

# GMA offers Sotto Drugs Board post

By MARVIN SY

Former senator Vicente Sotto III wants to be named chairman of the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB).

Speaking to reporters during the Independence Day reception for the diplomatic corps at Malacañang Thursday night, Sotto said President Arroyo had asked him to return to government service now that the one-year ban on the appointment of defeated sen-

atorial candidates has lapsed.

Sotto said he was instrumental in the DDB's creation, being the principal author of Republic Act 9165, the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

He said he wanted to focus on the rehabilitation of drug dependents, which is vital in the campaign to eradicate illegal drug use and sale.

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As DDB chairman, Sotto would have the rank of secretary and would serve for a term of six years.

The post is currently held by Anselmo Avelino Jr., a retired police official appointed by Mrs. Arroyo in 2006.

Meanwhile, the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (USDEA) has offered training and technical assistance to the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG) to enhance its capabilities to detect illegal drugs.

Lawyer Edmundo Arugay, PASG deputy director, told *The STAR* the USDEA has also donated four illegal drug detecting kits to the anti-smuggling group following its seizure of over P15-billion worth of shabu at Subic Bay Freeport last month.

"The USDEA is also willing to train PASG to further enhance our capability in checking drugs, evidence handling and others," he said in a statement.

Arugay said the training and technical assistance would be on the accurate identification and proper handling of evidence.

USDEA officials have visited Subic Bay Freeport, together with the PASG Task Force Subic, to document the investigation and the location of an estimated 745.36 kilos of shabu PASG has secured, he added.

Arugay escorted the USDEA team to the site of the two abandoned vessels and the warehouse of Anthony Ang, one of the main suspects in the case.

The Americans visited Subic Bay Freeport as observers, according to Timothy Teal, USDEA attaché.

Composed of three other USDEA officials, the team first inspected the headquarters of PASG-TFS where the contraband was being kept.

"We've never seen any secure place to secure the 'ice' confiscated by PASG and SBMA (Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority)," Teal said.

Teal said besides the container van "with its door pinned on the wall" where the seized shabu is kept, armed security personnel were also visible.

"In our case we only have an alarm system and hope that no one breaks in," he said.

Teal and his team also requested samples of the shabu that would be sent to their laboratory in the US for them to trace the source of the illegal drugs.

- With Paolo Romero