

## Illegal logging persists in Agusan despite ban

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Officials in Agusan and Surigao are either playing deaf or defying President Benigno Aquino III's order on a total logging ban following reports on Friday that illegally cut logs and lumber had been seized in those provinces, an official said.

Police confiscated the logs in Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur over the past two days, said Chief Supt. Generoso Cerbo Jr., National Police spokesman.

He said police seized 14.83 cubic meters of illegally-cut Lauan logs worth more than P84,000 and 1,181.11 board feet of illegally-cut Yakal logs worth more than P42,000.

On Friday, police intercepted a vehicle loaded with 36 slabs of Narra lumber in Poblacion village in Surigao del Norte and arrested the driver.

President Aquino has ordered the Anti-Illegal Logging Task Force to prosecute all people involved in illegal logging.

Presidential spokeswoman Abigail Valte, quoting a presidential memo dated June 26 and addressed to Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa, said the members of the task force were "individually directed to investigate, take the appropriate action and file the necessary cases against any official or employee within their respective departments who have been remiss or negligent in their duties or may have abused the commission of illegal logging activities in their regions."

At least 31 Environment officials in Agusan and Surigao face administrative and criminal cases after they were removed from their posts over the rampant illegal logging, particularly inside the 51,000-hectare Agroforestation Complex of the Manobo tribe in Agusan del Sur.

Interior Secretary Jesse Robredo said six Agusan del Sur mayors, including Gov. Adolph Edward Plaza, had been asked to explain the non-stop illegal logging in the province.

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The police director of Agusan del Sur and some chiefs of police in the province have also been fired and are now facing administrative and criminal cases.

National Police chief Gen. Nicanor Bartolome earlier ordered regional director Chief Supt. Reyando Rafal to explain why illegal logging remained unchecked in his jurisdiction.

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