

## **Suaram to get French court papers on subs in two weeks**

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**By Susan Loone**

Human rights group Suaram, which filed a civil suit against French naval defence giant DCNS for allegedly paying commissions to top Malaysian officials, will get access to Paris-based public prosecutors' investigation papers in two weeks.

NONESuaram director Cynthia Gabriel (left) said that while the NGO did not expect the complaint to make it through the French judicial system, it has nevertheless "waited with bated breath" for two years for the case to be finally heard in court.

"We witnessed with disbelief, how the prosecutor's office began to unravel further details of new commissions paid out, travel invoices and other payments made in the course of the procurement process," she said at a press conference yesterday.

"The murder of Altantuya Shaariibuu, although not directly tied to the complaint filed, is intricately linked with the alleged payments and kickbacks made," she added.

Two Scorpene-class submarines were purchased in 2002 for a total of RM7.3 billion by the Malaysian government when Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was defence minister.

razak baginda acquitted 311008 12It has been alleged that Perimekar, an obscure company linked to Abdul Razak Baginda - a close confidant of Najib and former lover of Mongolian translator Altantuya - was paid 114 million euros, or RM570 million, for acting as a go-between in the controversial deal.

However, the government has justified that the huge payment made to Perimekar was for its "coordination and support" services.

Abdul Razak and two of Najib's bodyguards were charged for murdering Altantuya in 2006, but he was acquitted after a sensational trial, while the other two were found guilty and sentenced to death.

Cynthia said two judges have been appointed to oversee the case in France - Roger Le Loire and Serge Tournaire.

"This is good news. Normally, only one judge will be appointed. This means the case is being viewed with great importance," Cynthia told Malaysiakini.

Hearing date has not yet been set

According to Cynthia, the case will be heard before the Paris Tribunal de Grande Instance, known as a first degree court that deals with civil litigation matters.

On March 16, Suaram lawyers informed the NGO that the case had been officially registered with the courts.

"Our lawyers have also informed us that a Suaram delegation will need to be present before the judge as key witnesses to kick off proceedings in the case," she said.

However, the date for this is yet to be determined, but Suaram will announce it as soon as a date is set, she added.

NONE Cynthia expressed gratitude to Suaram's French lawyers - William Bourdon (left) and Joseph Brehem - of Sherpa, an association of lawyers fighting to protect victims of economic crimes - who had worked very hard to pursue the case.

"To quote our lawyers 'while the entire case will be a long-drawn affair, the journey towards unraveling the truth has most certainly begun'," said Cynthia.

Bourdon was unceremoniously deported by the Malaysian immigration when he visited the country in July last year for a series of meetings.

Will PM Najib testify?

Cynthia lamented that the long awaited case came at the heels of numerous obstacles faced by the lawyers since the complaint was filed in April 2010.

"The high-profile nature of the case naturally attracted strong reactions - right from the prosecutors' very own objections to the case being heard in the open courts," she said.

"This includes alleged political interference from involved persons in both countries to Suaram's 'locus standi' in the French courts," she added.

When asked if Malaysians could be compelled to testify in France, Cynthia reminded that the case is being tried under French law.

NONE "There is no compulsion for someone to appear as witness in France, but we are hoping that the Malaysian government will cooperate when the time comes to clear its name," she said.

"It is important that the government answer all the questions that have been raised regarding the deal to ensure everything is above board," she stressed.

Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had said last year he was willing to testify in the French court.

Cynthia said none of the Malaysian politicians involved in the controversial defence deal, including Najib, would have ever imagined that an inquiry outside the country would open 10 years on.

She said that the trial will ensure that "no stone is unturned in the quest for the truth and accountability" in the scandal.

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