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PHILIPPINES

# Lopez: No to separate departments for environment, natural resources

A part list representative points out a 'natural conflict' between a department that 'seeks to protect the environment' and one 'that seeks to promote ultimate use of natural resources'

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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

MANILA, Philippines – Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on Monday, September 5, said she does not support any move to split the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) into two agencies.

The proposal was raised by Kabayan Representative Harry Roque Jr during the DENR's budget hearing at the House Representatives.

“Do you think there is a need to separate now the Department of Environment from the Department of Natural Resources?” Roque asked Lopez.

He used mining as a case study to show the "apparent" need for two separate departments.

“There seems to be a natural conflict between a department that seeks to protect the environment, and a department that seeks to promote ultimate use of natural resources,” he explained.

Roque then asked if Lopez supports any legislative initiative to separate DENR "so you will not have a schizophrenic personality.”

“I don’t support this stand,” the environment secretary said.

Lopez added: “This is my stand: I believe that the resources of the Philippines should be utilized and enjoyed by the people of the Philippines. It’s all about choices."

She said that while the country is blessed with “a lot of minerals,” it is also blessed with “agricultural lands” and “beauty.”

“In these areas, a choice has to be made.… If you divide it, mining and the use of our natural resources, you don’t allow those choices to be made,” she explained.

But Roque clarified that he suggested the separation precisely because a separate Department of Environment "will police those granted franchises by the state in exploiting natural resources.”

“They will make sure they will not violate environmental laws, whereas the system now is, because it’s one department, it’s very difficult to find that balance between sustainable development of natural resources and implementing the laws of the environment,” he explained.

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“They will make sure they will not violate environmental laws, whereas the system now is, because it’s one department, it’s very difficult to find that balance between sustainable development of natural resources and implementing the laws of the environment,” he explained.

Lopez still insisted “it’s better if we work together,” clarifying again that she is against the suffering of the people, and not the mining industry.

The DENR has suspended the operations of 10 mining sites since its audit began in July.

The department’s proposed budget for 2017 is P28.67 billion ($615.97 million)*. – **Rappler.com**

**US$1 = P46.54*

**Filed under:** 2017 budget DENR DENR budget Department of Environment and Natural Resources Gina Lopez Harry Roque budget natural resources environment

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One of the plans that excites her is going into business with one of the environment department's government-owned and controlled companies, the Natural Resources Development Corporation (NRDC).

"I'm very much into enterprise development. I like business," she said during a meeting with reporters on Wednesday, July 27.

"Government can't do business, but NRDC can, and it's a government institution under [the Department of Environment and Natural Resources]," Lopez added.

She cited as example the indigenous peoples in Palawan. Since these communities don't have money to invest in their natural resources, Lopez said Chinese traders provide the capital and use the IPs' rights to be able to get the resources in that land.

"Who gets the money? Not the indigenous people. Now what is the indigenous peoples' rights for joint venture with NRDC? And I'm not really interested with the money, which means that if they lack the capital, if they lack the financial resources, we can give it, the government corporation, which means you can go into a joint venture with them," she explained.

The NRDC is mandated "to promote investments in natural resource-based industries by providing financial, technical and management assistance."

## Replication

Following the success story of the La Mesa Ecopark, Lopez said she wants to replicate this kind of entrepreneurial venture in all areas covered by the country's National Greening Program.

"La Mesa Ecopark is making P40 million a year. Why? They made it really beautiful," she added. (READ: Gov’t to restore Laguna Lake to ‘original, pristine condition’)

ABS-CBN Foundation's Bantay Kalikasan partnered with the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System and the Quezon City government to rehabilitate and renovate a public park located outside the La Mesa Watershed which was later renamed La Mesa Ecopark in 2004.

"All income generated by La Mesa Ecopark is utilized for the continuous preservation and protection of La Mesa Watershed," Bantay Kalikasan said in its website.

Lopez envisions an enterprise development wherein the net income will go back to the community. While the proposal still needs approval from President Rodrigo Duterte, she is optimistic the President "will say yes because he is for the people."

"DENR can be a great tool for poverty alleviation in areas where there are environmental concerns," she explained.

"I'm very, very excited about that because business is the way to go. You need to make money because you can't give people money all the time, and I think if in all environmental areas, we put in a spirit of enterprise, then the people will benefit." **– Rappler.com**

**Filed under:** ABS-CBN Foundation Bantay Kalikasan DENR Department of Environment and Natural Resources La Mesa Ecopark Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System NRDC Natural Resources Development Corporation Palawan Rodrigo Duterte enterprise development entrepreneurship environment mining Gina Lopez

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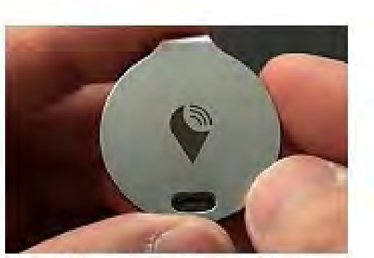
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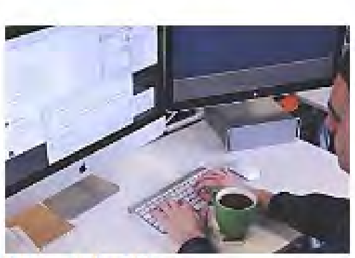
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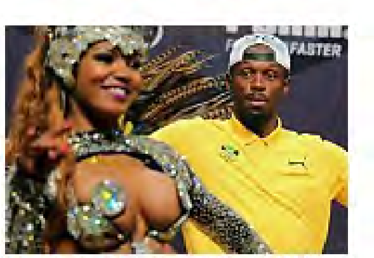
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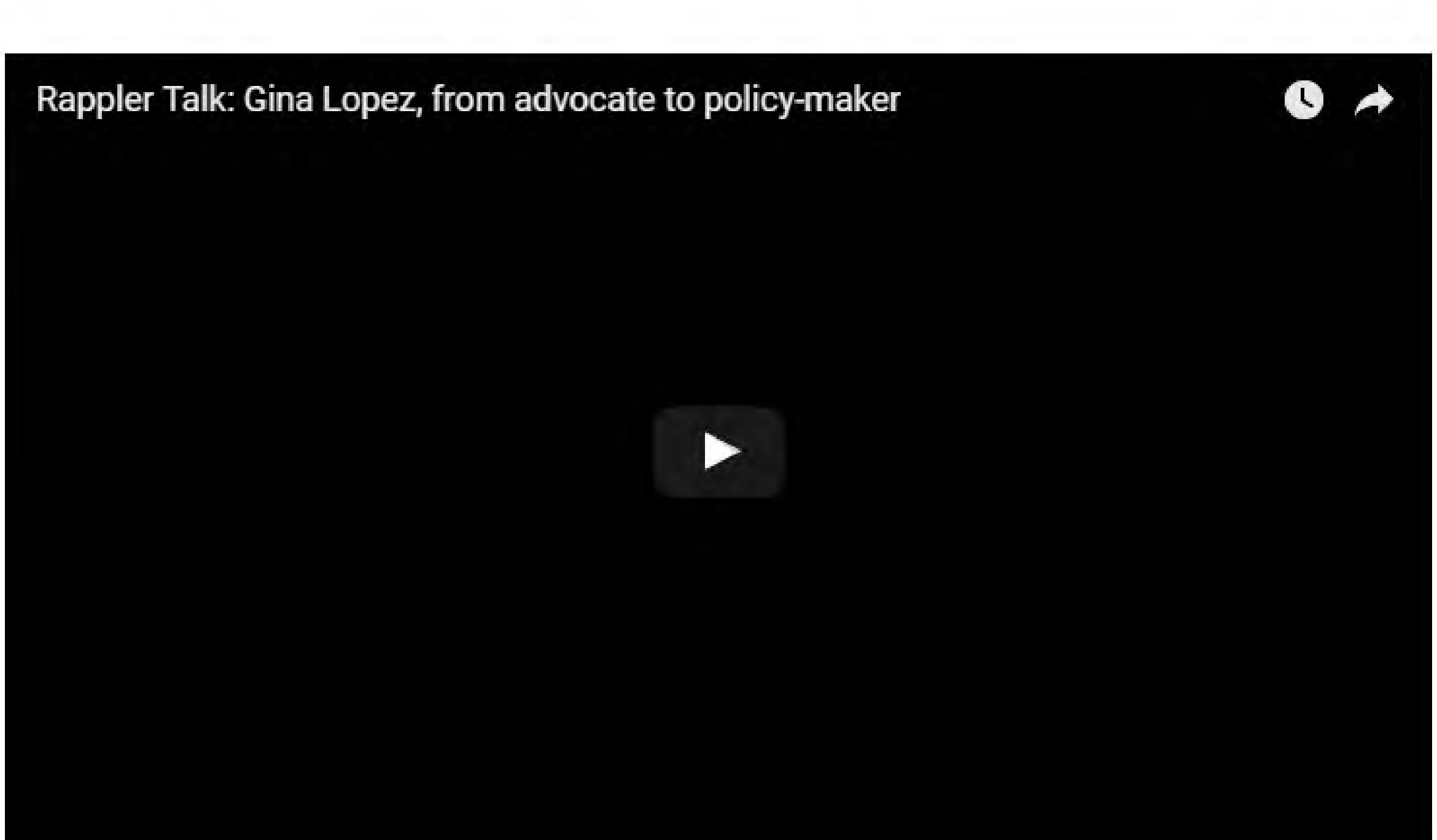
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