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**Duterte: FBI's taking of Meiring
an 'affront to Philippine sovereignty'**

Jowel F. Canuday / MindaNews / 30 May 2002

DAVAO CITY -- An irked Mayor Rodrigo Duterte confirmed today that agents of the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) spirited out of a hospital room here on May 19 an American national responsible for the blast inside a budget hotel room on May 16.

Duterte decried the FBI's action as "an affront to Philippine sovereignty."

Duterte warned he will arrest FBI agents if they return and operate here again without giving "fundamental courtesies" to local authorities here.

"I just would like now to make it clear, to inform .. the US ambassador and some morons there in the national government who are handling these FBI agents that you better not do that again here or I will have you arrested... I don't give sh_t with all these guys," Duterte told the Regional Peace and Order Council meeting at The Marco Polo hotel here this afternoon (Thursday).

Duterte stressed in his speech that he was not only addressing the body but the national leadership and the US ambassador to the Philippines, Francis Ricciardone.

"Sovereignty does not come cheap... Please do not forget our national sovereignty. It should be enhanced always by the dignity of the Filipino people," he said.

He said he is very emotional when it comes to the issue of sovereignty. "Please do not bargain our dignity as Filipinos," he said.

Duterte called the attention of US Embassy officials to "respect independence, sovereignty and local laws."

Duterte, a former city prosecutor and concurrent RPOC chair, said the "arrogant" FBI agents spirited out of his hospital room US national Michael Meiring, without the knowledge of any police, military or government official

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in the city or the region.

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Meiring's feet got blown off by dynamites he kept inside a budget hotel room here on May 16.

The city government and the police here were still building a case against Meiring when the FBI agents got him out of his hospital room on May 19.

The police here filed on May 22 a case of reckless imprudence resulting to damages to property and illegal possession against Meiring. But Duterte said Meiring should also be held liable for arson since a portion of his room at Evergreen Hotel caught fire.

He said US authorities appeared interested in pursuing Meiring's case after Philippine police authorities uncovered several dubious US Federal bank notes in his possession when they checked his room and belongings after the blast.

Duterte said the FBI agents, accompanied by "Filipino handlers from the highest echelons of the Philippine government" immediately flew in after the discovery of the bank notes and wanted to take custody of Meiring.

Duterte said that when the FBI agents went to the Davao Doctors Hospital where Meiring was confined, they were initially accosted by security guards but the FBI agents merely flashed their metal badges and proceeded in taking Meiring.

"They think and act nonchalant as if they own the place...I don't give a sh_t who they are. "Those metal badges do not have any value to me. If they (FBI agents) do that again, I will have them eat (their badges)," Duterte said.

Police detailed near Meiring's hospital room were also barred entry by FBI agents.

Duterte said initially, when he heard the news of Meiring's sudden departure for Manila, he thought this was with clearance from the highest levels of government.

But Duterte said he later learned that "nobody but nobody" in the city or the region was informed of the FBI's action. He said he was not demanding that he be personally informed about these operations as these could be matters of national security but stressed that

FBI agents should have coordinated with appropriate government agencies like the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency; Chief Supt. Eduardo Matillano, PNP regional chief here and the heads of other law enforcement agencies in the region.

Duterte also lashed out at the FBI agents for their gall to plan the arrest of alleged suspects linked to the Meiring case in the "Muslim communities" along Quezon Boulevard using as pretext the US war against terrorism.

Duterte said the the FBI agents targeted a raid on the communities along Quezon Boulevard simply because of the presence of "Muslims" there.

Sources at the Philippine National Police said FBI agents assisted by their "handlers" in the government, were actually targeting Meiring's Filipina live-in partner, a Moro who resides in Barangay Mini-Forest here along Quezon Boulevard.

The plan, however, was not carried out after local authorities here reacted to the FBI agent's behavior.

"Just because something has happened in America, just because there a lot of terrorists in Afghanistan, it does not give you the right at all, it does not invest you with moral authority to extend whatever sentiments you have in my country," he said.

"Don't go around arresting Filipinos, you don't go around pushing your way. We will not allow it here in Davao City... do not do it again or I will arrest you," he said.

"Please do not overlay your paranoia. (The September 11 terrorist attack in the United States) does not invest you with additional powers or extra-territorial powers. You do not go around arresting people unless there is probable cause and you have to strictly follow the criminal procedures in my country," Duterte said, apparently addressing the message more to the FBI agents and the US government than the RPOC members.