

Miners told to clean up their ‘mess’

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PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Sunday warned owners of destructive mining operations to clean up their mess or face closure in a government crackdown.

“I can’t do anything if [Environment Secretary] Gina [Lopez] would order the closure of erring mining operations. On my way here, I saw the destruction. Mindanao really is the most mined [area.] You can see the mountains being leveled and stripped—like a tansan [bottle cap] of Coca-Cola. You can see it even from Davao,” Duterte said, speaking to residents of Surigao City which was hit by the magnitude 6.7 tremor on Friday night.

Duterte said that if the mining firms operating in Mindanao fail to restore what they have destroyed, he will order them closed.

“I have a warning to all mining companies: Even if you rake in billions, even if you pay whoever to get concessions, I will not accept that. You have to think of the Filipino first. The sons of your sons must be able to benefit, and should not suffer from whatever... has been done to your lands,” the President said.

“We are cleaning up their mess until now. It was not made it public, but the one who was sent to help clean up the mess was Secretary [Carlos] Dominguez of Finance. Dominguez was a businessman. He was just quiet about it. If they cannot clean this up this early, I will not agree [for their operations to continue]. They have to clean it up while they are still here. “

“After extracting everything from the mines, big mining operators just leave the place in disarray, with toxic mine tailing and other chemicals left unsecured and uncleaned. I can’t allow that,” the President said.

Moreover, Duterte said that he will try his best to find alternative livelihood for displaced mining workers in the event of permanent closure.

“I can find a source, if I can find an industry to replace [the lost jobs], maybe I can really close these down because our forests have been denuded,” he said.

The Mining Industry Coordinating Council, led by Dominguez and Lopez, agreed over the weekend to a multi-stakeholder review of the DENR’s decision to shut down 23 mining companies after she admitted to disregarding the recommendation of a technical review committee to levy only fines and suspensions on erring firms.

Lopez and Dominguez agreed to take another look at the performance of existing mining operations in consultation with local government units.

The DENR chief had earlier announced the looming shutdown and closure of operations that failed in last year’s mining audit, but was put on to hold to look into whether the move followed “due process.”

Only after President Duterte decides on the status of mining operations can she order the closure of the mining companies in question, Lopez said.

On Sunday, the University of the Philippines Mining Engineering Society (UP Miners) said the suspension and closure orders issued by Lopez means unemployment for new graduates of Mining Engineering, Geology, Metallurgical Engineering and other affected fields.

In a statement, UP Miners said placing in jeopardy the future of new graduates and students of Mining Engineering, Geology, Metallurgical Engineering and other affected fields, along with the plight of some 1.2-million people in the affected mine sites, is a contradiction to the secretary's philosophy of anti-suffering.

UP Miners also called for transparency and full disclosure in the mining audit conducted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

During a mining forum hosted by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chamber of Mines president Philip Benjamin Romualdez said the mining sector has faith in the President to "make the right decision" in the light of the looming closure and suspension of 28 mines.

"Ultimately, the President will decide. Companies that may have had violations should be allowed to remedy them. People are suffering because of tentative decisions. It is sobriety that is needed now," he told the forum.

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