

Environmentalist Legarda backs Lopez's mining crackdown

By: [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

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MANILA, Philippines — The Senate's staunchest advocate for the environment on Wednesday lauded the courage of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez for her will to crack the whip on destructive mining practices, calling her "courageous" for the unprecedented act.

Sen. Loren Legarda expressed support for Lopez's swift and expansive action to stop mining activity in watershed zones just as the mining industry reeled from her earlier order shutting down 23 mines in the Caraga region.

"I support the actions of Secretary Gina Lopez. She's courageous and she has the heart for the job. As long as those that were canceled are in watersheds, which is a source of life, and if there are violations of environmental standards and laws, then [the contracts have] to be canceled," Legarda told the Inquirer in an interview.

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She expressed admiration for Lopez, saying she understood why the official initiated her crackdown.

"Because we can't compromise with the environment. Because the environment, it means livelihood. Environment is the lifeblood of rural communities," said Legarda, a key Philippine delegate to global climate talks and a United Nations Global Champion for Resilience.

“When you fight for nature, when you fight for the environment, you’re fighting for humanity. You’re fighting for the people who live on the land, with the land, and that’s a source of water. And I understand her and I fully support her,” she said.

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Lopez on Tuesday ordered the cancellation of 75 mining mineral production sharing agreements in watershed zones in South Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat and Davao del Sur, calling it a “gift of love” for people living in these areas.

This followed her order to shut down 23 of 41 Philippine mines, citing its damage to the environment.

In an earlier briefing at the Senate, Lopez said the mining industry contributed 0.004 percent to the government revenue in 2015, and accounted for .6 percent of total employment, noting its negligible effects on the quality of life in communities where mines exist. *CDG*

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