

## **PH READY TO HELP IRAQ IN FIGHT VS HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

BAGHDAD—The Philippines recognizes the progress Iraq has made in the fight against human trafficking and is looking forward to assisting Baghdad in its efforts to strengthen its existing mechanisms to address this concern, the Philippine Embassy in Baghdad said.

“We would like to continue our collaboration with Iraqi authorities in combatting human trafficking,” Chargé d’Affaires Elmer G. Cato said in his remarks during a reception the Philippine Embassy hosted to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Manila and Baghdad.

“The Philippines is encouraged by the positive steps that the Iraqi Government has taken during the past several years to address human trafficking issues,” Chargé d’Affaires Cato told the more than 100 Iraqi officials, foreign diplomats and other guests who attended the reception at the Babylon Warwick Hotel on Wednesday.

The Filipino envoy cited in particular the support and cooperation extended by authorities to the Philippine Embassy that resulted in the successful rescue and repatriation two months ago of 10 Filipino trafficking victims in the Kurdistan region.

In his remarks, Chargé d’Affaires Cato said the Embassy is ready to share its experience in helping Iraq formulate more effective measures to allow it to not only go after human trafficking syndicates but also to assist Filipino and other migrant workers victimized by these syndicates.

He said the Philippine Embassy will be working closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the High Commission on Human Rights and other concerned agencies on this important concern in 2016.

Chargé d’Affaires Cato said the Philippine Embassy will also further strengthen its collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) so that it could better respond to trafficking cases involving Filipino nationals in Iraq. He said the IOM also played an important role in the repatriation of the 10 trafficking victims from Kurdistan.

In July, the Philippine Embassy participated in an IOM sponsored a workshop that brought together Iraqi government agencies and embassies of labor-sending countries to discuss issues involving migrant workers in the country. In November, the Philippine Embassy and the IOM conducted a briefing on human trafficking for members of the Filipino Community in Erbil.

The Philippine Embassy believes there are as many as 2,000 Filipinos working in Iraq, most of them in the Kurdistan region and some in Baghdad, Basra and other parts of the country. ###