

Press Release
November 18, 2014

Bill passed to give martial law victims more time to file claims; ethnic origin to be included in national census

The Senate passed on third and final reading a joint resolution seeking to extend the deadline for the filing of claims by martial law victims by six months.

Senator Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, chair of the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights and sponsor of Senate Joint Resolution No. 10, otherwise known as "Joint Resolution Extending the Period For Filing Of Claims For Reparation Of Human Rights Violations Victims under Republic Act No. 10368, said that the approval of the joint resolution would give martial law victims more time to file their claims for repatriation and compensation. RA 10368 is known as the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013.

Aside from Pimentel, the measure was co-authored by Senators Chiz Escudero and Teofisto "TG" Guingona III.

"The Human Rights Victims Claims Board (HRVCB) has encountered an unprecedented number of claims from human rights victims. Due to the sheer number of the applications, compounded by the board's undermanned staff, the Board may not be able to accomplish its duties within the period prescribed by law," Pimentel told colleagues during his sponsorship speech.

"So as not to duly prejudice our aggrieved countrymen for whom RA 10368 was primarily enacted, and to accord the HRVCB sufficient period to discharge its statutory duty, the HRVCB should be allowed to extend the period to accept human rights victims' claims for another six months from November 10, 2014 or until May 11, 2015," he added.

According to the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), a coalition of human rights groups, the HRVCB had received only around 29,000 claims as of October this year. PAHRA chairman Max de Mesa said the board expected about 55,000 to 90,000 more applications to be processed.

"There are, in fact, more than 7,000 undocumented human rights victims from the cursory research conducted by our group, apart from the more than 9,000 Hawaii class suit claimants, De Mesa said.

"The extension, more than the filing of claim, ensures that all human rights victims will be given access to a means of gaining redress for the sufferings and sacrifices that they endured during the Martial Law," he added.

Pimentel, whose father, former Senate President Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel, Jr. was jailed for opposing former President Ferdinand Marcos during the martial law era, said in a radio interview early November that martial law victims could continue to file their claims for compensation once Senate Joint Resolution 10 and its counterpart, House Joint Resolution 16 would be enacted into law. Akbayan party-list Rep. Ibarra Gutierrez, one of the authors of House Joint Resolution No. 16, said the resolution would have a retroactive effect. The House of Representatives had passed Joint Resolution 16 on final reading before Congress adjourned last October.

Pimentel said he already asked the HRVCB to continue accepting claims even after the filing period as prescribed under the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013 had elapsed.

"I asked the Board to continue receiving claims. We will approve the resolution by mid-November that would give chance to all human rights victims to file their claims for another six months," Pimentel said. Meanwhile, the Senate also passed on third and final reading a bill which seeks to include the ethnic origin in the national survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Senator Loren Legarda, who authored and sponsored Senate Bill No. 2426 or the Ethnic Origin Act of 2014, said the government had no adequate information on the population of the different ethnic groups in the Philippines.

"The population data on the indigenous peoples (IPs) and indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) vary depending on the group handling the research or using the data. This reality compels us even more to obtain the accurate data. The Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos (ECTF) estimates our IP/ICC population to be between 6.5 and 7.5 million, while the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates it to between 12 and 15 million. This reality compels us even more to obtain the accurate data," Legarda said in her sponsorship speech.

Under the proposed measure, she said, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), would employ enumerators or deploy NCIP employees to gather data on Ethnic Origin during the conduct of the national survey and national census.

Such information, Legarda said, would contribute to the effective implementation of the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA). (Pilar S. Macrohon)