

# Catholic Church backs Lopez-NPA alliance

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Albeit a dangerous move, the Catholic Church appears to support Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Regina Lopez's intention to allow the communist New People's Army (NPA) to cooperate in implementing her plans on dealing with mining firms.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' (CBCP) National Secretariat for Social Action Justice and Peace (NASSA), said yesterday that the DENR chief's alliance with the NPA will "help open a window for peace."

"That's a very good initiative and move in pursuing the peace process while seeking to collaborate with stakeholders for social change," Gariguez said.

"We need to seek and open windows for dialog and lasting peace," he added. Some Catholic bishops and clergymen are among Lopez's supporters when it comes to her woes before the bicameral Commission on Appointments (CA) to is yet to approve her designation as DENR chief.

Lopez earlier said that she finds the rebels to be "nice people," saying that among those she talked to was an "ex-seminarian" thus pitching the idea of allowing them to participate in development projects for mining communities in Agusan del Norte.

The NPAs are notorious for torching mining activities of firms that do not give in to their "revolutionary taxation" scheme which is seen as a form of extortion. "I already asked the President if I can work with the NPA... What I've seen with the NPA, they just really want to get people out of poverty, they're really not bad people," Lopez said.

"They're really nice if you meet them... My hope there is we do it in one place, we've done it everywhere," she added.

Lopez said that she finds this cooperation with the NPA as a form of reintegrating the latter in civil society.

"If we're able to engineer a situation where they have inputs into the development plan, where their children and the people there can put food on the table and send their kids to school and everybody's earning and the place is beautiful, why will you fight?" she argued further.

<http://www.tribune.net.ph/nation/catholic-church-backs-lopez-npa-alliance>