

LOPEZ ORDERS CLOSURE OF 23 METALLIC MINES

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Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on Thursday ordered the closure of 23 metallic mines in the country, while suspending five more, for serious environmental violations discovered during the industry-wide audit conducted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) since July last year.

"My issue here is not about mining. My issue here is social justice. If there are businesses and foreigners that go and utilize the resources of that area for their benefit and the people of the island suffer, that's social injustice," Lopez said during a press conference held at the DENR OSEC Conference Room in Quezon City.

Lopez issued the closure orders against 23 mining firms based on the final results and recommendations of the multisectoral audit teams formed to look into the compliance of mining operators with the existing environmental laws and regulations.

The mining firms slapped with closure orders are the following:

- BenguetCorp Nickel Mines Inc., Eramen Minerals Inc., Zambales Diversified Metals Corp., and LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc., all in Zambales province, due mainly to siltation of rivers, destruction of a functional watershed and illegal tree-cutting
- Mt. Sinai Mining Exploration and Development Corp., Emir Minerals Corp., and TechIron Mineral Resources Inc. in Homonhon mainly for siltation of coastal waters and destruction of functional watershed
- AAMPHIL Natural Resources Exploration, Kromico Inc., SinoSteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp., Oriental Synergy Mining Corp., Wellex Mining Corp., Libjo Mining Corp., Oriental Vision Mining Phils. Corp., in Dinagat Islands mainly for siltation of coastal waters
- ADNAMA Mining Resources Corp., Claver Mineral Development Corp., Platinum Group Metals Corp., CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Carrascal Nickel Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp., and Hinatuan Mining Corp. in Surigao del Norte mainly for siltation of coastal waters and mining in functional watersheds
- Benguet Corporation in Itogon, Benguet and Ore Asia Mining and Development Corp. in Bulacan were likewise issued suspension orders by Lopez.

She deferred to give a decision on the fate of Filminera Resources Corp. pending further investigation.

The five mining companies that were issued suspension orders are Berong Nickel Corp., OceanaGold Phils., Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corp., Citinickel Mines and Development Corp. and Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

According to DENR Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Maria Paz Luna, the companies can file for a Motion for Reconsideration (MR) to the DENR within 15 days from receipt of the order.

Luna said the DENR decision can still be appealed to the Office of the President.

The DENR had earlier assured the mining sector and the general public that due process was "meticulously observed" in the audit of all existing metallic mines nationwide.

It also assured that the audit results "really promote the common good and social justice" espoused by Lopez and President Rodrigo Duterte.

A staunch advocate of responsible mining, Lopez has made it clear that the common good and the protection of the environment would be her paramount concern, not money.

She emphasized that no mining company can operate in a functional watershed which protects water sources.

"Water is life. We will not allow the water of our people to be at risk for any business interest," Lopez said.

Barely a week at the DENR, Lopez ordered last July 8 an industry-wide audit to look into the adequacy and efficiency of environmental protection measures taken by the mining companies, determine gaps in those measures and identify the appropriate penalties for violations of mining and environmental laws.

A total of 16 audit teams were formed to review the environmental compliance of mining companies in all regions in the country. Each team is composed of representatives from the DENR central and regional offices, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture and civil society organizations.

The audit focused on safety and health; mine environmental management; social development; mining tenement; and compliance with laws on clean air, clean water, hazardous waste and solid waste. ###

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