PH, US renew commitment to strengthen individual and collective defense capabilities, reaffirm respect for PH sovereignty

MANILA, PHILIPPINES 25 March 2014 The seventh round of negotiations for an agreement on enhanced defense cooperation here proceeded on its second day with both the Philippines and the United States renewing their commitment to strengthen individual and collective defense capabilities and reaffirming respect for Philippine sovereignty.

Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino, Chair of the Philippine Negotiating Panel, stressed that with the “changing regional security environment” along with the changes in the “internal environment,” there was a need to find a “new model for our security arrangement.”

Undersecretary Batino also emphasized that in finding such a new security arrangement model, there was a need to ensure that “our constitutional requirements are fully observed.”

For his part, Ambassador Eric John, Chair of the United States Negotiating Panel, said that he looked forward to “further talks and reaching an agreement that helps strengthen further our individual and collective defense capabilities,” even as he recognized and reaffirmed the importance of respecting Philippine sovereignty.

“The other issue we agreed on at the outset of this (negotiation) was the respect for the sovereignty of the Philippines. And that’s a message that you made very clear the very first round and that’s the message all of us took to back to Washington,” Ambassador John said.

“And it is in the best spirit of respect for sovereignty and respect for long-standing partnership that we entered into these negotiations,” Ambassador John said further.

Undersecretary Batino, on the other hand, also looked forward to “productive discussions” in the spirit of equality and common respect, a genuine interest to promote mutuality of benefits and support each other’s goals and “jointly contribute to the peace and stability of our region.”
This fresh round of negotiations follows the sixth round held earlier this month in Washington, D.C. where both panels went through the entire draft agreement and reached consensus on many provisions, including on the proposed accord’s preamble, purpose and scope, definition of terms, ownership of constructed infrastructure, coordination on security, contracting procedures, and resolution of disputes.

Undersecretary Batino emphasized that, as in the preceding six rounds, the Philippine Negotiating Panel is guided by the principles of full respect for Philippine sovereignty, non-permanence of US troops and no US basing in the Philippines, mutuality of benefits and respect for the Philippine Constitution, including the prohibition against nuclear weapons.”

The other members of the Philippine Negotiating Panel are Ambassador Lourdes Yparraguirre, Ambassador J. Eduardo Malaya, DOJ Undersecretary Francisco Baraan III and DND Assistant Secretary for Strategic Assessments Raymund Jose Quilop. END