

Land reform eyed in Boracay; casinos banned

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President Duterte has rejected a plan to build a \$500-million casino complex on Boracay Island, saying he will place the property under the land reform program for distribution to farmers.

“I never said anything about building even a nipa hut there. What I said is the island is owned by the government. I’ve said it before, agricultural and forestal,” Duterte said in a press briefing before leaving for China yesterday.

He said what he ordered was a cleanup of the country’s top tourist destination.

“My orders were to clean it up. So pag may cleanup, sarado (If there’s a cleanup, it should be closed). There’s one way in, one way out,” he said.

Duterte announced that P2 billion has been allocated for those who will be affected by the closure of Boracay to tourists.

“Lilinisin ko lang naman, ibalik ko sa Pilipino yung lupa nila. Walang plano diyang casino-casino. Tama na iyan kasi sobra na. May casino dito, casino doon (I just wanted it cleaned, I will return it to the Filipinos. There’s no plan to build a casino there. We have casinos here, casinos there). Give it to the people who need it most,” he added.

The President said he would no longer entertain suggestions or opinions from any group, especially the business sector, which opposes the Boracay closure.

Businessmen have been lamenting the loss in revenues due to the rehabilitation of the island.

“How about the businesses? I’m sorry. But that is the law. The law says it is forestal, agricultural. Why would I deviate from that? Do I have a good reason to do that?” he said.

Duterte issued the statement amid reports that Macau-based Galaxy Entertainment and its Filipino partner, Leisure and Resorts World Corp., would start the construction of a casino complex in Boracay next year.

The casino giant and stateowned Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. have signed a provisional license for the construction of the Boracay casino complex.

‘Recall closure order’

Some Boracay-based businessmen are making a last-ditch effort to urge Duterte to recall the order to close the island.

Interior and Local Government Assistant Secretary Epimaco Densing III said he received information that some groups of businessmen went to Malacañang to block the closure order.

Densing did not disclose the identities of the groups and their members who went to the Palace. He described the situation in Boracay as an example of failed governance – “not just a failure of the government, but of the people, businessmen, residents and workers as well. The time when people obeyed the law only when they wanted to. It’s time to correct this.”

Densing said the P2 billion allotted by the government is more than enough to finance the “bridge assistance program” for affected individuals. Indigenous people are among the bene-

ficiaries of the bridge assistance program.

“The local government units would be the primary agency to implement the program,” Densing said, adding the LGUs will not manage the funds.

He said the Supreme Court mandated the LGUs to demolish illegal structures in coordination with national government agencies.

‘Don’t lay off workers’

Meanwhile, establishment owners in Boracay cannot just lay off their workers when the island will be closed for six months.

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III has cautioned Boracay establishment owners against illegal termination.

“The temporary suspension of business operations should not and must not result in the termination or separation of any employee,” Bello said in an advisory issued on Friday.

He said employers could implement a ‘no work, no pay’ policy or require the employees to go on forced leave by utilizing their leave credits.

“Employees are expected to be reinstated once the rehabilitation of Boracay is completed and the closure lifted,” Bello said.

He ordered Boracay employers to “strictly observe and comply with the labor advisory.”

Employment assistance

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) allotted P60 million for the emergency employment of at least 5,000 workers affected by Boracay’s closure.

Labor group Partido Manggagawa (PM) urged the DOLE to explain to the affected and informal workers the terms of emergency employment assistance.

“The 9,365 unregistered workers in Boracay deserve the same assistance as the 17,328 registered workers. The unregistered workers comprise a third of all Boracay employees and should not be denied aid. Like registered workers, they also have families to feed and support,” PM chair Rene Magtubo said.

“We urge the DOLE officials to sit down with the representatives of the affected workers to learn their grievances and concerns. This way they could craft appropriate emergency response and assistance that can be implemented during the Boracay closure,” Magtubo said.

Cops, soldiers to secure Boracay

Hundreds of policemen and soldiers will be deployed in Boracay during the six-month rehabilitation period.

The Western Visayas police will deploy 610 officers on the island this week to help maintain the peace and order in the area, according to Chief Insp. Joem Malong, spokesperson for the regional police.

Authorities are expecting possible protest actions related to the closure of the island.

“Teams trained for civil disturbance management will be sent to Boracay,” Malong said.

She said their target is for the rehabilitation to go on smoothly and peacefully.

“Our deployment is indefinite. They could stay longer than six months if needed,” Malong said.

The Army’s 301st Infantry Brigade is preparing a platoon from the 12th Infantry Battalion based at Camp Monteclaro in Miag-ao, Iloilo and another from the Civilian Active Auxiliary for the Boracay deployment.

“We will deploy more personnel if necessary,” 301st IB commander Brig. Gen. Pio Diñoso said.