

5 February 2010 - The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is urging Filipinos facing the death penalty in China for drug trafficking to strive for reprieve through good behavior.

The DFA made this appeal to 62 Filipinos who were meted out the death penalty with chance of reprieve.

"There is still hope for our *kababayans* who are facing death penalty in China. We urge them to work on the possible reduction of their sentence from death penalty to life imprisonment by showing good behavior," DFA Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs Esteban B. Conejos, Jr. said.

Under Chinese law, in cases of death sentences with two-year reprieve, there is a possibility of commutation to a lower penalty - life imprisonment or not less than 15-year imprisonment - upon showing of good behavior by the prisoner within the period.

If a detainee does not show good behavior while in jail, and evidence of such behaviour is verified, the execution of death penalty is imposed after the two-year period upon ruling or an approval from the People's Supreme Court in Beijing.

China strictly imposes tough penalties against persons caught in possession of prohibited drugs. Smuggling of drugs as low as 50 grams can carry a 15-year imprisonment, life sentence or even the death penalty.

Meanwhile, the DFA continues to extend assistance to 10 Filipinos on death row in China without reprieve.

In death sentences without reprieve, decisions of lower courts are automatically elevated to the higher courts for review. The People's Supreme Court is the court of last resort before the judgment becomes final and executory.

About two weeks ago, the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) convened an inter-agency meeting to address the problem of Filipinos being used as drug mules to smuggle dangerous and prohibited drugs into China. Present were officials from the DFA, Philippine Drugs Enforcement Authority, Dangerous Drugs Board and other agencies on how to further address the alarming incidents of Filipinos being lured as drug couriers to China.

Upon the instructions of the Executive Secretary, the DFA submitted to the Office of the President a draft administrative order creating a task force to prevent Filipinos from being used as drug couriers and being victimized by international criminal syndicates as drug mules.

"The task force will strengthen the Philippine Government's fight against drug trafficking and protect our citizens from being victimized as drug couriers. It will also demonstrate the Government's resolve in working with China and the international community in addressing the drug menace," Undersecretary Conejos said.

"But ultimately, our people must take full responsibility for their actions by always being on guard against the inducements," he added. END