

Foreign Missions in Manila are Possible Terrorist Targets

November 28: International wire services have carried reports overnight that the Australian Embassy in Manila has temporarily closed its operations in the light of “credible information” that it was a target for a planned attack by Islamic fundamentalist groups. This report follows an announcement in Canberra on the evening of 27 November by the Australian Foreign Minister that the Australian Government was acting on information received and has been confirmed by the Australian Embassy.

The nature of the information received by the Australian authorities suggests that the attack was specifically directed at the building in Roxas Boulevard, Makati City, housing the Australian Embassy and that the information was very specific regarding both the timing and the nature of the attack.

The Embassy of the European Union, which is in the same building, has also closed its operations as has the Canadian Embassy. The latter mission is located elsewhere but is understood to have received separate threats of attack. The New Zealand Mission in Manila has announced it is staying open for the time being.

As far as is known, neither individual citizens of those countries resident in Manila nor businesses owned by such nationals have been singled out as specific targets. However the Australian Government has upgraded its Travel Advisory signaling a greater level of risk than hitherto.

According to the Australian Embassy statement “Threats against Australians and Australian interests in the Philippines are high, given possible terrorist action and civil disorder. We have received credible and specific information of a threat to the Australian Embassy in Manila.” The Embassy also cautions “Australians should maintain a high level of personal security awareness at all times and monitor developments that might affect their safety.” The Embassy suggests travelers should consider deferring all non-essential travel to or within the Philippines for the time being and to avoid places where crowds of foreigners are likely to congregate.

The decision to close temporarily the Embassy premises does not mean that all functions will cease. According to Embassy staff, arrangements are being worked out to provide essential and emergency services by other means. No time date has been given for a reopening of the Embassy although the evident hope is that the threat will quickly pass.

We understand that the Australian Ambassador in Manila has been in touch with the Foreign Secretary of the Philippines to stress that the decision to close should in no way be taken to reflect adversely on the level of security support provided by the Philippines Government. Rather it was the result of the Australian assessment of the evidence of possible attack. Full closure of an Embassy is a rare occurrence and therefore it can be assumed that the evidence was indeed sufficiently compelling to require quick and decisive action.

In briefing the Australian community on the development, the Australian Ambassador to the Philippines was at pains to point out the high level of cooperation received from both the Philippines National Police and local security authorities.

At this stage no foreign government is urging its nationals to leave the Philippines and most foreigners are continuing with business as normal. There is no sense of undue alarm within the local foreign business community. Neither should relatives overseas be alarmed by press reports. However it is widely believed that Muslim extremists may attempt to mount some kind of action over the Christmas holiday season and for that reason, travelers and residents alike are urged to seek advice from their governments and embassies prior to travel and to avoid unnecessary exposure to high risk places and activities.

Further information including links to government websites and travel updates can be found within the MCA Security Channel at <http://virtual-asia.com/ph/security/security.htm>.