

Arroyo orders random drug testing in schools nationwide

MARK MERUEÑAS, GMA News.TV

Article posted January 13, 2009 - 01:36 PM

(Updated 3:30 p.m.) MANILA, Philippines - Shortly after taking over the reins of the government's anti-drug efforts, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on Tuesday ordered authorities to conduct random drug testing in public and private schools in the country.

During a Cabinet meeting at Malacañang, President Arroyo said the government plans to tap private laboratories and several government agencies to ensure that all public and private high schools and colleges are drug-free.

Officials from the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Education (DepEd), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) – who were all present in the meeting – have already thrown their support behind the President's anti-drug efforts.

DDB chairman Vicente Sotto said anti-narcotics enforcers would make surprise visits to secondary and tertiary schools nationwide to conduct drug testing.

Sotto said he believes parents would support the anti-drug campaign because this will be for their children's own good.

He assured that anti-drug enforcers would respect the rights of students. The names of those who would be found positive for drugs will be held confidential, according to Sotto.

Aside from surprise drug testing in schools, DDB also plans to bring the anti-drug campaign to the showbiz industry and government offices.

President Arroyo also directed the DOH to upgrade and ensure the effectiveness of the facilities in drug rehabilitation centers, as well as the revival of local drug abuse councils throughout the country.

Mrs Arroyo's order came as she called not only on the academe but also on Church groups, non-government organizations, and other concerned sectors to intensify the campaign against illegal drugs.

Before the start of the Cabinet meeting, President Arroyo also offered to grant adequate funds for youth projects for those communities that would be declared drug-free zones.

For his part, Press Secretary Jesus Dureza also called on the government agencies involved in the enforcement of anti-drug laws and with the prosecution in drug cases to coordinate with each other instead of clashing among themselves.

The rift between the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and the Justice department was thrust in the open after PDEA agents accused government prosecutors of receiving bribes in exchange for the release of three affluent drug suspects who were arrested by PDEA.

Five DOJ officials implicated in the "Alabang Boys" mess went on leave on Monday, including Justice Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor, chief state prosecutor Jovencito Zuño, senior state prosecutor Phillip Kimpo, and state prosecutors Misael Lagada and John Resado. Resado penned the December 2 resolution dismissing the case against the three drug suspects.

PDEA Special Enforcement Services head Major Ferdinand Marcelino earlier alleged that DOJ prosecutors were bribed with P50 million by the drug suspects' affluent families to ensure their release. Marcelino also claimed that he was offered P3 million by the Tecsons so he will not file charges against the suspects in the first place, but said he refused the bribe.

The three drug suspects, who were nabbed in a buy-bust operation last September 20, are currently under PDEA custody. Their fate remains uncertain pending Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez's review of the resolution recommending their release. - **GMA News.TV**

Related Link:

DRUG TYPES

Source: PDEA Annual Report 2007

Two major types of dangerous drugs dominate the country's illicit drug market:

* amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) - e.g. methamphetamine hydrochloride a.k.a. "shabu" or "ice" and methylenedioxyamphetamine a.k.a. ecstasy (which is popular among the young and affluent members of the society mainly for its popularity as a party drug)

(street price of shabu in 2007 was P5,000-P6,800 per gram)

* cannabis sativa (marijuana) - considered as an alternative drug of choice for shabu users whenever the prices of ATS products escalate

PROFILE OF A DRUG ABUSER
Source: PDEA Annual Report 2007

Age mean: age of 28 years old

* Majority is coming from the 20-29 age group

* Ratio between male and female: 9:1

* Civil status: single (57.77%)

* Occupation: unemployed (35.81%)

* Educational attainment: high school level (29.79%)

* Economic status average