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Rape-Philippines

RAPE VICTIM'S RIGHTS MUST BE PROTECTED, SAYS OPLE

MANILA, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- The Philippine government will protect the rights of the 13-year-old victim of an alleged sexual abuse as it seeks to comply with a request from Malaysian police for evidence to support the child's allegations.

In a statement today, Foreign Affairs Secretary Blas Ople said he would shortly meet with justice officials to discuss the case of the child, one of the deportees from Sabah.

He said he would also take up the Philippine government's response to a request of the Malaysian police to bring the victim back to Malaysia so that she could identify the men who allegedly raped her while she was held at the immigration detention centre in Kota Kinabalu.

"The human rights and emotional well-being of the child are of paramount importance to us and this is why we would like to evaluate how best we can facilitate the request of Malaysian authorities," Ople said.

Ople said the Philippine embassy in Kuala Lumpur would engage a lawyer adept in sexual abuse cases to represent the victim in the ongoing investigation.

He described the child, now under the care of social welfare workers, as "in a fragile state."

Ople said he was considering as an option that instead of a personal appearance in Malaysia, a videotaped testimony of the child may have to be sent to the Royal Malaysia Police with proper authentication by the Malaysian embassy.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has ordered a swift and thorough investigation into the alleged rape case.

This was upon receipt of a letter from President Gloria Arroyo expressing outrage over the alleged abuse and a second diplomatic protest filed by Ople with the Malaysian ambassador over the incident.

Dr Mahathir also assured the Philippine government that the perpetrators of the crime would be punished once found guilty under Malaysian law.

The statement also said that Philippine embassy officials in Kuala Lumpur had been briefed by Malaysian police on the pieces of evidence required for a rape case under the Malaysian legal system.

It said CID Director Datuk Salleh Mat Som had informed the embassy that he had designated ACP Takbir Ahmad to lead an investigative team leaving for Sabah.

The Malaysian police officials requested the Philippine government's cooperation in the investigation, particularly in recording the victim's statement, conducting a medical examination of the victim, identifying the perpetrator and if possible, facilitating the visit of the child to the crime scene.

It said Salleh explained that although Takbir's team could take the victim's deposition in Zamboanga City, the case could stand a better chance under the Malaysian legal system if the victim were to return to Sabah to undergo the necessary steps.

"In effect, what they are saying is that the chances to get the culprit and send him to jail would improve if they are able to talk to the child, get the appropriate medical report and accompany her to the scene of the crime so that she can identify the man who raped her," Ople said.

Malaysian police assured the Philippine embassy that they are

determined to put the perpetrator behind bars.

The statement also said that Salleh and other police authorities announced a plan by the Malaysian government to put up a Victim Crisis Centre (VCC) which would be operational before the end of this year.

The VCC aims to provide victims with good, comfortable and therapeutic environment with special attention to children and trauma victims.

The Malaysian police also vowed not to protect anyone connected with the rape of the 13-year-old Filipino child, Ople said.

-- BERNAMA
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