

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 4, 2009

## RP's attaché in Middle East to focus on education concerns

With growing number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the Middle East and the establishment of Philippine schools in the region, the country is set to deploy its first attaché to focus on educational needs of the Filipino families there.

"These schools follow the Philippine basic education curriculum and are regulated by Department of Education," explained Education Secretary Jesli Lapus. To date, there are some 43 Philippine schools in the Middle East of which 23 are located in Saudi Arabia. The attaché will assume office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2010.

Lapus added that the attaché will supervise and assist these schools. Recognition of the students' qualifications and the schools programs and eventual enrolment in higher education is a key thrust.

"This move is aligned to the presidential directive to give special attention to Filipino students abroad," he said.

Since June 2008, DepEd and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) have been in close coordination for a historic development in the country's educational landscape.

Dr. Estrella Babano who has served as DepEd Regional Director for Northern Mindanao (Region 10) for 11 years was selected for the new post. She is a proponent of several initiatives in education, especially in strengthening Muslim education and indigenous communities.

She was instrumental in the mainstreaming of Madrasah and integration of Arabic language and Islamic values education in the country's public schools with Muslim minorities. She actively promoted the implementation of peace education in the schools of the Northern Mindanao region as well.

Babano has a post graduate degree in educational administration. She has represented the country in GRP-MNLF Peace Talks in Jakarta, Indonesia. She also participated in numerous trainings and educational tours in Japan, Malaysia, Hongkong, Australia, Iraq, Washington D.C., New York, Hawaii, Brunei Darussalam, and Thailand.

Her tasks include identifying areas of educational cooperation between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East region. She will represent DepEd in international conferences and meetings in the region.

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