

Philippines Confident peace talks will succeed

NS757

26 JUL 2003

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Philippines is confident that peace talks to be hosted soon by Malaysia will bring peace to Mindanao, southern Philippines, this time.

Speaker of the Philippines Parliament Jose de Venecia said: "We feel the peace process to end the fight between our Government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has now matured for final settlement.

"The active support given by Malaysia and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) countries especially Indonesia and Libya, and now also the United States, has given us confidence that a major breakthrough can be achieved," he said after a meeting with Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail.

He said the successful settlement would be a legacy for Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

De Venecia is leading a seven-member delegation including the presidential adviser for the peace process, Eduardo R. Ermita, on a visit to Malaysia.

He thanked Dr Mahathir and Malaysia for the role played by Kuala Lumpur in resolving the problems in Mindanao.

"The dates for the peace talks between the Philippine Government and MILF will be decided by Malaysia but it is our hope the talks could be held in the next few days.

"Our Government and the congress are currently putting together suitable economic and

social packages to support the peace plan between the Government and MILF."

Ermita said Manila was confident peace talks between the Government and MILF leaders, would proceed smoothly with the assistance of Malaysia and the recent declaration of cessation of hostilities between the two parties.

"We should be able to achieve an agreement sooner than later. Our confidence is based on the assistance by the Malaysian Government," he

said.

He said Manila had also asked Malaysia to monitor the ceasefire.

The Philippine Government had earlier put on hold the Kuala Lumpur peace talks following an attack on Siocon town in Mindanao in early May, resulting in 34 deaths. Manila blamed the MILF for the attack.

De Venecia said he had visited Jakarta and Bali before arriving here.