



PHILIPPINE CONSULATE GENERAL

## P R E S S R E L E A S E

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### **AIR TRAVEL TO RP REMAINS SAFE – AMB. GAA**

Washington DC, 22 January 2008 – Philippine Ambassador to the United States, Willy C. Gaa, assured the traveling public that despite the Federal Aviation Administration’s move to shift the Philippines from Category 1 to Category 2, travel to and from the Philippines remains safe.

“I would like to assure the traveling public that air travel to the Philippines remains safe and secure,” Ambassador Gaa said today. He added that “all necessary precautions are continually being undertaken by Philippine transportation and civil aviation officials in order to maintain the safety travel records of Philippine air carriers.”

Ambassador Gaa also noted that the country’s flag-carrier, Philippine Airlines, will continue to service its existing US routes, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas via Vancouver, Honolulu and Guam. The FAA ruling does not however render judgement on the overall safety and maintenance record of an airline operating to and from the Philippines.

The Philippine Air Transportation Office has likewise assured the public that it is “taking all necessary corrective measures” to return the Philippines to Category 1 status. “Towards this end,” Ambassador Gaa said, “President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has ordered the release of PhP110 million for the upgrade of the Philippines’ ATO.” President Arroyo issued the directive during a Cabinet meeting in Malacañang about an hour before she left for a seven-day trip to Switzerland and Dubai on 21 January 2008.

The President’s directive is aimed at improving ATO’s regulatory functions “focused on strictly implementing aviation regulations, upgrading its technical guidance systems, employment of highly qualified technical personnel, licensing and certification, surveillance and the proper resolution of safety issues.” Ambassador Gaa further stated that in addition to the supplemental funds for the ATO, the President has urged Congress to expedite passage of a measure creating the Civil Aviation Authority to allow the country to regain its previous safety rating.

The US FAA downgraded the Philippines from Category 1 to Category 2 on January 4, 2008. Category 2 countries are considered by the FAA as those not compliant with ICAO standards – does not provide safety oversight of its air carrier operators in accordance with the minimum safety oversight standards established by the ICAO. This means is that under Category 2, Philippine airport facilities would be operating at current levels under “heightened FAA surveillance.” Furthermore, according to FAA rules, under Category 2 “expansion or changes in services to the United States by...carriers are not permitted while in category 2, although new services will be permitted if operated using aircraft wet-leased from a duly authorized and properly supervised US carrier or a foreign air carrier from category 1 country that is authorized to serve the United States using its own aircraft.” END