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DENR to anti-mining groups: Don't mix up issue of insurgency and environment

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said anti-mining groups should not mix up issues of insurgency and environment and must not irresponsibly tag mining companies in the killings of environmental defenders.

This came as a Global Witness report declared the Philippines as the second deadliest country in the world, with killings in the mining sector as one of the main culprits.

In a phone interview, Environment Undersecretary Benny Antiporda encouraged environmental defenders and people in mining communities to report to authorities whenever they feel they are being harassed by miners or if they think there's illegal activities going on in their areas.

"If there are issues [in mining communities], we meet them. If there is harassment, then report it to DENR or the authorities," Antiporda said.

Antiporda was particularly reacting to the statement of civil society organization Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), which was "extremely distressed" with the Duterte administration for allowing killings in the mining sector to happen.

According to the group, red-tagging and legal harassments of anti-mining leaders were recently recorded in Nueva Vizcaya, Palawan, Masbate, Leyte and South Cotabato.

The harassment, according to ATM, happened as a response to the increased resistance activities that are happening now due to the recent decision of the DENR to reverse the

suspension and closure orders issued by late and former Environment Secretary Regina Paz Lopez.

Antiporda said that reviewing the operations of suspended mining companies and allowing them to reopen once they became compliant of environmental laws is a legal process.

“We didn’t reverse the suspension and closure orders of Secretary Gina. If anything, we even helped them in the enforcement of their orders. Closure orders and shutting down are two different issues. There was a closure order but there was no enforcement. We had to enforce their orders. We were the one that closed the mines and now we reviewed them,” Antiporda further said.

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