

Department of Foreign Affairs

8 March 2013

1. What transpired in the discussions between Secretary del Rosario and the Malaysian officials?

The Secretary, in pursuing a peaceful resolution, has been in contact on a daily basis with the Foreign Minister and other officials of Malaysia. The trip to Malaysia is consistent with that effort. During this particular trip, the Secretary continued seeking the exercise of maximum tolerance to avert further loss of lives. The Secretary also followed up on the Philippines' requests for a full briefing on the situation, for clearance for the Philippine Navy ship to proceed to Lahad Datu and for humanitarian and consular services to be made available to the Filipinos in Lahad Datu.

While in Malaysia, the Secretary likewise sought the consideration for women and other civilians not involved in the hostilities to be able to exit the area of conflict.

The Secretary was also specifically tasked by the President to explore avenues to end the standoff that is acceptable to all parties.

2. Was the Secretary able to achieve his objectives?

The abovementioned requests are still being considered in light of the security environment.

3. What avenues did the Philippine Government explore domestically for a peaceful resolution to save lives?

From the outset of this conflict, the Philippine Government has been pursuing options which could lead to a peaceful resolution where no lives would be lost. Sultan Jamalul Kiram's group was well aware of this as they were directly involved. These options, which involve the peaceful withdrawal of the Kiram group from Lahad Datu in order to ensure that lives are not compromised, were relentlessly pursued on a 24/7 basis. Unfortunately, some of these plans did not merit acceptance by all parties and those that did could not be implemented in time. The Philippine Government's constructive efforts were overtaken by events that were beyond its control.

With the peaceful withdrawal, the President initially offered that no charges would be filed and that an avenue for discussion would be made available.

4.What avenues did the Secretary explore with the Malaysian officials?

The Secretary worked with the Malaysian officials in ensuring that maximum restraint was exercised for the first two weeks. Until hostilities erupted, Malaysia agreed on a peaceful withdrawal where no charges would be filed. Even as hostilities had begun, the Secretary was still exploring the option of peaceful withdrawal.

5.What avenues did the Secretary explore with the Malaysians during this trip to end the standoff?

In meeting with the Foreign and Defense Ministers, the Secretary again pursued the possibility of allowing for an unconditional surrender of the group to avert further loss of lives and allow them to return to their respective homes and families. Negotiations for this remain in progress.

6.Despite our request for maximum tolerance, why were airstrikes and ground operations still conducted?

This is a question that can best be answered by the Malaysians.

7. Is it true that the Secretary agreed with the Malaysian authorities' labelling the Filipino group as "terrorist"?

According to Ambassador Malaya who was present at the meeting, the report is out of context and the Secretary did not label the Filipino group as "terrorist."

In Semporna, there were alleged acts of terrorism. As reported by the Malaysian Foreign Minister, after the police forces were lured into an ambush and killed, their bodies were brutally mutilated and desecrated. If indeed these atrocities were committed as reported to him, the Secretary and the Foreign Minister both agreed that these were, at the very least, terroristic acts.

8. Will this affect the GPH-MILF Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro?

It should not affect the peace process with the MILF.

9. How many casualties were there from the latest assault?

We do not have information on the number of casualties from the latest assault.

10. Is the standoff over?

According to the Malaysian Foreign Minister, as of noontime of 5 March, actions by the Malaysian security forces are ongoing.

□□□□ 11. What is the Philippine Government's plan to avert further loss of lives?

The Philippine Government will continue to explore all possible channels in an effort to achieve the objective of minimizing the loss of life and bringing the matter to an expeditious conclusion.

□□□ 12. If the members of the Kiram group are criminally charged by the Malaysian authorities, would the Philippine Government assist them and how?

Consistent with the President's policy of caring for the Filipino people wherever they are, the Philippine Government will provide the necessary assistance.

□□□□ 13. What is the Secretary's comment on the news that thousands of Tausugs are now sailing to Sabah?

There is a close cooperation between the Philippine and Malaysian navies to jointly enforce a blockade for such an eventuality.

□□□□ 14. What is the DFA's position on the Sabah claim?

The DFA has been named a member of the team tasked to undertake the necessary study on the Sabah claim.

□□□□ 15. On the issue of the "missing" letter, what does the DFA know about it?

On the issue of the missing letter written by Raja Muda Agbimuddin Kiram to the President days before the President took his oath in June 2010, that letter has been found with the DFA. The Secretary is taking full responsibility for the oversight.

□□□ 16. What is the Secretary's opinion on Sultan Jamalul Kiram's letter to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee?

□ It is Sultan Jamalul Kiram's right to appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee.

□□ 17. What is the Secretary's opinion on Misuari's suggestion to involve the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)?

It is a domestic issue and is therefore outside the purview of the OIC.

□□□ 18. Is the Philippine Government reinforcing the security of the Malaysian Embassy in Manila and the Malaysian Consulate-General in Davao City?

Yes. The Philippine Government has provided appropriate security to these diplomatic establishments in accordance with the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and on Consular Relations.

□□□ 19. In light of the advisory issued by the Malaysian Embassy in Manila for Malaysian citizens in the Philippines to exercise additional precaution, is the DFA planning on issuing a similar advisory for Filipinos in Malaysia?

For now, the Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur has issued an appeal to Filipinos in Sabah to remain calm and abide by the guidelines issued by local authorities.

□□□□ 20. With everything that has happened, how would the Secretary describe Philippines-Malaysia relations?

The relationship remains strong and both countries continue to exert efforts for enhancement of their bilateral relations. The Secretary believes that a close cooperation between the two countries is necessary for dealing with the challenges presented by the current issue.

21. How does the situation in Lahad Datu affect the 800,000 Filipinos in Sabah?

All concerned agencies of the Philippine Government are taking proactive steps to assist Filipinos in Sabah who are being negatively affected by the violence there. The Philippine mission in Malaysia, composed of representatives from the DFA, DOLE and DSWD, is closely coordinating with the Malaysian Government in order to ensure that the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers and communities are protected.

The DFA, particularly our Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, has a contingency plan in place to quickly extend consular and humanitarian assistance to the affected Filipinos. Meanwhile, DOLE has activated an inter-agency *Task Force Malaysia* to coordinate and monitor the assistance to returnees at the one-stop centers in Zamboanga City and Bongao, Tawi-Tawi.

22. What is the DFA's view on the statement issued by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon?

The DFA welcomes the statement. This is consistent with our call for a peaceful resolution of the situation.

23. What is the DFA's view on Sultan Jamalul Kiram's call for a unilateral ceasefire?

A ceasefire will only work if it is accepted by the other party. In this case, Malaysia has not accepted it.

