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Philippine-Lawyer

PHILIPPINE EMBASSY TO APPOINT LAWYER FOR 13-YEAR-OLD RAPE VICTIM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- The Philippine Embassy here will appoint a Malaysian lawyer to fight for the interest of a 13-year-old Filipina who was allegedly raped at the temporary detention centre in Sabah recently.

Philippine Ambassador to Malaysia Jose Brillantes said engaging a lawyer familiar in sexual abuse cases was a necessary course of action to protect the legal rights of the victim during police investigations.

"The move to appoint a lawyer for the victim is a normal course of action to safeguard her interest during the ongoing investigations," he told Bernama.

He said the Malaysian Government's ruling barring foreign lawyers from practising in the country had made it impossible to hire a lawyer from his country for the victim except if there was an exception.

Brillantes said the embassy had a list of prospective Malaysian lawyers and would pick someone most suitable to handle the case.

"Hiring a Malaysian lawyer will be the best option because they know better," he said.

Brillantes was responding to a report in Manila Times today quoting the republic's Foreign Secretary Blas Ople as saying that the Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur would appoint a lawyer to represent the girl in the ongoing investigations.

Ople also said legal funds for the girl would be sourced from the Legal Assistance Fund established by the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act.

On whether the victim would return to Sabah or the Malaysian police would go to Zamboanga City to record her statement, Brillantes said the matter had not been decided yet.

He was informed that the special investigation team headed by CID Deputy Director (special investigations) ACP Takbir Ahmad Nazir had left for Sabah to start working on the case.

Asked if the team had applied to go to Zamboanga City, Brillantes said: "Not not to my knowledge."

Federal CID Director Datuk Salleh Mat Som announced on Friday that a special team headed by Takbir had been set up to investigate the alleged rape.

The team was set up following a letter from Philippine President Gloria Arroyo to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urging him to investigate the matter.

Dr Mahathir had said the Malaysian authorities would investigate the allegation by the girl and bring the people responsible to justice if it was proven to be true.

On the possibility of videotaping the victim's statement and passing it to the Malaysian police as stated by Ople, Brillantes said that could be the best way in view of the "fragile state of the girl."

"If that is the best alternative (video tape), by all means go ahead," he said, adding that the matter must be deliberated further with the Malaysian authorities to ensure the method was acceptable to them.

Nevertheless, it would be better if the victim could go to the scene of the alleged crime and identify the person, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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