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Misuari's family can visit him

Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today said the family of Nur Misuari, the former governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines, may be allowed to visit him.

However, said Syed Hamid, the visit was subject to approval by the relevant authorities (police or Home Ministry).

"It depends on the authorities. If there are acceptable reasons on why they (Misuari's family) want to meet him then it could be arranged," Syed Hamid said at his residence here today.

He said the visit, if allowed, would be arranged carefully and according to certain security restrictions which should not attract "media discussion".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had, earlier in the day, said the Government would consider allowing the family of Nur Misuari to visit him.

Dr Mahathir reiterated he expected the Philippine Government to take custody of Misuari "very soon" because Kuala Lumpur cannot keep him under detention forever.

The Prime Minister also reiterated the Government's stand on the question of political asylum for Misuari.

"We cannot entertain asylum," he said.

"We have given an undertaking that people who carry out terror attacks in their country and taking ordinary people as hostages cannot be given asylum."

US-based lawyer, Elly V.L. Pamatong, who claims to represent Misuari, said yesterday that he has appealed to the Malaysian Government to allow the former governor's family members to visit him.

Pamatong had also appealed to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to intervene and prevent Misuari from being deported to the Philippines.

On his views pertaining to these recent developments, Syed Hamid said it was Kuala Lumpur's responsibility and commitment to hand over Misuari to Manila.

"We do not classify him as a refugee or an asylum seeker ...this has been said again and again.

"And I don't feel there is a need for UNHCR's presence in the current situation."

He said the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had given an undertaking that Misuari would be handled with respect and dignity.

"President Arroyo personally assured the OIC Ministerial Committee of Eight, which monitors the implementation of the 1996 peace pact in southern Mindanao, that Misuari will be treated with dignity."

Syed Hamid said Manila has also assured Misuari's safety when he is deported from Malaysia.

Syed Hamid, a member of the Committee of Eight, together with committee chairman Dr Hasan Wiraduyo, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, flew into Manila last week.

With the mandate from the OIC, they held several high profile meetings with Arroyo's government to ascertain the situation and Manila's position on Misuari.

The Philippines made it clear that they want Misuari back to stand trial

for rebellion and that there were no two ways about it.

Misuari was arrested while trying to enter Malaysia through Sabah on Nov 24.

firdy@nstp.com.my

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