

DoJ seeks return to detention of massacre suspect

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GOVERNMENT prosecutors have asked a **Quezon City trial court** to order the return to detention of one of the principal suspects in the massacre of more than 50 people in Maguindanao province in 2009.

In a pleading, the prosecutors also sought tighter security in the hospital where Zaldy U. Ampatuan is confined, to rule out his escape.

“The prosecution panel is not unmindful of the medical condition of Zaldy Ampatuan,” the Justice department said. “Unfortunately, it is apprehensive that his alleged hospital confinement under the cloak of being still undergoing physical and occupational therapy may provide him all the opportunity for a convenient escape.” Prosecutors said there was no need for Mr. Ampatuan to remain confined since he was only undergoing physical therapy.

“In deference to this honorable court, it should now stop extending so much grace, sympathy or concern to accused Zaldy Ampatuan but has to act firmly with an iron hand to prevent any untoward contingency while its decision is still underway,” they added.

The Supreme Court earlier gave the trial court until Dec. 20 to rule on the multiple murder case, where 58 people died including 32 journalists.

The ambush took place when family members and the media were accompanying then-gubernatorial candidate Esmael G. Mangudadatu to the Commission on Elections to file his certificate of candidacy. Mr. Mangudadatu was then running for governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The court was supposed to rule before the 10th year anniversary of the massacre but the judge sought more time. —