

'It's disgusting': Lopez on corruption in DENR

Nation

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AMID HER intense crackdown on illegal mining, Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez on Thursday claimed that a mining company attempted to give her a monthly bribe of P6 million if she would sign a document.

In a press briefing at Malacañang, Ms. Lopez said a "friend" of hers had sought her signature for a document belonging to a mine owner in exchange for a hefty sum. "I have a friend [who] went to me and then she said, 'Gina, if you sign this paper, the person own[ing] the mine, he didn't tell me, will give me six million a month. Wow,'" she said.

She said some workers in the Environment department are corrupt and there are officials who "have titled lands to themselves."

"Some of them are corrupt unfortunately. I'm cleaning up the work force," she said, adding: "It's disgusting."

"I was thinking I don't know how long I'm gonna last here," Ms. Lopez also said, citing the "*magulo* (messy)" dynamics of politics.

"Politics is a dimension of money and power and it's just *magulo* (messy) 'no. Let's see. I like the job. I like the fact that you can say, 'You can't do this, you can't do that.' I have so much money! I like the money! I really love the money to be able to make a difference," she said, adding that "the political scenario is unpredictable."

The Commission on Appointments (CA) bypassed 15 appointees of Mr. Duterte, including Ms. Lopez, in late October last year after the body went on a two-week Halloween break without approving the appointments.

In mid-November, Malacañang said it had resubmitted its list of appointees, which did not include the name of Ms. Lopez. The Palace sent a revised list last December.

Yesterday, Ms. Lopez said she was "*nagulat* (surprised)" when her name was not in the first list of appointees resubmitted by the Palace.

"So let me use my position now because I don't trust politics. You know remember the first time my name was not given in [CA]? *Nagulat ako* (I was surprised). I mean, I was doing really well. I rated the top in Pulse Asia [survey] but then my name was not given so I said... I saw the politics is so really *malabo* (complicated)," she said.

She said she would be "quite sad" if Mr. Duterte would overturn her decision to close and suspend mining companies, but qualified that it is "premature to say anything" and nobody has yet told her to quit her job.

"I'm here because, one, I like the President. He's really, really, really genuine. He's really real. He has a stand on social justice. As long as I can feel I can continue to serve the country, I will. I won't cop out. I'll stay as long as I can make a difference."

A meeting of the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC) -- which is co-chaired by Finance Secretary Carlos "Sonny" G. Dominguez III and Ms. Lopez -- was scheduled yesterday afternoon.

The CA is scheduled to deliberate the ad interim appointment of Ms. Lopez on Feb. 15, with two joint sworn oppositions filed against her appointment.