

Advisory unfair, uncalled for

China has issued a travel advisory warning its citizens that it is unsafe to travel to the Philippines.

The advisory came in the wake of a wave of crimes that victimized Chinese nationals. And fair or not, people also view China's issuance of the alert as its reaction to President Benigno Aquino III's pronouncements about seeking support for Manila from friendly European nations on the South China Sea dispute during his recent trip to Europe.

Tsinoy Beats & Bytes

By Teresita Ang Soo

But it's the crime situation in the Philippines that China is linking the travel advisory to. A Chinese Embassy official recently interviewed by *The Philippine Star* in Chengdu, Sichuan said representations have been made with Philippine authorities over the many Chinese nationals who have been kidnapped and killed, robbed, or assaulted. But, he said, the Philippine government has done nothing.

Unfortunately, *The Philippine Star* story omitted to give the following information: How many of the so-called victims were tourists? Did any of the tour groups which visited the Philippines complain about the peace and order situation? How many of the so-called victims were undocumented or illegal aliens, perhaps killed due to involvement in illegal activities? How many of these Chinese are investors or are productively working in the Philippines with proper permits?

Which really makes many wonder, Why the advisory? Why now? No one, the Tsinoys in particular, heard even a squeak of complaint from China at the peak of the kidnapping menace in the 1990s when victims – Chinese, Tsinoys and Pinoy – were being picked off like sitting ducks.

True, an increasing number of Chinese nationals are being kidnapped for ransom these two years, but the rise does not warrant such a strong advisory from their government. We sympathize with Chinese nationals who were victims, but we disagree when they say they are being singled out.

The advisory was meant for Chinese tourists traveling to the Philippines, but except for the 2010 hostage incident at the Rizal Park, no tourists from China have been harmed. In fact, Chinese tourists I recently met in Bohol praised the tourist police for being friendly and helpful. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hong Lei, in a Sept. 15, 2014 press conference responded to a query about this matter:

Q: Several Chinese citizens were recently caught in danger in the Philippines. What requests has the Chinese side made to the Philippine side?

A: There have been several cases in the Philippines over the past days where the security of Chinese citizens was endangered. The Chinese side is severely concerned about that. The Chinese Embassy in the Philippines has repeatedly lodged representations with the Philippine police, requesting them to solve these cases as soon as possible and bring perpetrators to justice. We have also asked the Philippine side to take concrete measures to safeguard the security as well as lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and institutions in the Philippines.

Given the security situation in the Philippines, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has issued a travel alert the other day, advising Chinese citizens there to step up precautions and Chinese citizens who plan to visit the Philippines to put their trips on hold for the time being.

The advisory has affected the Philippine tourism industry badly. But China also overlooked one thing: The advisory has also affected passenger bookings of Chinese airlines flying to the Philippines. In short, the Chinese nationals' own business interests.

What this advisory highlights is not the peace and order issue but the serious communication gap between the Philippine and Chinese governments. The gap includes coordination between the Philippine National Police and Chinese Embassy personnel to pinpoint the incidents that are the object of complaints and share the results of the investigations, if there were any. We have yet to hear the PNP, the tourism department and even the Department of Foreign Affairs say if China's complaint was warranted.

What the Chinese Embassy should have also done was to relay to Beijing an accurate picture of the supposed crimes that have affected Chinese citizens. For example, some of the supposed deaths due to kidnapping were drug-related. The negotiators for ransom were Chinese. Other supposed kidnap-for-ransom incidents involved casino gambling debts.

Both governments must open channels of communication to address the safety of Chinese nationals and other problems involving Chinese nationals. They can cooperate with one another in fighting crime, especially drugs. If Chinese authorities can curb the expansion of the illegal drugs trade and gambling syndicates from China to the Philippines, it will go a long way toward improving peace and order in the Philippines.

Senate hearing

On the invitation of Sen. Grace Poe, chairperson of the Committee on Law and Order and Illegal Drugs, I appeared recently at a Senate hearing looking into various charges against PNP Chief Alan Purisima.

I expressed my reservations that while all the bills and resolutions are well-crafted, well-researched and well-intended, passing new laws may not really solve the PNP's problems.

The root cause is the lack of implementation of the laws.

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