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‘Reinvent’ PHL mining sector? DENR chief says it can be done

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Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu urged the country’s mining industry anew to “reinvent” mining to preserve gains in promoting sustainable mineral resources development and usher in a new era of doing mining in the Philippines.

This as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) chief called on mining industry’s big players belonging to the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines to continue undertaking reforestation program, implement progressive rehabilitation in mining areas and provide appropriate mitigating measures to protect watersheds and water bodies, and strictly follow environmental guidelines in all aspects of mining operations.

In a message delivered for the DENR chief by Undersecretary for Climate Change and Mining Concerns Analiza R. Teh during the opening ceremonies of Mining Philippines 2018 Conference and Exhibition at the Sofitel Hotel in Pasay City on Tuesday, Cimatu said reinventing mining is “the only way to go” for the industry to move forward as an industry.

Cimatu, who was unable to attend the event, as he is attending to the developments in Itogon, Benguet, where a landslide buried to death dozens of small-scale miners taking

shelter at bunkhouses in a small-scale mining area during the onslaught of Typhoon Ompong.

According to Cimatu, reinventing mining means taking up a very different way of life for the various stakeholders of the mining sector.

He said reinventing mining is what the industry needs “to change to be almost entirely new.”

“We need to take up a very different way of life,” Cimatu said.

He added the national government, mining companies, local government units, communities, and all other stakeholders need to take part in reinventing mining.

For the DENR’s part, Cimatu said several policy issuances he signed were geared toward reinventing mining in the Philippines, namely DENR Administrative Order 2018-13 or Lifting the Moratorium on the Acceptance, Processing and Approval of the Applications for Exploration Permit for Metallic and Non-metallic Minerals, Administrative Order No. 2018-19 or the Guidelines for Additional Environmental Measures for Operating Surface Metallic Mines, and Administrative Order No. 2018-20 or Providing for a new Guidelines in the Evaluation and Approval of the Three-year Development/Utilization Work Program.

According to the DENR chief, the review conducted by the Mining Industry Coordinating Council, Technical Review Teams show that the industry needs to shape up as a sector.

“Even if there are responsible mining companies, those which still disregard environmental laws, unfortunately, affect not just the overall image of the sector but also provide an impression of the dismal performance of the industry, in general,” he said.

According to Cimatu, a review on specified major reforms are needed, such as on the inadequate mine tailings pond and the very slow rehabilitation of the disturbed mined areas.

The review also pointed out the unacceptable practices regarding stockpile areas, the location of tailings storage facilities and dumping of toxic and hazardous waste.

A former military general, Cimatu stressed that enforcement is critical to ushering in a new era of doing mining in the country.

Cimatu said reinventing mining entails improving the Mines and Geosciences Board monitoring of operations and compliance of mining companies to mining and environmental laws, rules and regulations.

“Enforcing fines, penalties, suspension and closure to demonstrate no one putting into force compliance and promoting deterrence for the commission of violations is imperative,” he said.

More important, he said, reinventing mining in the Philippines means providing actual benefits to the people, first and foremost, from the utilization of the country’s mineral resources as stressed by President Duterte.

“We can do more not by imposing additional taxes or giving incentives or implementing social development programs. We can do more by strictly complying with the protection and conservation of the natural resources to ensure that future generations will benefit,” he said.

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