

Entertainment industry stars take drug test

MANILA—Eleven entertainment industry personalities showed their support for the government's anti-illegal drug campaign by voluntarily undergoing a drug test at the Philippine National Police (PNP) headquarters at Camp Crame in Quezon City last Feb. 12.

Teen idols Mark Herras, Iwa Moto, Rainier Castillo and Ryza Cenon led other stars in giving their urine samples to police officials to demonstrate their full support for the war against illegal drugs.

Other teen idols like Mike Tan, Kevin Santos, Gino de la Peña, Victor Alivallas, Paulo Avelino, Prince Stefan and Kaye Alipio also showed up to support the campaign.

Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno lauded the teen idols for volunteering to be role models.

Puno said the drug tests were meant to show that they are drug-free and to encourage oth-

er students to participate in the random testing initiated by the Department of Education as part of the national campaign against illegal drugs.

Herras also exhorted the public to rally behind the revitalized anti-drug campaign, calling on the youth to stay away from drugs and focus their energies instead on productive activities that will help them develop their full potentials and ensure a stable future.

Puno said he was surprised that the celebrities volunteered to undergo drug testing.

"I was surprised to learn that our young stars have come forward to voluntarily subject themselves to drug tests and serve as examples to our youth," Puno told a press briefing at Camp Crame.

"I thank our young stars for coming forward. They have shown to their fans that they are socially responsible citizens and that they are truly role models for

our youth," he said.

RC Baltazar of the GMA 7 Artists Center, who spoke on behalf of the teen stars, said they volunteered to come forward to help the government in the anti-drugs campaign.

Puno called on other entertainment personalities to emulate the example set by Herras and the other teen actors.

Puno said their show of support will give a big boost to what President Arroyo described last month as her administration's "relentless and unyielding war" against the drug scourge.

He said the President has "taken a personal interest" in the war against narcotics after learning of the 2008 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which showed that the Philippines remains a significant producer, consumer and transit country of illegal drugs.

"This government is dead serious about erasing this negative image of the Philippines and

putting an end to the activities of drug syndicates who prey on the youth and destroy the social fabric of our society," he said.

Puno also said local officials could face administrative and criminal charges if they are negligent in their role in controlling illegal drugs in their respective communities.

Puno reminded local government executives of their duty to allocate a substantial portion of their annual budgets to finance the campaign against illegal drugs.

Puno also imposed yesterday a one-strike policy on police commanders who fail to detect illegal drug laboratories in their area of jurisdiction.

"The one-strike policy will be applied if the chief of police fails to lead anti-illegal drugs operations in their respective areas of jurisdiction or ignores adverse reports about the presence of drug dens or laboratories or the widespread use of illegal drugs," Puno said.

PNP chief Director General Jesus Verzosa said the PNP would continue its "unannounced random" drug testing among police personnel.

"Drug users have no place in PNP. We should serve as role models to the public. Change your ways or face dismissal," Verzosa said.

Verzosa also reiterated the

one-strike policy to all PNP unit commanders who will fail to lead anti-drug operations in their respective jurisdiction.

He ordered the immediate resolution of pending administrative cases involving policemen found guilty of using illegal drugs.

Verzosa also warned police officers using illegal drugs to reform or face dismissal from service.

Verzosa tasked Director Raul Bacalzo, chief of the Director of the Investigation and Detective Management and commander of the Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force (AID-SOTF), to oversee the resolution of administrative cases of erring policemen.

Bacalzo said he will personally supervise the early resolution of pending cases and see to it that due process is observed as well.

President Arroyo, meanwhile, issued Administrative Order No. 253 calling for an automatic review by the Office of the President of all drug-related cases dismissed by the Secretary of Justice.

While there are already issues governing the review of cases or resolutions of the Secretary of Justice and the courts, there are limitations as to which of them would be for review by the OP.

The AO specifically indicated that all cases related to Republic Act 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002

would now be subject to automatic review by the OP, unlike before when only the cases with penalties of life imprisonment would be subject for review by the President.

Although Malacañang would not admit it, the new AO was in apparent response to the Alabang Boys' case.

The controversy originated from the recommendation by government prosecutors to dismiss the case against the three so-called Alabang Boys charged by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) of drug trafficking.

The dismissal of the cases led PDEA to accuse the prosecutors of accepting bribes to release the suspects.

The case has led to a rift between the PDEA and the Department of Justice, which has jurisdiction over the state prosecutors handling the case.

While the recommendation of the prosecutors had not yet reached the office of Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez at the time the controversy came out, doubts were already raised on whether he could issue an unbiased ruling because of the statements he made against the PDEA.

President Arroyo was clearly concerned about the case and formed an independent panel to investigate what actually took place. (Philstar.com)

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RP & Vietnam to strengthen security & anti-crime cooperation

THE Philippines and Vietnam are currently conducting bilateral talks to strengthen security cooperation, particularly in the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism, Department of Interior and Local Governments (DILG) Secretary Ronaldo Puno said last Feb. 12.

Puno was interviewed after accompanying his counterpart, Vietnam Public Security Minister Le Hong Anh, during the latter's courtesy call on President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo last Feb. 12 in Malacanang.

The other Vietnamese delegates include Lt. Gen. Bui Van Nam, director-general of the Gen-

eral Department of Intelligence; and Lt. Gen. Le Quy Vuong, director-general of the General Department of Force Building.

Puno said the Vietnamese Minister arrived last Feb. 12 for a four-day official visit to discuss the mechanics of the Philippines-Vietnam Action Plan 2007-2010 that was signed during the two-day official visit of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in August 2007.

Puno said the bilateral talks would be centered on common anti-crime and anti-terrorism efforts such as exchange of information, seminars and other security initiatives.

"That is what we discussed this morning. They conveyed to the President their satisfaction with the way our mutual agreement has gone. And we jointly informed the President that we will be engaging in further discussions today, bilateral discussions to increase the detailed plan on how we will implement our agreement," Puno said.

Puno said they will discuss with the Vietnamese delegation the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement on the Prevention and Fight Against Criminal Activities (CAPFA-CA), focusing on transnational crimes. ■

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