

Miners galore... that's mine, mine...

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IF you love enough to do and you care enough to do and we all join hands, there is no problem in life that we cannot overcome... those who have more in life should pay it forward so that those who have less would benefit from their gains. -DENR Secretary Gina Lopez.

There is a growing support for Gina Lopez to head the DENR. Sanlakas was among the groups leading the 4,000-strong rally, consisting of victimized communities, church leaders, indigenous peoples and sectoral groups, in support of Gina Lopez.

Too many communities are negatively affected by illegal mining in Sta. Cruz, Zambales. Sanlakas leads these communities in opposing the decision of the Commission on Appointments (CA) to start a Secret voting process.

This Secret voting will deprive the public of knowing who voted to retain mines. The public will not know who voted for a safe, healthy environment. This Secret voting is planned to appease the minds of mining companies, while escaping the scrutiny of these elected officials by their constituents.

Environmental advocates and peoples' organizations across different sectors decry the Commission of Appointment's (CA) decision last week to set a new rule; to allow Secret voting by CA members.

This opposition to the Secret voting is from victimized communities where destructive mining practices put the lives of miners, their families, and their environment at risk. Sanlakas Secretary General Atty. Aaron Pedrosa: "It is no surprise that the CA would want to appease the minds of mining companies while escaping the scrutiny of their constituents." Secret voting will conceal the position taken by the CA members. "What we need from the CA is a vote for our environment, rights and future," said Pedrosa. A vote for the people's environment, rights, future need not be hidden and concealed by the Senate.

Pedrosa noted that far from a "vote of conscience," as described by CA assistant majority leader Sen. Tito Sotto, this Secret voting would allow CA members to escape accountability of their votes. This Secret voting could receive considerable backlash. The Commission's powerful members have a few with ties to the mining industry. CA vice chairman and San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora's family owns Nickel Asia. Wednesday's hearing exposed that Senator Manny Pacquiao is a miner--part owner at least.

"It is a shady thing that when we need transparency the most, is when our leaders choose to hide behind closed doors." Hide behind Secret Votes.

Aren't these conflicts of interest reason enough for the Senate members to demand that their colleagues with vested interests inhibit themselves from participating in senate hearings and debates?

Meanwhile, affected communities from Sta. Cruz, Zambales are alarmed as the Minerals & Geosciences Bureau in Zambales continues to issue permits to ZDMC/DMCI and ShangFil even as their MPSAs have been cancelled. Dr. Benito Molino of the Concerned Citizens of Sta. Cruz (CCOS) called this a direct violation of the orders given by the DENR and President Duterte.

"It is clear that there is much to be accomplished by the DENR and has great need for the disciplined leadership of Secretary Gina Lopez," Molino said. "We ask the CA to heed the call of the residents of Sta. Cruz and the rest of us who are suffering daily because of destructive mining," Molino said.

Open letter from Vic Mar: That the abuses and violations of the mining industry have been allowed/tolerated by the DENR regional and provincial officials shows that environmental destruction should not be solely blamed on the mining industry.

Closing mining operations is not the answer if the needed regulation has not been done in the first place!!! As in the war on drugs, war on mining violations should start with the cleansing of ranks; in this case, of the DENR officials and bureaucrats who allowed the violations to flourish for so many years!

Open letter from Bernardo Mejia: For a small country like ours, mining will never be good.....it will destroy our land and leave it barren forever.....so is our people in miseries too..... keep up the best of you, Madam Gina Lopez.....We the sovereign people support you.....unconditionally.....

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