DOLE holds Stakeholders' Meeting on Workers' Rights in Ecozones

Representatives from the labor, management, and government particularly the Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Department of National Defense (DND) and Department of Justice (DOJ), attended the Stakeholders' Meeting on the implementation of the Guidelines relative to the exercise of the workers' rights and activities and on the setting up of the Joint Industrial Peace Council (JIPCO) in the Ecozones, on 13 February 2020 at the Labor Governance Learning Center (LGLC), DOLE Building, Intramuros, Manila.

OIC Undersecretary Benjo Santos M. Benavidez explained that the Stakeholders' Meeting seeks to address issues and concerns raised by different labor organizations relative to the implementation of the said Guidelines, particularly in view of the recently established JIPCO in special economic and Freeport zones in Central Luzon.

JIPCO is a program launched by the PNP and PEZA through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 2018.

Atty. Mark Rubio of PEZA clarified that JIPCO is a PNP program and PEZA was only involved as a partner agency consistent with its mandate to develop more ecozones that are not purely industrial, but which resemble a township with residences, hospitals, and government agencies. "Along the periphery of the ecozones, there will be a PNP station to ensure peace and order, and the PNP may only enter the ecozones in coordination with PEZA", he added.

PMGEN Benigno Durana of PNP further explained that the JIPCO initiative is part of PNP's

effort to contribute to the national development bearing in mind that a stable, peaceful and orderly environment will enable further development and economic prosperity in the country. "JIPCO aims to bring the services of the police closer to the sector where it matters most, where it can contribute to industrial peace, as well as employees and employers' rights and welfare", PMGEN Durana added.

However, in a joint statement, NAGKAISA Labor Coalition and the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) called for the scrapping of the establishment of such structure. NAGKAISA and KMU representatives said that the explicit purpose of JIPCO is to stop trade unions from organizing and is clearly an institutional and government-led attack on workers' right to organize.

"JIPCO poses a great danger to the lives and safety of union leaders and organizers as it further encourages irresponsible "red-tagging" and compromises the basic rights of the people," they added.

On behalf of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Secretary Bello expressed serious concern with the establishment of such structure within special economic and freeport zones in view of its labor and economic impact considering that the effective exercise of freedom of association and collective bargaining contribute to the sustainment of industrial peace and inclusive growth.

"The establishment of JIPCO could also impact the country's trade and investment opportunities in the international setting", he added.

Secretary Bello further underscored that workers' rights are protected under Philippine and international laws citing that the DOLE, in collaboration with labor, employer and various government agencies, formulated and issued two (2) Guidelines governing the conduct of stakeholders relative to the exercise of workers' rights and activities.

In order to harmonize the existing Guidelines and the MOA, Secretary Bello called for the creation of a Technical Working Group (TWG) to work and thresh out issues relating in the implementation of the Guidelines.

The aforementioned guidelines are the Joint DOLE-PNP-PEZA Guidelines in the Conduct of PNP Personnel, Economic Zone Police and Security Guards, Company Security Guards and Similar Personnel During Labor Disputes, issued on May 23, 2011, and the Guidelines on the Conduct of the DOLE, DILG, DND, DOJ, AFP, and PNP Relative to Exercise of Workers' Right and Activities, which was issued on May 7, 2012.

END/Honey Glaze Alipio