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DOLE to put up more offices to protect OFWs

By MAYEN JAYMALIN

The government is putting up additional Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs) to better serve and monitor overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) is planning to establish this year new POLOs in Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the United States.

"We will set up a new POLO in Florida so we could address the concerns of our Filipino seafarers there and another in Frankfurt, Germany," Bello said.

He said there is a POLO in Tokyo, but the DOLE intends to set up another in Osaka.

"We do not have a POLO in New Zealand and our workers there are under our POLO in Australia," Bello said.

He said POLOs would be established in countries with large concentration of OFWs.

The DOLE chief said President Duterte wanted the government to

provide better services for OFWs and would not hesitate to stop deployment in countries that do not treat Filipino migrants right.

The DOLE suspended the deployment of newly hired workers to Kuwait following the suspicious deaths of seven Filipino workers in the Arab country.

Meanwhile, Bello said the agency sent a team to Saudi Arabia to monitor the conditions of OFWs.

He said Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) chief Hans Caddac visited Riyadh, Jeddah and Al Khobar.

"DOLE sent teams to various countries to conduct periodic inspections and see the actual condition of our OFWs," he said.

Bello said he earlier sent a three-man team to Hong Kong.

He said they have not monitored high incidence of abuses among OFWs in other countries except in Kuwait.

Visa status

Philippine embassy officials in Moscow and the Russian Labor Ministry

met to discuss possible solutions to the visa status of a majority of OFWs in Russia, who are not properly documented.

The embassy said efforts to address the problems of OFWs resumed when Ambassador Carlos Sorreta met recently with Mikhail Kirsanov, chief of the Russian employment department.

A majority of Filipino household workers in Russia are not properly documented as there is no visa category applicable for them.

"We agreed to work together to find a solution to this problem. Solutions could include modification by the Labor Ministry of existing quotas, amendments to Russian migration laws and the conclusion of a labor agreement between the Philippines and Russia," Sorreta said.

"We will continue with our efforts but what is crucial at this point is that we are able to show respect for the current

Russian laws and there is no increase in the number of undocumented Filipino workers," he said.

Sorreta attributed the progress that the embassy achieved to the closer ties between the two countries and the OFWs' respect for Russian laws as well

as better performance of their duties.

Aside from Sorreta, the meeting was attended by Consul Jeff Valdez and Russian labor officials Oleg Gubarev, Gennady Sedakov, Dmitry Mylnikov and Stanislav Stepakov.

- With Pia Lee-Brago

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EMPLOYMENT (DOLE)