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'No legal grounds to stop Cove Manila's balloon drop'—DENR

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A MID online protest, Okada Manila's New Year balloon-drop event may proceed as planned.

Environment Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units (LGUs) Benny D. Antiporda said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has no legal grounds to stop the record-breaking event.

According to Okada, the dome of its entertainment space Cove Manila will be showered by 130,000 balloons at exactly 12 midnight of December 31 to welcome the New Year.

In a telephone interview, Antiporda said the DENR's hands are tied after finding no legal grounds to stop Okada Manila from pushing through with the event.

Antiporda earlier issued a public pronouncement that the DENR will not allow the event to push through.

"Our people were there in Okada to stop the event. First of all, we came up with a letter telling them to abide by the law; yet they are insisting that the balloons are biodegradable and that these balloons will be recycled," he said. "They are in talks with a recycling company to use the balloons

in the production of eco-bricks."

Antiporda added executives of Okada Manila, the integrated resort and gaming complex owned by Japan's Universal Entertainment Corp., also assured him that the balloons will not be inflated with helium.

"There is no issue. There is no helium. No single balloon will get out of the establishment," he said.

However, Antiporda said all these conditions will be monitored by the DENR.

"We will be physically present on the event to make sure that these balloons will be properly disposed of. It will proceed. We will be closely monitoring," he said. "But with even a single violation, we will be filing an appropriate case against them."

In a Facebook post, Cove Manila assured the public that "the preservation and protection of the environment is something Cove Manila—and Okada Manila, for that matter—has always been committed to upholding, which is in fact, one of

the pillars of Okada Manila's corporate social responsibility programs.

"Cove Manila's much-anticipated balloon drop is not a whimsical effort to just 'play' with thousands of balloons. It is an earnest effort not only to make a new world record for the country, but also to demonstrate that we can have a lot of fun but still remain responsible," the statement said.

Unnamed officials of Okada Manila said in a statement the balloon drop "has been planned with solid environmental management protocols in place to minimize, if not eliminate, any possible impact on the environment."

Various environmental groups scored organizers for coming up with such an event.

Kalikasan-People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan-PNE), for one, said Okada's attempt to set a Guinness world record will generate at least 260 kilograms of rubber balloon garbage.

"This vast amount of waste generated just for a single event will worsen pollution in Manila Bay, as all the garbage in the metropolitan area ends up in the sea," Kalikasan-PNE National Coordinator Leon Dulce said.

Dulce added Okada Manila's promise it will "follow all necessary guidelines on the waste disposal"



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is "highly... on the volume of scientific information on solid waste."

The year 2018 saw the Philippines infamously claim the global second spot in terms of contribution to ocean plastic pollution. A 2010 World Bank study, in fact, pinpoints higher income pollution sources as the biggest sources of urban solid waste, Dulce explained.

He added there are many ways to celebrate New Year without using unsustainable and hazardous materials.

"There are biodegradable materials such as flowers and other plant-based materials. These can be locally sourced and even contribute to the local economy," he said. "There are other gimmicks for record-breaking that shouldn't require disposable materials. What about 130,000 lights, gym ribbons or choir singers? Extra creativity—and sensitivity to our environmental situation—can go a long way."

Dulce's view was seconded by Rodne R. Galicha, country director of Climate Reality Project-Philippines.

"There are lots of alternative to balloon drop. But one of the best things they can do is to grow indigenous trees to offset their carbon

emission. For every entrance ticket, a number of trees will be planted in behalf of the attendees," Galicha said. "This is also an opportunity to contemplate on the implementation of the Green Jobs Act and SEC's [Securities and Exchange Commission] Sustainability Reporting."

For his part, Arnel A. Yaptinchay, director of the Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines, said "130,000 balloons will produce 130,000 pieces of single-use solid waste, which is unacceptable these days because it disregards the problem the country is facing."

Yaptinchay added the Philippines "struggles to implement its waste management laws being the third plastic waste polluter in the world and undermines the movement to reduce consumption and packaging."

He further said "it is insensitive for a corporation, who even claims to be sustainable, to hold such a frivolous event that will just add to the problem."

"They are clearly clueless, uncaring for the environment, and are absolute 'greenwashers,'" Yaptinchay said. "We need these corporations to change their mindsets so that they can contribute positively to a sustainable future of the planet."



D.E.N.R. AWARDS GLOBE TELECOM FOR VOLUNTEERISM EFFORTS

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has awarded Globe Telecom for its volunteerism efforts and "invaluable support for DENR's [Department of Environment and Natural Resources] pursuit for sustainable development."

The Certificate of Recognition, signed by Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, was presented to Globe

by Environment Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and LGU Concerns Benny Antiporda in the recent celebration of National Volunteer Day with the theme "Volunterismo: Tugon sa Nagbabagong Panahon."

Globe is among 55 DENR partner-organizations from the business sector, government, non-governmental organizations and the academe that were

honored for their active participation in DENR volunteer projects and special events since 2012.

"This is our small way of thanking you for the big contributions you have made to the success of the DENR's programs and activities," Antiporda told the agency's partner organizations at the event, even as he enjoined more people and organizations to

help in protecting the environment. "The citizen's support alone will dictate either the success or failure of DENR's programs," he added.

Globe is an active supporter of DENR volunteerism programs and advocacy, such as coastal cleanup at the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area; mangrove tree planting in Calatagan, Batangas; watershed-ecosystem awareness at the Angat Dam, Norzagaray, Bulacan; and staging of history and nature bike parade, among others.

Globe is one of the country's few companies that nurture its people's innate desire to help by providing every employee with a day of Volunteer Time-Off every year to pursue their chosen advocacy. It also encourages "volunteaming", where employees are free to organize themselves in groups to pursue their advocacies.

Antiporda (left) hands over a plaque of recognition to Globe Chief Sustainability Officer and Senior Vice President for Corporate Communications Yoly Crisanto (right) for the company's support in DENR's sustainability efforts. Together with them is Jaypee Gulay, program and partner relations manager, Globe Citizenship and Advocacy Marketing.





PH is not an ideal location for new mineral processing plants – Bravo

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLORE**

President Rodrigo Duterte once identified industrialization as one of the top policy directions for the mining sector, something that Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu has supported since day one of his appointment.

Duterte, in one of his statements regarding the sector, explained that industrialization "invariably involves value-adding activities for downstream processing of metallic mineral resources."

Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA) President Dante Bravo just burst that bubble and said the Philippines is not a strategic location to develop new mineral processing plants in.

Right now, the Philippines, one of the highly mineralized countries in the world, only ships raw minerals abroad.

But Bravo said the administration's downstream dream may only backfire to the government and its policies.

Moreover, he said the country may also find itself in an awkward position in terms of dealing with its highly industrialized market for nickel, which happens to be China, the second largest economy in the world.

"It's a question of viability," he said, pointing out to two obvious reasons — Executive Order (EO 79) and the high cost of power.

Under EO 79, no new mineral agreements should be approved until a legislation rationalizing existing revenue sharing schemes and mechanisms shall have taken effect.

"The question is do you have sufficient reserves to put up a plant because it takes years of reserves. Right now, there is EO 79 and a new policy limits mining operations," Bravo said, also referring to the recently issued Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order which limits the area where miners can operate at any given time.

He then pointed out that Indonesia, also a top nickel exporter, has cheaper power cost than the Philippines which makes it more ideal for new processing plants.

"Another thing we have to consider is given we have to compete with China, where are we going to sell [the processed minerals]? In China, too?" Bravo said.

"We don't have the local market for it. China can produce stainless steel in big

volumes because they are using it. They have the technology, they have the money, they have everything," he added.

Right now, Philippines is still the largest supplier of nickel ore to China.

"What we can do is to continue to be part of the value chain," Bravo said.

Bravo, who also serves as the president of Global Ferronickel Holdings, Inc. (FNI), the largest single lateritic mine exporter in the world, said the aforementioned reality in the mining sector is also what's making it hard for his company to push through with its partnership with Russian firm Vi Holding.

FNI is the third largest nickel ore producer in the Philippines and the largest single lateritic mine exporter in the world.

Right now, FNI is working with Russian firm Vi Holding on a feasibility study for the proposed processing plant for lateritic ores here in the Philippines.

It was on the exact day of his confirmation last year when Cimatu first mentioned about Vi Holding's plan to expand here.

He said the foreign firm's entry in the Philippines will help add value to the country's mineral resources.