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Phil, Kuwait agree on draft deal on OFW protection

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A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Philippines and the Kuwait governments will be signed in two weeks after the Arab state gave in to the former's demands

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said two contentious issues that initially caused an impasse in the two-day negotiations were resolved last night.

"The panels agreed to have the signing most likely in Kuwait," Bello said in an interview. Officials of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and Department of Foreign Affairs held closed-door meetings with their counterparts from Kuwait in Manila.

The negotiations between the two parties initially ended in a deadlock after the Kuwaiti delegation rejected the Philippines' proposal to disallow employers from withholding the passports of overseas Filipino workers.

Later, Kuwait agreed to have the passports kept by the Philippine embassy.

The Kuwaiti group also agreed that the employment contracts of the OFWs would be based on Philippine laws and not Kuwait's.

Bello added the two parties agreed

to go back to the negotiation table. The Kuwaiti delegation is set to leave today.

Under the MOU, Kuwait agreed, among others, that the monthly minimum salary of OFWs should be \$400 net and that the salary of the workers should be deposited in a bank.

The Philippines also succeeded in getting the nod of the Kuwaiti group on their proposal that there should be a written consent from OFWs before they can be transferred to another employer.

The transfer should also be approved in writing by the labor attache.

The Philippine delegation was headed by Labor Undersecretary Claro Arellano while the Kuwaiti panel was led by Ambassador Ghanim Saqr Al Ghanim. The two-day meeting was held at the Diamond Hotel in Manila. The agreement covers both the skilled and household service workers in Kuwait.

Bello explained that even with a final MOU, it is not a guarantee that the total deployment ban to Kuwait would be lifted.

President Duterte also wants justice for Joanna Demafelis, the household helper whose body was found stuffed in a freezer in an abandoned apartment in Kuwait last month.

- * DOLE - Dept. of Labor and Employment
- * DFA - Dept. of Foreign Affairs