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Misuari-Meeting

MISUARI HOPES HE WON'T BE SENT BACK TO PHILIPPINES

By: Mohd Haikal Isa

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 27 (Bernama) -- Fugitive Moro leader Nur Misuari today expressed the hope that he would not be sent back to the Philippines. His wife Siti Tarhata Ibrahim said he mentioned this when she met him at the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman here.

"My husband believes that the Malaysian government will not send him back," she told Bernama at a hotel here after the two-hour meeting.

Siti Tarhata said her children Nur Redha, 7, Khalid, 4, and nine-month-old Nur Hata also met their father during the meeting, the first for the former governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao during his month-long detention in Malaysia.

Siti Tarhata said she was grateful to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for giving her and her children the opportunity to be with Misuari during this Hari Raya period.

"I am very grateful to the Prime Minister for our reunion," she said.

"My husband looked healthy although a bit thin," she said, adding that several police officers were present during the meeting.

"He was treated very well by the Malaysian authorities," she said.

Siti Tarhata said the children were very happy to see their father and did not want to leave him after the meeting.

She also said she did not know where her husband was being detained.

Siti Tarhata said she would remain in Malaysia until the decision on Misuari's application for an asylum from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was known.

Misuari's lawyer Elly Pamatong, who was present during the interview but not allowed to attend the family meeting at Bukit Aman, said there was no plan for a future meeting.

Pamatong called on the Malaysian government to allow Misuari's six other children, from other marriages and now residing in Saudi Arabia, to visit their father.

Misuari, the Moro National Liberation Front chairman, was captured along with six supporters at Pulau Jampiras, near Sandakan, on Nov 24 for illegally entering Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Pamatong said Siti Tarhata had earlier today asked the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees for asylum, fearing for her safety.

"She is formally turning over herself and her three children under the custody and protection of the UNHCR," Pamatong said in a statement.

He said Siti Tarhata believed that her life and the lives of her children were in grave danger in the Philippines because she was the wife of the Moro leader.

Pamatong said she sought to be resettled in the United States or Britain, and that she also asked the UNHCR to consider her husband's application for political asylum.

-- BERNAMA

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