

## PRESS RELEASE

**Luistro clarifies issues raised by DepEd Union**

Education Secretary Br Armin Luistro has issued clarifications on issues raised by Atty Domingo Alidon, president of the Department of Education (DepEd) National Employees' Union.

"Concerns like these serve as my guide," said Luistro. "This is a kind of feedback mechanism that will help us improve our job and be better public servants."

Among the concerns raised by Alidon are the alleged hiring of 440 consultants and contractual employees even though the government calls for austerity, the designation of consultants to line functions and to positions of authority. Alidon also asked for clarification on the appointment of a new personnel to a Director III position that should have been abolished along with the Muslim Affairs Office.

According to Luistro, no consultant was assigned a line position and that of the above number, majority are janitorial and maintenance personnel in the central office and the Baguio Teachers' Camp. Also among the contractual employees are the DepEd's field engineers who assist, monitor, and maintain school buildings and educational facilities around the Philippines. Records showed that the contracts of these employees were renewed during the term of the former administration to facilitate transition and avoid work disruption.

"Every new appointment made in the department is reviewed for legality and compliance with civil service rules," shared Luistro. "Meantime, we allowed existing personnel under contract to continue with their services for a limited time only. We can say that transition is still going on and these contracts are being reviewed. Whether they may be allowed to continue on after the expiration of their current contracts will depend on the outcome of the review. We cannot, in one fell swoop, fire all the Department's contractual employees, otherwise, we would cripple our operations as well as expose the Department to legal liability."

The Personnel Division also revealed that the Director III item being questioned is a plantilla, co-terminus position that was approved by the Office of the President and is not specifically part of the Muslim Affairs Office.

Many contracts of service will end on September 30, 2010 and a few others on December 31, 2010.

According to Luistro, since he assumed office, he entered into 30-day contracts with the 2 Undersecretaries and 4 Assistant Secretaries who were separated from the service by Memorandum Circular No. 1, because

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they needed time to turn over their duties and files to their successors. The Department has also re-hired 2 former Undersecretaries and 1 Assistant Secretary under 3-month contracts, to allow them to conclude specific projects and initiatives which were formerly within their purview. "Other than those," Luistro adds, "I think we have only hired 2 people to perform specific duties for 3-4 month periods."

The union also asked Luistro to consider the comments of other stakeholders on the proposed K+12 education program and give priority to the resource gaps urgently needed by schools.

"We still have our eye focused on closing resource gaps," said Luistro. "Planning the proposed K+12 program is a parallel effort. Announcing our plan to pursue K+12 early opens the matter to discussions. This will give us more inputs that will become part of the planning process."

He also reiterated his previous statement that pursuing a 12-year education program will take time and cannot be simply put in effect without looking at all variables first. In addition, the Secretary has vowed to continue consulting all the various stakeholders on the K+12 program – teachers, parents, students, and legislators before implementing the K+12 program.

Alidon criticized the Secretary for allowing volunteers to perform important duties in the Department. Luistro's response: "On the issue of volunteers, I will welcome any well-meaning, committed individuals who wish to help us. However, let me emphasize that we do not allow volunteers to usurp the authority of duly appointed officials."

Alidon also asked the Secretary to continue including union representatives in major management committees. To this, the Secretary replied, "We recognize the vital role of public sector unionism in the Departments policy-making, implementation, and monitoring, and will comply with what is legally required. We have yet to constitute the major committees, but of course we will include the union representatives in the decision-making process for any policies which impact on our employees' rights and welfare, including the management committee, the personnel selection board, and the performance review committee, among others."

The leadership of the employees' union and Luistro is scheduled to meet again in early September for the third round of consultation.

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