

Miriam: Visiting Forces Agreement up for review

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com



Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago

MANILA—The Legislative Oversight Committee on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) will review the pact to set clearer guidelines on how US soldiers accused of crimes should be treated.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Legislative Oversight Committee chair, said they must take a "good tough look" at the VFA.

"There are other pending VFAs, for the information of the Filipino public, with other countries," she said.

Santiago said the hearing would be held next month as Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo had asked that he be given time to attend to the issue.

"Generally, my personal opinion, as chairperson of the committee on foreign relations, is we have to start examining these VFAs and see whether the loss to our self-esteem and our sense of sovereignty is compensated for by what normally are the regular bargaining chips of these countries," she said.

Santiago said she personally did not like the VFA because the Philippines had been getting "junk" military aid from the US.

"Besides, it's supposed to be a two-sided agreement, but we never go to the United States, our people do not go to the United States, we never practice our military exercises there, so it's completely one-sided," she said.

Santiago said the Philippines must be getting more from the VFA since it had been "acting as a lightning rod for the enemies of the US."

"We are being used as a monitoring station by the US Armed Forces in its so-called 'war on terror.'"

"Every few years they need to upgrade their facilities and then they go around the world offering these junk to countries like the Philippines who can be badgered or pressured to grant these concessions which normally do not sit well with the

but of Daniel Smith's departure from the country. We followed all the procedures of the VFA."

Kenney said Smith left the Philippines after receiving a copy of the Court of Appeals decision acquitting him of the crime of rape.

"The CA sent him a copy of the decision which called for his immediate release," she said.

Kenney said US Marine Corps Headquarters will determine what to do with Smith. He should be entitled to the same privacy given to Nicole "so they can rebuild their lives and move on."

Smith is now reunited with his family in the US, Kenney said.

Smith to leave Marines
Smith is expected to leave the US Marine Corps like the other US soldiers who were involved in the Subic rape case, his lawyer said last April 27.

"I think so," lawyer Jose Justiniano said when asked if Smith is expected to leave the service after he serving for more than four years.

Justiniano said Americans who join the military voluntarily are

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No quorum for House Charter change debates

by Jess Diaz
Philstar.com

MANILA—The expected floor debates on Speaker Prospero Nograles' Resolution 737 on proposed economic amendments to the Constitution were delayed again last April 27.

At 7pm, Majority Leader Arthur Defensor told *The Star* he would no longer call the resolution for debate as many House members had already left the session hall.

He said those opposed to Charter change (Cha-cha) might question the quorum.

Congressmen spent their session last night hearing privilege speeches from several members.

In Resolution 737, Nograles proposes to amend Sections 2 and 3 of Article 12 of the Constitution to allow 100-percent foreign participation in the exploitation of natural resources and foreign ownership of land.

At present, foreigners are limited to 40-percent participation and land ownership.

But the debates centered on whether the chamber can tackle specific Cha-cha proposals without convening itself and the Senate into a constituent assembly (con-ass).

Militant representatives, including Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel of Akbayan and Liza Maza of Ga-

briela, questioned the legislative process route that Nograles prefers for his resolution.

There is no such mode for Cha-cha under the Constitution, they said, making it appear that they favor con-ass.

Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, principal proponent of Cha-cha via con-ass even without the Senate participating, was elated by Baraquel's and

Maza's arguments.

The resolution was filed last week. Aside from Villafuerte, who heads President Arroyo's Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) party, 174 other House members led by Speaker Prospero Nograles signed the resolution.

It was sent to the rules committee chaired by Majority Leader Defensor for further study. ■

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