



Office of the President

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON
THE VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT**

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PRESS STATEMENT
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**STATEMENT OF USEC. ZOSIMO JESUS PAREDES II ON THE
COMMISSION'S ACTION ON THE ALLEGED RAPE-CASE**

The Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement is tasked to oversee the implementation of the Visiting Forces Agreement. The VFA-related incident of an alleged rape of a Filipina by six U.S. servicemen has placed the provisions of the VFA to the test.

In my capacity as the Executive Director of the Commission, I have resounded the provisions of the Agreement, particularly on matters of custody. I wish to clarify that I never declared that there were no provisions on the Agreement regarding custody. On the contrary, I have discussed the issue of custody, and even repeatedly recommended through memorandums that custody should remain with Philippine authorities. From what I have gleaned from the VFA, the Agreement is only silent on the location where US servicemen may be held should the Philippines transfers custody to U.S. authorities.

It is the Commission's opinion that this case has two issues: One, the rape case itself, which will be dealt by our criminal justice system; and, Two, the obligations of two nations bound by an Agreement which will be dealt on a diplomatic level. Although these two are intertwined in this unfortunate VFA-related incident, the government simultaneously deals with these two separate issues.

Contrary to the belief that the Government was slow to respond to the rape case itself, I wish to inform the public that the Commission made immediate coordination with the different agencies of the Government to ensure that the complainant and her family are shielded from unnecessary interviews. SBMA immediately gave assistance to the victim and her family, and provided them a safe house while awaiting judicial proceedings. The DSWD promptly sent its representatives to provide psychological support for the complainant. The Department of Justice assured that the resolution of the case would be expedited.

On the other hand, on the implementation of the VFA, the Commission made immediate recommendations to the Chairman, Alberto Romulo, who immediately initiated dialogues with the Department of Justice and the legal luminaries of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Agreement, as any other law or statute, may be interpreted to the advantage of each contending side. In our dealings with other nations, the Philippine Government outlines its actions carefully and ardently places heavy consideration on its decisions. The different agencies involved in this VFA-related case held consultations with one another to ensure that the implementation and interpretation of the VFA would lean towards advancing the interests of our Philippines. I assure the public that the Government, particularly the officials of the Department of the Foreign Affairs, the Department of Justice and the VFA Commission will adamantly endeavor to pursue and implement any provisions of the Agreement to the advantage of Philippine interests. **END**