



11 February 2010 - The Philippines and the European Union (EU) formally launched today the Philippine-EU Justice Support Programme (EPJUST) which aims to assist the Philippine Government in addressing the problems of extralegal killings and enforced disappearances.

The program was signed on 8 October 2009 by Executive Secretary Eduardo R. Ermita, Chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Committee, and EU Ambassador Alistair McDonald for the European Union.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto G. Romulo, Executive Secretary Ermita and EU Delegation Head Ambassador MacDonald, held a joint press conference to launch the program at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

In his remarks, Secretary Romulo reaffirmed the Philippine Government's commitment "to the promotion and protection of human rights in the most comprehensive and sustained manner possible."

He explained that the EU-Philippine Justice Support Program "is another step the Philippine Government is taking, in collaboration with the European Union, to improve its institutional capability vis-à-vis the effective investigation, prosecution, and trial of persons involved in any way in extralegal killings and enforced disappearances."

"Let there be no doubt about the seriousness of the Philippine Government's resolve to address these human rights issues. Over the past few years, we have initiated and pursued several measures towards this end. And the fruits of our efforts on this area have not failed to gain the notice of the EU and the international community in general," Secretary Romulo said.

The EPJUST is an 18-month-long program, with an approved budget of €3.9 million, which will assist the Philippine Government, particularly the criminal justice system and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and civil society organizations (CSOs), in solving extralegal killings and enforced disappearances.



Under the project, the EU will provide technical assistance to the Philippines in the form of an EU Expert Team which shall provide advice on enhancing the institutional capacity of the Philippine Government in addressing human rights issues. The EU experts are currently in Manila for the implementation of the project.

Moreover, a Project Steering Committee was established to review and guide the overall direction of the program's work and to coordinate the activities of the agencies concerned.

The Committee which is chaired by Executive Secretary Ermita, is composed of senior representatives of the judiciary, government agencies involved in the program's work, and the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

The Head of Delegation of the European Union in Manila, along with the EU Expert Team Leader, comprise the EU side of the Project Steering Committee.

The EPJUST program is projected to be completed by April 2011.

For his part, Executive Secretary Ermita recalled that the brainchild to have a technical cooperation in the area of human rights between the EU and the Philippines was broached following the respective reports of the Melo Commission and United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston on the problem of unexplained killings and enforced disappearances in 2007.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo then issued several directives meant to address their findings. One of these directives was to task the DFA with engaging the EU to improve the Government's capabilities to investigate these offenses and to enhance its capacity to protect human rights. (photos by; Tony Bosa Jr. DFA-PISU) END