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Moro-Talks

MORO TALKS TO FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF TRUCE, DEVELOPMENT IN MINDANAO

PORT DICKSON, July 24 (Bernama) -- The Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) resumed peace talks today aimed at hammering out details for the implementation of a ceasefire agreed upon by both sides in Tripoli, Libya four weeks ago.

Philippine government negotiating panel head, Jesus Dureza said the meeting would be looking into the possible establishment of a specific body or institution to monitor the truce.

Dureza said the first round of talks in Tripoli identified three countries that would do the job -- Malaysia, Libya and Indonesia.

"We will now in our meeting with the MILF find out what is the body that we should set on the ground to do this monitoring," he told reporters on the sidelines of the discussions at this resort town located some 100km from Kuala Lumpur.

The 13,000-strong MILF has been fighting for more than two decades for an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. Its negotiating team here is headed by Haji Murad Ebrahim.

To a question, Dureza said the United Nations (UN) would not be called in to help with the monitoring process.

"We agreed to have the three countries in our peace process because they have committed to us that they will help us in seeing that there is peace and development in Mindanao. That is the reason why we have invited them to be part of the monitoring team," he said.

He said details of the make-up of the monitoring team would probably be known at the conclusion of the latest round of meeting between the two negotiating panels.

Dureza also said the second area that they would dwell on here was the mechanics for the development of the areas affected by the conflict.

"We hold the view under President Gloria Arroyo's administration that it is important even while negotiations are still on-going, as you know this will take a little time, we can hit the ground in terms of improving the lives of the people concerned," he said.

Dureza said the MILF had been reminded that the issue of the setting up of an Islamic state was not on the table at this meeting.

The government negotiator also said he had been asked by Arroyo to express the gratitude of the Philippine government to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Malaysian government for their assistance in the quest for peace in Mindanao.

"Because we see a lot of quick movements of the peace process in Mindanao thanks to the help of the Malaysian government, and of course Libya and Indonesia," Dureza said.

He said the president wished to see that efforts to develop Mindanao fast-tracked because "the people in Mindanao can no longer wait".

"We'll have to marshall resources to improve the lives of people there," he said.

Dureza said he would return to Manila tomorrow and come back here on Thursday with a 15-member technical working committee.

The meeting is tentatively scheduled to end on Aug 3.

-- BERNAMA

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