



South African Embassy in the Philippines

ADVISORY TO SOUTH AFRICAN PASSPORT HOLDERS TRAVELLING TO THE PHILIPPINES

Rising Number of Arrests

There has been a concerning increase in arrests of South Africa over the past 12 months for drug-related offences at Philippine airports and seaports. A significant number of these arrests have involved travellers originating from or transiting through South Africa.

Due to the growing number of drug courier interceptions linked to flights departing from Johannesburg, Philippine authorities have now classified South Africa as a red-flag country. Additionally, several drug consignments intercepted at Philippine ports were traced to shipment addresses in Johannesburg.

This pattern has raised serious concern with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), which has formally engaged the Embassy on this disturbing trend.

Philippine Law Is Extremely Strict

Unlike some jurisdictions, Philippine drug laws impose life imprisonment for drug trafficking and large-scale possession. This penalty applies equally to foreign nationals and Philippine citizens. There are no special exemptions.

It must be clearly understood:

- Ignorance of the law is not a defence.
- Economic hardship is not a justification.
- Promises of "easy money" do not mitigate criminal liability.

No economic difficulty can justify spending the rest of your life in a foreign prison thousands of miles from home. Drug trafficking defeats the very reasoning often used to rationalize it- it leaves individuals in a far worse situation than before.

This is not alarmism. It is fact.

Additional Risks Along Transit Routes

Many routes to the Philippines involve transit through countries that impose the death penalty for drug trafficking. At any stage of travel, authorities in transit jurisdictions may intercept and arrest passengers.

Flights to the Philippines often exceed 20 hours in total travel time. During this period, passengers may be profiled, monitored, or screened at multiple checkpoints. The risks are exceptionally high.

Embassy Support Limitations

The South African Embassy can provide only consular assistance, such as:

- Facilitating communication with family
- Providing lists of legal practitioners
- Monitoring welfare conditions

The Embassy does not provide financial assistance, pay legal fees, settle fines, or secure release from custody.

Nothing is free. The same modus operandi has been observed across all recent arrests -vulnerable individuals, both young and older, exploited with promises of quick financial gain.