

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SECRETARY MARIA ANTONIA YULO-LOYZAGA
August 10, 2023 [2:39 P.M. –3:01 P.M]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong hapon, Huwebes, August 10th.

Recently, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. announced the suspension of the Manila Bay Reclamation Projects noting several issues, among them, its impact on flooding of Metro Manila and other environmental concerns. And to give us more details about this, we have here today, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga. Good afternoon, Secretary Loyzaga.

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: Good afternoon, Daphne, and thank you very much for this opportunity to, again, clarify some of these matters. I think, maybe the best way to start is to reiterate that, as you may have heard in the SONA, this is an administration that understands the intersection between sustainable development, the environment, biodiversity, climate change and land-use change among others. And so, we are here at the point where the President has then issued a suspension of reclamation projects in Manila Bay really to look into, number one, the environmental impacts, but also the social impacts of these activities. And on the part of the DENR, we are, of course, as I have said before, looking into the compliances under the conditions under which the ECCs (Environmental Compliance Certificates) and area clearances were issued.

So this is the role of the DENR, and as I've said before, we have already started to look at the compliance issue. And we are continuing to do that starting with, of course, the ongoing but then, we will look into all the projects for compliance.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Opening the floor to questions. Cathy Valente, Manila Times.

CATHY VALENTE/ MANILA TIMES: Good afternoon. Ma'am, Senator Cynthia Villar claimed that you are afraid daw po, influential people, behind the Manila Bay Reclamation Project. Who are these influential people and bakit ilag tayo or afraid tayo?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: So, this is Senator Cynthia Villar's, I guess, statement of concern regarding this very complicated issue, and I am very grateful for our interaction 'no. Senator Cynthia and I have been really conversing very deeply on this issue of reclamation and environmental impacts.

As you will see and as I have reiterated, our work regarding compliance and the review started earlier this year when we started to meet with advocates including Pamalakaya, including Agham. In that meeting, Oceana was there as well; they came to represent the few other advocates. After that, we held two other multi-stakeholder fora to actually ventilate all these issues.

I'm very grateful to Senator Villar for her concern. But we are here to do our job and we will do it slowly but deliberately because we want to make sure that we stay within the bounds of the law.

CATHY VALENTE/ MANILA TIMES: Pero, ma'am, sinu-sino po itong mga influential people na binabanggit, mayroon po ba? At sinasabi niya rin, ma'am, parang there were no consultation daw po sa mga reclamation project at nagpirmahan lang ng mga contracts. Paano po nangyaring may pirmahan na bago po itong mga studies pa—I mean violations, possible violations na niri-reveal?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: Thank you, Cathy. Nangyari po ito before I joined government so I will not venture to say what happened then. Ang role ng DENR dito is to stay within our mandate. We do have a mandate under the mandamus which is to rehabilitate Manila Bay to the point where people can actually swim and fish, and that is an order we take very seriously. Hindi lang po ang DENR ang kasali doon; there are 13 other agencies aside from us na ino-order ng Supreme Court to rehabilitate the bay.

Now, if we are to do what we have been obligated to do by the Supreme Court, we need to do the review of these projects.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Nestor Corrales, Philippine Daily Inquirer.

NESTOR CORRALES/ PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: So, Secretary, you are not afraid of these influential people as claimed by Senator Villar?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: Well, for those who—well, I don't know many of you, but you can ask the people who do know me – I am not easily scared.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Ivan Mayrina, GMA7

IVAN MAYRINA/ GMA7: Secretary, the President said that all except one has been suspended. May we know which is this 'one' that was allowed to proceed?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: Actually po, upon clarification with the President and, as you will see, the suspension, all are under review.

IVAN MAYRINA/ GMA7: So, all are under review?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes, sir.

IVAN MAYRINA/ GMA7: Okay, under review. While they are under review, they're not allowed to proceed. But apparently, ma'am, the Philippine Reclamation Authority is saying that they don't have any communications from the Office of the President for them to impose this suspension. As we speak, in effect na po ba iyong suspension?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: I have a copy of the suspension, so I think that the PRA will also have a copy.

IVAN MAYRINA/ GMA7: So, as we speak, ma'am, in effect na ito?

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: As soon as the President speaks, I think that will be in effect. And so he actually declared this over last couple of days, I think, when he was in the Bulacan area for the flood incident, and we now have a formal ano.

IVAN MAYRINA/ GMA7: Yes, ma'am. The reason I asked this, as of yesterday, reclamation activities were still ongoing in the bay, so there.

DENR SEC YULO-LOYZAGA: So, we just—I've had something issued today. Thank you

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Maricel Halili TV5.

MARICEL HALILI /TV5: Hi, ma'am. Good afternoon. Ma'am, hihingi lang po kami ng detalye tungkol doon sa suspension. How long will these reclamation projects be suspended?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Well, the issue really here is the cumulative impact assessment, and I have said this before to the group. The scientific team that we are actually engaging will be organized by this month, as I have shared with you. And we intend to provide a program of work once they have all met together. Hindi lang po ito simple because cumulative impact assessment involves drivers, it involves feedback and it involves many different disciplines.

I have heard some observations noting that I have not mentioned social scientists. For those people who know me, know that I have been an advocate of trans-disciplinary work – not inter, not multi, but trans-disciplinary work that means, discipline needs to intersect, the results need to reflect the intersections between the disciplines. And when we say trans-disciplinary work, we learn from communities, we learn from experts and practice, we don't just learn from scientists who are professors.

MARICEL HALILI/TV 5: What's our target?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: We will know once the scientific team converges and the work program will be laid out. So, again, this will include physical scientists, oceanographers, as well as, of course, geologists. There will be climate scientists on board; there will be social scientists on board.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Secretary, just to clarify. You mentioned that all projects are under review, is it accurate to say that all of these projects are suspended?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So, all are under review. We have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing, because they are in fact, already impacting the areas. And then, we will graduate to those that are in fact, still not yet begun.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So, we are talking about how many projects, Secretary?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: In this particular region, we are talking about roughly 22 projects.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESS MIRROR: Good afternoon, ma'am. We would just like to clarify: Prior itong ma-announce ni President Marcos iyong suspension, hindi pa suspended iyong mga activities doon sa Manila Bay?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Hindi po.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESS MIRROR: So, iyong pag-announce, tsaka pa lang nag-suspend?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes po. And they have been under review, but we don't have—the DENR does not have the authority to suspend.

CATHERINE VALENTE/MANILA TIMES: Ma'am, may we know po kung sino po iyong nag-approve po ng mga reclamation project na ito na under review, kung hindi po during the time of President Marcos?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Lahat po ito had been previously approved under the PRA in the previous administration.

CATHERINE VALENTE/MANILA TIMES: Previous administration, anong administration, Pangulo po pala?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Just the previous administration, so the Philippine Reclamation Authority under the previous administration.

CATHERINE VALENTE/MANILA TIMES: Duterte, ma'am?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes po.

NESTOR CORRALES/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Ma'am, just your comment on the US Embassy's statement that they are raising concern about a Manila Bay Reclamation Project being undertaken by a Chinese construction company that was blacklisted by Washington three years ago?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes. Our role in the DENR is to really focus on environmental compliance. As you know, the proponents of the projects are the local government units and they do have their own partners, etc. We are not actually able to comment on the choice of contractors or the activities that may have gone on in order for them to engage these contractors. We are here to actually implement environmental laws.

ALLAN FRANCISCO/PTV4: Hi, Sec. Sec., what is the long-term outcome or effect of this reclamation, please?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes, as we know, any disruption in any natural ecosystem will alter its function. So, when an ecosystem is actually in place, it's in fact in a state wherein it provides certain services, ecosystem services, such as for example the drainage of flood waters, then when that is disrupted by any kind of physical introduction, infrastructure, or digging-up just for any purpose, there will be a disruption in the delivery of that service.

I think what is important to know is that certain sections of the Manila Bay Region are at zero elevation. When you say zero, nandiyan na po ang dagat. And some of them are actually subsiding. When we say subsiding, lumulubog po siya. And when you have the situation where you have extreme weather events, and we are looking at scenarios in the climate ... looking forward to ten, fifteen, twenty years. When you have an extreme weather event, what's important is, the ecosystem service of drainage for flood management, for example, needs to be preserved and enhanced, especially because the City of Manila and other cities around the bay have areas which are heavily populated, quite well-developed but almost at zero elevation.

So, in terms of the long-term prospects, we need to take into consideration climate change impacts on the cities that are involved and the municipalities that are involved. We need to take into consideration the geological risk. As you know there have been many discussions on the Big One. I mentioned the last time when I was here, I think, hindi lang po ang Big One sa West Valley Fault, may Manila trench scenario rin ang PHIVOLCS, at iyon po ang, for me, what needs to be taken into consideration in the long term but also in the very medium term because we may in fact have an event that would impact everything that is built around the bay region.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Ma'am, if ever po itong impact assessment natin ng mga reclamation projects ay magpakita na it has negative effects sa environment natin, puwede po bang umabot iyon na the government will also hold iyong mga previous DENR officials who approved iyong mga ECCs accountable?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: I cannot answer speculative questions such as that. However, our job, moving forward, is to make sure that we are able to, with transparency, assure compliance so that the sustainable development of this area is possible. That's a legal question and it's speculative, Pia. So, I won't venture there.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Another question po, submitted lang ng reporter namin. DOST Secretary Solidum said na, "Okay sana ang reclamation kung island reclamation dahil nababawasan ang risk ng maling koneksiyon ng mga drainage sa mainland which could exacerbate the problem of flooding." Ganito rin po ba ang tingin ng DENR?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: There are many ways to do reclamation correctly. And as you can see, Luneta, Intramuros, these are all reclaimed areas. Where the Cultural Center is, that is a reclaimed area. So I will not say categorically, na mas mabuti iyong island because it really depends on the specific physical and social context ng area. But Secretary Solidum, of course, is the secretary of Science and Technology, and we respect his own inputs to this process.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Sam Medenilla, Business Mirror.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESS MIRROR: Ma'am, itatanong lang po namin. In case na after ng cumulative review ng DENR ay may makitang mga violations, will DENR shutdown the operations or bibigyan lang sila ng time for corrective measures doon sa mga projects nila?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: There is due process here 'no. So they will be given, of course, a period within which they may be able to correct, however ... and the guidance as to what can be done or not done during that period. And if they do not comply, it's possible for, of course, the ECCs to be suspended.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Hi, ma'am. Clarification lang po. Iyong pinapakita ninyo sa aming papel, ma'am, ay suspension order na po ba iyan and dated when? And naibigay na ng kopya doon sa 22 reclamation projects?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: I think you will have to wait for the official release 'no. However, the 22 projects will be written to, some of them have already been written to on the part of DENR 'no in terms of the compliance review. So regardless of whether suspended sila or hindi, gagawin namin ang review for compliance 'no.

So just to give you a little bit of background: When the ECCs and the area clearances were issued, there were conditions attached to those ECCs and area clearance. So we're looking now at the actual compliance to those conditions 'no, and iyon po ang medyo mabigat na

trabaho because ang dami po niyan and it involves multiple agencies giving their ‘no objection or objection’ to the different projects.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Follow-up lang, ma’am. Sa Senate inquiry po ay na-question ang Department of Public Works and Highways dahil parang sinasabi ni Secretary Bonoan, wala sila doon sa technical group para doon sa reclamation project na iyan. Sabi niya, binibigyan lang sila ng paper para sabihin na kung approved sila or not doon sa project. Puwede ba iyon na mag-say “yes” ka or “no” kung hindi naman pala sila kasama doon sa technical group?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Actually, there is a process by which the different departments are all given the opportunity to certify that they have objections or no objection. So nandidiyan na iyan; it’s part of the process. Not everyone will be part of the actual reclamation. Remember, these are local government-owned projects and, therefore, the local governments are now going to be, in collaboration with the PRA, implementing whatever approvals that they have.

Sa totoo lang, in fact, the DENR is not even a member of the monitoring teams of the projects. And we are hoping that we, in fact, can correct that situation.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Anymore? Jean Mangaluz, Inquirer.net.

JEAN MANGALUZ/[INQUIRER.NET](https://www.inquirer.net): Hi, ma’am. Can we just get a categorical answer that all reclamation activities are under review and suspended?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Yes.

JEAN MANGALUZ/[INQUIRER.NET](https://www.inquirer.net): Did the DENR give a recommendation to the President for him to suspend the reclamation activities? And what was the suggestion of the DENR?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: These issues on environmental compliance have been in discussion for some time. As I said, the President has been aware of the economic, as well as the environmental and social impact of the reclamation projects and, therefore, I cannot speak for him in what made him make that decision at this point. However, we provided what we have as far as the inputs from the DENR in terms of the need for the cumulative impact assessment.

I should say this: The cumulative impact assessment is actually part of EO 74. And if you can look that up, that is a very critical EO. And it actually mandates certain actions to be taken regarding the formulation of a national and regional reclamation policy; that is what we also want to do and, we also would like to review the whole governance procedure over these types of decisions moving forward.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: I was actually going to ask clarification on that. I took some notes given that Manila Bay Reclamation Area impacts all of Metro Manila and not just the LGUs

fronting it, I was going to ask about the governance aspect and what can we reform moving forward and what do you think of how this was implemented?

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: My own personal opinion, Daph, at this point is that, iyong reclamation is a development issue and it's an environmental issue that is related to development. And therefore, the decisions regarding reclamation really should be part of an overall economic and social and environmental strategy to achieve the sustainable development goals. And so, the procedures that we need to design then need to reflect the performance of the country against those goals and against the Philippine Development plan overall.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Anymore question? Okay. Thank you so much, Malacañang Press Corps. Thank you, Secretary Loyzaga.

DENR SEC. YULO-LOYZAGA: Thank you, Daphne. Salamat po.

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