

Beat: Local

Philippine lawmakers reject bill to revive death penalty

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USPA News - Philippine lawmakers on Wednesday rejected a proposal that would have reinstated the death penalty, brought on by a recent series of high-profile crimes in the Southeast Asian country, nearly eight years after Congress overwhelmingly voted to abolish the practice. "All the representatives are in agreement not to revive death penalty," said Minority Floor Leader Ronaldo Zamora of the House of Representatives, the lower house of Congress, as quoted by the Philippine Daily Inquirer newspaper.

Representative Silvestre Bello III added that the death penalty had already shown to be ineffective at curbing crime. But Senator Vicente C. Sotto III, who filed Senate Bill 2080 to revive the controversial practice, disagrees and said the "influx of heinous crimes" poses an "alarming situation" in the country. "The indiscriminate and horrendous brutality happening everywhere rightfully and justifiably compels the government to resort to the ultimate criminal penalty," he said, as quoted by Inquirer. Sotto added: "Due to the alarming upsurge of such crimes, which has resulted not only in the loss of human lives and wanton destruction of property, but also affected the nation's efforts towards sustainable economic development and prosperity while at the same time has undermined the people's faith in the Government and the latter's ability to maintain peace and order in the country." Speaking earlier on Wednesday, Philippine President Benigno Aquino III showed little support for the initiative, saying the government would need to thoroughly study the proposal and expressing concern that a person sentenced to death may not always be able to prove his or her innocence due to imperfections in the justice system. "The question is, is the convict given all the opportunities to defend himself or herself in court? Can we absolutely be sure we are not wrongly sentencing someone to death? Sad to say, this is still a work in progress," Aquino said. "We have to be absolutely sure a person is guilty because an execution cannot be undone." The Philippine leader also noted that the Public Attorney's Office is already "swamped with work" and may not have the time or resources to review the cases of all persons who could be sentenced to death. "So I believe the proposal should be studied thoroughly," he said, adding that arrest and existing punishment will already "make people think twice" before committing a crime. In 1987, the Philippines became the first Asian country in modern history to abolish the death penalty for all crimes, but it was reintroduced in late 1993 for 46 offenses. Executions resumed in 1999 after a period of 23 years but former President Joseph Estrada announced a moratorium on executions in 2000, leading to the world's largest commutation of death sentences by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in April 2006.

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