

PHL, Netherlands sign partnership pact vs. human trafficking

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The Philippines and the Netherlands have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for a more thorough partnership in battling cross-border human trafficking.

The signing of the MOU was participated in by Philippine representatives from the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) led by Justice Secretary Leila de Lima and Dutch delegates led by Marion Derckx, Human Rights Ambassador Kees van Baar, Deputy Head of Mission Ruth Emerink, and Police Liaison Arjan Verhagen.

De Lima, who is IACAT chair, said the MOU seeks to enhance cooperation and communication in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in persons cases. The Department of Justice supervises the IACAT.

"The ratification of the MOU between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Philippines signifies the commitment of the government in addressing the human trafficking problem and its vow to work closely with like-minded partners to end exploitation of the vulnerable," said the Justice secretary.

De Lima described the development as a "milestone in the government's drive in eliminating modern-day slavery."

Among the areas of cooperation covered by the agreement are the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in human beings, sexual abuse of minors, production, import, export, and distribution and selling of child abuse images, possession of child abuse images for sexual exploitation, and travelling child sex offenders.

As early as 2011, the Philippine and Dutch governments have taken steps to curb reported labor trafficking cases involving overseas Filipino workers and companies based in the Netherlands.

In early 2014, a team of anti-human trafficking experts from the Netherlands visited the Philippines and met with local officials to strengthen both countries' effort to fight human trafficking.

The Dutch team's visit was aimed to enhance cooperative efforts and mutual assistance with foreign countries through bilateral and/or multi-lateral arrangement to prevent and suppress international trafficking in person.

Discussions between the Dutch delegates and the IACAT ranged from law enforcement to human trafficking prevention, including efforts to stop child pornography.

A ground-breaking ceremony for two Dutch-funded projects in the Philippines: a Victim Processing Center which serves as "shelter homes" for victims, and a presentation of the National Case Audit Report were also held during the Dutch visit.

In 2012, the Dutch government extended its support to the Philippines' anti-human trafficking by building a victim processing center and donating P1.8 million for the enhancement of the IACAT's database system.

Data from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in 2012 showed that there had been 268 cases of trafficking from 2007 to 2010, with a total of 452 victims, 79.51 percent of whom were women. -**Mark Meruenas/NB, GMA News**

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