

19 March 2013 – The Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur has ramped up consular services and assistance to Filipino nationals in Sabah, in light of recent developments in Lahad Datu and nearby areas.

Two officials from the Embassy, including Vice Consul Francis Herrera, left Kuala Lumpur on March 18, and have joined the Embassy's humanitarian/consular team in Lahad Datu, specifically to provide passports and travel documents (TD) to Filipinos who have expressed their wish to return to the Philippines.

There are two Embassy humanitarian/consular teams, with augmentation from the Department of Foreign Affairs and other agencies, attending to the needs of Filipinos in Sabah, one in Lahad Datu and the other in Tawau.

The Embassy's Philippine Overseas Labor Office has also reached out and checked upon the conditions of the 1,285 Filipino workers deployed in Sabah through the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency since 2011. Labor Attaché Alicia Santos and her staff called on the 17 companies they work for, and the Human Resource managers of the companies informed the Embassy that the Filipino workers under their employ are safe and are doing well. These companies are in the electronics, construction, plantations, and other industries.

"The humanitarian/consular teams are operating on a mobile basis, going to areas where their services are most needed. They are assisted by the Embassy's network of Filipino community leaders in reaching out to our nationals," Philippine Ambassador to Malaysia J. Eduardo Malaya said.

The Embassy conducted 10 consular missions to Sabah last year to provide passports and other services to nationals during Sabah's then 5P regularization program, including two teams from the Department of Foreign Affairs which stayed there for six months. It has also engaged the National Statistics Office (NSO) for a civil registration drive in November last year to provide

birth certificates to Filipinos there. The NSO registered some 2,000 Filipinos during that consular/civil registration drive.

The Philippines has no permanent consular presence in Sabah, in view of issues pertaining to the territory.

Upon the request of the Embassy, the Department of Education and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas conducted a joint needs-assessment mission in Sabah to look into how best to provide alternative education to children of undocumented Filipino migrants who have limited access to public schools. The Embassy likewise partnered with the Borneo Child Aid Society which runs some 120 Humana Child Aid alternative learning centers in Sabah's vast plantation estates, as well as with the Indonesian Children Education Awareness Foundation and the Society for the Education of Needy Children in admitting more Filipino children in their schools.

Upon the Embassy's encouragement, Filipino-Malaysian community leaders have done their part and established the "Stairway to Hope" Learning Center in Kota Kinabalu which now provides some 100 children with lessons in English, mathematics, Malay and good manners and right conduct. Other Filipino community leaders in other areas have similarly opened alternative learning centers, including the "Stairways to Success" Learning Center in Sandakan.

"We are most grateful to the Filipino community leaders for being our pro-active partner in uplifting the welfare of the Filipino community in Sabah," Ambassador Malaya explained. END