

22 February 2010 - The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) lauded the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) for its recent arrest of four members of a West African drug syndicate which recruited Filipinos as drug couriers.

"This decisive action by Philippine law enforcement authorities should serve as a stern warning to those who have been victimizing Filipinos. It is also a reminder to our *kababayans* not to allow themselves to be willing victims in exchange for money," DFA Spokesperson J Eduardo Malaya said.

The syndicate is composed of three Guinea Bissau nationals and a Filipina. NBI agents said the four were in their way to bringing their Filipino recruits to the airport in Clark Field, Pampanga. They also seized from the suspects two thumb-sized capsules containing 20.0170 grams of cocaine hydrochloride as well as instruments used for drug trafficking.

The NBI recommended the filing of charges against the four for violation of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 before the Angeles City Prosecutor's office in Pampanga where the arrest took place.

Earlier, DFA Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs Esteban B. Conejos, Jr. revealed that the number of Filipinos facing drug-related charges in China has increased at alarming levels. Seventy-two Filipinos are facing capital punishment due to drug trafficking, of which 62 have a chance of getting a reprieve.

Meanwhile, the DFA welcomes another positive development that would further strengthen the Philippine Government's ongoing campaign against the use of Filipinos as drug mules.

Last February 8, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed Administrative Order (AO) No. 279, creating an inter-agency task force for the prevention of Filipinos being used as drug couriers by international drug trafficking syndicates.

President Arroyo signed the Administrative Order on the recommendation of the DFA.

According to the AO, the fight against illegal drugs would require that all available government resources be utilized and that concerned law enforcement agencies be coordinated to ensure the implementation of a unified anti-drug program that would address the problem of drug couriers.

The Drug Couriers Task Force (TFDC) will be composed of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency as chair; the DFA as co-chair; and the Department of Labor and Employment, the Bureau of Immigration, the Bureau of Customs, the NBI, the Philippine Information Agency, the Manila International Airport Authority, and the Philippine Tourism Authority as members.

The TFDC shall develop and execute programs and strategies against the recruitment of Filipinos as international drug couriers by international drug trafficking syndicates that victimize overseas Filipinos.

It shall also promote closer coordination among the agencies in combating the enticement and recruitment of Filipinos as drug couriers by international drug trafficking syndicates.

The Task Force is also expected to start a sustained media campaign to deter the cases of Filipinos being recruited as drug mules. It shall also orchestrate and operational efforts and provide assistance towards a more aggressive apprehension and prosecution of members of drug trafficking syndicates operating in the Philippines.

Moreover, the TFDC will closely coordinate with counterpart agencies of other countries for the formulation and execution of bilateral or regional actions against recruitment of Filipinos as drug couriers. END