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DENR pushes stiffer penalty, fine for wildlife trade offenders

By
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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is pushing to amend Republic Act 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act that would impose a stiffer penalty and higher fines for environmental crimes, particularly offenses involving illegal wildlife trade.

This, as the DENR further stepped up its campaign against the illegal wildlife trade, which has been linked to the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), the disease caused by the novel coronavirus that is believed to have originated from a wet market selling live wild animals in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China.

Theresa M. Tenazas, officer in charge of the Wildlife Resources Division of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) said they are looking at increased jail term from the maximum of 12 years under the current law to a maximum of 20 years imprisonment for crimes related to the illegal wildlife trade.

The DENR, through the BMB, is enforcing Republic Act 9147, and is prohibiting the collection, hunting and possession of wildlife, its byproducts, and derivatives, including trading and transporting.

“We are also working on the amendment of the aforesaid law to impose the most stringent penalty of 20 years imprisonment as the maximum penalty for wildlife trafficking,” Tenazas said.

The effort to amend the law, she said, is to deter wildlife crimes, together with a campaign to tighten regulation when it comes to import and export of wildlife and ensure

full compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), of which the Philippines is a signatory.

Also, the DENR is now strengthening partnership with various law-enforcement agencies and tightening watch over the country's airports and seaports, Tenazas said.

“We also find indispensable the continued and intensified partnership with different law-enforcement agencies in the country that man airports and seaports and other borders to prevent wildlife crimes, to include other cross-collaborative activities,” she said.

Meanwhile, to further build the capacity of the DENR and its partner-law enforcers, a total of 12 workshops are lined up for 2020 such as Online Trade Investigation, Financial Investigation on Wildlife Crimes Advance Prosecutor and Enforcement Workshop, to mention a few which are to be conducted in partnership with UNODC, USAID Protect Wildlife Project, BMB-ADB/GEF IWT Project, and the United States Department of Justice Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, & Training Counter Wildlife Trafficking.

The target participants include DENR Regional Law Enforcement Units, DENR lawyers, Department of Justice, National Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Customs, among others.

“Lastly, our effort will also include escalation of the campaign to the public to raise awareness of the risks of wildlife consumption to public security and to public health with the end in view of furthering the enforcement efforts against trafficking of wildlife,” Tenazas said.

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