

Press Release
4 February 2012

In commemoration of the Filipino-American War
Liza Maza of International Women's Alliance warns:
Increased US military presence to boost prostitution and sex trafficking of
Filipinas

The International Women's Alliance (IWA) raised alarm over the United States' policy to increase military presence in the Philippines and the Asia Pacific region under "America's Pacific Century" project. This renewed drive to militarize the region involves the deployment of more US troops and war materiel and the acquisition of more facilities and access for military exercises, rapid deployment of forces and expansion of basing rights.

IWA Chairperson and former Gabriela Women's Party representative said, "The heightened US military presence will increase prostitution and sex trafficking of Filipinas within and outside the Philippine borders." She added that, "Already Filipinas along with Russian women comprise the majority of foreign "entertainers" working in so-called juicy bars near the US bases in South Korea. Many Filipinas likewise work as "singers" and "dancers" in entertainment bars around the US bases in Okinawa and mainland Japan."

IWA noted that where there is US military presence, there is proliferation of the rest and recreation industry where prostitution and sex trafficking thrive. This was the Philippine experience with the US bases in Angeles and Olongapo, where an estimated 55,000 prostituted women had been documented in 1981-85. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand also had a boom in military prostitution with the entry of US military troops. Prostitution in Thailand, for instance, escalated during the 1960s when the United States set up bases for the Vietnam War.

According to IWA, the abolition of the US-Philippine Military Bases Agreement in 1991 did nothing to stop the prostitution and sex trafficking of women, because the Visiting Forces Agreement ensured the continued presence of American soldiers in the country and thus of the continued victimization of women, especially those from the rural areas.

Maza also criticized the use of the Spratlys issue as justification for the militarization of the region. She said that the US government's claim of a "pivot shift" in military focus from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific region is a desperate move to resuscitate its ailing economy which never really recovered from the economic and financial crisis since 2008. As US Secretary of the State Hilary Clinton said in her speech at the APEC leaders' week in Hawaii in November 2011, "Open markets in Asia provide the United States with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology. Our economic recovery at home will depend on exports and the ability of American firms to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia."

The deployment of troops and battleships which is short of reinstalling permanent bases in the Philippines and other countries in the Asia Pacific region, is to secure available opportunities for the US on investments, trade and technology against any and all forms of resistance from the people. The shift, therefore, serves only the interest of the United States and not of the people. In fact, it is a dangerous move that posts very serious threats on the lives and livelihood of the already poverty-stricken people in the Asia Pacific region.

Maza also slammed the Benigno Aquino government for allowing the US government to intervene with its foreign policy. "The President should stop being a US government puppet and learn to make independent decisions based on what is good for the Filipino people and not for Uncle Sam," the IWA Chair said.

