

Lawyer urges church to present Fr. Ben Ejares

- Fred Languido -

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The legal counsel of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has urged the Archdiocese of Cebu to present Father Benedicto Ejares and let him answer the charges that the National Bureau of Investigation has filed over his alleged lascivious conduct towards several high school students who participated in a religious seminar five months ago.

Councilor Gerardo Carillo believes that the church officials are aware of the whereabouts of Ejares contrary to the claim of Msgr. Achilles Dakay that they do not know where the priest is.

"Dili ko motoo nga wa sila mahibawo kon hain ang pari, kahibawo gyud na sila sa whereabouts," Carillo said over radio station dyLA.

He added that instead of hiding the priest and let the controversy affect the church they should present him so he can answer the charges.

The NBI earlier subpoenaed Ejares to appear during the investigation but he did not show up.

Carillo is confident that the priest was not able to leave the county because he was put in the immigration watch list.

A source however told The FREEMAN that Ejares was spotted in one of the towns in Misamis Oriental.

Carillo lauded the NBI for completing the investigation and filing the charges against Ejares before the Cebu City Prosecutor's Office. He said, as soon as the case is filed in court, he will sponsor a resolution in the Cebu City Council commending the NBI for solving the case.

Carillo said that despite the failure of the church officials and the families of most of the victims to cooperate in the investigation, the NBI was still able to identify the priest and file the necessary charges.

Ejares' identity was unknown at first to the victims. It was the NBI which able to uncover his identity based on their files. When the NBI took over the investigation from DSWD Special Investigator Jedidah Hife immediately subpoenaed the alleged victims to get their statements.

The victims were made to go over several pictures in their files including that of Ejares.

Based on the enlarged picture of Ejares taken when he applied for clearance, the victims positively identified him as the one who allegedly sexually harassed them.

Carillo said he will also personally see to it that the case will be properly prosecuted as soon as it is elevated in court. Carillo said he will assist in the prosecution, if necessary, together with the other DSWD lawyers.

The NBI filed seven counts for violation of Article 339 of the Revised Penal Code in relation to Article 6, Section 10 (a) of the

Republic Act 7610 otherwise known as the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination and Republic Act 7877 or the Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 against Ejares.

Even if it was only seven counts, Carillo said the number of complainants has already improved because originally there were only four among the more than 20 alleged victims, who expressed willingness at first to file the case.

The NBI found out that Ejares should be indicted of the above cases after seven of the more than 20 high school participants of the Life in the Spirit Seminar at the Abellana National School in November last year accused him of inappropriately touching them. - ***NLQ***