

INTERNATIONAL
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Philippines bars US activist from ASEAN summit amid tightened security

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MANILA, Philippines

Philippine airport authorities have barred an American labor activist from entering the country, saying he may cause trouble during a summit of Asian leaders next week, officials said Thursday.

Immigration Commissioner Alipio Fernandez said lawyer Brian Campbell arrived at Manila's airport via Hong Kong on Wednesday and was put on a flight back to the Chinese territory the same night.

"He was on the blacklist ... that is the directive of the Department of Justice," Fernandez said in a telephone interview.

Campbell is a member of the Washington-based International Labor Rights Fund, an activist group that had earlier joined protests against alleged human rights abuses and a string of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said his government has compiled a blacklist of 300 people from among names supplied by other countries ahead of the summit of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The three-day summit opens Monday in central Cebu province.

"This list came to us, I suppose because of the ASEAN, because every country wants to protect his own prime minister or president," Gonzalez said.

He said several countries have submitted lists of people to be blacklisted, including Singapore, the U.S. and European countries.

"We are a little bit more strict of people going to Cebu because we don't want the gathering there to be disrupted," he said.

Organizers of an "alternative forum" scheduled during the summit denounced the blacklisting of Campbell, who was to attend the Asia Pacific Research Network conference on jobs and justice in Cebu.

"We are deeply disappointed that the Philippine government, while supposedly promoting the vision of a caring and sharing community in the ASEAN, would deny a foreign delegate entry ... just because he is deemed to have views that are different from the agenda in the ASEAN summit," Theresa Lauron, APRN general secretary, said in a statement.

Britain and Australia have warned that terrorists may be in the final stages of planning attacks in the central Philippines during the summit.

Last month, Gonzalez said the government would crack down on protesters in Cebu, earning the ire of activists when he told the newspaper Philippine Daily Inquirer the government "will throw them into the Mactan Strait and let the sharks eat them there."

He later said he was using "a figure of speech."

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