

‘Duterte can sit as DENR chief’

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Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo said yesterday that President Duterte can head the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), but if it were up to him, he'd rather not see the President saddled with more work since his hands are already full with matters of the state.

“A president can always assume any position in the Cabinet while being president. But I think – let's not saddle him with work. There's so much work already burdening him,” said Panelo, following the Commission on Appointments' (CA's) rejection DENR Secretary Gina Lopez's reappointment last Wednesday.

“I am very sad about the rejection of DENR Secretary Gina Lopez. The President has been supporting her all out. But we have to respect the decision of the Commission of Appointments. That's how the laws work in this country,” he said.

Panelo cited former leaders who assumed Cabinet posts while being President like Joseph Estrada as who stood as Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) secretary from June, 1998 to April, 1999; and Benigno Aquino III as OIC of the DILG from June 30 to July 9, 2010.

REFORM REMAINS

Making sure that “sweeping reforms” will continue in the DENR, Lopez had signed an administrative order that centralizes the processing of environmental compliance certificate (ECC), particularly for projects critical to the environment.

Under the DENR Administrative Order (DAO) No. 2017-04, which was signed by Lopez prior to the rejection of her reappointment, the project proponent has to seek approval from the DENR Secretary before it could secure an ECC.

An ECC certifies that the proposed project under consideration will not bring about unacceptable environmental impacts.

The order also ensures that specific conditions are first met by project proponents before they are issued ECCs. The order will take effect today, May 5.

JUDASES OF CA

Meanwhile, Lipa Archbishop Emeritus Ramon Arguelles branded the CA's action against Lopez's heading of the DENR as a betrayal of God's will.

In an interview in Church-run radio station, Radyo Veritas, Arguelles condemned the lawmakers, who voted against Lopez's appointment as the country's “Judases.”

Arguelles was referring to Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus Christ in exchange for 30 silver coins. “They betray God and our people because of self interest,” he said. (With reports from Ellalyn B. De Vera and Samuel P. Medenilla)

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