

Breaking News / Regions

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view/20080414-130368/Cuyo-mayor-denies-Amanpulo-claim-in-death-of-worker>

Cuyo mayor denies Amanpulo claim in death of worker

By Redempto Anda
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PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Philippines -- The mayor of Cuyo town denied Monday he ordered the transfer of a dead worker's body to Metro Manila as claimed by the management of Amanpulo resort, which the police are now investigating for a suspected murder case coverup.

Cuyo Mayor Teodoro Villagracia told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that contrary to the statement issued by an official of Amanpulo resort, he did not order the body to be flown out of the island but instead advised the resort management to secure a health certificate from the Cuyo rural health officer before they could remove the body.

Police have filed a murder and obstruction of justice case against the resort's manager, Miguel Guedes de Sousa, and several other resort personnel for allegedly covering up the suspected murder of a construction worker, Rodolfo Abamo, last January 2 at the resort's workers barracks.

"It is not true that I was the one who ordered that the body be flown out of the island. They came to me and told me that someone died from natural causes and they wanted to bring the body to his relatives. I merely told them that they should first secure a death certificate from the rural health office," Villagracia said.

Narcisa Villaflor, treasurer of 7-Seas Resorts and Leisure Inc. that owns the resort facility, said in a statement sent to the Inquirer that Villagracia had advised them to move the body because it was already decomposing and the municipality of Cuyo did not have the facilities to conduct an examination.

"Taking the mayor's advice, Excell Construction officers contacted a funeral parlor in Marikina," Villaflor stated.

The Inquirer also learned that the in-house doctor of Amanpulo initially reported to police that a murder had taken place at the resort, but later recanted this.

In the same statement she issued last Saturday, Villaflor said Dr. Romcello Gumabon indeed reported to the Cuyo police that there were indications that Abamo might have been murdered.

Cuyo police chief Necerato Sabando Jr. had said there was no indication Abamo was murdered based on the initial report they received from Gumabon and later when they interviewed some staff members of the resort.

Abamo's body was flown to Metro Manila the day after the death was reported to the Cuyo police.

Villaflor explained that they had to fly the body to Metro Manila because it was already in an advanced state of decomposition when found.

She claimed that the insinuation of foul play was the handiwork of disgruntled former Amanpulo employees "who were dismissed after being found falsifying invoices and vouchers in the Amanpulo Resort."

In a separate statement, the private contractor engaged by Amanpulo Resort that hired Abamo branded the filing of murder and obstruction of justice charges as an attempt to blackmail.

"We suspect that some individuals are trying to take advantage of this situation, knowing that the incident happened in an exclusive island resort, and using the family of Mr. Abamo to advance their personal interests," Melquiades Castillo, president of Excell Contractors and Developers, said in a statement.

Castillo called the filing of the case by the PNP Mimaropa Regional Office "highly irresponsible and primarily based on unconfirmed, unverified and reckless allegations."

Castillo dismissed the police conclusion that the resort and their company had tried to cover up a crime when they transferred Abamo's body by private plane to Metro Manila where it was autopsied at the Eastern Police District Crime Laboratory.

He added that the Cuyo police could not come to the island immediately after the incident because of rough waters during that time.

Sabando earlier said he had requested the officials of Amanpulo to fetch scene of the crime operatives by plane since traveling to the island by boat was not feasible.

Located in Pamalican Island off Cuyo group of islands in Palawan, 360 kilometers south of Manila, Amanpulo is considered as one of the country's most expensive and exclusive island resorts.

[^ Back to top](#)

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