

GMA orders DND to review national ID system

By JAMES MANANGHAYA

President Arroyo directed yesterday the Department of National Defense to study the possibility of implementing the proposed national identification (ID) card system, to ensure that the program will not violate any law, said Lt. Col. Bartolome Bacarro, Armed Forces of the Philippines public information office chief.

He said the military had recommended reviving the proposal for a national ID system.

• "That is one recommendation but of course this is subject to study and the President has directed the department of defense to conduct a study relative to the implementation of the ID system," he said.

Bacarro said Mrs. Arroyo wanted to ensure that the ID system will be within the scope of the law.

The President yesterday presided over the annual joint command conference of the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) at Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, where the proposal to revive the national ID system was among the matters discussed.

The military spokesman said that the purpose of implementing a national ID system is for people to avail of government services without unnecessary delays brought about by the identification processes.

PNP chief Director General Avelino Razon Jr., who attended the command conference, said in a separate interview that one of the objectives of implementing the national ID system is to prevent terrorists and other national security threats from hiding under the cloak of anonymity.

He said that the proposal, which has been rejected several times, should be implemented as soon as possible and that the public should not worry if it would be imposed.

"We should really establish an ID system and citizens should not be alarmed. The ID system is not a way to infringe on ba-

sic human rights but to provide service to our people, just like Philhealth or SSS (Social Security System)," he said.

Razon explained that the national ID would only be an expanded version of the SSS ID or the Philhealth card, which contains personal information.

This developed as military and local officials in Patikul, Sulu, are planning to implement a local ID card system for residents in the town to prevent Abu Sayyaf bandits from infiltrating villages, said Brig. Gen. Ruperto Pabustan, officer-in-charge of the Joint Task Force Comet and chief of the Joint Special Operation Group (JSOG).

He said that local officials have received complaints from villagers that Abu Sayyaf bandits posing as residents have slipped into remote barangays and have threatened peace and order in the area.

He said Patikul Mayor Kabler Hayudini and the local council have agreed with the recommendation of the 3rd Marine Brigade commander Col. Natalio Ecarma to adopt security measures that will protect residents.

Ecarma's unit had initiated many humanitarian projects and civic action programs in the town and the local officials want to prevent the bandits from disrupting the development projects in Patikul, a former base of operations of Abu Sayyaf commander Radulan Sahiron, Pabustan said.

Pabustan said the continued military operations in the area forced the group of Sahiron to withdraw from Patikul, and local farmers can now peacefully plant and harvest tropical fruits, coffee beans,

and cassava that are sold in nearby provinces and even in Manila.

Patikul officials proposed a local ID card system similar to the national ID program earlier planned by the government.

Local officials said that the presence of bandits in the remote villages has prevented residents from planting crops, which is their main source of livelihood.

"What I learned is that the identification card or a similar system is yet to be implemented with the coordination of the local leaders," said Pabustan.

He said the local leaders reported that Abu Sayyaf militants are posing as civilians and using multiple identities to slip into villages.

Pabustan said town officials have appealed to their constituents to get residence certificates or *cedula* to enable barangay officials to identify legitimate residents.

He said the military and local officials are trying to find a security system that would not violate human rights but would provide security to the residents of Patikul.

- With Roel Pareño, Cecille Suerte Felipe