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Terror-Pact

ANTI-TERROR PACT WITH M'SIA, INDONESIA QUESTIONED

Manila May 22 (Bernama) -- The Philippines' newly signed anti-terror pact with Malaysia and Indonesia has raised questions on whether it needs senate ratification to make it legally binding.

Opposition senators brought it up after they noted that the accord, inked during President Gloria Arroyo's May 7 visit to Kuala Lumpur, would impose obligations on the Philippines.

These include joint security operations across borders, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, freezing of suspected terrorist funds and other forms of security cooperation, they said.

The agreement was signed by Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Philippine Interior Secretary Jose Lina Jr.

It aims to establish a framework to facilitate cooperation to address border and security incidents, terrorism, piracy, trafficking of women and children, transnational crimes, and other illegal activities.

Arroyo and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad witnessed the signing of the agreement called "Information Exchange and Establishment of Communication Procedures."

Opposition lawmakers said the deal involved law enforcement and armed forces agencies and hence, would require congressional action. But Foreign Secretary Teofisto Guingona ruled out any need for a senate ratification to make the accord enforceable.

"If there are no basic policy changes, and there are no law changes or constitutional requirements, there is no need for a senate ratification," he said.

His reaction came after the senate initiated last Monday an inquiry regarding the trilateral pact which seeks to strengthen anti-terror cooperation among the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

But Guingona, also the country's vice president, said he welcomed the inquiry, saying "the senators have their own interpretation" of the agreement

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