

DENR chief bans new open-pit mines worth \$8B

Industry officials slammed the order as 'absurd'

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Open pit mine / Manila Bulletin file photo

Environment Secretary Regina Lopez on Thursday announced a ban on new open-pit mines, a move that threatens over \$8 billion in investments.

Lopez, who has already ordered the closure of 23 mines this year, told reporters she would not allow any new open-pit mines to operate, even those that gained government approval before she assumed office.

“Don’t come here. Don’t even apply. Go away. Go to another country,” she told prospective open-pit miners.

“The history of mining in the country shows that most, if not all open pits have ended up as perpetual liabilities, causing adverse impacts to the environment,” a copy of her order said.

The Philippines is the world’s top supplier of nickel ore and main exporter to China.

Her special assistant, Leo Jasareno said the Lopez decision directly affects three major mining ventures worth a combined \$8.9 billion that have been approved by the government but have not yet begun operation.

Industry officials slammed the order as “absurd”, arguing Lopez does not have the authority to act unilaterally.

“Her proposal is absurd. Open-pit mining is an internationally accepted method of mining. It can be done safely and properly,” Chamber of Mines of the Philippines vice-president for legal and policy affairs, Ronald Recidoro said.

“Gina Lopez cannot add or deduct from the law by herself. It needs amending legislation from Congress,” Recidoro said in a statement.

Lopez, a former socialite and environmental crusader who President Rodrigo Duterte named to the position last year sending shockwaves through the industry, insisted she does have the right.

“It’s the mandate of the mining law that you should not do anything which puts at risk the lives of future and present generations,” she said at a press conference where she showed footage of old open-pit mines which she said had destroyed the environment and poisoned water supplies.

However she said existing open-pit mines would still be allowed to operate.

Jasareno said there were four existing open-pit mines in the Philippines and 10 that were abandoned or had suspended operations.

Mining firms have accused Lopez of breaching contracts and have been asking Congress to reject her confirmation as environment secretary. However Duterte has backed her amid the criticism.

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