

MICC usurps DENR?

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Environment Secretary Gina Lopez has called out Finance Secretary Carlos “Sonny” Dominguez for trying to “usurp” her powers through the creation of the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC).

In a recent television interview, Lopez clarified that the MICC cannot overturn her order to shut down 23 mines and suspend five others for environmental violations since its powers were “purely recommendatory.”

“They are not my boss. The only one who can tell me what to do is the President,” she said.

The MICC was created last February to review Lopez’s order for the closure of the erring mines. Dominguez, a former mining executive, accused the environment secretary of failing to follow due process in coming out with the order.

The council started its review of the shuttered mines this month.

For Lopez, Dominguez’s insistence on creating the MICC was practically an attempt to usurp her authority since the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ mining audit has already been completed.

“When Sonny Dominguez said that he will spend P50 million to review mining operations, it seemed to me like spending money to do something which is similar to a usurpation of powers. You’re not supposed to do that,” she said.

While Lopez admitted she “naively” signed the order for MICC’s creation and naming her as a co-chair alongside Dominguez, she said there is “no compromise” regarding her order to shut down the erring mines.

She said the law is clear that DENR is the sole government agency mandated to review mining operations.

“The audit is finished, I’ve already made my decision. I think this is Sonny’s idea. He wanted to do something more, whatever. But if you’re not going to evaluate from the lens of social justice, I’m not there,” Lopez said.

Lopez added she was grateful to President Rodrigo Duterte for supporting her hardline stance on mining despite the powerful mining lobby in the Commission on Appointments.

In a speech last March 11, Duterte said he would rather follow Lopez on mining and forego the estimated R70 billion in revenues the government gets from mining companies.

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