

## Persons with disabilities may now avail of free legal assistance

### **A September 28, 2012 press release from the Department of Social Welfare and Development**

In recognition of the need to assist persons with disabilities in their legal concerns, the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), an attached agency of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) established the Sub-Committee on Access to Justice and Anti-Discrimination for Persons with Disabilities.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) will chair the Sub-Committee on Access to Justice and Anti-Discrimination with members from NCDA, Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Public Attorney's Office (PAO), Philippine National Police (PNP), Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), and PWDs organizations.

The Sub-Committee was launched recently through the signing of a memorandum of agreement. During the launching, NCDA Acting Executive Director Carmen Reyes-Zubiaga turned-over to DOJ Assistant Chief Counsel Ruben F. Fondevilla a case monitoring report containing some 346 deaf cases documented by the Philippine Deaf Resource Center (PDRC) from 2006 to 2012.

After the launching, a consultation-dialogue was held with the newly-designated "PWD-Friendly Public Attorneys" from the DOJ-PAO together with different PWD organizations. The mechanics on how to respond to the legal issues and concerns of PWDs, including the availment of PAO legal assistance were discussed.

Social Welfare and Development Secretary Dinky Soliman said that with the creation of the Sub-Committee on Access to Justice and Anti-Discrimination and the introduction of the DOJ-PAO "PWD-Friendly Public Attorneys" the complaints and cases filed by PWDs will be speedily resolved.

The Philippines is one of the signatory-State Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in December 2006. Article XIII (Access to Justice) of the UN Convention emphasizes that State Parties are committed to take appropriate measures to ensure the rights of PWDs through the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodation, appropriate training for those working in the field of administration of justice, to facilitate the effective role of PWDs as direct and indirect participants in all legal proceedings, including investigative and other preliminary stages.

"We should always ensure that the dignity, human rights and freedom of all PWDs are respected, promoted and protected. PWDs have the same human rights as others, and must be able to enjoy them on an equal basis with non-PWDs," Secretary Soliman emphasized.

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