



ENVIRONMENTAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTER, INC.

Carlos P. Sayang Compound, Mitra Road, Bgy. Sta. Monica,
Puerto Princesa City 5300 Palawan
Telefax (48) 726-1641; Email: elacpalawan@gmail.com

PRESS STATEMENT

Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC)
Reaffirming Truth and Justice in Palawan's Environmental Discourse
April 3, 2025 | Puerto Princesa City, Palawan

The Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC) expresses serious concern over the narrative being promoted by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), which disproportionately blames kaingin (upland swidden farming) as the primary cause of environmental degradation in Palawan. This oversimplified framing lacks nuance and overlooks the PCSD's own mandate and accountability in managing the province's ecological challenges.

We do not deny that certain kaingin practices fall outside the bounds of traditional, sustainable swidden agriculture. Hindi rin po namin ipinagkakaila na may mga gumagawa ng pagkakaingin na hindi naaayon sa tradisyunal na paraan.

These destructive forms of land clearing—often rooted in poverty, land insecurity, and policy neglect—must be addressed. However, the responsibility for regulating these practices and protecting Palawan's environment lies with government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the PCSD, and local government units (LGUs).

It is misleading and unjust to place the blame solely on small upland farmers and Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who have practiced sustainable land management for generations. This scapegoating diverts attention from the real issues which are weak enforcement, inadequate resource allocation, and the exclusion of affected communities from decision-making processes.

Under Republic Act 7611 or the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) Law, the PCSD is legally tasked with promoting sustainable development in Palawan through participatory governance and the preservation of ecological integrity. Its failure to fully implement and enforce the SEP Law—especially in establishing guidelines for sustainable livelihoods and community-based forest management—has left communities vulnerable and ecosystems at risk.

We urge the PCSD to:

Fulfill its mandate by fully implementing the SEP Law;

Recognize, support, and protect traditional sustainable farming practices through research and policy integration;

End the criminalization and scapegoating of upland farmers and Indigenous communities;

Tackle the true drivers of environmental degradation, including unregulated extractive industries, unchecked land conversion, and poor enforcement of environmental regulations.

Palawan's environmental future cannot be secured by marginalizing those who have long been its stewards. Real progress requires transparent governance, inclusive dialogue, science-based policy rooted in justice, and a deep respect for Indigenous and traditional knowledge.