; however, it fails to take into consideration imprisonment as part of the penalty for small offenders. We will study the potential effects of imprisonment as a deterrent to the continued pollution of our water sources.

It is likewise important to note though that there are some contributors to water pollution who also belong to the poor communities, who by their situation, inadvertently pollute our

waters too. The government should take this into consideration and implement programs that will address this.

As a side note, let me take the chance to discuss the damage caused by the oil spill in Guimaras last year. If our country is to successfully avert and/or buffer the potential damage of future oil spills, it becomes highly imperative for the government to study the recent oil spill and for the legislature to help the executive craft a national protocol in responding appropriately to oil spills. Oil spills, after all, could likewise seep into our water sources if not immediately and appropriately addressed.

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

It is in the public interest if the existing players in the water industry do their best to provide accessible and reasonably-rated water services. The mere privatization of water services will help safeguard against monopoly. What is imperative is that these players address issues of corruption and inefficiency besetting these utilities. The government and Senate can look into the following areas to ensure the people's fair access to water and guard against monopoly:

- ensure transparency and auditing of the collected Foreign Currency Differential (FCD) from the end-consumers by Maynilad Water Services, Inc.
- compel Maynilad to pay its long-overdue concession fees to enable the government to meet the maturing loans it incurred just to avoid the maturing loans of the former. This is a simple borrowing money to pay for borrowed money. And the interest is slowly depleting our national treasury for something that a private concern should be shouldering in the first place.
- Given that the water utilities have always sought the cover of currency differential and the currency crisis to pass on forex related charges to the consumers, government can now look into the revenues generated out of the recent peso appreciation against the dollar and factor this into the whole picture to explore rates relief for the end-consumers.

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 MRF or ecology centers exist in the country's 42,000 barangays. What legislative action will you take to ensure the effective implementation of RA 9003?

This is really more of an executive issue owing to political will, or lack of it, more than it is a legislative one. We will study the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the said law and tweak it to become more responsive to the needs of the accountable local governments. We will look into the reason for non-compliance first and more than just coming up with stiffer penalties and more stringent and defined accountabilities, one should look into how the national government can better support the LGUs in the implementation of this noble legislation.

Legislature will have to secure and earmark adequate funding to aid the establishments of more Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs) into fruition. This budget can be secured also through the annual General Appropriations Act. The sustainability of the Materials Recovery Facility into a community-based center that can provide alternative incomes and sources of livelihood can be realized through the combined effort of the community leaders and organizations/ cooperatives. If and when the barangays realize that MRFs can also help provide income and jobs to their area, the market itself will move to make MRFs sustainable. But no amount of legislation can bring impetus to this – it is the Executive branch that can appropriately do this. Though the legislative can also help provide linkages and networks to make these projects work.

2. Thousands of families subsists by collecting discards from bins and dumps. RA 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?

Waste pickers indeed form a big part of the underground economy for waste management. They remain as an untapped force whose socio-economic well being, health and other needs are more often than not overlooked. An appropriate amendment to RA 9003 addressing the contribution of waste pickers and stipulating guidelines for their well being will help these marginalized groups in the area of waste management.

Other action plans will be as follows:

- provide necessary linkage to private sector companies and organizations that help engage in waste trading like Philippine Business for the Environment with its monthly Recyclables Collection Events or even SM chain of malls which engage now in waste trading.
- Strengthen network of health support from the individual Barangay Health Workers to address the health needs of the waste traders and educating them on proper waste handling and even avoiding food poisoning – something which the waste traders are so prone to.
- Enforce strict guidelines and penalties against parents and employers allowing children to engage in waste trading, pursuant to child labor laws of the country.
- Help organize the huge pool of waste traders in geographic areas by tapping the barangay leaders and aid them by providing training and briefings that will help them do a better job.

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.)?

Yes, I will definitely support legislative measures compelling companies to totally phase out toxic substances in their products, in packaging and in production systems. This will invariably help both their customers and their employees.

Companies who have been reaping massive profits these past few years should realize that it is now their time to pay it back to the community. Given that most companies now are strengthening their corporate social responsibility arms, they should make take-back systems for their end of life products a huge part not only of their CSR efforts but of their operational and production procedures and product cycle flow. They will not only be doing their communities a favor, this will also help them come up with better alternatives of income from these wastes. We are quite certain of their innovativeness when it comes to these initiatives.

4. Do you support banning of 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?

Yes, I will support banning certain types of plastics and disposables. While other countries are aptly adopting non-plastic bags and containers for their consumer and retail shopping needs, the Philippines is still lagging behind in this initiative. The recent development and international recognition that the country got for being the "Center of all centers for marine biodiversity" is something that we should all be proud of. It scares me to think that we could easily lose this title due to the unbridled waste and plastic pollution. Even the beauty of Boracay could be spoiled by its worsening waste and plastics problem.

The issue of disposable plastics packaging is just a matter of political will. I will support the regulation of the use, production and disposal of plastics packaging and will support slapping a kind of "sin" tax on these products so long as we have safety nets in place to protect the end-consumers from ultimately shouldering whatever sin tax the government may be imposing on the plastics company.

D. TOXIC WASTE TRADE & JPEPA

1. Malacañang 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?

Given its present form and substance, I will vote to REJECT the JPEPA for the following reasons:

1) JPEPA is a one-sided bilateral agreement that seeks to advance the economic interest primarily of Japan more than it will do so for the Philippines. There are no safety nets put in place that will allow the Philippines to maximize the foreign direct investment to be had from Japan from this agreement. There is no guarantee of technology and skills transfer and there is lack of assured employment of Filipinos as a corollary effect of these investments. Performance requirements for Japanese investors are flushed down the drain and this is tantamount to subsidizing Japanese industries with little or no regard over what real economic benefits we could have sans the performance requirements.

I personally adhere to the foreign policy of multilateral engagements more than bilateral ones believing that there is strength in numbers. There are likewise several trade activities and negotiations that the Philippines can engage in with other countries including Japan which are stipulated in the existing WTO agreements thus I see little appreciation over our going into such onerous agreement.

2) JPEPA contains anti-environment provisions that would open our floodgates to hazardous and toxic waste. Under the present agreement, waste products form part of the regular products to be traded and are even given preferential tariff rate of zero percent. This invariably gives blanket license for Japan to make the Philippines its dumping ground.

Japan is indeed hell-bent in looking for trade individual trade partner-countries who will tolerate its scheme of waste trading given that it will have difficulty pushing for these under existing WTO agreements. The Philippines should look after its economic and ecological interest first more than that of another country's.

3) JPEPA poses many legal and constitutional questions which have to be addressed. There was insufficient public consultation and information on this agreement. It will also hold the country accountable for having been signatories to the Basel Convention and now we are about to give leeway for Japan to undertake transboundary movement of its waste into our shores. It indeed has significant impact on the other existing laws that we have, so much so that this requires very massive changes on other such laws. The inconvenience brought upon by such process is heavy enough to offset whatever bogus benefits we are supposed to gain from such deal.

Other than our bilateral agreement entered into with the US several decades ago, this trade agreement would set a negative precedent for all other future bilateral agreements we will have. I say we do things right the first time and save time, re-work and economic resources in the future rather than to haphazardly enter into an agreement that does not really spell real advantages for the Filipino people.

- 2. Parties to the Basel Convention adopted in 1995 the Basel Ban Amendment which prohibits the transboundary movements of hazardous waste form 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”?**

As party to the Basel Convention and owing to the spirit and logic of the proposed Basel Ban Amendment, the Philippines should move to ratify the Basel Ban Amendment with much dispatch. By doing so, this will aid and protect the country from transboundary movements of hazardous wastes.

There is so much at stake for the Philippines should we fail to ratify the said Amendment. As a gateway to Asia and being an archipelago in the Pacific, we are one of the most vulnerable countries to transboundary movements of hazardous waste. Our ratification of the Basel Ban Amendment will send a strong signal to the international community that we are no push-overs and that we do NOT welcome any hazardous wastes for that matter. For this very reason and after looking at the merits of the Basel Ban Amendments, I will initiate and support the country's ratification of the Basel Ban Amendment when given a chance to be in public office.

Hazardous waste whether they have economic usage or not are still hazardous wastes. We cannot define hazardous waste in the context of the economic usage or the benefit it may bring to our economy. As such, we will review this seemingly lopsided and myopic definition of hazardous waste as defined in RA 6969.

- 3. The dumping of post consumer goods from developed to poorer countries containing toxic wastes, such as electronic waste, is 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?**

Cliché as it may sound, we only have one planet. The tremendous amount of waste that the world is churning out daily is truly alarming. Governments are duty-bound to ensure the safety and future of its citizens.

As I have stated before, it is high time we ask the manufacturers and companies to do their share for the community. We are not seeking for them to siphon off significant shares from their profits but just a miniscule part from their end to be accountable for their products at end-of-life. They have enough R&D support to find innovative means to either prolong the shelf life of their products or to find suitable ways and income-generating means to recycle their wastes – something which the government may not really have the time and resources to diligently look into. This does not, in any way, inhibit the government from abdicating its responsibility of waste management; it is just regulating and tapping the private sectors to do its part.

E. GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)

- 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?

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As I have stated before, it is high time we ask the manufacturers and companies to do their share for the community. We are not seeking for them to siphon off significant shares from their profits but just a miniscule part from their end to be accountable for their products at end-of-life. They have enough R&D support to find innovative means to either prolong the shelf life of their products or to find suitable ways and income-generating means to recycle their wastes – something which the government may not really have the time and resources to diligently look into. This does not, in any way, inhibit the government from abdicating its responsibility of waste management; it is just regulating and tapping the private sectors to do its part.

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?

No, I will not support the introduction and commercialization of GM rice in the country on several points. Firstly, there has been a reported breakout of rice contamination all over the world on these GM rice. We have to secure the health and safety of our citizens and children first. Unless the government and the GM proponents can provide adequate studies and proof that these do not bring unmitigated harm to our citizens, we should be wary about the introduction and commercialization of such products.

Second, given that the government has also approved EO 481 pursuing and promoting organic agriculture, the introduction and commercialization of GM rice in the country looks to be a step in the wrong direction. Up until there can be a massive, long-term and exhaustive study certifying the safety of GM rice, our country cannot run the risk of its introduction in the country, rice being our staple food.

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

Yes. I support the mandatory and immediate labeling of all products containing GM organisms or GM ingredients. Labeling is an important aspect that ensures the consumers' awareness and protects them from health hazards such as GMs. I am a consumer myself and whenever I purchase things, I make sure I read the labels as well. Labeling is also a good compromise to make sure that the choice is given to the public should there be no withdrawal of these products from the market. The said labeling should

carry no minimum weight for such brand to be labeled. Even the slightest gram of a GMO ingredient in the product should be labeled as such.

The government executive should likewise do its part to ensure that we inform the public the advantages and disadvantages of GMs in our food supply. The government can also certify and accredit certain establishments as 100% GM-free. We are not trying to create a stigma against GMs. We just have to make sure that we provide adequate information to the public until such time that the debate on GMs has been exhausted.

F. SUSTAINBLE AND 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 agricultural practices?**

We will review existing legislation if indeed there are existing ones that do provide for subsidies to synthetic farm inputs. There are several conflicting studies that prove that pesticides and agricultural chemicals in our agricultural products have miniscule health effect or none at all while there are also studies that prove otherwise. In this light, the path to organic agriculture is a step in the right direction.

Indeed, these subsidies to synthetic farm inputs and other agricultural implements should be re-channeled immediately to the promotion of organic agricultural practices. Organic agriculture is going back to the basics and we trust that nature has enough laws in place to ensure adequate food supply and security in the first place. While the issue of fertilizer fund may leave a bad taste in this administration's mouth, it becomes the role of legislative as well to make sure that all these subsidies are re-channeled appropriately to the correct recipients – the thriving farmers who are instrumental in the implementation of organic agriculture in the country.

- 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?**

YES, it is the very use of chemically based and synthetic means and pesticides that allow the issue of GMs to thrive and prosper. Some scientist claim that the commercialization of GMs will buffer the need for pesticides and other such synthetic farming means.

It is in the context of this debate which makes the path to Organic Agriculture a path of least resistance. It is giving back to nature and its laws the free rein to provide for humankind. We will explore the need for legislation given that EO 481 has already been promulgated. We will also help safeguard and ensure that the annual budget for organic

agriculture be given its due and sufficient funding in the General Appropriations Act as defined also in EO 481 as the source of succeeding funds for this initiative.

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?

It is important to give back to the communities the role of forest management. There are no other stakeholders on the issue of forest management and logging more so than the nearby residents and communities. They become the first victims of natural calamities and freak phenomenon owing to lack of forest cover in their area. As such, the following measures are proposed to further advance community-based forest management and enforcement of laws against illegal logging:

- Provide active linkages between the academe and the communities for the former to aid in the knowledge enhancement on forest resource management. The identification of flora and fauna and the corresponding knowledge base which would help the communities has to be expanded.
- Identify critical areas all over the country and mandate all LGU's down to the barangay level to initiate a volunteer corps that would help in securing forest covers.
- Provide alternative sources of livelihood and income to families and communities who rely solely on logging as source of income.
- Review the existing approval process for logging permits and ensure that the government leaves no room for corruption in the process.

I fully agree that natural forests should be kept free from commercial logging or conversion into other uses.

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?

Yes, this recourse may sound a tad too extreme to most people but our depleting forest cover has caused damage to our economy and communities. This will provide ample time for the communities to build capacities in forest resource management and will allow the laws of nature to take root and allow our forests to regenerate. The log ban bill has long been pending and has been passed up by several congresses. We will work to ensure that this bill makes inroads in the next congress.

The issue of forest cover also helps counter the greenhouse gas emissions. As a country rich in natural resources, it becomes highly urgent for us to allow some time for forests to regenerate and put a stop to destructive logging. The issue of logging is also highly

connected to the issue of corruption – if we do not address the issue of corruption and compañero mentality in the logging industry, there is little hope to address this declining state 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?

So much leeway is given to mining companies at the expense of our communities and even indigenous tribes. While it is true that we derive economic benefits from their continued operations, we should never continue to do so at the expense of the environment. Mining should never cause damage to critical watersheds, eco-systems, agriculture and fisheries.

We will review the existing Mining Act of 1995 and enjoin the participation of more stakeholders in its review. We will particularly look into the creation of a “damage index” and assess the impact of mining activities to different impacted communities. Government should cease becoming a permits and license mill and should review licenses released to companies.

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

Yes, a community-based, environment-friendly small-scale mining would be a step in the right direction. Though they may not enjoy economies of scale, the stake of communities on the issue of mining is so huge owing to the fact that they are the most affected. The government’s iniquities in the proper monitoring and regulation of large-scale mining operations has allowed the latter to grow to uncontrollable proportions and has resulted to unquantifiable damage to the environment. The support for a small-scale community-based mining would result to an over-all policy of self-regulation and thus it aids the government in the regulation of the industry.

IBON Foundation estimates the number of small-scale miners to be from 300,000 to 500,000. With this number and with their families, such sector could indeed be a primary contributor to the economy if given ample support and opportunity.

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?

We will review the said outstanding conflicts and inconsistencies and work to come up with winning solutions that would address the rights of our indigenous people and seek to protect our identified protected areas. My background in the culture and the arts has allowed me to carry a strong inclination to preserve our cultural practices, uphold the rights of our IPs and protect their heritage.

We do have economic interests derived from mining but we cannot deny the fact that there are also a myriad of ways by which we can engage in economic and industrial pursuits without undue cost to the environment and to our people. On the other hand, we only have a single spirit as a people as defined by our culture and I cannot allow compromising this spirit for economic expediency.

I. AIR POLLUTION

1. Air pollution remains a serious threat to public health. What legislative steps 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?

The issue of Philippine Clean Air Act is really more of an issue of the executive department. Given that the policy already stands, it is a matter of political will more than it is an issue of policy formulation. The executive department just has to better enact this law and ensure full implementation at every level. The most that legislation can do is to fiscalize the executive to make sure that the latter gives tooth to the law. We can give undue support by providing necessary funding for the initiatives that would uphold this law.

I will support a ban on the importation of dirty, second-hand diesel engine. We have become an international dumping ground of sorts and I do not think this is our idea of becoming Asia's gateway – becoming a gateway of wastes. We should send a strong international message that we refuse to be a junkyard of other countries. Becoming a more self-reliant nation, will give us more bargaining powers and we will become less subservient to the economic interest of developed countries.

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

While the government cannot intervene in the pricing schemes of the auto industry, the most that legislation can do is to provide tax breaks to environmentally sound car models and products to help spur market demand and usage. It would help if Congress can look into the existing production of clean fuels and provide support and financing mechanisms to small-scale start-up or pioneer companies.

Government can provide ample support to our local scientists and inventors who are at the forefront of the study of alternative fuels and even has inventions that would reduce fuel consumption – ample support should be provided to them to make their inventions commercially viable. As an interesting side note to this issue, there are also several initiatives from the academe like LaSalle’s solar powered car which should be considered and be given adequate government support. As a creative and resourceful people, it becomes easy for us to come up with means to address these issues - government just has to provide the right impetus and support.

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.

The vision of Aksyon Demokratiko, the party founded by my husband, is to have a “creative people in a self-reliant nation united under God.” As such, it becomes urgent and important for the Filipino people to become united and be responsible stewards of God’s resources. Ours is such a gifted country rich in natural resources complemented by very skilled and creative citizenry.

One of the principles that Aksyon upholds is to “protect the environment for sustainable development.” One does not have to have an Economics degree to realize the importance of sustainable development if a country is to prosper, much less, to survive.

The gradual destruction of the environment is a threat to our national economy that could lead to loss of livelihood, drastic decline of natural resources ultimately endangering our lives. In spite of ordinances coming from the government, industrial sites are being put up in protected areas, destroying the forest cover in favor of the so-called “industrial development” that was supposed to bring jobs while sacrificing the bigger consequence.

Development is supposed to be sustainable, something that will benefit the future generations. According to noted environmentalist-lawyer Antonio Oposa Jr., people need to be reminded the four laws of ecology that: everything is interconnected, everything has to go somewhere, nothing is for free, and that nature has the last say.

Only a small portion of our coral reefs is being rehabilitated and a smaller percentage of our mountains are being reforested. Our garbage system only works for the disciplined individuals who care to throw them in trash cans and garbage disposals.

It is a sad fact that as we progress with technology, we are also sacrificing our natural wealth in favor of our immediate need to grab a hold on our natural resources forgetting the quintessential consequences. This is a concrete example of short-term gains for long-term pains. We are serving the interests of the greedy minority while forfeiting the rights of the upcoming generation.

Aksyon advocates for sustainable development, one that protects the environment and secures the future of the next generation. This was reflected in the platform of my late husband, Raul Roco, which I endeavor to continue now.

In pursuit of Aksyon's goals and mission, we will engage in accelerating sustainable development measures such as:

- Promoting sustainable human settlement development including livable-and workable-cities;
- Integrating environment and development in decision- making;
- Protection of the atmosphere;
- Managing our fragile ecosystem by combating deforestation, desertification and drought;
- Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development;
- Conservation of biological diversity;
- Protection of the oceans and enclosed and semi-closed seas, and coastal areas and the protection, rational use and development and use of water resources;
- Protection of the supply of freshwater resources through application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources;
- Environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals;
- Environmentally sound management of hazardous, solid and radioactive wastes;
- Promoting environment education, public awareness and training; and
- Sustainable tourism.

My family has always been nature lovers. We keep a garden in Antipolo that we call "Maogmang Lugar" or happy place, where we practice vermiculture and zero-waste management. Our inclination towards environmental pursuits also manifest in our yearning to make lasting public policy changes in our bureaucracy and legislation.

Though I may not have had the chance to be active in public policy and legislation in the past, I always try to contribute in my own ways to help the environment believing that there is no small act that we can all undertake to contribute for nature. I have engaged myself in environmental projects both in the academe and in my role as a legislator's spouse. I actively spearheaded the GALINLUPA Awards sponsored by the Senate Spouses Foundation. By going around the country to assess environmental projects, it has exposed me to a myriad of ways by which schools and communities can do their share in helping the environment.

We hope to continue the legacies left by my late husband, Raul Roco. We hope to remain as good stewards of God's bounty. After all, these are all just borrowed resources that we are all just being entrusted with. As an educator, I hope we all get more than just mere passing marks and pass with flying colors as good stewards of these resources.