

DENR chief: I'm not anti-mining

By Rhodina Villanueva (The Philippine Star) | Updated February 18, 2017 - 12:00am



Environment Secretary Gina Lopez yesterday responded to the threats of mining firms affected by her closure order against mines that destroy mountains and watersheds, saying she will keep her stand as “the quality of life” is more important. **King Rodriguez/Presidential Photo**

MANILA, Philippines - Environment Secretary Gina Lopez yesterday responded to the threats of mining firms affected by her closure order against mines that destroy mountains and watersheds, saying she will keep her stand as “the quality of life” is more important.

She also clarified that she is not anti-mining, she has followed due process and she is willing to work with mining companies that passed the audit.

Lopez’s statement came after some mining firms said they are looking at possible graft charges against Lopez for the alleged lack of due process in her order to close 28 operations and cancel 75 mining contracts.

The mining sector also claimed Lopez’s order would result in massive job loss, and warned that it could affect her confirmation at the Commission on Appointments (CA).

But Lopez said she does not just stop at issuing closure orders for erring mining firms because the Department of Environment (DENR) has a plan of investing in a “green economy” and help poor people to be productive.

She also explained why the DENR cancelled 75 contracts.

Headlines (Article MRec), pagematch: 1, sectionmatch: 1

“With regards the recent cancellation of the 75 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements, we first issued show cause orders for the companies to explain why their MPSA should not be cancelled on a watershed, which is

critical for the welfare of the people. If you don't reply, then we take action. If you reply, then we will investigate," she said.

Lopez maintained that she is just doing her job and vowed to stand by her decision.

"I'll do my duty. I really feel there should be no mining in watersheds. The quality of life of the people is more important than the money they make. I'll keep my stand. Let them do what they want to do," she said in response to the reports that mining firms are set to block her confirmation at the CA.

"Those who would want to see the (audit) report, they can come to the office and see it. I even have the files, which we gave the mining companies. The whole process took seven months. I followed due process," she added.

Lopez also said mining firms that failed the audit can appeal her decision before the Office of the President.

"These firms should not be operating unless they appeal the decision. The closure becomes final when the President says it is," she added.

President Duterte said he chose to appoint Lopez as she shares his stand on responsible mining and environment conservation.

Lopez also said that the DENR can help mining firms in putting to good use their Social Development and Management Program (SDMP) for it to become beneficial to a wider sector.

SDMP is a comprehensive five-year plan of the contractor/permit holder/lessee authorized to conduct actual mining and milling operations towards the sustained improvement in the living standards of the host and neighboring communities by creating responsible, self-reliant and resource-based communities capable of developing, implementing and managing community development programs in a manner consistent with the principle of people empowerment.

"There is an SDMP fund. But instead of giving it to the host community only, the money – with the help of the DENR, the mining company and stakeholders – can be used in such a way that the area becomes productive," Lopez said.

"With my expertise and background on development, we can replicate the projects I've helped implement before, wherein with a start-up fund of P1 million, we were able to make it grow and target communities are now earning P30 million a year," she added.

Leftist lawmakers yesterday expressed support for the decision Lopez to close mines that destroy mountains and watersheds and pollute rivers. – **With Jess Diaz**

(Article retrieved from: <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/02/18/1673414/denr-chief-im-not-anti-mining>)