

24 February 2013 - A ship on a humanitarian mission will be dispatched tonight to fetch and ferry back the women and other civilians among the 180-member group who are holed out in Lahad Datu, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said today.

The ship, with hull number AT296, will sail from Bongao, Tawi-Tawi to the village of Tanduo in Lahad Datu.

The ship is being prepositioned offshore Lahad Datu while talks with the group are underway.

There are reportedly some 180 individuals in the group, including some 30 armed escorts.

Notification of the ship's dispatch was conveyed by the DFA on Saturday, February 23, to the Malaysian Embassy in Manila.

Onboard the ship are Filipino-Muslim leaders as well as social workers and medical personnel.

"We sent the ship to Lahad Datu on a humanitarian mission. We are deeply concerned about the presence of five women and other civilians in the group, and we urge them to board the ship without delay and return home," Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert F. del Rosario said.

"As we have stated in countless occasions previously, we call on the entire group to go back to their homes and families, even at the same time, we are addressing the core issues they have raised. Please do so for your own safety," Secretary del Rosario stated. END