




Taytay priest no-show in trafficking case hearing

By Christopher Lloyd Caliwán

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MANILA -- Monsignor Arnel Lagarejos did not attend Monday's preliminary investigation before the Department of Justice on the criminal complaint filed against him by the mother of the 13-year-old girl whom he allegedly brought to a motel in Marikina City.

Lagarejos, 55, has been charged with violation of Section 6 for qualified trafficking under Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003, which is a non-bailable offense, before the DOJ through the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) headed by lawyer Persida Acosta.

During the closed-door hearing, Lagarejos was represented by his lawyer while the victim, together with her mother, subscribed their complaint in front of Assistant State Prosecutor Karla Cabel.

Cabel told Lagarejos' lawyer and four other respondents to submit their counter-affidavit after five days and set the next preliminary investigation of the case on Sept. 22 at 3 p.m.

Also named respondents in the charge sheet were Shaira Pedragoza, Ace Lasaca, Luisa David, a minor and several John Does are facing a complaint for violation of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act.

Acosta said the filing of the charges was based on the month-long investigation conducted by PAO Marikina and on testimonies provided by the victim.

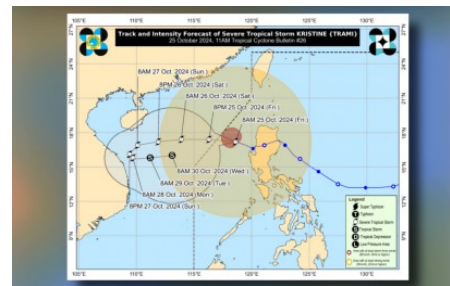
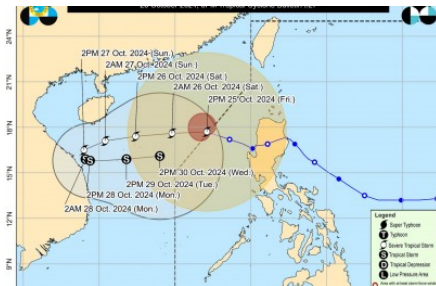
"It was established that there are two other incidents involving said priest. So applying Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the incident falls under qualified human trafficking because there was a procurement of the child and also considering the age of the victim which is 13 years old, a minor," Acosta said.

"So on the basis of those incidents and revelations of the child through the care of Marikina Social Welfare Office, it was established that this special law on trafficking of children was violated," she added.

Acosta said the complaint was not only based on the victim's testimony but also on text messages and social media posts of the victim.

Lagarejos was already indicted before the Marikina City regional trial court for qualified trafficking under Section 6 of Republic Act 9208 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003) but was able to post bail worth PHP120,000. (PNA)

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