

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## PGMA hails BPO company's expansion in RP

**ILOILO CITY**—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo hailed and thanked Teletech, a foreign business processing and outsourcing (BPO) company for expanding its operations in the Philippines and helping provide more good paying jobs for Filipinos.

The President briefly visited Iloilo City, Tuesday, March 3, and led the ribbon-cutting and marker unveiling rites for Teletech's 8,083 square-meter call center facility here that includes its state-of-the-art communication and related equipments.

Maulik Farekh, Teletech executive vice president and general manager for Asia relayed the good news to President Arroyo about their need for some 2,000 employees to increase their current 23,000

workers to 25,000 before end of this year.

"We are actively looking for 125 employees here in Iloilo for March alone. Madam President, I'm very proud to report that with over 23,000 employees in 12 locations in the country, Teletech goal now is to hit our goal of 25,000 employees by the end of 2009," Farekh told the President.

The company's call center at the third floor of SM City here, is its fourth in the Visayas and its 12th in the country.

Farekh, in his welcome remarks, said the President's visit to their Iloilo BPO center is her eighth in as many of Teletech's 12 call centers in the country in three last three years, "a clear testament" to her strong support for the BPO industry nationwide.

"And this is a testament of commitment, not only to Teletech but to the Filipino people, and we sincerely thank you for that," Farekh said, adding that since they open their Iloilo call center in January 2008, they now have 1,600 employees here.

Farekh also thanked Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Trenas for his support to their operations in the city.

Iloilo Governor Niel Tupaz, Mayor Trenas, Rep. Raul Gonzales Jr.,

Presidential Assistant for Region 6 Raul Baniyas and the top officials of Teletech headed Farekh and Teletech Iloilo site manager Nicki Agcaoil welcomed President Arroyo upon her arrival here this morning.

Aside from touring the Teletech facility, the President also interacted with Sharon Acosta, a former overseas worker in Brunei, Jeol Calle, and Augustine "Gus" Escalona and listened to their inspiring stories and how they changed and improved their lives after employment with Teletech.

The President's party included Trade Secretary Peter Favila, Labor Secretary Marianito Roque, and Justice Secretary and Cabinet Officer for Regional Development (CORD) 6 Raul Gonzales. ■

## ICRC WORKERS' KIDNAPPING

# US will have no role in rescue—Kenney

by **AQUILES ZONIO & JULIE ALIPALA**  
Inquirer.net

**GENERAL SANTOS CITY**—US Ambassador Kristie Kenney again ruled out the direct involvement of the United States in efforts to secure the release of the three kidnapped workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Sulu.

Kenney issued the statement amid uncertainties about the fate of Swiss Andreas Notter, Italian Eugenio Vagni and Filipina Jean Lacaba.

The three ICRC workers were abducted just outside the Sulu provincial capitol in Patikul after visiting inmates at the provincial jail there on Jan. 15.

"We are not part of the operation. The police and military are working on it," Kenney said during the inauguration of the P12-million Central Mindanao police regional special training facility.

Kenney said she believes that the police and the military are capable of getting back the hos-

tages safe.

A number of US forces are stationed in Sulu and have been conducting humanitarian projects in the province, which is among the country's poorest.

Kenney also called on the Abu Sayyaf, which has said it is holding the aid workers, to immediately release the hostages.

"We have been saying that it's completely an uncivilized behavior to kidnap anyone, anywhere, anytime, like people out there doing humanitarian missions. We call on the perpetrators to release the hostages soon," she said.

Sulu officials remained tightlipped on the progress of the efforts to rescue the ICRC

workers.

In Basilan, a demand from the Abu Sayyaf for P10 million to release of Sri Lankan peace worker Umar Jaleel has led to a stop to negotiations, an emissary who has been talking to the kidnappers said last March 3.

"We decided to call it (negotiations) off," the emissary, who asked not to be identified, said.

Jaleel, who works with the Non-violent Peaceforce, was abducted from his home in Lamitan City by the group of Abu Sayyaf leader Purdji Indama on Feb. 13.

He said the group that Jaleel belongs to was firm about not paying a ransom.

"They would only deal for [his] unconditional release, meaning no money involved. Just release Jaleel for humanitarian reasons," the emissary said.

In Zamboanga City, Superintendent Jose Bayani Gucela, spokesman of the Western Mindanao police, said "there's [a] positive development pertaining to [the case of] the three teachers" abducted by suspected Abu Sayyaf gunmen off Landang Gua

Island on Jan. 23.

But Gucela declined to provide additional details except that "we are implementing [a] two-pronged approach here."

"The military and police forces are pursuing the kidnappers, and the other group is keeping its line open [for negotiations]," he said.

Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat said local authorities have received proof of life from the kidnappers of Janette delos Reyes, Freires Quizon and Rafael Mayonado.

But Lobregat did not say what the proof of life was or when it was sent.

Mayor Talib Pawaki of Muhammad Adjul town in Basilan said the latest development he got was that the kidnappers reduced the ransom demand for the three teachers from P6 million to P5 million.

"These are the reports my people are giving to me, but we don't have confirmation since no one from the captors are making direct pronouncement," Pawaki said ■

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