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15 blacklisted for abusing Filipinos

By JOHN TANG

AT least 15 employers of Filipino domestic helpers have been blacklisted by the Philippines Consulate for having physically or sexually abused their maids in the past three years.

The employers have effectively been barred from hiring other Filipino workers, according to the consulate's new labour attache, Mr Arturo De Lira.

He said yesterday the employers were put on the list only after they were given the opportunity to refute the allegations before consulate officials.

The list, known only to himself and senior consular officials, was useful in pinning down physical and sexual abusers and preventing Filipino maids from being abused, he added.

"Since it came into exist-

tence three years ago, it has been definitely helpful. Without it we cannot exercise a certain control," he said.

He declined to reveal the identity of the employers or their backgrounds.

Mr De Lira said each application for Filipino helpers was cross-checked against the blacklist.

So far, none of the blacklisted employers had sought further contracts with Filipino domestic helpers again.

Since he took office in February, Mr De Lira said there had been two cases of sexual abuse reported to the consulate. However, neither has led to prosecution because of a lack of evidence.

He said there were a number of minor physical abuse reports, including an employer throwing a vase at a maid and one incident of a maid being bitten by an employer's child.

The bulk of complaints involved unreasonable termination of contracts, which averaged about 150 cases per month.

Sharing his view, Eliseo Tellez, a spokesman for the concern group, the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, said nine sexual abuse complaints and 39 physical abuse complaints were reported to him last year.

Mr Tellez said it was difficult to prove abuse as most cases occurred without witnesses.

He said the strict conditions of service, which require all domestic helpers to leave Hongkong within two weeks of termination of employment, had deterred many victims from reporting abuses.

But Betty Yung Ma Shan-ye, chairman of the 300-strong Hongkong Employers of Overseas Domestic Helpers Association, said

the relationship between employers and domestics helpers had been very good in general.

"It would be much fairer to the 40,000 employers if we also take into consideration the plight of the employers. A large number of maids were illegally changing jobs, or hopping from one job to another," said Mrs Yung.

She said the employers' organisation received about one complaint concerning the work of Filipino maids per month.

Meanwhile, legislator Elsie Tu will ask the authorities to confirm the number of employers blacklisted by the Government.

She will also ask how many Filipino domestic helpers have in the last three years expressed fears of reporting physical or sexual abuse because of unfairness resulting from the new conditions of service.