

Samar prelate backs DENR drive vs ‘indiscriminate mining’

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Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Gina Lopez. INQUIRER FILE PHOTO / RICHARD A. REYES

TACLOBAN CITY, Leyte—The bishop of Borongan in Eastern Samar hailed the decision of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to cancel the mining operations in the province, saying he hoped that it would be permanent.

Bishop Crispin Varquez told the Inquirer on a phone interview that the mining operations in Eastern Samar, particularly on the islands of Manicani and Homonhon, should be stopped due to their adverse impact on the environment.

“The mining operations only resulted (in) the destructions of the islands’ environment and affected the water,” said Varquez, a known anti-mining advocate.

He also said that whatever “livelihood” that these mining companies bring to the local people is not enough compared to the operations’ adverse effects.

“These people have already their livelihoods like fishing and farming even before these mining companies came in and these livelihoods are more sustainable,” he added.

A Church-based organization also welcomed the move of Lopez to protect the country’s natural resources.

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“We hope that rehabilitation of the mining affected communities that prioritizes the well-being of people over economic gains will be pursued. We hope that those responsible for the destruction and desecration of our lands shall be held accountable,” said the Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. in a press statement.

The group called for immediate implementation of the order and the rehabilitation of the affected areas.

“But we hope and pray that more mining audits will be conducted and more mining companies will be held accountable...” the group said.

Lopez earlier ordered the closure of 21 mining firms around the country for their “indiscriminate mining.” Four of these were in Eastern Visayas particularly on Manicani Island and the historic island of Homonhon, both in Guiuan town, Eastern Samar.

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Of the four, three are in Homonhon — Mt. Sinai Mining, Techiron Mineral Resources and Emir Minerals Corp.

Only the Hinatuan Mining Corp is based in Manicani.

But Celeste Faith de la Cruz, information officer of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (MGB-DENR) in Eastern Visayas, said that three of these had already stopped their mining operations before the suspension order was issued.

Only the Techiron Mineral Resources continued to operate. It applied in 2012 but only started its operations in December, 2015 to mine for chromite. It was given an application to mine chromite covering 1,500 hectares.

Mt. Sinai, which was given a mining permit in 1997 ceased to operate in 2011 due to low price of chromite in the world market, MGB records said.

Its mining permit covered 510 hectares while Emir Minerals Corp. stopped its operation to mine nickel, also in Homonhon, covering 279 has in August 2016.

Hinatuan Mining, meanwhile, has stopped mining for nickel covering 1,165 has on Manicani Island, Guiuan town since 1992.

But the mining company was given permit to haul its ore deposit in 2012 and started to do so in 2015.

“We have not received the copy of the order from our Secretary but we will comply the order once we have the copy,” De la Cruz said.

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