

Arbor Week and Forest Conservation

by

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The Philippines is rich in forest resources. Some of the most durable, beautiful and versatile tree species are found in our forests. Forest products have consistently ranked among the country's top dollar and income earners. In view of its abundant supply of raw materials the lumber industry has become a pillar of the country's economy.

It is for this reason that Filipinos should think of the importance of their trees more than ever. And it is also for this reason that we should give this year's Arbor Week celebration a meaning that is both encompassing significant and refreshing.

It can not be denied that our country is rich in timber resources. But we can not likewise deny that we are destroying them faster than anywhere else in the world! Mountains and hills once crowned with verdant grandeur that has inspired a well-known poet to call our country a chain of green emeralds strewn in the vast Pacific are now cogon lands being badly mutilated by erosion.

We can not afford to lose our forests. We can not afford the same tragedy that befell China, Mexico, Japan and Israel and other countries in Europe due to the destruction of their forests. We can not enjoy the life we have now without our forests. It is because forests are everything to us.

One can just look around without moving from where he is and he will see how trees have been helping him in his life. The tables, chairs, houses, government buildings, churches and transportation facilities are

either wholly or partly made of wood. Trees are playing a major role in the progress of practically every industry in the country, like fishing, mining, agriculture and others.

Our forest are indispensable to us. They play a key role in the development of the economic, social and cultural aspects of Philippine society.

Arbor Week celebration this year should be focused on the importance of conserving and protecting our forests. It is about time we put into practice the tenets of forest conservation and protection. It has long been overdue. Although it may be late already, we can still save our forest if we start now — in earnest.

Let us draw inspiration from this year's Arbor Week celebration. Let us start being forest conservation conscious and help in the government's massive program of protecting and conserving the forests.

To us, every week should be Arbor Week. There is no more time to waste. Experts say the forest protection effort of the government is losing the race to forest destruction. If this is true then in due time we will see deserts in places where now stands the bulk of our country's forests.

This year's Arbor Week celebration should remind us of our responsibility towards our forests. Forest conservation and protection need acceleration together with reforestation. These are gigantic programs which should meet the general support of the people. Forest conservation and protection is everybody's concern.

This year's Arbor Week will again witness the usual tree planting ritual all over the country. Some politicians will use this occasion to preach their political ambitions rather than the gospel of forest conservation. The real meaning of the celebration will be lost in the midst of political bickering and mudslinging.

This year's Arbor Week should call for vigorous and concerted forest protection and conservation campaign. It calls for well-knit conservation program among the various forestry agencies in the government. It calls for action—accelerated action—to save the remaining forest resources of the country from destruction and unwise utilization.

We have to save our forest at all cost! In order to attain this objective there must be no shrinking from the performance of our obligation. If ours is the task to prosecute forest vandals then we must perform whatever right, power or duty imposed on us by law regardless of who gets hurts in the process.

The call of the moment is the prevention of our forests from further destruction. Available resources have to be mustered in order to augment the government forces now fighting the war against forest vandals. It is here where you and I can come in. We are indispensable in the success of the drive against forest denudation.

Foresters, the guardians of Philippine forests, should redouble their efforts in leading the massive forestry conservation campaign. And everybody should lend a helping and cooperative hand.

Lumbermen are called upon to perform a bigger role in the forest protection and conservation program. Logging operation should be done in accordance only with the sustained yield management of the bureau and in such other manner as maybe prescribed in order to minimize destruction of

residuals and insure the perpetual supply of wood.

All segments of society are exhorted to come forward and help in the all-out effort to conserve and protect what remains of the country's timberlands.

The farmer out there in the glades of our forests should settle down in one place instead of roaming the forests as *kaiñgineros*. They are among those who contribute to the denudation of our forests. Local officials should look after the welfare of these *kaiñgineros* in the sense that they be given encouragement so as to stop their nomadic nature rather than shielding them from prosecution. Otherwise these officials would be helping in the frustration of the law.

Peace officers who have been helping in the drive against all forms of forest destruction are called upon to intensify further the drive against forest vandals.

Congress should do its part by giving the various forestry agencies in the government the necessary funds that would enable them to carry out effective program on forest protection and conservation.

Let us not forget that forest is not only for the present generation. Our children and our children's children will need the forests as we need them now.

The bureau of forestry, with its inadequate funds, personnel and equipment cannot alone cope with the forest destruction in this country. No one can expect the bureau to make miracle, especially if politicians continue to interfere in the implementation of forest protection laws. What is needed most is the cooperation of the people in the forest conservation campaign and a more vigorous effort on the part of those entrusted with the function of guarding the forests.

It is hoped that Arbor Week this year would usher in a new and more significant meaning to our people.