

Help for Filipinos to return legally

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MANILA, Sat. — President Gloria Arroyo said today the Government would work to ensure that more Filipinos could legally find work in Malaysia, including by seeking labour agreements “more beneficial to our countrymen”.

The Department of Foreign Affairs will help some deportees get the proper documents “so they can obtain work permits so they can return” to Malaysia, she said.

Thousands of Filipino illegal migrants have been leaving Sabah in recent weeks due to a Malaysian crackdown on illegal migrants.

She also assured the country that she would seek justice for the alleged abuse of Filipinos being deported from Malaysia after a crackdown on illegal immigrants.

She assured she had acted quickly on reports that a 13-year-old Filipina had been sexually abused at one of the Malaysian detention centres.

But she refrained from blaming the Malaysian government for the situation and praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for calling a moratorium on the deportations.

Arroyo also urged the public in a weekly radio address to unite to help the thousands of Filipinos returning from Malaysia.

Arroyo said she and congress leaders had yesterday outlined a strategy to help the deportees.

She said the country should focus on “how to protect the returnees and the remaining Filipinos in Sabah while seeking justice for the abuses they endured”.

This would include the Department of Foreign Affairs compiling more testimonies from alleged victims of abuse for a possible legal complaint to be filed in Malaysia, she said.

The Philippine consular office will also ask to be allowed to visit the detention centres to provide legal assistance to the deportees while the Department of Foreign Affairs asks Malaysia to improve the conditions at the centres.

Dr Mahathir pledged swift action after Arroyo complained about the alleged rape of the 13-year-old girl reportedly by a policeman at a detention centre.

A Philippine delegation that inspected the detention centres said in a joint statement with the Malaysian authorities that it found the Malaysian Government “has exerted all efforts to ease the hardships of Filipino detainees/deportees”.

While expressing concern over the

situation in Malaysia, Arroyo acknowledged that the burden was on the Philippines to reintegrate the deportees and “create more jobs for the jobless, especially for the thousands of people... who have lost their livelihood”.

She called for a nationwide charity drive for the Filipino deportees to provide them with food and shelter until “they can stand on their own feet and become productive citizens”.

— AFP