

# She's no angel

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I'm just fascinated at how Gina Lopez is able to hide her shortcomings and incompetence as environmental secretary behind her staunch anti-mining advocacy.

Imagine how avid Duterte supporters, the same legions who abhor her then as she was closely identified with the previous administration, are now defending her every move, pushing for her confirmation before the Commission on Appointment (CA).

Well, hold your horses fellas. You might as well take a second look at this self-proclaimed environmentalist.

In case Duterte supporters who are now backing Lopez might have overlooked, the one-tracked mind Cabinet secretary who arbitrarily ordered the closure of several mining firms despite a different recommendation coming for the audit team she herself put up, is facing criminal and administrative charges before the Office of the Ombudsman for allegedly covering up past wrongdoings of her trusted lieutenants who favored a supplier involving a questionable project worth P1 billion.

United Filipino Consumers and Commuters (UFCC) president Rodolfo "RJ" Javellana, one of the complainants said no less than Lopez herself had admitted there was no anomaly in the purchase of Differential Optical Absorption Spectroscopy or a DOAS system which were acquired during the time of former President Benigno "Noy" Aquino but which she chose to ignore when the issue was brought to her attention.

UFCC, along with Airboard Company and the Coalition of Clean Air Advocates of the Philippines (CCAAP) had filed a nine-page complaint sheet before the Office of the Ombudsman against Lopez and three other Department of Environment and Natural Resources officials over the alleged

anomalous purchase of the DOAS by the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) — Air Quality Monitoring Section (AQMS). Incidentally, Lopez was a former member of the Board of Trustees of the CCAAP.

Another complainant, managing partner of the Airboard Company Manuel Galvez revealed that “due to the incompetency and inaction of the new DENR secretary, another new bidding activity on the same types of questionable air quality monitoring equipment is now again in the offing at the DENR. But Lopez has never been a real friend of the environment, especially when she has to choose between her so-called environmental advocacy and people close to her.

In 2012, when Aquino was being accused by indigenous people of selling their future to investors on the issue of mining, Lopez openly defended the former president describing Aquino as incorruptible who has never been irresponsible when it comes to mining matters.

“Please don't say I said President Aquino is also grossly irresponsible over the mining industry,” I remember Lopez telling me when I asked her then over Aquino's responsibility to the indigenous people's concern. Aquino, that time, was accused by the Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas of taking sides with foreign investors with regard to the mining industry.

Aquino's record to protect the country's mining industry has been proven dismal.

Under his administration, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau endorsed for approval a total of 530 applications covering about five million hectares of prospective mineral lands.

In 2011, a high-profile delegation from the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines, accompanied Aquino to China to seal up to \$3 billion in mining investments and mineral-supply contracts with Chinese firms during President Aquino's state visit to China.

I am just not sure whether those granted by Aquino mining permits, were among those ordered closed by Lopez.

The other day, Christine Herrera of the Manila Standard reported Lopez is in hot water again, this time for allegedly accepting an all-expenses paid travel to Paris sponsored by a private contractor, and for personally benefiting from foreign donations amounting to 260,000 euros or about P13.7 million intended for an environmental project at a public university.

According to Javellana, part of those funds were diverted to bankroll her October 2, 2016 trip to Paris as DENR secretary.

Also, without the benefit of any probe, Lopez also reportedly exonerated her friend and benefactor French national Jean Philippe Henry, who is now facing qualified theft charges for making the huge withdrawals that benefited Lopez and deprived the students of Urdaneta City University in Pangasinan of the donated funds that were secured for them in the first place but never reached them, Sabrina Simbulan, president and trustee of Ecoglobal Foundation Inc., bared.

The Standard report furthered that on October 3 or the day after Lopez and several other DENR officials left for Paris, Henry, who diverted the donated funds for Lopez's travel, was able to secure a renewable energy service contract.

According to Simbulan she and the EFI board of trustees did not authorize Henry's withdrawal of funds for Lopez's trip.

Oh, and by the way, how many renewable energy service contracts has her family secured so far?

Sorry to disappoint my Duterte supporter friends who are backing Lopez in her bid to hurdle the CA. She's not the environmentalist you are hoping she can be and what she is trying to portray herself.

As long as she is under the mantle of big businesses, she can never be a true-blooded, honest-to-goodness environmentalist as business interest would have to play the bigger role. She would just be a major protagonist in an Oligarchs' war, fighting for the supremacy of the interest she represents. Unfortunately for us, with the backing of her family-owned media network (Hers was the only CA confirmation telecast live as far as I remember), she has had little success in taking us for a ride. But I hope eventually not. For she's no angel, trust me.

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