

GMA may cut short US trip

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WASHINGTON – President Arroyo may cut short her US trip with former President Corazon Aquino's death, after wrapping up her visit to Washington on Friday with a flurry of meetings with senior American officials and a US agreement to help train Filipino Navy SEALs battle piracy in Southeast Asia.

But Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, who is with the presidential entourage, said they have yet to decide whether to leave New York Saturday night or Sunday morning. A final announcement is scheduled at 2 a.m. today.

Meanwhile, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the memorandum of understanding on cooperation on maritime counter-piracy training and education was a significant agreement for the Philippines, a major seafaring nation many of whose seamen have been abducted in the high seas and held for ransom particularly in the Gulf of Aden.

He said Mrs. Arroyo and US Secretary of Transportation Raymond LaHood signed the MOU to send a message to international pirates that the US is solidly behind the Philippines and its seafarers.

But there was no discussion over the fate of a number of Filipino sailors still held by Somali pirates.

In addition to LaHood, the President also met with Attorney General Eric Holder and Trade Representative Ron Kirk.

The meetings held at her Willard hotel suite took place in the morning and lasted about 30 minutes each.

In the afternoon she held meetings with Senators Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka to thank them for their efforts in the payment of benefits to Filipino World War II veterans.

She also met Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki.

Filipino veterans wrote to Mrs. Arroyo earlier to complain about "the slow approval process and unacceptable delays" in payments to surviving veterans and to intercede on their behalf.

In her meeting with Holder they discussed intelligence sharing and agreed to work together against human trafficking and drug trafficking and be more active in exchange of personnel training between and among NBI and FBI and other law enforcement agencies, Remonde said.

– With Marvin Sy