

Chamber of Mines cites FOI on release of DENR audit report

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By Philippine News Agency

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) on Tuesday cited its right-to-know under the Freedom of Information (FOI) to compel the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to make public the audit report which was the basis for the closure of 23 mining firms and suspension of operation of five others.



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In a press conference held at the Discovery Suites in Pasig City, former Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) Chief Horacio Ramos said there should be transparency in the report and that it should be based on scientific process.

“There should be transparency in all the reports you prepare, especially if the reports would lead to the suspension or closure of a mining company,” he said.

For his part, COMP Vice President for Legal and Policy Ronald Recidoro said it was the duty of the DENR Secretary to make public the mining audit report.

“If she refuses, clearly she’s going against the Duterte administration’s mandate on transparency,” he said.

“Every person accused of an offense must know the precise details of the offense you are being charged with,” he added.

The DENR has ordered the closure of 23 mining firms and the suspension of five others for breaching environmental standards.

COMP said while Lopez reiterated her purpose to “heal” the sector, the closure order had grave repercussions on the industry and the country as well.

“This is not the way to ‘heal the hurt.’ This is not the way to harness the mineral industry’s potential as a contributor to the country’s progress,” said COMP chairman Artemio Disini.

Disini said the closure order would affect more than 1.2 million Filipinos and cripple local government units and communities that benefit from tax payments of mining firms.

“She (Lopez) is creating an unstable policy environment resulting in threatening the economic growth momentum under the Duterte administration and putting in limbo USD 22 billion worth of investments,” he said.

According to the MGB, the projected actual mining investment for 2016 is USD 619.5 million.

But with the closure, as estimated Php 62.5 billion on investment and P 4.1 billion in taxes will be lost.

“Lopez is slowly killing an industry that has paid billions in taxes and fees annually,” Disini said.

The affected mining firms account for half of the nickel ore output by the world’s top supplier of the metal.

Dr. Carlos Arcilla, director of the University of the Philippines’ National Institute of Geological Sciences, in a statement, has said while he agreed with the DENR chief that irresponsible mining operations should be shut down, he was puzzled as to why Lopez had not furnished the mining firms and even the media copies of the mining audit, which should have been the basis for ordering their closure and suspension.

“We are in agreement that the irresponsible mines should be closed. No argument on that. That is the purpose of the audit — technical people checking whether the mines are fulfilling the obligations under law to protect the environment,” Arcilla said.

“We are interested to know what the bases are for closing mines — we have to teach future geologists and engineers the correct and scientific ways to mine so as not to endanger the environment,” he added.

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