

Lopez: Jobs, farming revenues waiting for mining dependents

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Environment Secretary Regina Lopez fired back at his detractors in the mining industry, claiming there are 35,000 jobs and P200 million revenues awaiting those to be displaced when her order closure against 25 mining firms takes effect.

According to Lopez, those who will lose their jobs can expect a P200-million combined revenues from farming.

“We already have a plan. No one will lose jobs. Actually they will earn so much more. On the second year they can make up to P200 million net and 35,000 jobs. We have the plan and the model,” Lopez told the Daily Tribune. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) will allocate P50 million to enable the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC) undertake a comprehensive review of mining contracts nationwide, starting with those ordered closed or suspended last month by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Finance Sec. Carlos Dominguez said DBM Secretary Benjamin Diokno informed him that the budget for the review would be sourced from the government’s contingency fund.

Dominguez said the MICC, which he co-chairs with Lopez, will request that it be given a permanent allocation under the succeeding national budget programs of the government, beginning with the proposed General Appropriations Act of 2018.

“This MICC has never been funded so I think for the 2018 budget, we will propose that we will do that,” Dominguez said in a press briefing after the Council’s March 3 meeting.

“It’s been done (with other similar Councils) so we can do it,” he added. Dominguez said the MICC will start the process of selecting the members of the TRT today.

Dominguez said it was only proper that the MICC be given a permanent allocation under the national budget given its task under Executive Order 79

of reviewing all 311 mining contracts in the country once every two years. For this year, the MICC last Friday approved the guidelines on the conduct of an “objective, fact-finding, science-based” review of mining operations nationwide, initially covering those ordered closed or suspended by the DENR.

The MICC also decided in its Friday meeting to complete the review to be conducted by five interdisciplinary technical review teams (TRTs) within three months, with primary focus on the technical, legal, social, environmental and economic aspects of the affected mining operations.

Dominguez said the review will be done “in accordance with existing guidelines and parameters set forth in the specific mining contracts concerned and other pertinent laws rules and regulations.”

He said the members of the TRT “shall be qualified, certified or licensed persons in their fields of expertise and experienced in mining operations who shall be independent and have no known conflict of interest.”

Each TRT will include 1) a geologist, mining engineer or metallurgical engineer, 2) lawyer, 3) community relations officer, 4) environmental management officer and 5) economic representatives of the local government unit hosting the mining operation, Department of Finance, Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE), Department of Trade and Industry, National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Social Welfare and Development or other concerned government agencies.

“An adhoc review management unit or RMU and five TRTs shall be organized to manage and undertake the review, respectively,” Dominguez said, reading from the approved guidelines.

“The RMU shall manage the review through the provision of office space, provide administrative and financial services, hire individual experts and consolidate documents and reports for submission to the Council,” Dominguez said.

Lopez, who was not present at last Friday’s MICC meeting, was represented by DENR Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Maria Paz Luna.

It was the MICC’s second meeting since Lopez ordered last Feb. 2 the closure of 23 mine sites and the suspension of five others on environmental grounds. On February 14, Lopez canceled 75 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements (MPSAs) still in the pre-operation stage.

In the March 3 meeting attended by representatives of various government agencies, the DOLE expressed concern over the high costs of the emergency employment program that had to be immediately put in place to support workers who might be displaced should the DENR 's closure and suspension orders push through.

Joji Aragon, the DoLE's Asec. for Legal, Legislative and International Affairs, said at the MICC meeting that the DoLE will assess and look at the impact of the mine closures on employment and job displacement.

Aragon said DoLE is also currently working on a comprehensive transition plan in case the mines are closed.

The guidelines approved by the MICC in Friday's meeting stated that: "The review shall refer/take off from the existing reports (e.g. audit reports and checklists) prepared/developed by the DENR audit team and Technical Review Committee.

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