

Reference News Articles

Palace seeks to boost gov't anti-terrorism campaign

by Jon Carlos Rodriguez, abs-cbnNEWS.com

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MANILA, Philippines – Malacañang is lobbying for amendments to the Human Security Act (HSA), in an effort to improve the government's campaign against anti-terrorism.

In a press statement, Executive Secretary Paquito N. Ochoa Jr., who also heads the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC), said changes are needed to give more teeth to the law and at the same time address possible abuse of the law by authorities.

“The government recognizes that terrorism is a constant threat that requires us to be vigilant. After reviewing our counter-terrorism initiatives, we decided to focus on strengthening anti-terror legislation to make it more responsive to the threats posed by terrorists,” Ochoa said on Saturday.

According to the statement released by the Office of the President, President Benigno Aquino III has asked congressional leaders to prioritize a bill proposing amendments to the HSA of 2007 in response to calls for stronger anti-terrorist legislation.

Define terrorism

Ochoa said the government is pushing Congress to consider merely the intent of creating a condition of fear and panic among the public or to coerce the government or an institution to give in to demands as terrorist acts.

There are provisions in the HSA that require authorities to inform suspected terrorists that they are under surveillance and that their bank accounts are subject of investigations,

A portion of the law also states that the application of the law is prohibited one month before and two months after an election.

Ochoa noted that these particular sections must be removed, as they “defeat the whole purpose of covert surveillance and investigations by the authorities.”

“We want these amended to make our law a more effective tool in our efforts to prevent terrorism,” said Ochoa.

The ATC also proposes that results of investigations must be reported within 30 days.

“While our goal is to strengthen the law, amendments are also necessary to ensure that the law will not be abused. We believe that ensuring the security of our citizens should not come at the expense of their civil liberties,” said Ochoa.

US attacks

Meanwhile, US authorities are looking into unconfirmed but "credible" threat that terrorist group Al-Qaeda has plans of targeting bridges and tunnels in New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, a decade after the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Despite the terror threat, ceremonies in Ground Zero in New York, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania will push through to mark the 10th anniversary of the attacks.

The memorial found at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center in New York will be opened to the public on September 11. A museum will be opened in 2012.

Among those to be honored in the museum are 20 Filipino passengers who were killed onboard the

aircraft that crashed into the twin towers.

In a press statement, Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Abigail Valte said “the Filipino people join the world in commemorating the heroism demonstrated in so many ways on that day, too.”

“Most of all, this is a day for all nations and peoples to reaffirm their commitment to peace and stability built on mutual respect and dialogue between cultures and religions,” Valte added.

Rectory attacked in Aurora; priest unharmed

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Unidentified men strafed a Catholic rectory in Casiguran town in Aurora province over the weekend, but the Catholic priest believed to be the attack’s target escaped unhurt and remained defiant.

Fr. Jose Francisco “Joefran” Talaban, parish priest of Nuestra Señora de la Salvacion in Biancoan village, said he had received threats because he tried to protect local farmers and fishers from some local development projects.

"Alam nila naman siyam na taon ako nagtatrabaho rito bilang parish priest dito. Meron ng mga pagbabanta at ito ang pinakamatinding nangyari sa akin na malapit sa aking tulugan ang malakas na pagsabog," Talaban, 43, said in an interview on dzRH radio Monday.

(I have been working as parish priest here for nine years. I have received threats but this is the most serious so far.)

But while police continue to investigate the incident, Talaban said he would continue to oppose some local projects.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said Talaban had particularly been a vocal opponent of the Aurora Special Economic Zone (APECO).

An article posted on the CBCP [news site](#) on Monday said the incident occurred on Saturday when an explosion followed by successive gunshots hit the parish house in Purok 5 in Biancoan village in Casiguran town.

Talaban was sleeping when the explosion occurred near the parish house at about 2:20 a.m., the CBCP said.

Neighbors also said that a black service van without license plates stopped in front of the parish area and unidentified men approached it, the CBCP account said.

Aurora provincial police chief Senior Superintendent Romulo Esteban said investigators recovered an empty shell from an M-16 rifle, three empty shells from an M-14 rifle, and shrapnel from a grenade.

He added that the suspects also left plastic laminated pamphlets warning Talaban to pack and to leave the area because he was allegedly sowing disunity in Casiguran.

The pamphlets were supposedly issued by the “Aniban ng Ayaw sa Komunista (ANAK),” an

anticommunist group.

Other laminated pamphlets accused Talaban of being an advocate of Satan and questioned his integrity for being part of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Security tightened at parish

In the meantime, Talaban said local police and community officials tightened security in the area. "*Sa ngayon ang komunidad ay concerned, tinutulungan natin sila sa pagbabantay tuwing gabi. May tanod at minsan may kapulisan na nagroronda sa parokya ko,*" he said.

(Our community is concerned. They are now helping secure the area. Sometimes police show up to conduct patrols in the parish.)

He also stressed that he would not be cowed. "*Ang simbahan ay hindi hihinto sa pagkiling sa mahirap at inaapi* (The Church will not stop protecting the poor and the oppressed)."

"If I will be asked regarding the harassment, I will never leave my parish. I am not affected by the said incident," he added.

Last Good Friday, Talaban led a protest action against APECO participated in by farmers, fishermen, indigenous people, and two priests. He also urged management of APECO to respect the rights of farmers to their titled lands and not grab them for their own profit.

He said the ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples are their sole possession and their only means of survival.

Bishop condemns attack

Infanta, Quezon Bishop Rolando Tirona condemned the attack and said the threats will not deter the local church from defending the rights of the poor and exposing irregularities in the province.

Calling the perpetrators "cowards and without conscience," Tirona said the attack on Talaban's rectory was related to the support of the Church to groups opposing the establishment of an economic zone in the province.

"Definitely, 100 percent of this incident is related to the assistance Father Joefran is extending to those who are affected by the APECO," Tirona said.

"The allegations against Father Joefran are all lies and being spread by people who are disturbed because the villagers have already learned the truth," he added.

Also, he said the attack happened as Talaban and the prelature elevated the issue to advocacy groups based in the University of the Philippines and Ateneo de Manila University when the residents decided to oppose the conversion and expansion of Aurora Special Economic Zone Act (ASEZA) into the APECO. - **RJAB Jr/KBK, GMA News.TV**

Military accused of torturing detained health workers

By Dona Pazzibugan

Philippine Daily Inquirer

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MANILA, Philippines?A health workers? group has accused the military of torturing the 43 medical workers, including two doctors, who were arrested during a training seminar in Morong, Rizal last Saturday.

?Based on accounts by the detainees, the Armed Forces of the Philippines subjected them to various forms of torture and sexual harassment,? Dr. Geneve Rivera, secretary general of the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD) said in a statement.

She said even the pregnant women were not spared the interrogation and harassment.

Rivera said she was included in Commission on Human Rights chairman Leila De Lima's party when she visited the detained medical workers Monday.

Through De Lima, the detained health workers were also able to see their relatives and relate how they were kept in handcuffs and blindfolds for more than 36 hours after they were brought to Camp Capinpin, headquarters of the Army's 202nd Infantry Brigade.

She said 60-year-old Dr. Alex Montes was electrocuted and punched on the chest several times during interrogation. Rivera added that after several hours of the torture, ?he was willing to admit to anything? that his torturers wanted him to admit.

?They were not allowed to go to the bathrooms on their own and their custodians were the ones who removed their underwear every time they had to urinate. A female health worker complained that a female custodian was even the one who washed her genitals after she used the bathroom,? Rivera said.

Military and police operatives raided a rest house owned by another doctor in Morong, Rizal, on Saturday morning and arrested 43 people including Dr. Montes, Dr. Merry Mia, nurse Gary Liberal, midwife Teresa Quinawayan and some health workers.

The military claimed the health workers were communist rebels who were training in bomb-making.

Rivera described Dr. Montes and Dr. Mia as long-time members of the nongovernment organizations Community Medicine Development Foundation (COMMED) and Council for Health and Development (CHD), respectively.

She said the two doctors, the nurse and the midwife were conducting a health skills training among community volunteers.

She said the detained health workers were forced to admit to being members of the communist New People's Army. They were reportedly confined in dark cells and forced to listen to sounds of gunfire.

They were not allowed to speak to each other and men would come in every night to hit them and take their pictures.

?One of those detained already had sore arms and wrists from being tied down for so long,? Rivera said.

She said a certain Col. Aurelio Baladad taunted the health workers and their relatives during their tearful reunion, and called them ?paid actors.?

?The mental and physical torture inflicted by the Armed Forces is inhumane and criminal. That they can do this to the very people who care for our lives and well-being speaks volumes as to the kind of soldiers and officers the military establishment employs,? Rivera said.