

PH in denial over sex tourism issue?

Written by Administrator

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Foreign tourists talk to Filipino bar girls.

MANILA — The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking of Persons (IACAT) on Sunday questioned the pronouncement of U.S. Ambassador Harry Thomas that at least 40 percent of male foreign tourists come to the Philippines for sex tourism.

According to IACAT, the Philippine Government has never tolerated sex tourism in the country.

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“In fact, the government has been intensifying its campaign against all forms of human trafficking and will act swiftly and accordingly on reports of existence of related exploitations be it by foreigners and locals alike,” said IACAT head and Justice Undersecretary Jose Vicente Salazar.

Salazar said human trafficking is one of the top concerns of the Aquino Administration, which will never tolerate the promotion of sexual tourism in the country.

“While we acknowledge the existence of such problem as pointed out by Ambassador Thomas, there is a need, however, to verify the accuracy of his statistics so that an appropriate response, a calibrated one, together with tourism authorities will be enforced,” he said.

The IACAT head said police agencies, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Tourism and even non-government organizations do not have an accurate number of sexual tourism and related cases.

Salazar added that the government is resolved to prosecute not only Americans but all — foreigners and locals alike — involved in cybersex and human trafficking crimes.

He said the government is thankful for the U.S. Government’s support in the campaign against human trafficking in the country.

Denial stage

Sen. Pia Cayetano, on the other hand, criticized the administration for being in a state of denial over the continued proliferation of sex tourism in the country, which she said is a real problem that needs to be addressed.

In a privilege speech Monday, Cayetano said that the government must wake up to the reality that the increase in sex trade is a real issue in the promotion of tourism.

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She cited the recent speech delivered by Thomas where he noted that at least 40 percent of male foreign tourists in the country come for sexual tourism.

Cayetano lamented that Malacañang, through its spokesperson Abigail Valte and Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez seemed to be downplaying the statement made by Thomas by questioning the accuracy of his data.

“The Palace and Secretary Jimenez appear to be in a state of denial regarding the existence and continued proliferation of sex tourism in our country. The remark made by Ambassador Thomas that up to 40 percent of male foreign tourists come here primarily for sex was met by an avalanche of denials from the government,” Cayetano said.

“Instead of directly addressing the issue, deputy presidential spokesperson Abigail Valte and Secretary Jimenez dwelt on questioning the accuracy of the ambassador’s statistics. But really, may we ask, what has the government been doing to address these problems?” she added.

According to Cayetano, it does not matter how many cases there really are and that what is important is that the situation exists.

“In fact, we don’t even have to physically visit these areas to verify for ourselves because with just one click of a mouse, we will see that sex tours to the Philippines are openly being promoted to foreigners through the Internet and social networking sites,” she said.

She said that the problem must be addressed right away and that this should start with the DOT acknowledging “the existence of this monster and must work with the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development), the BOI (Board of Investments) and other government agencies to deal with it.”

Cayetano said that even the United Nations has acknowledged that sex tourism exists as part of tourism and has raised concern over its effects.

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She pushed for the repeal of the existing provisions on prostitution in the Revised Penal Code as well as the passage of the proposed Anti-Prostitution Act.