PRESS RELEASE

2020 July 30

No letup in anti-trafficking drive despite COVID pandemic - BI

MANILA, Philippines - The Bureau of Immigration (BI) Chief Jaime Morente said its campaign against human trafficking continues even amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic.

"As the world observes the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons today, 30 July 2020, we, in the BI, reaffirm and declare our unwavering resolve to combat human trafficking in our ports by preventing the departure of suspected victims of this menace to our society," Morente said.

He observed that while human traffickers are apparently lying low due to the pandemic that prompted restrictions on international travel, "these syndicates will always take advantage of every opportunity that may arise to spirit their victims out of the country."

Morente said he believes that trafficking syndicates are just around the corner and waiting for the right time to resume their nefarious activities that prey on poor Filipinos who are mostly women and, in some cases, even minors.

"I have thus directed our port personnel to be vigilant and prepared to conduct stricter screening of departing passengers now that the government is eyeing less restrictions on outbound travel of Filipinos," Morente said.

Incidentally, the BI Chief issued the statement a month after the US government announced that for the fifth year in a row, the Philippines retained its Tier 1 ranking in the 2019 Trafficking in Persons report of the State Department.

A Tier 1 rating means the Philippine government fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and has continually demonstrated serious and sustained efforts to combat the crime.
According to BI Port Operations Acting Chief Grifton Medina, immigration officers at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) and other ports barred more than 38,000 travelers from leaving the country last year due to the Bureau's intensified campaign against trafficking.

Medina said that the total number of whose departures were deferred in 2019 was 16-percent more than the nearly 33,000 travelers who were stopped from leaving in 2018.

Medina added that last year, the BI Travel Control and Enforcement Unit (TCEU) identified and referred to the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) more than 400 passengers tagged as potential victims of human trafficking and illegal recruitment.