

Chamber of Mines questions gov't audit

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The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) on Thursday questioned the fairness of a mine audit done by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which led to the order for closure of 23 mines and the suspension of five others.

“Mining companies were invited by the government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development,” COMP chair Artemio Disini said in a statement.

“By entering into these contracts, the government is bound to observe due process,” Disini said. “Environment Secretary [Gina] Lopez “cannot just shut down mines without due process.”

The chamber reiterated that the conduct of the audit was questionable as the inclusion of antimining activists in the audit teams “tainted the process.”

“We are not against a strict implementation of the law,” COMP executive vice president Nelia Halcon said. “What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez’s early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed.”

Also, the industry group lamented how the latest findings of the audit were again first made known through a press conference.

“If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements,” Halcon said.

“Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity,” she added.

Halcon said the decision to close mines seemed to be “based merely” on a quick fly-by over Surigao del Sur last week in a helicopter during the height of the rainy season.

“It may not have been based on the review conducted by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB),” she said. “Reports reaching us even said MGB personnel were even banned from her press conference.”

“Former MGB Director Leo Jasareno, earlier dismissed by the Office of the President, was present in the Office of the DENR secretary during the press conference,” she said. “Further, it has been reported that the review results will not be released by Secretary Lopez saying it was ‘too complicated.’”

COMP called on the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), cochaired by the Department of Finance, to convene and review the policies and “arbitrary actions” of Lopez.

“Her drastic action ... will have detrimental and far-reaching impacts on the economy, the mining industry and the country,” the group said.

The mining industry contributes less than 1 percent to the Philippines’ gross domestic product.

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