



President Benigno Aquino III, left, and New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key attend the APEC CEO Summit in Yokohama, near Tokyo, Friday, Nov. 12, 2010. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

YOKOHAMA — President Benigno Aquino III appeared in fighting form before other heads of state during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit here, lashing out at his counterparts for recent adverse travel advisories on the Philippines.

Mr. Aquino was particularly irked by the travel advisories coming from countries that he said are supposed to be allies of the Philippines.

He said the advisories had been issued amid efforts of his government to encourage investors to come to the country.

Mr. Aquino, who attended the APEC CEO Summit here along with [New Zealand](#) Prime Minister John Key, was the one who got the most attention from businessmen, as several questions were thrown at him over how they could invest in the [Philippines](#) in the light of the adverse travel advisories.

Mr. Aquino and the New Zealand leader were joined by business and industry leaders led by Asian Development Bank (ADB) president Haruhiko Kuroda, DHL CEO Hermann Ude and All Nippon [Airways](#) Co. Ltd. chairman Yoji Ohashi, who is also vice chairman of Nippon Keidanren.

Mr. Aquino and Key were separated by a coffee table and delivered their speeches before the question and answer portion.

Mr. Aquino sternly answered the question on travel warnings against the Philippines, which elicited laughter from the crowd.

Key, for his part, seemed to have reddened serious and blushed while Mr. Aquino voiced his displeasure over the advisories. New Zealand was among six countries that warned against [travel](#) to the Philippines, citing imminent terror attack.

Host nation Japan the other day joined the other nations that issued adverse travel advisory against the Philippines, but this time, warning against robbery and kidnappings.

Mr. Aquino lamented that other countries should be more considerate to their allies vis-à-vis their responsibility to warn and protect their own citizens.

Mr. Aquino though thanked the businessman during the forum for bringing up the issue of adverse travel warnings. He said the Philippines “unfortunately is not one of the [tourism](#) powerhouses yet.”

“We have three million visitors a year, some of our neighboring countries would have as high as 22 million visitors. Unfortunately, with the terror advisories recently we were singled out as a place to avoid,” Mr. Aquino told the forum.

“Unfortunately for us, there seems to be standards when they issue these alerts. There are countries that have experienced terrorist attacks directed at tourists (and) that area placed in a category lower than the Philippines in terms of terrorist alerts,” he said.

Mr. Aquino said there are countries that have harbored terrorists who attacked other countries but they are not included in the list of [travel alerts](#) .

“We don’t understand why, on the basis of a report that actually talked about a threat that was very dissimilar to previous Islamic, fundamentalist, jihadist attacks, suddenly gains so much credence that’s enough to issue all of these alerts that unfortunately were played up by our media,” he explained.

Mr. Aquino was acerbic in his comments, eliciting laughter from the crowd, particularly when he questioned the “sincerity of our allies” in issuing the adverse advisories.

He said the travel warnings came even as the Philippines is preparing a tourism campaign on Nov. 15.

“One has to suspect the sincerity of some of our allies,” he said. “We have made our displeasure known to their ambassadors.”

Mr. Aquino told the forum that the Philippine government had implemented a new procedure

that would validate any information on security threats.

“We have a new procedure put in place. You know the basis of the information given to our government came in the form of SMS (short messaging system) and it was more, in the best light it can be said, it was taken so that they will not be accused of not doing anything,” Mr. Aquino said.

“But in terms of validating the data, it seems there is no effort at all to validate and this negatively impacted on our country’s efforts and again one has to wonder why such a thing came from allies,” he added.

‘Is not unusual’

Malacañang, for its part, said the latest travel advisory issued by Japan against the Philippines “is not unusual and extraordinary.”

“These are just precautionary measures. We respect our Japanese friends on this,” Presidential Communications and Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma said.

Coloma stressed the responsibility of the Japanese government to ensure the safety of its citizens.

He said the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is regularly holding dialogues with embassies for a “clearer understanding” of foreign governments.

“We want to know what their concerns are,” Coloma said.

What makes the Japanese travel advisory different, Coloma noted, was that text was written in

Nippongo, which means only Japanese people can understand it.

“There is no English or international version,” Coloma said. “The travel advisory was written in Japanese.”

Coloma also noted the Japanese travel advisory did not mention any possibility of terror attack in the Philippines.

Japanese Ambassador Makoto Katsura explained the advisory was merely a reminder for their nationals visiting the country to take the usual precautions against criminal elements.

The travel advisory, Katsura said, is being issued by the embassy regularly, particularly in the last months of the year when a significant number of Japanese [tourists](#) travel to the Philippines.

“So we just ask them to take safety measures against any security concerns like robbery and kidnapping,” he said.

Katsura pointed out his government’s advisory was “completely different in nature” to those issued by the [United States](#), Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada and France.

The six nations came out with their respective advisories one after the other within a matter of days, all of which warned of an imminent terrorist attack.

Security forces confirmed they were aware of the report of a terrorist threat on the country but stressed the information should be validated.

Officials said this was the same information used by the six nations when they issued their

advisories against the Philippines.

Matsura clarified the advisory did not discourage their citizens from [traveling](#) to the Philippines. What it did was only to remind Japanese citizens to “take safety measures against any security concerns like robbery and kidnapping.”

“Our advice is quite different from them. We just remind them of the possible security (risks). We advise them to take precautionary measures,” Matsura said.

Matsura said the Japanese embassy had no idea about the information used by the six nations to issue the travel warnings.

President Aquino lamented that foreign countries did not share information with the [Philippine](#) [S](#) _ that eventually led to the spate of adverse travel advisories.

He said the six countries did not even bother to coordinate with their Philippine counterparts on intelligence matters to check if the reported terror threats were real and accurate.

The US embassy issued a statement explaining the latest travel advisory against the Philippines carried only “slight changes.”

The British government also clarified it did not issue any new advisory to its nationals but only a revised travel advisory.

The Australian and New Zealand embassies also responded in similar tones.