

DOJ sees progress in bid to declare Reds as terror group

MANILA -- Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said prosecutors pursuing court action to formally declare the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in the country as a terrorist organization will be gaining ground soon.

"The amended petition is for publication. (T)hen let's see who among the respondent CPP/NPA's known officers or members will file an answer," Guevarra told the Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Wednesday when sought for an update on the proceedings.

Last February, a Manila court hearing the government's petition to declare the CPP-NPA as terrorist organization has dropped more than 600 names in the original petition filed by the government against the rebel group.

In an eight-page resolution dated February 1, Manila Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 19 Judge Marlo A. Magdoza-Malagar also directed the Department of Justice (DOJ) to instead serve summons to the organizations, through the terror groups' known leaders, Jose Maria Sison and Antonio Cabanatan.

The order exchanged the names of more than 600 personalities in the original government petition but whose links to the organization were not substantiated by evidence.

The DOJ has identified eight individuals as current officers of the CPP-NPA whom summons may be served, which include Sison, Cabanatan, Jorge Madlos, Jaime Padilla, Francisco Fernandez, Cloefe Lagapon, Leonido Nabong, and Myrna Solarte.

The magistrate explained that "its interest in ensuring the petitioner (DOJ) identified only

those with unassailable links to the respondent-organizations is not because these parties are considered respondents to the petition but only because their undisputed link to the CPP-NPA is necessary for this court to ensure proper service of summons and acquire jurisdiction over the instant petition and herein respondents."

The court, in underscoring Sison's links, cited sworn statements from a number of individuals executed between 2003 and 2014 including the sworn statement of a certain Ruben Guevarra dated Jan. 15, 2003 executed at the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) referring to Sison as the CPP-NPA Central Committee and Military Commission chairman and the direct head and mover of the NPA and the National Democratic Front (NDF).

Likewise cited was the sworn statement of Veronica Tabara dated May 22, 2006 and Oct. 9, 2006 in Sibulan, Negros Oriental referring to Sison as the founding, elected and recognized chairman of the

Central Committee of the CPP/NPA/NDF.

The court also considered affidavits of Gloria Asuncion in May 2006 naming Sison as the chief of the Political Bureau and the Executive Committee and Military Commission of the CPP/NPA as well as sworn statements of Rafael Cruz, Glecerio Roluna, and Numeriano Beringuel in Tacloban City.

The court also noted that an indictment in 2007 before the Hilogos, Leyte RTC Branch 18 accused Sison as leader of the NPA members who were behind the murder of 15 persons whose bodies were found buried in a mass grave at Sitio Mt. Sapang Dako, Barangay Kauslisihan, Inopacan, Leyte.

An indictment in 2014 pending before the Manila RTC Branch 32 also named Sison for the murder of Juanita Aviola who was among those found buried in Leyte along with Concepcion Aragon, Gregorio Eras, Teodoro Recones Jr., Restituto Ejoc, Rolando Vasquez, Junior Milypapis, Crispin Dalmacio, Zacarias Casil, Pablo Daniel, Romeo

Tayabas, Domingo Napules, Ciriaco Daniel, Crispin Prado, and Ereberto Prado.

The deaths are suspected to be a purging by the organization of suspected military spies within its ranks.

The court said the DOJ's amended petition excluding the names of personalities alleged to be members of the CPP-NPA shall be taken as basis for the court to declare nine individuals along with the 600 other personalities as "non-parties"

These individuals, namely Joanna Carino, Joan Carlin, Jeannette Ribaya-Cawiding, Beverly L. Longid, Windel B. Bolinget Sr., Elisa Tita Lubi, Rey Claro Casambre, Sherwin De Vera and Randall B. Echanis as well as the more than 600 personalities named and enumerated in the DOJ's original petition were labeled non-parties to the government's amended petition.

The CPP-NPA is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. (PNA)

More social welfare attachés to be deployed abroad soon: Angara

MANILA -- Senator Sonny Angara on Wednesday said more social welfare attachés will soon be deployed abroad to assist distressed overseas Filipinos and their children now that the bill seeking to institutionalize their deployment is up for President Rodrigo Duterte's signature.

Angara, a principal author of the measure, said deploying more social welfare attachés in Philippine embassies and consulates would help bring comfort and provide assistance to overseas Filipino workers, who are victims of abuse, illegal recruitment, and maltreatment, among others.

Angara noted that only seven social welfare attachés are currently deployed in several parts of the world, including Malaysia, Kuwait, Qatar, Hong Kong, Dubai, and Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

"Having 'malasakit officers' in Philippine embassies and consulates is a reassurance that the government truly cares for our modern-day heroes, who sacrifice a lot to create better lives for their families and help the Philippine economy to stay afloat through

their remittances," Angara said.

Angara cited the need for a trained professional who can provide "care, comfort, and counseling" to OFWs in crisis situation and in need of special protection, noting that this kind of skill-set might not be found in the organizational setup of an embassy.

"In the division of labor inside what is basically a multi-agency embassy, there are assigned personnel that can handle legal cases, liaise with local police, as well as military, trade, agriculture attachés," Angara said.

"Kahit meron tayong magagaling na

abogado sa mga embahada at batikang eksperto sa lokal na regulasyon, ang isang kakulangan ay 'yung magbibigay ng psychosocial care doon sa mga biktima ng trafficking or violence (Even though we have great lawyers and experts on local regulation in our embassies, we still lack trained personnel who could provide psychological care to victims of trafficking or violence)," Angara said.

He said a total of PHP90 million is allocated for the creation of the Office of the Social Welfare Attaché under the 2018 and 2019 national budget. (PNA)

DPWH aims to finish Manila Bay cleanup by July

MANILA — The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) is looking to finish the "Sagip Manila Bay" clean-up works of the 1.5-kilometer area of Manila Bay in the next three months.

DPWH Undersecretary for Technical Services and Unified Project Management Office (UPMO) Operations Emil Sadain reported that the deployment of two units of multi-purpose amphibious dredge Watermaster Classic 5 will contribute to their efforts of completing the removal of debris, plastics, other solid wastes and dissolved solids or the so-called muck with some traces of sand by July.

He noted the units with cutter suction that offers combination of mobility and heavy-duty dredging capacity will further fast-track the cleaning between the area of US Embassy to Manila Yacht Club in preparation for the upcoming rainy season.

"Improvements as a result of DPWH activities can

now be seen but we will not relax and instead we beefed up our operating fleets of two crawler mounted land based, four amphibious excavators, debris segregators, and among others," Sadain said during an inspection of the dredging operations on Wednesday.

The operation at Manila Bay Area was divided into five sectors each ranging from 200 to 300-meters long, until the entire 1.5-kilometer is finished.

It is estimated that to date, the total volume of removed muck and silt from 20 meters distance from shore to bay and thickness/depth of two meters is at 18,000 cubic meters.

With cleaner water, Sadain said Manila Bay will soon be fit again for swimming and other contact forms of recreation.

Also present during the inspection were Bureau of Equipment Director Noel Ilao and Assistant Director Amador Andrada, and Project Director Patrick Gatan of UPMO-Flood Control Management Cluster.

Early last month, DPWH Secretary Mark Villar officially launched desilting operations by deploying a fleet of equipment composed of amphibious excavators, dumping scows, dump trucks, debris segregator, street sweepers, and vacuum sewer jet cleaners.

DOJ questions journo group's 'conclusions' on PH media situation

MANILA -- Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra on Wednesday questioned the conclusions of a group of visiting foreign journalists on press freedom in the country.

"Contrary to the opinion of the visiting foreign journalists, I believe that the Philippine press is the freest in the region. Anyone can criticize or say anything against the government without fear of retaliation," Guevarra said, as he challenged the basis for the report by representatives of

the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) from the US and Alliance for Journalists Freedom (AJF) from Australia showing "increasing levels of intimidation" against Filipino journalists and "shrinking space for the free press in the country."

The group said the cases against online news site Rappler and its chief editor, Maria Ressa, were a form of "formal and informal pressure on journalists... that appear to be politically motivated" and which "created a

sense of fear throughout the media industry, leading to self-censorship."

"Maria Ressa's case is not reflective of the overall situation. Her cases arose from a violation of our Securities Code, which led to other cases such as tax evasion and anti-dummy charges. Her cyber libel case was initiated by a private individual, not by the government," Guevarra pointed out.

Officials from the CPJ visited the country this week to check what

it described as the "increasing levels of intimidation and a shrinking space for the free press in the country."

Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFoMS) executive director and Undersecretary Jose Joel Sy Egco earlier discussed with officials of CPJ and UNESCO accomplishments made by the task force in less than three years after its creation.

In the meeting, CPJ Asia program coordinator Dr. Steven Butler, CPJ board chair Kathleen Carroll, and