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PMPI CONDEMNS MASS TREE CUTTING ALONG QUIRINO AVENUE, AS HARMING THE RIGHT OF PEOPLE TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT, VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF NATURE, AND A FORM OF “ECOCIDAL” ACT IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. (PMPI) condemns and expresses deep alarm over the ongoing mass cutting of mature trees along Quirino Avenue, San Marcelino Street, and surrounding areas for the Southern Access Link Expressway (SALEX) project. More than 600 trees are covered by DENR permits, with at least 225 already felled, transforming what was once a shaded urban corridor into a heat-exposed, denuded stretch in the heart of Manila.

While the Department of Environment and Natural Resources asserts that the activity is legally authorized, PMPI stresses that legal compliance does not equate to ecological justice. Mature trees—many decades old—are living infrastructure, providing irreplaceable ecosystem services such as cooling, air filtration, stormwater absorption, and carbon sequestration. As documented, “mature trees cannot be equated with newly planted saplings” due to their vastly different survival rates and ecological function.

Cutting these trees harms not only the residents of Manila but also communities in neighboring cities. Mature trees act as a critical buffer against Metro Manila’s rising heat index—now forecast by PAGASA to reach 43–44°C—in an urban landscape dominated by paved roads and concrete structures that trap and radiate heat. Their removal strips away one of the few natural defenses people have against intensifying urban heat, exposing millions to heightened health risks.

PMPI likewise asserts that the destruction of these trees constitutes a violation of the Rights of Nature, which recognizes ecosystems as rights-bearing entities with intrinsic value beyond human utility. The large-scale removal of healthy, mature trees—despite alternatives that could have minimized ecological harm—reflects a development paradigm that treats nature as expendable.



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The rights of nature is legally recognized under the Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System (Republic Act No. 11995). It asserts that nature has intrinsic value, separate and distinct from the economic benefits we derive from it. It mandates the maintenance of nature's vital cycles, functions, and processes, ensuring the sustainability and health of natural ecosystems. Any development that alters or affects the rights of nature must be sustainable and must allow for their renewal and restoration.

DENR should rethink its policy of allowing tree-cutting to accommodate development projects in light of PENCAS's legal framework.

The scale and impact of the clearing also mirror patterns associated with “ecocidal” development, where severe and widespread environmental damage is justified in the name of infrastructure expansion. In a climate-vulnerable metropolis like Manila, such actions deepen climate injustice, disproportionately harming commuters, pedestrians, and low-income communities who rely on the urban canopy for protection from extreme heat.

“What is happening along Quirino Avenue is not just tree cutting—it is the systematic erasure of living urban ecosystems. When we destroy mature trees in the middle of a climate crisis, and we know that this will result in long-lasting impacts to the community and people, we are committing harm that borders on ecocide. The Rights of Nature demands that we treat these trees not as obstacles to development, but as vital members of our urban community whose well-being is tied to our own,” Yolanda R. Esguerra, PMPI National Coordinator, said.



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PMPI urges the following:

- Full transparency from DENR and the City of Manila on an environmental basis, approval process, and implementation of the SALEX project;
- An independent ecological and urban heat impact review, including assessment of alternatives that could have avoided mature tree loss;
- A science-based urban ecological restoration plan that acknowledges the irreplaceable value of mature trees and a stronger urban tree protection policy that prioritizes avoidance over removal;
- Engaged and urgent actions by local government authorities and Metro-Manila citizens against these destructive projects and actions.

The trees of Quirino Avenue are not mere landscape elements. They are living protectors of public health, dignity, and survival in a rapidly warming city. They are voiceless entities that witness the area's destructive transformation and development. Their destruction echoes a warning: Metro Manila cannot afford development that sacrifices ecological stability for short-term convenience.

A shift toward people-centered, climate-resilient, and ecologically grounded urban planning that respects people's rights to a balanced ecology and the rights of nature, and primarily adopts nature-based solutions to the current ecological crisis, should be urgently adopted.

PMPI is a social development and policy lobby network, with more than 230 member organizations spread across the Philippines, pushing for regenerative economic development, ecocentric governance, and the legal recognition of the rights of nature in the Philippines.