

Swift resolution of human rights cases sought

PRESIDENT Arroyo appealed last March 5 to the members of the judiciary to swiftly resolve human rights cases in the country.

In her speech during a luncheon with the delegates of the 14th national convention of the Philippine Women Judges Association and International Association of Women Judges at Malacañang, Pres. Arroyo also cited the gains the government has achieved in improving the country's human rights record as recognized by foreign institutions.

"I ask the support of the Women Judges Association to make it our joint advocacy so that human rights cases can move faster in the courts because the World is waiting for more convictions," she said.

On recent negative reports on the country, she said "human rights conditions in any state is always a work in progress."

The President said various international agencies, including the US State Department, cited the country's gains such as the huge drop in

the number of cases of unexplained killings in the last two years as a result of many deterrents that the government has instituted;

Recognition of the continuing human rights education and information campaigns in the police and military organizations, usually in partnership with the independent Commission on Human Rights;

Identification of non-state actors such as the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army, lawless groups within the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf Group as among the major perpetrators of human rights violations in the Philippines;

Improvement in jails and detention centers managed by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology as a result of decongestion efforts; and Recognition of freedom of speech and of the press, among others.

Pres. Arroyo said the Philippines has also made great strides in terms of gender parity. ■

World's largest floating library arrives in Manila

MANILA—Metro Manilans will have their last chance to visit or shop for books as the world's largest floating library the MV Doulos, fondly called by national leaders as the 'Grand Old Lady of the Seas,' makes its final call in Manila this week.

MV Doulos, listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest active ocean-faring passenger ship, will berth at Pier 13 of the Manila South Harbor from March 6 to 30 for the final leg of its two-month Philippine sojourn.

Vice President Noli de Castro and Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim have been invited as guests of honor and speakers on opening ceremony today for the floating library.

While in Manila, the 6,818-ton vessel would be open to the public, notably students, professionals and book lovers who may want to see what its library has to offer.

The ship carries more than 6,000 English titles covering a wide range of subjects—from children's books to management to science. These books, along with a wide collection of CDs, cassettes, and stationary items would be on display and for sale.

The visitors would also have the chance to meet with the

ship's 330 crewmembers who came from over 50 countries, among them volunteers and students who receive no pay and are even bankrolling their expenses on board.

She was originally built as a freighter named SS Medina serving the Atlantic, and had a tour of duty with the US Coast Guard during World War II, then converted into a passenger ship known as SS Roman with cabins for 287 guests and dormitories for additional 694 people, and luxury liner MV Franca C doing the Mediterranean.

The ship is currently owned and operated by the German charity organization Gute Bucher fur Alle, meaning Good Books for All, which acquired it in 1977.

MV Doulos, a Greek word for "servant," has toured the globe several times—docked in more than 500 ports in about 100 countries.

This is supposed to be her last world tour and may ultimately be de-commissioned next year. (Philstar.com)

House approves P100 million for new Bataan Nuclear Power Plant study

THE House appropriations committee approved last March 5 a P100-million allocation for a new study on the viability of commissioning the mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP).

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, senior committee vice chairman, proposed the new "validation or feasibility" study as a "compromise" to the bill of Pangasinan Rep. Marcos Cojuangco seeking the "immediate rehabilitation and commissioning" of the nuclear plant.

The bill of Cojuangco is facing stiff opposition from many congressmen and civil society groups, as well as from Catholic bishops. The lawmaker is a son of billionaire businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. who has investments in power distribution and oil refining and retailing.

Lagman said a fourth study has to be conducted to determine whether the nuclear plant could still be operated despite its being mothballed since the Marcos years due largely to unresolved safety issues.

He said the results of three previous studies should be used as references by a group of local and international experts who would be commissioned to

undertake the new study.

He said the P100-million budget would be taken from this year's budget of the Department of Energy and the state-owned National Power Corp.

Lagman said a provision in the committee-approved allocation prohibits the commissioning of the plant ahead of the completion of the new study.

Rep. Cojuangco initially frowned upon Lagman's proposal, saying a "feasibility study" is "politician's language that connotes inaction and indecision."

"We should decide once and for all whether we want to operate this plant or to sell it for its junk value," he said.

He said at present, the government is spending P40 million a year for the upkeep of the plant, which has not generated a single watt of electricity.

Quirino Rep. Junie Cua, appropriations committee chairman, prevailed upon Cojuangco to accept the compromise.

After Lagman's proposal was accepted, Rep. Roilo Golez of Parañaque suggested that portions of the Cojuangco bill that are "incongruous" with the compromise be deleted.

Golez said the "incongruous" portions include allowing the National Power Corp. to

immediately rehabilitate and operate the nuclear plant.

He said this might be interpreted as an authority for Napocor to operate the plant even while the mandated new feasibility study is still underway.

"If these irrelevant portions are not deleted, this will be a ridiculous and a defective bill," he said.

Rizal Rep. Jack Duavit, a co-author of the commissioning bill, said even if the new study finds the plant to be operable and viable, it would still go through a

process of licensing by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"This process alone will take time and is usually more strict and tedious than a validation or

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