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SENATE

PSR No. 440

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Loren Legarda

A RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL COMMUNITIES TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE REPORTED DETERIORATION OF THE IFUGAO RICE TERRACES, A WORLD HERITAGE SITE, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF RECOMMENDING REMEDIAL MEASURES TO PRESERVE THE SAME

Whereas, the Ifugao Rice Terraces have been dubbed as the "Eighth Wonder of the World" and inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1995 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);

Whereas, long before its inscription in the World Heritage List, the rice terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, specifically the Ifugao rice terraces, were given due recognition in 1973 by the Philippine Government as a national landmark for its high world cultural value and as an irreplaceable treasure of the country;

Whereas, built 2000 years ago, the Ifugao Rice Terraces have been regarded as a "landscape of great beauty that expresses the harmony between humankind and the environment" which resulted from the "fruit of knowledge handed down from one generation to the next and the expression of sacred traditions and a delicate social balance";

Whereas, the Ifugao Rice Terraces Commission (IRTC) was created in 1994 by virtue of Executive Order No. 158 to act as an advisory body to the President on matters affecting the Ifugao Rice Terraces. This was replaced in 1999 with Banaue Rice Terraces Task Force (BRTTF) through Executive Order No. 77 which was mandated to restore, preserve and develop the Ifugao Rice Terraces as well as to prepare a development plan for the same;

Whereas, in 2002 BRTTF's responsibilities, functions and assets were transferred to the Provincial Government of Ifugao. This resulted in the creation of the Ifugao Rice Terraces Cultural and Heritage Office (IRTCHO) under the Office of the Provincial Governor, which was later replaced by the Ifugao Cultural Heritage Office (ICHO);

Whereas, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) sent a crop specialist to Banaue in the late 1990's, who discovered that the worms were damaging the roots produced by germinated rice seeds aside from eroding the terraces by burrowing in their walls. The rats, meanwhile, were eating the rice flower heads and contributing to the terraces' erosion with their burrowing and if left unchecked, the rats could destroy about 75 percent of rice crops;

Whereas, according to the same PhilRice report, severe drought and massive deforestation of the highlands have also contributed to the terraces' collapse;

Whereas, the rice terraces were included in the list of 100 most endangered sites of the World Monument Watch in 1999;

Whereas, in 2001, the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO decided to inscribe the Ifugao Rice Terraces on the List of World Heritage in Danger, asserting that "in the absence of a systematic monitoring programme or a comprehensive management plan, it is, at present, impossible to guarantee the preservation and sustainable development of these rice terraces";

Whereas, a UNESCO report, presented in the 2001 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, revealed that many farmers have left, abandoning 25-30 percent of the terraces, and letting their ingenious irrigation system fall into ruin. This abandonment, together with rat and worm pests, threatened to destroy the terraces;

Whereas, the same UNESCO report maintained that despite good planning, irregular development is taking place, threatening to erode the heritage landscape. It further claimed that international assistance has not been mobilized to help the area so far;

Whereas, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature advised that if ongoing destruction of the terraces is not arrested, widespread damage may be irreversible;

Whereas, there is an urgent need to look into the progress of various efforts and initiatives to save the Ifugao Rice Terraces from total degradation;

Whereas, there is a necessity to address growing concerns over the many issues surrounding the rapid deterioration of the rice terraces, in order to determine whether remedial measures must be introduced to ensure that the Ifugao Rice Terraces are sustainably protected;

NOW BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, to direct the Senate Committee on Cultural Communities to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the deterioration of the Ifugao Rice Terraces, a World Heritage Site, with the end in view of recommending remedial measures to preserve the same.

Adopted,


LOREN LEGARDA
Senator