

**“GANITO TAYO NGAYON, PAANO TAYO BUKAS? PROSPECTS OF FILIPINO LABOR MIGRATION AND PHILIPPINE DEVELOPMENT”**

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## Forum Objectives

1. To promote a healthy exchange of ideas between the government, the advocates and civil society, and the migrant sector on the prospects and perspectives of Filipino labor migration and the country's overall development agenda
2. To identify and recommend policies, practices, and attitudes on labor migration that will put premium on the protection and well-being of OFWs and their families
3. To evoke ideas and proposals for the country's development agenda that will provide more viable alternatives to labor migration

## Welcome Remarks



*Mirko Herberg*  
FES Resident Representative

Good Morning to everyone! Dear friends and guests. Undersecretary Esteban Conejos, Noriel Devanadera, Michelle Bolos, Aster Suigitan. I am very happy to be here. This is the first time I'm here at an AJG forum. I have been appointed Resident Representative of FES only this January. So I'm relatively new to the country. And I am very happy to be able to continue the work of my predecessor who has been engaged in this work with the migrant labor sector.

FES, as a German political foundation that has its roots in the German labor movement, promotes participatory democracy, social justice, and international understanding through its eighty offices worldwide.



These goals that we have link very much with the issues of migration. Because if we talk about participatory democracy, then the link with the migrants is very clearly established when we talk about the voting rights of absentee voters, when we talk about legislating the framework for OFW deployment for their protection abroad.

And also we talk about the local government's involvement in pre-departure and re-integration. In terms of social justice, there's a link clearly established to provide a fair share for the migrant workers, which needs to include their protection. And also speaking about local justice involves looking at the reasons why there is such a big-scale migration and what are its effects on social development.

From an international understanding perspective, it's very clear that migrants play a role in their host countries. We all know that, unfortunately, there are still existing conditions of discrimination and xenophobia in host countries. Also there's an issue of international understanding providing for venues of dialogue between host-country societies and migrant workers.

So there are many reasons why the issue of migrant labor fits within the work and spectrum of Friedrich Evert.

Again, we welcome you to this forum. Thank you.

## Background Presentation – Highlights of CMA's 2005 Migrant Rights Report



Philippine Migrant Situation 2005

**Rhodora A. Abano**  
Center for Migrant Advocacy

*“Today, one out of every ten Filipinos is overseas, mostly migrant workers, including the undocumented. One out of every ten Filipinos is dependent in some way on the earnings of a migrant worker relative or kin. And nearly every Filipino has been touched or affected by the fact that the Philippines is a global nation.”*

Foreign Affairs Secretary Romulo



As of December 2004, eight million Filipinos or 10% of the population were abroad. The 3.1 million are permanent residents, mostly in the USA, and in Canada, Australia, Japan, UK and Germany.

The 3.6 million OFWs consist of almost a million in Saudi Arabia and almost half a million more in the rest of West Asia, particularly the Gulf States. Half a million also work in Europe and almost 300,000 in Japan. At least 1.3 million more Filipinos abroad, concentrated in the USA and Malaysia, particularly Sabah, are TnTs (*tago nang tago*) – undocumented or irregular.

### STOCK ESTIMATES<sup>i</sup>

TOTAL	PERMANENT	OFW	UNDOCUMENTED
US 2,700,000	2,300,000	101,249	350,000
WA 1,500,000		1,400,000	112,750
KSA 994,337		976,134	18,000
Asia 1,500,000	91,901	1,000,000	443,343
Malaysia 352,253		52,337	300,000
Japan 353,253	83,303	238,522	31,425
Europe 824,419	174,378	506,997	143,035
Italy 138,461		85,527	48,000
UK 116,322	52,500	56,341	7,481
8M	3.1M	3.6M	1.3M

DOLE and POEA nearly met their one million target overseas jobs. POEA reported deploying 5.15% more OFWs in 2005 or a total of 981,667, processing an average 2,711 contracts

per day, with contracts reaching 1.1 million.<sup>ii</sup> Deployed landbased OFWs went up 4.17% to 733,970 while the seabased shot up by 8.17% to 247,707. OFWs continue to flood Saudi Arabia as well as the Gulf states of UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. More Filipino women went to Hong Kong and Singapore, mainly as domestic workers, and to Japan as entertainers, although deployment to Japan went down by 42% with the implementation of its stricter immigration policy.<sup>iii</sup>

### TOP TEN DESTINATIONS<sup>iv</sup>

	2003		2004		2005
1. Saudi Arabia	169,011		18,8107		193,991
2. Hong Kong	84,633		87,254		94,553
3. Japan	62,539		74,480	UAE	81,707 (19% up)
4. UAE	49,164		68,386	Taiwan	46,714
5. Taiwan	45,186		45,059	Japan	42,586 (down 42%)
6. Kuwait	24,737		36,591		40,248
7. Singapore	24,737	Italy	23,329	Qatar	31,418 (47% up)
8. Qatar	14,344	Singapore	22,198	Singapore	27,599 (24% up)
9. UK	13,598	Qatar	21,360	Italy	21,261
10. Italy	12,175	UK	18,347		16,799
11. Brunei	9,829		10,313	Lebanon	14,936 (up 91%)

### 1999-2005 OFW Remittances

Remittances from overseas work help migrant families, even extended families, survive the Philippine crisis or even improve their lives. Most of the 6% families who receive remittances could afford better food; send their children to better schools or buy education plans; build, buy or improve their houses; seek better health care, even private hospitalization, or buy health insurance; enjoy rest and recreation and even



conspicuous spending that were undreamed of luxuries in the past.

At the community level, they donate CGMA classrooms (Classroom Galing sa Manggagawa sa Abroad), like the 10 in Northern Mindanao and 2 in Marawi City<sup>v</sup> and houses for the poor. They send scholars to schools and donate to their alma maters. Health professionals participate in medical missions. They raised funds for victims of the landslides in Quezon and in Leyte. They support community activities and help finance socio-economic projects.

At the macro level, their US\$10.7 billion remittances made up 10.5% of the gross national product (GNP). Secretary Bunye said it kept our economy afloat. Their purchasing power translates into greater domestic demand for products and services and stimulates domestic production. As DOLE Sec. Sto. Tomas said, these remittances generate a consumer-led economic growth amidst recession and high unemployment. GMA said it buoys the peso.

Remittances saw us through typhoons, floods and landslides, oil price hikes, insurgencies as well as the “Hello Garci” issue and coup attempts. Its impact is said to be more significant last year, when the economy felt the fallout from the political crisis faced by the government.

Once again, overseas migration relieved unemployment, underemployment and contractualization. They left vacancies for those looking for jobs, like the 385,000 graduates last year and those who will graduate this year. But those who leave are also the experienced ones, those in responsible positions who are difficult to replace. They are the experienced nurses, doctors-turned-nurses, experienced teachers, veteran aviation engineers and pilots.

## **Philippine migration, a woman’s face**

Philippine labor migration truly has a woman’s face. Since the 70s when women made up only 12% of OFWs, they grew so fast that by the 1990s, they have overtaken the men. By 2000, they made up 64% of all deployments. In 2005, women already accounted for 74% of deployments.<sup>vi</sup>

Comparing the deployment trends of the first semesters of 2004 and 2005 with the top ten destinations confirms this. The service sector recovered from 2004, with growth from domestic workers, about half of total OFWs by end-2005<sup>vii</sup> and caregivers to Hong Kong, the Gulf States, as well as Italy and the UK. Caregivers mainly went to Israel, Canada and the UK.

Deployment from the professional/technical sector in the first semester of 2005 were again mostly women. They consisted mainly of OPAS or entertainers for Japan, 99% women, and nurses who continued to flock to Saudi Arabia and the UK. A significant number of Filipina OFWs joined production work in Taiwan.

But they remit much less, accounting for only 57% of what the men remit. This suggests that women migrants are in the 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) such as domestic work and caregiving, which are shunned by the nationals of receiving countries. With cheaper salaries and lesser benefits, most of these jobs are not covered by labor and/or social laws and unregulated by the host government. Again, unskilled or low-skilled and low-paid jobs are taken by women.

Nevertheless, Filipinas continue to grab at the chance to make their own money, provide for their family and make decisions. They have witnessed other Filipina OFWs who are respected or recognized. Many want to see the world or take a break from oppressive or abusive relationships. Some want to live on their own, apart from their husbands, children and clan.



## The Difficult Side

But migrants and their families pay the costs of long-term separation of couples and of parents and children. While they sacrifice much to keep their families together, one out of four migrant families is “crippled” when one or both parents migrate for work. CBCP-ECMI found out that 39% of families whose fathers work abroad leave their children vulnerable to harmful external influences. This soars to 62% if mothers are the ones who leave, and up to 89% if both parents are abroad.<sup>viii</sup>

### OFW Families in crisis

At the level of couples, we continue to hear of dwindling communications, of unfaithfulness on either or both sides, double families, neglect of families, separation, as well as crimes of passion. In 2004, 2,588 families sought the assistance of the DFA and OWWA to verify the whereabouts of missing OFWs or those who have stopped communicating. 2,674 more complained that their remittance was delayed or that they did not receive any.<sup>ix</sup>

Couples and parents become strangers and their children become orphans – emotional orphans. The balikbayan box, the latest cellphone, toys, computer or DVD player, designer clothes could not replace a parent. On the other hand, there are also developing attitudes like “*bilmoko*” or “buy me this, buy me that” among spouses or kids, reducing relationships around remittances.

### Situation of our modern-day heroes

By end of December 2005, the Department of Foreign Affairs reported that the 4,775 overseas Filipinos in jails worldwide in 2004, of whom more than a thousand were women,<sup>x</sup> went down to 2,177.<sup>xi</sup> Only 12 of our 82 diplomatic posts abroad reported not having aided a detained Filipino in 2004.

Filipinos in detention centers, under house arrest or with pending cases in court Dec. 2004 (Top Countries)

Country	Female	Male	Total
Malaysia (mostly Sabah)			1,200 (1,003 undocumented in 2005)
Israel			1,028*
Japan	157	157	314**
Saudi Arabia	72	141	213
Singapore	116	6	122***
Hong Kong	77	41	118
Kuwait	47	8	55
	469*	353	2,755

\*we can assume the bulk would be female, OFWs going to Israel being 98% women

\*\*excludes those undergoing investigation or awaiting deportation – average 112/mo

\*\*\*only 44 remained in prison by Dec. 2004

Four were beheaded in March 2005, in addition to the four beheaded in Saudi Arabia in 2004; 32 more still have pending cases or undergoing trial or sentenced to death, 10 were saved from death penalty in 2005.<sup>xii</sup>

Considering that 98% of OFWs to Israel are women, most of those detained in the above-listed countries were women.<sup>xiii</sup>

### Common Problems

Problems continue to besiege many Filipino migrants, particularly the undocumented, from pre-employment to on-site. The DFA reported that its Assistance to Nationals Funds covered 1,836 overseas Filipinos and its Legal Assistance Funds, 206 as of end of 2005. It also reported to Congress that 5,883 OFWs sought help from diplomatic posts in 2004.

POEA reported that the number of recruitment agencies suspended in 2005 due to recruitment violations increased to 235



from 230 in 2004, while DFA reported that 7 illegal recruiters were charged, tried and found guilty<sup>xiv</sup>, a minuscule number given that in 2004, POEA and OWWA reported assisting almost 5,000 illegally-recruited workers, with many more who did not report their cases. Complaints related to illegal recruitment and recruitment violations include exorbitant recruitment fees.

#### Problems encountered by OFWs (mostly DWs) in 2004

	KUWAIT	UAE	SINGAPORE	SAUDI	MALAYSIA
-runaways	2,122	797	448	605	73
-deportation/repatriation	1,043	402	492	2,185	5,895
-detention	55	83	122	213	1,200
-no rest day/lack rest/overwork	302				
-verbal abuse	239				
-inhuman treatment	165				
-locked up					
-lack of food	159				
-no medical assistance	1				
-physical maltreatment/abuse	116				
-unpaid/delayed salaries					
-illegal/iqama deductions	89				
-no rest day/lack of rest	72				
-finished contract/no ticket					
-no end of service benefits	12				
-misunderstanding with employer	10				
-passport confiscated					
-unfit to work	9				
-visa problems	9				
-poor sleeping quarters/housing	8				
-contract substitution/invalid contract	2				
-accused of stealing					
-marital/family problems/homesickness	3				
-exorbitant placement fees					
-loam problems					
-Shari'ah violations					

-physical/mental illness	8				
-sexual harassment	7				
-rape/white slavery	7				
-others	115				

\*Based on records of 1,248 runaways in Dubai Feb-Nov 2004<sup>xv</sup>

Upon arrival in the host country, some have their contracts replaced by spurious ones. OUMWA reported 508 contract violations in 2004. <sup>xvi</sup> Passports are confiscated. Some are illegally terminated -- some just a few days into a contract, some within two days. If they are sent home, they would never be able to recover the money they spent to get there in the first place – the recruitment fee and the escort fee, usually borrowed from loan sharks or produced from pawned houses or property.

During their work abroad, contracts are often violated, wages and benefits lowered - no more free vacation leave and end-of-service provisions like a free ticket home. Employers would renege on the promised work permit or health or social insurance, resulting in an irregular status for the worker.

Many OFWs suffer from overwork, often without overtime pay, or they are loaned to work for more than one employer, without corresponding remuneration. There is no rest day or they could not rest enough, especially live-in domestic workers and caregivers who are on call anytime of the day or night.

For many, they not only suffer inhumane living conditions, e.g. insufficient sleeping quarters, lack of food, left-over or even stale food as well as the prohibitive culture, especially in the Gulf states. Worse, their wages are delayed or not given at all. OUMWA reported that 1,618 OFWs complained of unpaid salaries in 2004 and 58 of other work-related problems. <sup>xvii</sup>

#### Labor and recruitment violations

For many domestic workers and caregivers, especially the live-ins, they have to suffer regular verbal, physical and



emotional abuse. Former Ambassador Roy Seneres said in June 2005 that eight in twelve OFWs are abused. In 2004, the DFA processed at least 129 complaints of physical and/or verbal abuse.

POEA reported end of 2005 that its Adjudication Office reduced by 35% its docketed cases through voluntary conciliation of 1,549 cases. Settlement rate for voluntary conciliation went up 55%, affecting 1,304 complainants. Total fines collected from erring agencies through voluntary compliance rose to 11 million pesos. On the other hand, dispute settlement by compulsory arbitration shot up 63%, covering at least 2,147 cases, with the Office disposing of a total of more than 5,000 cases in 2005.

### **Gender-based violence**

Migrant women also confront perennial threats or actual sexual harassment and even rape. DFA and OWWA reported almost a hundred raped or sexually abused in 2004. Kanlungan reported five more. These came on top of loneliness, homesickness, and worry over the children and husband, parents or siblings they left behind. Seneres wrote that most of those who complain of sexual abuse beg posts “not to tell anyone about their ordeal...Married women did not want their husbands to know of their traumatic experience in fear of rejection. The unmarried ones did not want their parents to know, fearing it could hasten their parents’ journey to the grave.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Health problems**

They would go through all of these to the extent that their suffering manifests in their health. OWWA and OUMWA reported almost a thousand OFWs suffering from various illnesses, including mental problems. Former Ambassador to UAE Seneres said that almost all their runaways suffered from depression due to homesickness.<sup>xix</sup> In 2004, OWWA reported assisting 29 mentally ill patients while their Airport Assistance

Program reported assisting 124 more. DFA did not qualify their reported 319 illnesses if these were physical or mental.<sup>xx</sup>

### **Runaways**

When OFWs could no longer bear it, they are forced to either run away or take more drastic steps like murder or suicide, often under mysterious circumstances. DFA reported that 2,122 domestic workers ran away from employers in Kuwait alone, almost 800 in UAE, 600 plus in Saudi and 448 in Singapore in 2004.<sup>xxi</sup> In 2005, the post in Dubai reported that five domestic workers ran away to the embassy everyday. There were more than 60 runaways as of August, with 25 sleeping in one room, waiting for back wages and tickets to go home.<sup>xxii</sup>

In some countries, domestic workers forced to run away from abuses are charged with absconding that are automatically reported to the immigration police and results in cancelled visas and hold orders. Absconding is also usually coupled with trumped up charges like stealing.

Meanwhile, the murder of a Filipina domestic worker by another Filipina domestic worker in Singapore hit the international media owing to its similarity to the Flor Contemplacion case. It was touching that upon arrest, the accused was more concerned with her sick child in the Philippines.

Indeed, even violence against OFWs has a woman’s face. When one is a migrant worker, a woman and undocumented, one is ever more vulnerable to all sorts of abuses.

### **Repatriation and deportation**

DFA reported that 1,056 OFWs were repatriated or deported in 2005, much less than the 12,613, a quarter women, by end 2004.<sup>xxiii</sup> It added that from 2002 to November 2005, it





repatriated and assisted a total of 315 victims of trafficking, 70 for 2005 alone.

Host country	Number of OFWs repatriated/deported		
	Female	Male	Total
Malaysia			5895
Saudi Arabia	1159	926	2185
Japan	1075		
Kuwait	1043	1043	
Israel			999*
Singapore	383	9	492
UAE	402		
Qatar	94	68	162
Iraq	158		
Beirut	149	2	151

\*can be assumed to be women

On the other hand, the extent of repatriation and deportation confirms their vulnerability, and the risks migrant workers, especially women, children and the undocumented, face. In April 2006, the post in Malaysia was reported to still be working on the repatriation of 1,173 Filipinos held at one detention center. Among them are 151 boys and 90 girls.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **Gulf War victims' claims paid after 14 years**

Fourteen years after the War, the DFA Secretariat paid 247 more claimants a total of US\$033,848.39.

### **Top Ten Destinations for Newly Hired Land-Based Women<sup>xxv</sup>**

Despite these problems and difficulties, our women still go in droves to high risk countries. The top ten destinations the past few years include Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Singapore. Lebanon is poised to join the top ten destination countries, already in 11<sup>th</sup> place. Deployment to Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait, UAE and KSA were 99.9%, 98%, 89%, 32% and 26% women respectively.<sup>xxvi</sup> These countries' established record as

top migrant rights' violators do not deter the influx of OFWs, especially women.

Why is this? The top ten country destinations and the top countries in terms of remittances show why. OFWs go where the jobs are. While Saudi Arabia continued to be the second top source of remittances, Singapore, UAE and Kuwait hugged the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> places in 2005.

The DOLE and POEA look forward to sending more OFWs to these countries, going by their market projections. Sto.Tomas said that various marketing strategies will be pursued by the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOS) in the Middle East to ensure OFW access to the new 258,950 job opportunities projected to be generated in the region starting 2006 until 2008. Almost 200,000 of these jobs will be generated by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman and in the non-GCC countries of Lebanon, Israel, Libya and Jordan.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **HIV/AIDS**

OFWs are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In this case, their partners and children could also be vulnerable to the virus. The Philippine National AIDS Council estimates there could be 3-4 more cases for every case documented because of the victim's refusal to come out in the open, fearful of the stigma and discrimination HIV/AIDS entails.<sup>xxviii</sup>

749 or almost one-third of the 2,260 Filipinos afflicted with HIV as of April 2005 were OFWs: 268 or 36% were seafarers; 126 were domestic workers; 69 were employees; 52 were health workers; and 50 were entertainers.

### **A 'temporary' solution turned permanent**

Labor export, a "temporary" solution when Marcos started it in 1974 has turned permanent. While President Arroyo campaigned in 2004 that "We regard the stream of Filipinos



going into overseas employment as a temporary phenomenon that needs to be effectively managed...” POEA Administrator Rosalinda Baldoz said in 2005 that “The exodus of Filipino workers will continue. It has ceased to be a temporary stop-gap measure. It has become a permanent fixture of Philippine labor, economic and foreign policy...”

### **Push Factors**

It is not surprising because the government has not, or would not, address the factors that push Filipino workers to opt out. An average of 50 workers daily or some 4,569 were retrenched in the first months of 2005, 67.9% higher than the 2,721 laid off in the same period the previous year (DOLE). They included 1,232 returnees from abroad who sought assistance from the Public Employment Office.<sup>xxix</sup> Unemployment stood at 8.1% as of January 2006, with 2.8 million not able to find a job. It was 7.4% in October 2005. This number could have been a million more if the 981,667 OFWs did not get deployed. The 21.2% or 6.9 million underemployed have to be counted in as well.

### **Jobless growth**

The economy grew but not the jobs – a jobless growth. More than a million new workers joined the labor force in 2005 but only 750,000 new jobs were created, more than half of which (389,000) came in the form of unpaid work for the family, mostly in agriculture (Cielito Habito) and 263,000, self-employment. That is, 87% of those who did land jobs worked for themselves or their families. In addition, only a mere 13% of these new job openings came with regular wages or salaries. Thus, if only about half of existing jobs are held by salaried employees and wage earners and if only 13% is the best that the “strong” economy can generate, more workers will work just to eat or who will add to the huge army of the unemployed. Another forced option just like overseas migration and not because they are “pilihan” or choosy as Sec. Favila claimed.<sup>xxx</sup>

One out of every six Filipinos experienced hunger in 2005, or 17% of the population, higher than the 12% recorded in 2004. Successive fuel price hikes also hit the economy, up by 30% from end-2004 levels. Inflation was at 7.7%, more than double the 2002 levels. Average prices more than doubled from the 2001 level. About 33% of the population want to go abroad.

It is no wonder why the 4,000 OFWs in Iraq at the time of the hostaging of Angelo de la Cruz in 2003 has gone up to 5,000-7,000 by 2005 despite the ban on deployment there. OFWs prefer to risk life and limb than face poverty, hunger and hopelessness in the country. And Filipinas, numbed by poverty, turn blind eyes to physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuses that await them in the jobs they seek, especially in the Gulf states.

### **Pull factors**

On the other hand, while the pull factors are still there, there are also unfavorable developments like tightening of immigration controls and greater competition between more foreign migrants scrambling for overseas jobs that push wages down. Indeed, globalization fuels mass migration. As ILO Director General Juan Somavia said, “The present form of globalization has not produced enough jobs for all those who need them or in the places where they are most needed.”

### **Options for the poor**

So what options are left for the poor and even the non-poor? Again, even the middle class are voting with their feet. The Philippines could be suffering not only from hemorrhage of doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers and pilots. It could be a case of hemophilia.

Spokesman Bunye assured the OFWs that “The present administration has a blueprint for making the country a first world in 20 years, backed up by the Filipino as the most



powerful economic resource, both in the local and international arenas.” It seems it is getting too late for the Philippines.

### **Responses of OFWs**

Despite these disheartening developments, OFWs continue to organize. In Hong Kong, they have started to unionize themselves. They engaged the host government in their struggle to regain what wage increase they had won, which they lost again twice the past few years, and to scrap the levy and the two-week rule.

They also joined those in Saudi Arabia and advocates in the Philippines in lobbying Congress to amend the deregulatory sections of RA 8042 and to reform the OWWA. They marched, picketed, dialogued with governments at the national and regional levels and lobbied with the UN and ILO. In Hong Kong, they use theater advocacy and concerts to lobby their interests. OFWs also maximize the multi-media, publish their newsletters and newspapers and broadcast in their own radio programs or i-pod casts.

As organized forces or individually, they continue to assist each other. KASAPI-Hellas in Greece continues to serve its members and other OFWs ever more responsively than the embassy. Its Munting Nayon Community School continues to provide the children of Filipino domestic workers as well as of other migrant communities responsive and cheaper day care and elementary education. DIWATA-Greece continues to be a cooperative effort to help each other out financially when they are in need.

In Saudi Arabia, the Pusong-Mamon Task Force and other OFW organizations in Riyadh rescue and assist domestic workers in distress more readily than the embassy. The V-team, also in Riyadh, developed a SMS SOS helpline and, together with CMA, now provides a virtual “*salbabida*” for distressed Filipinos to hold on to, just a text away.



Unlad-Kabayan, Atikha and Kanlungan use similar and different approaches to provide reintegration options and other psycho-social assistance to OFWs, active or returned.

In the US, Europe and elsewhere, OFWs contribute to poverty amelioration projects as well as actively participate in the issues that confront the country including the debate on the legitimacy of the current President, the TALSİK campaign against graft and corruption, etc. These are only a few of the OFW organizations and NGOs organizing and/or rendering various services to OFWs, their families and communities as well as the country as a whole.

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- <sup>i</sup> OFW Global Presence A Compendium of Overseas Employment Statistics. POEA. 2005
- <sup>ii</sup> POEA 2006
- <sup>iii</sup> POEA website
- <sup>iv</sup> POEA website
- <sup>v</sup> OFWs erect 16 GMA classrooms in Normin. Rutchie Cabahug-Aguhob. January 19, 2006  
<http://www.pia.gov.ph/news.asp?fi=p060119.htm&no=49>
- <sup>vi</sup> Kanlungan.Fast Facts on Filipino Labor Migration 2004
- <sup>vii</sup> Roy Seneres, PDI, April 9, 2006
- <sup>viii</sup> William B. Depasupil. Church urges govt to address OFW problems. Manila Times Mar 4 2006
- <sup>ix</sup> Kanlungan 2004
- <sup>x</sup> Philip C. Tubeza. Heroes in distress 4,775 OFWs in jail. PDI Nov 29, 2005
- <sup>xi</sup> DFA. 2005 Highlights of the DFA's work in assisting overseas Filipinos and protecting their rights, safety and welfare. Jan 2006
- <sup>xii</sup> DFA Jan 2006
- <sup>xiii</sup> Kanlungan 2004
- <sup>xiv</sup> DFA Jan 2006
- <sup>xv</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xvi</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xvii</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xviii</sup> Seneres. PDI April 9 2006
- <sup>xix</sup> Seneres. PDI April 9 2006
- <sup>xx</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xxi</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xxii</sup> AP. RP Consulate filled with abused maids. PDI Aug 19, 2005

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- <sup>xxiii</sup> DFA 2005
- <sup>xxiv</sup> AP/Volt Contreras. PDI April 11,2006
- <sup>xxv</sup> Kanlungan 2004
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Kanlungan 2004
- <sup>xxvii</sup> PIA, Dec. 1, 2005
- <sup>xxviii</sup> AIDS
- <sup>xxix</sup> Joblessness awaits Batch 2005. C.M. Ramota. Bulatlat Vol. V. No. 7. March 20-26, 2005
- <sup>xxx</sup> Editorial. PDI April 1, 2006



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## Panel Presentation

### Migrant Representatives



#### *Aster Suguitan*

Asian Domestic Workers' Union (ADWU)/  
Filipino Domestic Helpers' General Union-Alliance of  
Progressive Labor (FDHGU-APL), Hong Kong

I would like to share to you some of my experiences in Hong Kong during my stay there. I have been an active member of ADU (Asian Domestic Union), which deal with different problems of migrant helpers.

I have encountered problems, especially among women concerning their families and employers. Employers usually abuse their workers, like sexual harassment. What we do is we get them from their employer at the middle of the night when we get reports of harassment. The employer cannot do anything

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because if we go to their house, we can call the police who can assist us in getting the employee.

Another problem is the working condition of domestic workers. Some domestic workers have to work from 5:30 a.m. until 11 p.m., sometimes until 1 a.m. of the next day. Sometimes employers do not follow the one-day-off rule or its equivalent of 14-days annual leave.

So we assist workers in filing complaints in the labor office. We have successfully called for wage increases in 1993. That year Hong Kong had a minimum wage of HK\$3,200. We were able to raise it to HK\$3,500; from HK\$3,500 to HK\$3,750 in 1994; and from HK\$3,750 to HK\$3,860 in 1995.

So in 1999, after the handover of Hong Kong to China, the government wanted to cut the minimum wage of domestic helpers. The government proposed a 25% decrease, so we protested again. We successfully lowered the cut to only 5%.

In 2000 the government imposed a levy from the domestic helpers, and we had a decrease of HK\$400. That was a very large decrease from our salary. In 2005 the government gave an increase of HK\$50. Since it was not enough, we asked them to bring back our salaries to HK\$3,670.

Another issue is the two-week rule. You have to get back to your country of origin within 14 days after termination. And your stay cannot be extended. We are against this because we cannot find an employer within 14 days. We have been fighting this issue since 1989.

We also proposed to the government that the levy it gets from employers be used for the benefit of foreign domestic workers and not only for retraining local workers. The coalition is also studying this proposal.



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In June 2005 the Hong Kong labor department increased the wages by HK\$50. This was not enough because they already take HK\$600 from our salaries.

Sometimes we are paying HK\$10,000 for one contract, so we are also asking the government to look on this matter. As I have said the working condition is another problem for domestic helpers. Some DHs do not eat enough and their employers refuse to give them extra food. Some are just given leftovers.

The sleeping condition is also another problem. Some DHs are made to sleep in the kitchen where it is very cold. We also experience physical harassment and verbal abuse.

We suffer discrimination in our jobs. Our employer says we go to Hong Kong because we don't have enough food in our country. It is very discriminating and we have been fighting for better treatment. We are going to the government to ask that we be transferred to another employer who will not violate our rights.

The Hong Kong government now has a policy that you cannot process your papers in Hong Kong if you are terminated. You can only do this if you finish your contract.

Also we would like to tell the government to remove the e-card. The first time a migrant worker leaves for abroad, she is issued an OWWA ID, which is supposed to be for life. Now the government changed its policy, it is now only per contract, meaning after every two years.

In applying for an e-card we have to pay HK\$200. So we are also against it. The NGO that is helping us in Hong Kong is the AMC. The HK-CTU and the APL are also with us. We are already forming a coalition.

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I also recommend that the government look for these agencies who are asking excessive fees. Some workers have to pay more than P80,000. Some agencies extend loans, which employees must pay back monthly. Also in Hong Kong they are very good at terminating employees even though the workers are doing great work. These workers find it hard to complain without the help of NGOs.





***Michelle Bolos***

Daughter of a retired OFW from Saudi Arabia

I am proud to say that I am a daughter of an OFW, a former OFW rather. Myfather, Mike Bolos, left the country in the late 70's to work in Saudi Arabia and retired in June 2005, after a quarter of a century. I was turning five years old then, My sibling, Madel, who is a year younger than I am, brought dad to the airport one day and did not realize that Daddy would be coming home later than we thought.

Twenty-five years is a lot of time being apart. Easy to say in figures but that is almost my whole life as of the time being. Technically, I can say I grew up with a father for only 25 months... that's his yearly vacation from work. It was a roller coaster of emotions for a month. I remember Madel would hide from him and would not want to come near him and will cry her might if he ever gets any closer. And just when we get adjusted to his presence at home that's when he needs to go again.

Whenever asked how it was like growing up with my father not being around, Madel and I would simply put it this

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way: we know how to do a little carpentry and plumbing job; we can fix our car's flat tire or change the busted lights at home. Most people would laugh at this anecdote of ours but it's true. My dad not being around most of the time made us learn to do a lot of things on our own especially the main tasks.

The growing up years without dad was partly difficult and partly easy.

It was difficult in the sense that we both missed 25 years of witnessing each other's life. He didn't get to see a wound in my knee at play, the medal at school, those sick nights, a blush on my face when I see my crush, the tears of painful disappointments, the promotion at the job and a lot more. He wasn't able to witness me and my sister grow up as women. As for me, I did not witness the same amount of joys and pains he had in all those years in the far away land – the price we all have to pay. Physical absence is something you can get used to but not the longing for a father and daughter relationship. And, now that my father has retired, we have a lot of catching up to do.

I can never complain a day in my life because it has been good although painful and sad. I have experienced life in its different facets. Before my dad left for abroad, I can say that we get by but it got better afterwards. My dad is a hardworking man; he provided us well and made us experience so much of the good things in life that one may say, there is nothing more to ask for. He secured a future for all of us and never wasted the sacrifice we all made. The material blessing made it easy to cope up with the situation but these never substituted for the long years of separation.

There were lessons in the 25 years of my father being an OFW. It has taught me to become a mature, independent, strong and wise person. I've learned the value of working hard because there was so much entailed just to be where I am now. I've grown in character and came out strong and independent amidst



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trials. I became wiser and mature in disposition. I learned to appreciate the blessings that my father brought to our family.

The best lesson my Dad made us realize when he retired was that our outlook and lifestyle should not change just because there is so much material blessings. Working abroad is not forever and while one of our family member is out there, we should learn to value the sacrifice and secure a future for them too when they retire. We may not contribute financially but just remaining to live a simple life today will be of value tomorrow especially these days that our country's economy is uncertain.

Difficult times force our people to migrate either temporarily or permanently to seek greener pastures. Labor migration brings more separation among families. It also affects our local labor force because some of our best workers leave the country. Some of our fellow Filipinos make it out there and still some suffer unfortunate events.

What will happen to our society if more individuals grow up in the absence of a mother and father? Money is not a substitute family.

What will happen to our country when all the best brains leave to serve other people and countries instead of ours?

What happens to each labor migrant that did not make it good like the others and are sometimes abused if not killed by their employers?

I hope for the day that labor migration will stop but I know that this is like shooting for the moon because of our present economic situation. Let us not drive our people away and deliver them in the wrong hands. If labor migration cannot be avoided then there should be better laws to protect the rights of the migrants and better representation and working agreements with the host country.

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We, the people and government should work hand in hand to create more jobs here in the Philippines so they do not have to migrate and leave their family. We should set up better opportunities, livelihood and entrepreneurship programs where they can invest their hard-earned money and have better use for it while they are working abroad and so that they can have something to look forward to when they retire. Let us encourage and support OFW organizations that can lend a hand to fellow migrants.

The Philippines is one of the best countries in the world to live in. It is rich in culture and history; it has the most picturesque places and the best and hard working people. I believe that it is still a paradise for each Filipino only if we work together, set aside differences, think and act more for this country.







***Edna M. Dalinoc***\*

Former OFW, married to an OFW based in Saudi Arabia

My husband has been in Saudi Arabia for seven years, working for Sauditel Company. My children and I have been finding it difficult to make both ends meet because he has not been sending enough money for us.

My husband has not sent money the past two months. We have been surviving through the kindness of other people.

Right now I am also planning to work abroad so I can properly provide for my children's needs. But I am having second thoughts because of my children who will not have both their parents with them.

I also worked in 2000 in Kuwait as a domestic worker. I did not finish my contract and was forced to come home when two of my children fell ill.

\*Translated from the original text delivered in Filipino.

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Right now I am still trying to make both ends meet for the sake of my children. But we have been getting almost nothing from my husband.

I found out that my husband already has another family in Jeddah. He has three children with another woman. My children are the ones who suffer from my husband's infidelity. I hope we can have something to legally hold on to so we can force my husband to support our daily needs.

My husband went home in 1998 after finishing his contract with Alcatel, Inc. He immediately applied for work abroad and was able to leave for Saudi in October of that same year. I was then pregnant with our third child, and we thought that our new child would bring us luck.

Our family's condition remained stable even after I gave birth to our youngest, Mariella. We already had three children by then and felt that this was the ideal size for our family.

But my husband began to change as the years passed. The money he sent us became lesser and lesser and came far in between. Even his parents and siblings regret my husband's decision to work abroad. My children are now beginning to feel disappointed with their father.

If my husband still fails to fulfill his responsibility to us, it would be better if he just came home. Our situation anyway has worsened. I would prefer that we come back to where we started, instead of knowing that he is working abroad, away from us, but getting no support from him.

Right now the number of people who want to work abroad is increasing because of the poverty. If only there were enough decent jobs here, there will be no reason for people to leave and work abroad. And families will not be separated anymore.

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*Ronnie Abeto\**

Pusong Mamon Task Force, Saudi Arabia

**Why I left for abroad.** My main reason in working here in Saudi is to improve my family's finances to ensure my children's education. I also wanted to see the biblical sites here in Saudi Arabia.

I left the country mentally, spiritually, and physically prepared, and based on my and my wife's convictions that this is all for the future of our children. My wife, Chie, was also mentally, spiritually, and physically prepared for our temporary separation. While I was abroad, my wife and children devoted their time to serving the church.

**While working abroad.** What I experienced in Saudi was the same as my expectations. My contract was fair and legal, and my work was fair. My wife nurtured my children well, handled our finances well, and helped keep our relation smooth.

In the early part of my stay here in Saudi, I noticed the Philippine Embassy had to respond to too many concerns and unexpected developments. Things improved here after we started our advocacy work with eLagda, PMTF, and the V-Team.

The Saudi community is filled with regionalism, each to his own, and people don't care about what others are doing. Saudi society is very much different and their laws are conservative and suspicious, especially when it concerns women. Their culture is one-sided and favors the men. Men can marry women of other nationalities while women cannot. Saudi laws, especially labor laws, although thoroughly enforced, lack the necessary measures and provisions that would address workers' problems.

\*Translated from the original text written in Filipino. Ronnie's paper, e-mailed from Saudi Arabia, was read by Anna Navaro.

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Discrimination is not only found between Saudi nationals and foreigners, but also between Filipinos and other foreigners. Sometimes discrimination exists even among Filipinos: between the elitists and the street denizens. In Riyadh it is common to hear people remark that those from Olaya (just like Ayala Avenue) are different from those from Batha (same as Quiapo or Divisoria), Sinaiyah (industrial area), or Ma'ather (where many are employed at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital).

Migrant workers have to face many challenges while working in Saudi Arabia. One is loneliness. Another is adapting to the Saudi culture and to the cultures and traditions of other foreign workers, like the Indians, Pakistanis, Egyptians, and Bangladeshis. There is also the maltreatment of domestic helpers, the long hours of work, and the lack of day-off, especially during Ramadan where for a whole month a domestic helper only gets three hours rest. Domestic helpers only get to rest between six to nine in the morning. Employers are awake the whole time and only go to sleep after their morning prayer up to their noontime prayers.

**Upon repatriation.** Reintegration with the family, especially in dealing with children, is a major concern for migrants who work abroad for more than two years. Many migrant workers get used to order and neatness in their place of work abroad. Upon return, they expect the same order and neatness at their own house. They also get used to not taking care of the daily running of the household, so they easily get irritated when minor concerns crop up at home.

**Message to other migrants.** Empower yourself. Study your contract well before signing it. Study the labor laws, culture, traditions, and religion of your host country. Make sure that the security situation is good.

**Do not sign any contract offered to you by your future employer, especially if it is written in another language.** Get advise from POLO or Philippine embassy officials before signing any contract.



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Make sure that you know how to contact our embassies or consulates at your host country. Report or register immediately to the Philippine embassy or consulate upon your arrival in the host country. Always include the name of the agency that recruited you and the name of the responsible person in that agency.

To Filipinas applying as domestic helpers in Saudi, please do not work here!

### **Message to migrant NGOs**

NGOs should provide service without any hidden motive. We should advocate for good governance, transparency, and accountability on the part of Government.

### **Message to the Government**

**To DOLE.** Stop issuing the standard employment contract. This has caused many problems of contract substitution. Do not let manpower recruitment agencies issue the same contract. Finally, stop sending Filipinas to work as domestic helpers in Saudi Arabia.

Change the system of pre-departure orientation (PDOS) given to departing migrant workers. Separate would-be migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and other middle-Eastern countries from would-be migrant workers in Hong Kong, Europe Japan, Taiwan and other countries. Differences in culture and laws among countries and regions should be given attention.

Address the many issues faced by OWWA and the passage of its Omnibus Policies.

Saudi companies like AL-NASBAN, SAMAMA and others that have local agencies like MHHR and ZINA are known for maltreating their employees and having ambiguous contracts. Even our embassy in Riyadh and consulate in Jeddah have recommended that these companies be black-listed. But these companies continue their operations in the Philippines. What have you to say about this?

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**To DFA.** The Saudi Arabian posts are sorely lacking in resources, like vehicles that can be used in responding to the migrants' concerns. This was requested by the embassy long ago, but the DFA has not acted on it.

Many other migrant concerns I have not mentioned here need to be raised in succeeding CMA forums. Meanwhile, this is all for now. We salute the organizers of this forum. We are sure that our dear friend Dr. Alfred Ganapin is pleased wherever he is now because we have continued what he started in Saudi Arabia.



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***Rashid A. Fabricante \****  
Pusong Mamon Task Force, Saudi Arabia

### **Reflections and Recommendations**

The manpower export was originally envisioned as a temporary solution to our country's economic ills but it has been observed for the last two (2) decades that it has become a permanent interim policy with no end or clear direction in sight.

Considered to be a palliative and interim strategy to support a nationwide job creation objective, as our own critics, we begun to question the very insignificant labor absorptive capacity of the economy while all efforts in terms of "diplomatic thrust" and "regular marketing missions" remain a priority of the government sending hundreds of thousands of our countrymen especially the most vulnerable sector –the domestics workers?

Statistics shows that they had caused us "national shame" every time a casket disembarks at our international airports, or a crippled and limping Filipina while 7 out of 10 Pinays repatriated had lost their dignity and honor in foreign lands.

A prominent Saudi family had asked me once in a courtesy call meeting why your woman President should allow the Filipinas to work as domestic workers in the Middle East regions where rape, abuses, beatings and other forms of sexual harassments is more of a rule than an exemption. I just stared at him with no words able to defend our compatriots.

\*Ka Rashid's paper, e-mailed from Saudi Arabia, was read by Jeremiah Opiniano.

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Thus it necessarily means that the increasing remittances almost to reach a 12B USD mark this year makes the government reluctant to end its overseas employment program by among others, generating alternative employment locally for our countrymen?

Should there be a need for our countrymen to travel to alien climes in search of decent living notwithstanding that actual salaries received especially the vulnerable service sector whose net pay is just enough to put food on the table, cloth their families, with a rented roof and support the basic education of their children with a slim chance of forced savings and compromising their honor and dignity as Filipinas resulting from abuses, violence, contract substitution, low wages etc.?

We have yet to see a verifiable DFA, DOLE, OWWA, POLO, NSO, DTI, NEDA statistics showing that majority of skilled and professional workers who leave for abroad that their departure leaves a shortage which is easily filled up by a sector of workers largely unskilled, we think otherwise.

Historical studies and research have shown that the "economic benefits" derived from overseas employment among the most vulnerable (DHs) categories have become illusory that the costs of going abroad outweighs the material short term benefits. What can we expect from a USD 150.00 or 200.00 monthly gross income of a married Filipina domestic worker with four children where her life and honor is always exposed and at peril?

The mass exodus of the many productive members of our workforce considered as "invisible losses" among migrant workers watch and advocates have concluded that it virtually eliminates whatever short term financial benefits the country derives from our remittances due to-



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- the productive capacity of the migrant Filipino is utilized not in his homeland  
But in a foreign country, thus-
  - Whatsoever potential Filipino migrant workers have to contribute to the development is channeled not to the development of our country but to the growth of the receiving country.

This resulting brain and brawn drain of our strategic human resources, with little or no compensation by countries whose economy is still developing. While it becomes a more pernicious dimension when the loss of manpower involves highly skilled professionals whose education and training has been paid by our taxpayer's money.

The “commercialized” rather than “welfare” oriented policies of the government towards labor migration have been reinforced by recruitment agencies and PDOS curricula of informing prospective workers especially the domestic workers about unreliable positive aspects of employment and attractive benefits to be derived from working abroad but miserably failed to give the actual or negative side of working in foreign lands.

Not even the basic laws, culture, existing taboos and sensitivities of the receiving country and its people are conveyed properly to empower our workers. While recruitment agencies were on the rise promising available jobs in exchange of handsome placement fees from applicants and commission from various foreign principals.

Worse, updated contact number and addresses of embassies, consulates, welfare officers and labor attaches in the form of kits and primers remains a luxury among the ill informed and misinformed OFW's about to board the plane to their respective destinations.

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The perennial issues of contract substitution remains the “mea culpa” of POEA/DOLE and OWWA mandated to monitor and enforce the spirit and provisions of the employment contract originally signed in the Philippines.

We have yet to see a regular POEA/NLRC website report lists of agencies that were suspended, delisted, cancelled, inactive, fined and forever banned in engaging overseas recruitment activities and/or status of recruitment regulation cases.

POLO/OWWA offices abroad must reflect in their websites list of recommended agencies for blacklisting and ensure that all employment contract authentications by employees should be screened properly and their credentials verified by no less than the Labor Attaches.

A full thrust in dynamic diplomacy to help influence changes in the policies and attitudes of receiving country officials and authorities and utilizing “country team approach” by various agencies in the post should actively assist and pursue the filing of suits and compensation in foreign jurisdictions in behalf of our nationals who were victims of abuse, not self-inflicted cases, exploitation and other crimes affecting honor.

We believe that DFA through its Chief of Mission in various posts have the political clout to effectively work for the redress and custodianship of sensitive OFW cases while the DOLE/OWWA/POLO have the resources to carry out the diplomatic initiatives to a justified and minimum ageing and resolution of cases. Combine these with the cooperation of volunteer crisis intervention groups accredited by the Embassy or Consulates, they don't become reactive and become burn out with a lot of cases but rather proactive and dedicated to serving their countrymen.



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## Message to the Government

**Senate and Congress.** Conduct a cross sectoral intensive examination of the economic and social cost/ benefits of the present overseas employment program and recommend measures to minimize if not eliminate the injustices committed against our domestic workers especially in the Middle Eastern regions.

Present program and policies had come to a point of “dehumanizing” level causing embarrassment and national shame to all Filipinos in and out of the country.

Determine strategies and doable plans to maximize OFW remittances that will redound to the benefit of our families and the national economy as a whole.

Initiate urgent legislative measures to come out with viable alternatives of home based generated employment or income generating activities conducive to Filipinos that they may opt to stay at home.

Accelerate the passage of all pending bills in the lower and upper house having to do with the improvement of our lot, protection of our rights and welfare and our families.

Speed up the amendments proposed to RA 8042 and initiate bills for a comprehensive reintegration program of returning OFWs;

Initiate bills that will allow OWWA to have its own charter similar to SSS or GSIS since

Contract migration is about to stay for a longer period than expected, to protect our trust fund; allow more OFW representations in its governing board and present a transparent

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accountable fund management that is welfare and livelihood centered programs and projects;

House resolution mandating PHILHEALTH to immediately deploy representatives in foreign countries where significant number of OFW’s exists to update their membership from OWWA run MEDICARE in compliance to nationalization of health delivery services among local and OFWs;

**POEA.** Increase the staffing and personnel of the anti-illegal recruitment task force headed by Capt. Reynaldo Jaylo;

ILASS chief to reassess the present condition of OWWA run FWDC half way house in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, increase its budget and operational requirement not to the detriment of our stranded workers. Maintain the deployment of DSWD officials and Medical doctors and provide budget thereof.

Terminate the services of non performing case officers and translators whose handling of run-away DHs unable to repatriate them in 90 days, promote Welfare Officers who have displayed the highest resolution of cases and re-align budgets of non performing OWWA/POLO run offices and divert to high risk critical areas such as KSA, Kuwait and UAE.

**DFA.** It has been 5 years in a row since we have been following the augmentation of rescue/ service vehicles of Riyadh PE. From the VP to the DFA Secretary and several Undersecretaries and Ambassadors by their admissions need to beef up the transportation services of the Embassy.

Fill-up all the vacancies left by other diplomats ASAP whose completion of the tour of their duties were recalled to home office – KSA is a sensitive post needing additional capital outlay to replace its ageing communication facilities.



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Clear up all blood money receivables especially in the case of LISING, Leonardo who died 15 years ago c/o Jeddah consulate and Riyadh PE;

To review our proposal of fielding up OFW Migrant Workers Especialists as troubleshooters of sensitive OFW cases especially in the Middle East and other hard post areas;

Beef up the ANS section of the embassy and consulate in Saudi Arabia due to expected rise of ofw self inflicted and other police cases.

To properly screen passport applicants originating from Muslim Mindanao and Northern part of Luzon where ground monitoring reveals that even 15 years old Filipina Muslims were able to acquire passports shortchanging their names or actual DOBs;

To review our proposal of systematically monitoring the entry and job site location of all domestics' workers in the region, without the need of additional capital outlay and the only investment is the political will of the Chief of Mission to convey this proposal to Governors of Dammam, Jeddah and Riyadh

**OWWA.** Reconsider the request of the families of OFW's who died overseas or at home for illnesses and were denied OWWA benefits for failure to validate their OWWA memberships, though they have been OFWs for the last two decades.

To cause the publication/announcement in tri-media all updated and current telephone numbers and mobile phones of all welfare officers in the whole MidEast to enable OFWs with problems in remote areas to have access to POLO/OWWA services;

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To regularly conduct summits/forums on CORE/ Reintegration Programs in all places in Saudi Arabia where huge numbers of OFW's exist.

**Message to co-OFW's and aspiring migrants.** Prepare your families, yourself physically, emotionally and psychologically when aspiring to work overseas;

Learn PDOS by heart, verify recruitment agency status with POEA, validate job offers with friends or relatives who are abroad

Do not sign blank contracts or documents, do not forge your medical exam results, trade test and other personal documents

Do not embrace Islam as a religion when your intention is just to enter the Holy Places in Saudi Arabia for employment opportunities, do not be involved in drug trafficking and respect all the religious and cultural sensitivities of the host country;

Get involved in community and self-help projects of various ACP organizations in your localities;

Ask questions when in doubt and don't look for problems while at work or off the job sites, learn to work and respect your kababayans;

Acquaint yourself with the location and contact numbers of your embassies, POLO and OWWA offices;

Actively get involved in advocacies, forums and seminars protecting your rights, welfare and well being as an OFW;



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**Message to NGO's and other migrant workers watch and advocacy groups (home and abroad).** Work with the realization of your visions, goals and objectives by having the right, committed and dedicated people in your organization;

Learn to unify in the face of adversities – be issue and not personality oriented individuals and leaders;

Register your organization with the SEC;

Be of real service to your members and true to your missions and do away with regional, parochial, ethnic and personal interests groups of individuals;

Stop politicizing non-political issues and concerns;

Foster unity and camaraderie in all fronts and at all costs, reach out to your members and be responsible to your positions in the organization;

Be accountable, transparent and observe best practices in managing the organization and its members

Avoid being a ningas-kugon type of organization – vie for results and not the activities.##

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## GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES



### *Director Noriel Devanadera*

Director for Licensing and Regulation  
Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

Maraming salamat at magandang umaga sa inyong lahat. Dapat po ay si Secretary Sto. Tomas ang narito at kapiling ninyo ngayong umaga. Kaya po siya ay nagbibigay ng paumanhin na hindi siya makakarating sa pulong na ito sapagkat meron siyang previous engagement. So she asked POEA to represent herself in this forum.

Just like every one of us, marami po tayong naririnig na kwento. Just like what has been expressed, may bleak stories and bright anecdotes.





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Babasahin ko na lang po. I will read some of the excerpts from Secretary Sto. Tomas' paper read in Brussels, Belgium last March 15. It is very relevant in this morning's discussion.

Alam po naman natin na labor migration, both in the global arena and domestic front, is undoubtedly an unavoidable phenomenon. Nandiyan na po iyan, I think it is an accepted fact that labor migration both in the global and in the national fronts is already an accepted phenomenon.

In fact, in the international scene, the number of people crossing international boundaries has steadily increased over the last four decades. According to figures of the United Nations, there were 75 million migrants in 1965; 84 million in 1975; and 105 million in 1985, or 2.9% of the global population.

Today there are almost 200 million international migrants, a great portion of which are migrating independently; and the number is expected to grow rapidly in the next ten years. We cannot overemphasize the major role that migrants play in promoting development and poverty reduction in countries of origin, as well as the contribution they make towards the prosperity of destination countries.

We talk of the skills contribution to the host countries and the remittances that have flowed back in to help the national revenues of sending countries. Of this amount, about 170 million dollars went to developing nations. These cash inflows from remittances are considered crucial in their economic development since these are reported to overshoot national exports, exceed direct foreign aid from other governments, and account for a greater percentage of the national income.

The Philippines, a country with a population of 84 million, is known in the Asian region as a major labor supplier to developed economies of the world. In fact the Philippines is the

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model for overseas employment. That is why almost every week we are receiving foreign delegations who want to hear our success stories.

About a million leave annually or a daily average of 3 thousand -- mostly doctors, engineers, teachers, technicians, health care providers, construction workers, production workers, service workers and seafarers (who constitute 25% of the world's fleet.) Another 1.5 million are estimated to have left the country undocumented or irregularly. That means they are illegally recruited or undocumented. Overseas they are going to America, Europe, Asia or in the Pacific.

The dynamic overseas employment program that the Philippine government has institutionalized seeks to optimize the gains of overseas migration and minimize the attendant risks.

Masasabi po natin dito na it is already an accepted phenomenon. So what we can do is to be able to manage the gains of overseas employment and at the same time minimize the attendant social risks. We have put in place a structure characterized by a system of recruitment, settlement of disputes, pre-employment education and on-site assistance and training.

All of these operate within the legal framework directed towards the protection of all our overseas employment workers. The task to ensure that our overseas workers are adequately prepared and their protection is guaranteed is indeed posing as a great challenge.

To help us meet these challenges, we have been quite visible and active in international fora, such as this conference, and in multilateral and bilateral talks where we engage our counterparts in the countries of deployment and origin on matters of mutual interests and concerns.



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In fact we have been holding a continuing dialogue with our counterparts abroad. We received a delegation from Cyprus just about two days ago. Last Tuesday we received a group of our recruitment agencies deploying to Lebanon to discuss about the issues and problems that are confronting workers in Lebanon.

So there's a continuing dialogue between and among the receiving and sending countries. We have worked together towards strengthening the legal and administrative framework to prevent exploitation and abuse of migrants and maintain order and greater fairness in the movement of peoples across international boundaries.

Working conditions are discussed in bilateral meetings between the host and the Philippines. We have bound ourselves for capacity building, coordinated welfare strategy, information sharing, and regional and transnational cooperation, as we share the vision that labor migration should be humane and an enriching experience for migrant workers, benefiting both the sending and the receiving countries.

Some of our overseas contract workers are not well informed. Meron po tayong tinatawag na pre-employment orientation seminar (PDOS), of which we have been vigorously and aggressively implementing. Ibig pong sabihin sa PDOS meron na po silang kontrata at aalis na. Our PDOS is a country-specific pre-departure orientation. So if you are departing for Saudi Arabia, you will be receiving a country-specific kind of pre-departure orientation.

What we are telling them are, of course, success stories and at the same time we tell just what you've heard this morning -- success stories and bleak anecdotes of the overseas employment program.

We offer PDOS three times a week in POEA. And we are going down to our regions to inform those who would like to

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go overseas to listen and hear also stories of people who have worked abroad.

They are required to attend counseling sessions and re-integration programs where they are taught entrepreneurship and encouraged to save and place part of their earnings in productive investments. This is to ensure that remittances are more efficiently allocated.

They are tutored in the use of formal channels in the transfer of cash earnings to the country, with the advice to remit at least 70% of their monthly wages as part of their obligation to their families they leave behind.

On site they are reminded of the need to prepare for their retirement at the end of their contractual employment. In host countries where there's a huge concentration of overseas Pilipino workers, we have the human resource development centers which were established as venues for training for entrepreneurship and livelihood programs, skills upgrading classes and savings mobilization sessions that are conducted with volunteer migrant associations.

With the wide range of government interventions which can be seen throughout the phases of migration, we can optimize the positive impact of migration. But the state can only advocate and suggest, for the ultimate decisions on how to utilize their hard-earned savings lies greatly on the migrant worker and his family.

There have been success stories. As I have said, the workers' remittances have largely contributed to the boom and growth in the retail and wholesale trade services, communication, and construction industries. There have been countless beneficiaries of the multiplier effect of the construction of hundreds of migrants' houses. Speculative data show that personal spending in food, education, garment, shoes, insurance,



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pre-need, real estate, tourism, and cinema has given much needed impetus to these industries and helped boost economic growth. The multiplier effect of domestic consumption in the business sector is quite overwhelming.

To cite a very specific and concrete visible impact of overseas employment, communities that sent migrant workers in numbers have become prosperous in their own way. For example there's what we call an Italian village down south in Manila. I think it is somewhere in Batangas, where an Italian village has emerged where many big houses, designed like roman villas complete with tiled roof, have been constructed mostly by overseas employees coming from Italy. And they call their village the "Italian Ville".

The village contains complete facilities and amenities enjoyed by residents. The scene is repeated all over the country, particularly in the countryside where houses of overseas workers have mushroomed, all built from their blood, sweat and tears.

As a strategy for economic development, we see the need to redefine our country as a highly labor sending country, transforming itself into a world-class manpower supplier to the international labor market. To pursue this strategy the government moves to equip our overseas workers with newer and better skills by making skills-training mandatory and investing in the support system.

In consonance with this government action, schemes for skills-proficiency have been developed and put in place. Such initiatives help address the social dimension of globalization. In fact, in a very recent meeting with our deploying agencies in Lebanon just a week ago, it has become compulsory that all domestic workers to be deployed in Lebanon must be accompanied by a certification of training for domestic help services. That is our agreement, so that no domestic helper to be deployed in Lebanon should be deployed without the certificate

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of eligibility for having gone through a domestic help training seminar or skills training.

It was also our agreement in that meeting with Lebanon recruitment agencies that any requesting employer must be able to submit its requirements for domestic services. How many people to be served? What are the skills needed? And what is the work to be done?

This is done so that our Filipino worker would not be surprised when she gets to work as a domestic helper, she's not familiar with the kind of work and she becomes overwhelmed with the demands of work abroad. So that has become our agreement that our domestic helpers must also be given this kind of information if she is applying for domestic work.

There is, however, an emerging concern for the need to study the negative impact that the continued migration of professionals and skilled helpers like healthcare workers and teachers to labor-short countries may have in our development code. Through bilateral and multilateral negotiations, we look forward to seeking the assistance of labor seeking countries by way of financial or development aid and investment, people to people exchanges in the field of education and technology, and training transfer schemes to promote brain gain help replenish those losses to overseas employment program.

Over the above, the dollar remittances are the invisible gains of overseas employment: new knowledge, new skills, new technology and social and cultural awareness. The overseas employment program was there to be managed and sustained with all the key players -- government, civil society, private sector and all other stake holders -- participating, cooperating to optimize contribution to the national development. Thank you very much.



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I would like to add a few things just to co-relate the past to what we are doing now. In the past maganda iyong takbo ng ating overseas employment. But how do we control, how do we solve the problems of the future unless we manage? Baka sumama pa iyong takbo ng ating overseas employment.

There are about 1,400 recruitment agencies operating in the Philippines. In 1974 or early 70's, there were only 280 agencies. The Policy of the POEA is we are discouraging and making it difficult for an individual to apply for a license. Why? Because the business now is very unhealthy. Meron po diyang tinatawag na bargaining. "How much do you give your OFW? Well, I give my OFW a \$300. Okay you go to me and I give you \$300."

So meron pong situation sa ating industriya ngayon na medyo especially for new licenses. In these cases, it is very difficult to enter now in acquiring a new license so that you will be legitimately deploying migrant workers. Sapagkat mahirap pong pumasok sa overseas recruitment or legal recruitment, marami pong unscrupulous persons illegally recruiting at diyan po dumadami ang problema natin.

In fact the problem of DFA mostly involves undocumented workers. Kasi po iyan po ang masyadong exploited worker. Kasi po kapag ikaw ay documented worker and you have a problem on-site, we are giving notice to your recruitment agency to issue within 24 hours a repatriation ticket. Kasi ang worker po ay qualified for repatriation. Pag hindi nag-issue ng repatriation ticket, suspendido po ang agency. So we are ordering suspension to an agency who fails to facilitate the said repatriation.

One of our major programs is to combat illegal recruitment and I think we cannot do that alone. Alam nyo naman na ang Pilipino ay matalino pagdating sa illegal things.

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So kailangan po talaga na tayo ay magkaisa sa pagsugpo ng illegal recruitment. Thank You.





***Esteban Conejos***  
Undersecretary, DFA-OUMWA

Good Morning. First of all I would like to congratulate FES and CMA for organizing this dialogue. I find the theme for this morning's dialogue very relevant to all of us. Basically it is telling us to take stock of where we are now and what are our plans and visions for tomorrow. Sometimes, especially those in government, we are so caught up with day to day operations. We attend to so many problems everyday that we forget that the most important thing sometimes is when six o'clock comes in the evening and you have time to reflect on what you have done and what are your plans for your office.

So this type of dialogue, especially the topics you have raised for the forum today, is really important and useful for all of us to go into. Second, I like the format of this dialogue. We are not here to deliver speeches but actually make a sharing of

our actual experiences with each other. We hope to understand better what each other's roles are and respond to problems and make sure that, for example in my case, what we are doing is actually what should be done in relation to problems.

Sometimes there are problems which we try to respond to, which actually do not exist. And we do not actually in effect respond to a problem which urgently needs attention. What I would do is share specific cases. But before I do that, the best way for me to share our experience in the office is to tell you all about the office of the migrant workers affairs in the DFA.

Basically my office takes care of three things. The first one is the provision of legal assistance to our overseas Filipino workers, and overseas Filipinos who are in distress. So my constituency is not only just the OFWs but all other Filipinos abroad who are in distress, meaning they are in need of physical, psychological, or legal assistance.

In discharging this legal obligation, the law has provided our department with what we call the legal assistance fund. It is a very modest fund in relation to the potential problems that we have to respond to. We get 15 million pesos annually and we use this fund principally to hire lawyers to represent OFWs facing cases abroad. We also use this fund to pay for bail bonds to secure the provisional release of persons in detention. We also use the fund for the purpose of paying litigation expenses and other costs and charges in pursuing a case abroad.

A second function of the office is what we call the ATN –Assistance to National Fund. So we have this arrangement as mentioned earlier. In every foreign post that we have, we have the embassy or the consulate general. And in those areas where there is a large concentration of Filipino overseas workers, we have the POLOs, the Philippine overseas labor office and the OWWA there with us.



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We have this informal division of labor. If an issue arises which concerns labor relations, employer-employee relations, it is normally handled by the POLO, OWWA group in the foreign post. Any other problem under the sun, apart from this, where employer-employee relation is involved, that will be the function of the ATN. One of the mandates of the DFA is to protect and promote the welfare of all overseas Filipinos. That is the legal basis of the ATN.

We also have a fund to advance this program. And that is what we call the ATN fund, which is a P45-million annual fund.

What are the uses of this fund? As I have said, for non-labor related cases. For example, for the repatriation of overseas Filipinos abroad. Those illegally recruited and undocumented Filipinos abroad who have no means of going back to the country. We have to provide the transportation for them.

More than the transportation, we also have to provide for their basic necessities. We house them in the embassies. We house them in the Filipino Workers' Resource Center. In at least 19 posts abroad, we have earmarked and identified a facility, the FWRC, (Filipino Workers' Resource Center), where Filipinos in distress can run for immediate assistance.

When you are a complete stranger abroad and something happens to you, the first thing that comes to mind is, "where can I seek refuge?" You run to the embassy for assistance. In the case of the victims in these 19 areas, we provide a separate facility where anybody in distress can immediately run to for immediate assistance.

We provide for repatriation and we provide for their living expenses while they are in these centers awaiting repatriation. And we provide for all other types of expenses. Even requests for the whereabouts of OFWs abroad are provided

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for. These are sent to the ATN unit and we try to track the OFW down.

We mentioned something about broken families. This is a recurring story. The ATN officers try to exert efforts to try to get the spouses together again. So we work on anything under the sun plus the ATN. It is good for you to know that.

Third, we are the office that implements the Anti-Trafficking in Persons law. The law, passed in 2003, aims to prevent the exploitation of minors and women.

So Three things: one, legal assistance if there are cases filed against you, it is my office that will try to resolve these cases. Two, any other problem short of labor problems, any problems short of those involving employer-employee relations will fall under the ATN. And third is the anti-trafficking in persons act.

Let me now go to my personal experiences. I think the best way to do it is to respond to what our other sharers said earlier.

Aster mentioned about physical abuse. Physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and in worse cases, rape. Let me cite an example. I was in Kuwait only 3 weeks ago. In Kuwait, there is a law called the Absconding Law. That law says that if a domestic helper leaves her place of employment without the consent of the employer, the employer is obligated under the law to report the case to the nearest police station within 24 hours. The net effect of the reporting is that a travel ban is immediately imposed. The domestic helper cannot leave the country. That is from their side. Let's now look at it from our side. Why did the DH leave? Because of physical abuse and sexual exploitation.

Our DH runs to the embassy, to the FWRC. The embassy tries to get to the bottom of things. She left because she



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was subjected to physical abuse, sexual exploitation and worse, rape.

In this case, what we will normally do is to conciliate. We call up the employer. If the employer is willing to settle the case, then that would be for the benefit of both parties. But in some cases, we are in a situation where in addition to the absconding case filed against the domestic helper, the employer tries to put up trumped-up charges, theft for example.

From the very beginning, the DH is already disadvantaged. Number one, she faces absconding charges. Number two, she faces theft charges. For us, we file cases of physical abuse, maltreatment and rape. But rape is very difficult to prove. The worker gets to file a case in the next two or three weeks within which time the evidence is no longer there anymore. The important evidence is lost

Problems also come up if we have to go to the police to file the case. Remember, she is already facing two charges there. We have to surrender her to the police. She will have to stay in detention until these two cases are resolved. So the choice at that point is this: Are we going to pursue this case and file charges of rape and physical abuse? Or are we going to face up and try to settle these cases? One part of us will tell us what our search for justice says: we go, we file, let's do what we can do.

On the other side, even the domestic helper will tell us she wants to be practical about these things. "How long will I have to stay in jail to face these absconding charges, these theft charges, and even for my crime, rape," for example.

I learned this in the last two months that I have been in this office. Sometimes what's written in the law is so clear. But when you go down to the frontlines it is so different. Your ingenuity, your imagination is being challenged constantly on a daily basis. And ultimately we have to take this on a case to case

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basis. There are no hard and fast rules. There is no jurisprudence for this that you can pick up. Sometimes you have to look at it individually. In the end, in one case, we might decide that it is better to try to settle this case. And after this is settled, get our domestic worker back to the Philippines.

In other cases I insisted that we should file a case. I have noticed since I assumed this office for the last two months that we have always been at the receiving end. I told my staff under my tenure that I like to see cases pursued vigorously and brought to successful conclusion against employers who, I believe, have really trespassed and committed serious offenses against our domestic helpers. I hope to see results in the next several months.

Just the other day I authorized the release of 24-thousand dollars to hire lawyers to prosecute five cases in Kuwait. Four are for serious physical injuries, two for rape, and one for molestation. But sometimes we have to be realistic with these things. Sometimes it is the domestic helper who comes to us and say, "Sir, huwag na nating ituloy ang kaso. Let us try to settle. I want to go home. I want to get this problem over with." And that's what we do, we negotiate. Sometimes you would tell us, "No, but where is the sense of justice." That is correct. Justice is there. But sometimes we have to deal with realities here.

Number two, the system. In the Philippines we are so used to the judicial system. We know what due process is. I am not trying to pass judgment on other countries. Other countries have their own legal and jurisdiction system but based on customs and traditions unique to them. When we go there, we go there as visitors. We go there under the realization that we must comply with their laws no matter how difficult and hard they are. We cannot impose our own standards. We are guests in their countries. Having said that, we must recognize how difficult their legal systems are.



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You've heard the case of Ronario. I went to Kuwait and studied the case. I noticed that in most of our death penalty cases (around 33 cases), convictions have been given on the basis of confession. Here in the Philippines, pag may confession, immediately may question mark kaagad iyan. Was it voluntarily given? Was force, intimidation exerted? It is difficult to sustain a conviction based purely on confession. Under our system, the judge, even when faced with confession, is obligated under the law to scrutinize carefully if the confession was given voluntarily. In other systems that is not the case. In other systems, pure, simple confession would be sufficient basis for conviction.

We have problems in our constitution; that's why sometimes we feel there's so many things wrong with our country. But go abroad, look at their system and you become proud to be a Filipino to realize how our systems have operated. How familiar we are of basic standards of due process, of law, and etchetera. In some countries, they have what we call a holding period. For four days, detainees can be kept in detention incommunicado. Nobody can approach them at all. After the fifth day there definitely is a confession. And another point: it goes into trial.

At the trial we are familiar with the order of presentation of the evidence. The prosecutors present their evidence, the defense crosses, the prosecution proeses. In other countries there is no such order of presentation of evidence. The court, based on police report, on the medical report, and on the confession can conclude that the evidence in front of him is efficient to render judgment without the possibility of hearing the other side and render a judgment of conviction.

We in the department, and I'm sure my colleagues in government do not see this as a problem. We see these as challenges but we would like people to understand that these are

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different systems we are dealing with. We have to use our imagination in trying to protect our workers here. Thank You!!





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***Marianito Roque***  
OWWA Administrator

Siguro ho, to be able to find out how we would be tomorrow, probably it is worth looking back. Paano ba tayo noon? Probably I'm in a position of advantage or disadvantage to say that. Because among the panelists here, ako lang yata ang tumagal ng tatlong dekada sa overseas employment program.

Lets all look back and see how we were before so that we will establish why we are what we are now and how we will be proceeding there from tomorrow. Back in 1974, that was 32 years ago, we had a very good take-off of a structured overseas employment program,

We we're the first in Asia to do this. We we're looking upon the South Korean model then because, unknown to most of us, the Philippine overseas employment program was modeled after the KODCO, Korean Overseas Development Corporation, which is a corporate design of manpower export then when Korea was still providing its manpower, mostly technical, to most countries of the world, especially the Middle East.

So we studied the KODCO model and that's how we were able to devise the Philippine migration model in 1974, 1975 and 1976. So iyon ho ang simula niyan, diyan tayo nagsimula ng ating overseas employment program.

But of course looking back at the time when South Korea reached the advanced stage of industrialization, it became a natural magnet for their people to come back. And we don't see many Koreans right now doing overseas work, except Korean businessmen investing in the Philippines and sharing their technologies in countries all over the world. Hindi na ho sila migrant workers or overseas workers.

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Our wage standards at that time were also patterned more or less after Korea. We were termed as the TCN's or the Third Country Nationals. The first country national being the national of the host; the second country national being the Americans, Europeans or what we call the Caucasians; and the third country national are the Asians. Meron pa hong fourth country nationals noon, iyon pong Africans

So we belonged to the third, and we pretty well established our wages standard concerns. Sa ngayon ho like our laborer na pumapasok all the way to the laboring class sila ay sumasahod ng \$400 basic. Wala pong overtime pay. So the gross income noon ay wala pa hong \$500-600 na take home.

That's the situation noon. How did we enter the so-called labor market of the world? We did not start in the Middle East. We started in Iran actually because Iran was more advanced than the Arabian gulf states then. We helped in building their infrastructure. The initial oil discoveries in that part of the world were found in Iran.

Pumasok po tayo sa Iran. There were about 40-50 thousand nationals working in Iran at the time of the Iranian revolution. Mass exodus po tayo sa Iran. At the same time we we're also starting in Nigeria and Papua New Guinea. Sa Nigeria we were entering as public sector employees. We sent seven thousand teachers to Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, especially in the vocational trade.

Noong ma-topple ang Shah doon tayo lumabas. We had Filipino domestics noon sa Iran. Sila po ang binitbit ng mayayamang employer, kasi ho noong araw yoong mga foreign managers na pumasok sa Iran na nag-build ng infrastructure, binitbit ho ang mga Filipino helpers nila kaya nakarating tayo ng France at Italy.



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We have now 50 thousand workers in Italy and France. Iyan ho ang simula why we have several hundred thousands workers in Europe.

Why am I saying this? Because I was in Saudi Arabia a few days ago and tried to examine what we are now because what we are encountering now are several complaints of maltreatment, non-compliance with contracts, duplication, non-payment of wages, and reduction of wages. Katakut-takot na problema ang hinaharap natin ngayon.

But these are problems that we did not encounter in the past. I had that side of the past na nakita ko. Wala naman kaming case na ganyan in the past. We did not have much of a welfare problem.

So in the early days there was no need for us to set up an OWWA in the 1970s. It was just purely employment. We did not need to support the employment program with the welfare program then because we did not have a welfare problem. Once the employment contract ended, the worker will voluntarily go back to the Philippines. On top of that, we had a lesser number of females working abroad.

It was a predominantly male population we had. When we started in Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, we had 90% male. Then we started in Saudi Arabia. Noong pumasok tayo sa Saudi Arabia, we had foreign companies, multinational or transnational, deploying Filipinos. Why did they prefer Filipinos? Because we speak English and we had good discipline.

Kalimutan na ho natin ang sinasabi nating Filipinos are the most skilled workers in the world. Hindi ho totoo yan; mas skilled ho sa atin ang ibang countries pero ang advantage natin ay we know how to speak good English and have a good discipline.

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But ang employers po natin noon ay multi-nationals. Dayuhan din po sila doon sa host countries, so they were implementing standards that they carried from their country, kung saan ho naka-reside ang company nila, Just like a French company who put a French standard contract, a British company who put up a British standard contract. Wala ho kaming problema. Ang pinag-uusapan lang ho namin doon ay ang ibang terminologies. But essentially iba-ibang kontrata; wala pa ho tayong model employment contract. Na-devise lang ho natin ang contract noong 1978-79.

We already led the way in overseas employment program. But before that every country had its own contract that they were presenting to us. We just evaluated it on the basis of about 12 basic requirements needed to be included in the contract, like worker's compensation, free medical, free emergencies, and free-dental. Iyon lang po ang hinahanap to approve the contract. But basically the wages were very high compared to the present wages standards we are encountering now.

Filipino lang ho ang pumapasok noon; ang kalaban natin ay ang Koreans. Ganon ang labanan natin noon. Ang situation ho natin ngayon na hinaharap is that we are having so many problems on welfare and treatment of our workers owing to the fact that they are going to localization measures in these countries. And that will be the future of overseas employment -- localization and nationalization and the entry of work competitors from other labor sending countries.

Given that we have 10 or 11 deploying countries from Asia, we can expect more competitive wages and tightening of employment. So this means to us that we now really need to regulate overseas employment, so that we can assure adherence to all our employment standards. In other words we need to negotiate the migration process.



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We will have to increase the level of competence to be able to impose our own standard of overseas employment, meaning kung magagawa natin yan we can control and manage the welfare side of overseas migration. We will have lesser human rights violation. For this we will have a better welfare situation, lesser problems encountered among our nationals. That is where we should be headed for. Thank you!

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## **CMA Policy Paper: Major Policy Recommendations**



*Noel Esquela*  
Chairperson, CMA Board

We do not close our eyes on the benefits of overseas migration on the national, family and individual levels. Recognizing that overseas migration will continue in the age of globalization, we uphold the inherent right of Filipinos to travel and to work abroad, right to equal opportunity and equal protection of laws, right to free association, right to protection by Philippine government and receiving countries, as well as the right to family reunification, among other equally important migrant and human rights.



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We equally foresee that the social, economic, political, and individual costs of overseas migration will outweigh its benefits in the long run.

Some sectors advocate that since overseas migration is now an integral part of our national life and is no longer a “stop-gap” solution to our economic problems, we should embrace and manage it as a permanent development strategy.

We do not subscribe to this view.

We are not ready to give up our national and collective dream and ambition of establishing a vibrant and self-reliant Philippine economy in this age of globalization. To do otherwise is to lose hope for the future of our nation. To subscribe to management of overseas migration as a development strategy is to seal our national fate as a service economy in a globalized world, a fragmented and disjointed local economy that does not promote real and humane growth and development, and extremely vulnerable to adverse economic and political developments in foreign lands.

It is our firm belief that the path to true and humane development is the management and reform of government policies that will promote the development of a vibrant and independent local economy; policies that will create decent local employment; policies that will promote the protection of human rights of migrant workers; as well as the exercise of political will to eradicate graft and corruption and promote good governance.

Guided by this framework, our advocacy work will focus on several areas to influence the government to show its political will and act decisively for the migrants’ welfare. We shall call on the Government to

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1. Review the overseas employment program in order to determine its direction in view of its impact on national development and its corresponding human and social costs

2. Address the gaps in Philippine laws and the lack of political will on the part of government to enforce them, and the inadequacy of support being extended by government posts abroad.

3. Work for the political empowerment and representation of OFWs.

4. Negotiate for bilateral and multilateral agreements with labor-receiving countries for the protection of the rights and welfare of migrant workers. Existing UN and ILO conventions provide sufficient basis in international law for the negotiation of such agreements.

5. Act on the more pressing migrant issues that need immediate attention:

- a. Keep a close watch on recruitment, seek out the illegal recruiters and prosecute them
- b. Conduct pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) for workers leaving for jobs abroad to inform them of their rights while working abroad. PDOS given to departing OFWs hardly touch on their human rights.
- c. Assign more labor attaches in countries where there are large numbers of Filipinos so they can provide assistance to OFWs who are victimized by their foreign employers.
- d. Provide legal assistance to OFWs who are making claims for just compensation against their foreign employers. These workers have no compatriot lawyers to consult and no labor union to support them while in a foreign country.
- e. Extend immediate repatriation assistance to abused or terribly homesick OFWs, especially women migrants, before they resort to desperate measures.



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f. Engage in nationwide sustained and continued information campaign on the realities of migration.

6. Finally, in order to keep our best and brightest at home, government must work out a national development program that will effectively harness the country's human resources and justly reward workers for their labor. It should be a development program that can compete globally in terms of compensation and working conditions. In due time, overseas migration will have become a choice and not a forced option for Filipinos.

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## OPEN FORUM



*Carrie Tharan,*  
Founding Member, Migrant Forum in Asia

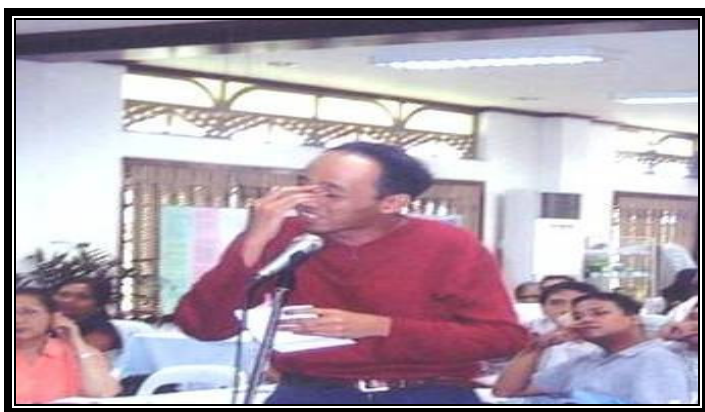
I was so touched, especially by Michelle's wish, “sana dumating ang panahon na wala nang taong aalis para lang mabigyan ng disentang kabuhayan ang kanyang pamilya.” Yet, she shared a happy, successful experience. Ano tayo ngayon and paano bukas? Before, there were more men; and now there are more women migrants. If we look at it, migrant women work as domestic helpers, entertainers, and factory workers. Nurses are also increasing. Now doctors, even engineers, are shifting to nursing. The increase in the number of women migrants has a big impact, especially on the family. The social cost is very high. We have reached a point where young children say their dream is to go abroad. Only a few want to stay to serve our society.

CMA says migration should not be a major development strategy. So what is the government doing to create conditions for OFWs to return? For Filipinos to have options to leave or



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stay? In the last two days, the government has come out with different pronouncements regarding the country. Rene Ofreneo said job opportunities in the formal sector has shrunk, while it increased in the informal sector. Mr. Favila said there are many jobs available but Filipinos are choosy. What is our real situation? Secretary Sto. Tomas said there is just a mismatch of graduates and the needs of the economy because most courses taken up are for overseas needs and not for what we need



***Jeremiah Opiniano,***  
Institute for Migration and  
Development Issues (IMDI)

Migration is both a blessing and a curse. There's the conflict between remittances and broken families; skilled workers and brain-drain. Manolo Abella asked, "what do we do next?" Is it hard to admit that this is really happening to us? Why can't the government come out with a national policy that will harness the gains of overseas migration and use these to re-enforce national development? Many say we are a hopeless case. Some Filipinos say they have their own problems to confront. They need to decide individually on what they want.



***Josuah Mapa,***  
Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL)

We should also look at the struggles of migrants for their rights while working abroad, like the early Filipino migrants in Hawaii who joined the workers' struggle. These migrant Filipinos were active members of united farmworkers. OFWs also supported struggles not only abroad but also local struggles.

The Labor secretary is bragging that there are many jobs here but the skills needed are not available. The propaganda line over the lack of jobs is that there is a mismatch between skills and available jobs; or Filipinos are choosy in applying for jobs. Mr. Favila and Ms. Sto. Tomas have no right to be secretaries of important government agencies. These two are not grounded in the country's realities.

The CMA statement directly attacks and counters the government argument for development. We need to add that while we should work for multilateral frameworks, these should not fall within the World Trade Organization (WTO) framework. This is important to counter what Secretary Sto. Tomas is doing in her praise of GATTs. This is a stupid argument from a labor secretary. She just wants to sell our workers without any regard for the country's development. We need to look at structural



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problems. Migration cannot be a development strategy because we cannot control what the host countries will ask from us. Should we train all women to become nurses or domestic workers abroad? The GATTS framework will not protect workers. It will even worsen the situation for migrants. Congratulations to CMA.

***Marianito Roque***, OWWA Administrator

It is also our dream for overseas employment to become an option and not a necessity. This has been our design for a long time. Looking back, migration was designed as a stop-gap measure to help the unemployed find work abroad. But those who were already employed were the ones who left because the demand was for skilled workers. Overseas employment helped create mobility inside the country. We cannot dream that all should stay in the country. Even developed countries have citizens working abroad. But it is an option, like Korea where there was voluntary recall and better conditions inside their country. Voluntary recall and better conditions in the country are the best conditions that we should reach.

We just have to move along with GATT even if we don't like it. We join or we will be left behind.

We have problems with the fitness of graduates. In call centers, for example, only 30 are hired for every 100 jobs available. The problem lies in language facility and diction. Let us look at the preferences of students. Many enroll in courses that are not applicable to the potentials of local employment.

***Noriel Divanadera***, POEA

We all want the same: to create adequate jobs. We aim for this and it is provided in the Magna Carta. But we need to

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accept reality. The wisest move is to manage the gains and minimize the social cost of overseas migration. Even if all Filipinos have decent jobs, people will still opt for overseas employment for a better opportunity in life. We cannot stop the right to mobility. If people are qualified to go abroad, they will go abroad even if everybody have jobs.



***Byron Bocar***,  
Akbayan

There are questions mentioned in the framework. The title poses questions about the future, our prospects as Filipinos, about migration and its role in development. There are moves to amend the constitution. And as we heard, the train has left the station and will run over everything. I oppose it.

We need to ponder over Philippine development and the place of migration in this framework. We recognize that was not intended as a major part of development. But it became a phenomenon and now plays a major part in the economy because of the remittances that prop up the country, especially in times of



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need. It usually happens second and last quarters of the year when foreign remittances prop up both the economy and the peso.

We should look at a Philippine strategy in terms of development. If we just try to ameliorate the conditions of migrants abroad and maximize the benefits of overseas employment, then we are in the path of making permanent what is not permanent.

This path is being opened by charter change. The agenda is to shift to a parliamentary form of government. But next would be to go ahead with other amendments, including economic reforms and relaxation of protection measures to develop the local economy

Why is overseas migration strategy no longer temporary? We did not develop the other aspects of our economy with a more rational, strategic, people- or nationalist-oriented strategy. We are going going nowhere. Charter change proponents want to the open economy further.

What are the prospects of migration while we are in this economic situation? We cannot wait to ameliorate the situation of OFWs. We should address it now. Korea was exporting highly-skilled people, but they developed their own economy with a local economic strategy. Voluntary recall was not difficult for the Koreans because there were jobs available at home brought about by a developed national economy.

At a congress forum attended by experts, participants, including Gerardo Sicat, suggested that we allow foreigners to own land. But our farmers themselves do not own land. They do not have the capacity to develop. Why don't we develop our local capital and domestic market. We should also address the debt problem and corruption in government. We should question

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the government's present and future migration and charter change process.

*Joshuah Mapa*, Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL)

Korea's case is very different from ours. They had their industrialization plan and protected their economy.

On the GATTs issue, Secretary Sto. Tomas says everybody has already ridden the train and we will be left behind. But the train did not leave us behind; it ran over us. We are not preventing people from leaving. It is the government that imposes conditions that force people to leave. The government violates the same principles it is supposed to uphold.

*Noriel Devanadera*, POEA

We are not violating anything. We respect the people's constitutional right. But we should also consider the critical skills in migration. We need to give six-month notice before going out so replenishment can be in place. We will be affected by the exodus of pilots because it takes 10-15 years to train pilots. We have to temporary control their exodus until they are replenished. We are also worried that their replacements could be second-rate pilots. Pilots have marketable skills and they are leaving for better-paying jobs abroad. Some aviation people approached us and told us of their plans to leave. We cannot stop them, so we compromised with the six-month notice before leaving for abroad.





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## Feedback, Input from OFWs and Filipino migrants abroad

### **MAX BRINGULA**

Chairman, Pag-asa Community Support Group  
Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia  
20 years as OFW and counting....

Thanks for providing us this chance to share our thoughts and hearts on our government's program on labor migration.

Magandang pakinggan ang ganitong mga panukala patungkol sa pagtataguyod sa mga manggagawang Pilipino sa labas ng bansa. Subalit gaano na ba karami ang ganitong mga programa? Gaano karami na ang mga organisasyon sa Pilipinas o sa labas man ng bansa na ang tanging hangarin ay maitaas ang antas ng labor migrants? Marami-rami na rin. Subalit, magpahanggang ngayon, nananatiling "lip service" ang mga programang inihahandog ng ating pamahalaan.

Tinuturing na mga "Bagong Bayani" raw kami. Subalit sa oras ng pangangailangan ng tulong mula sa mga ahensiyang naitalagang mamahala sa kapakanan ng mga labor migrants ay sama lamang ng loob ang iyong makakamtan.

Ang inyong lingkod ay kasalukuyang Chairman ng Pag-asa Community Support Group dito sa Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia, na ang misyon ay matulungan ang mga kababayan nating nagkakaroon ng problema sa kanilang mga trabaho o sa kanilang mga employer. Sinisikap ng Pag-asa na ilapit sa POLO-OWWA through mediation ang mga problemang nakakaharap ng ating mga kababayan upang mabigyan ng solusyon at matulungan sila sa kalagayang sinapit.

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Subalit ang katotohanan - sa halip na ang mga ito ang tumulong sa ating sawing-palad na kababayan, ay sila pa itong nagdudulot ng higit pang lungkot at kawalang pag-asa dahil sa kanilang mga gawi at pamamaraan.

Ang tulong na inaasahan ay ipapakiusap mo pa, hihintayin mo pa at ipapa-follow up mo pa ng makailang beses. At di ka pa nakasisiguradong matutulungan ka.

Ang aking hangarin ay nawa'y ang forum na ito ay makatulong upang maisulong at maiparating sa mga kinaukulan ang kalungkot-lungkot na kalagayan ng ating mga kapwa-manggagawang Pilipino sa labas ng bansa, at malapatan ng aksiyon.

Nawa'y di manatili itong isang talastasan ng kaalaman subalit hungkag naman sa pagkilos at paggawa.

Ang pagsulong ng Pilipinas ay nakasalalay sa kung gaano natin pinahahalagahan ang mga labor migrants na siyang nagtataguyod sa ekonomiya ng Pilipinas.

### **Jerry Tel-e**

2 years as OFW in Saudi Arabia

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Labor migration is no doubt a progressive act by a certain individual. He may have various reasons for going through it. But the most is to seek employment, to earn a living for himself and his family. Other reasons are just a small fraction of the whole pie.

Most of these people are going out because of higher salary and the availability of a job. I won't believe someone saying to go out for the benefit of the country. But in effect, by the number of people who are already OFWs and are sending dollars for their families at home, the government or the land is



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benefiting. Economists know these as a fact, traders and all business minded people know it as well.

Now, with the question, if labor migration is good for the country, the family and or to the individual? I would say it is since the purpose is to earn a living. A certain individual would not be going out of his land if he has a land to till, if he has a successful work or productivity that is enough for the needs of his family and himself. It is good for the country since it is one source of income one way or the other.

Brain drain for the country? I don't think so, I still have my two brothers there who are more intelligent than I am working under separate companies and they are enjoying it.

We still have a lot of professionals out there who don't have work because of no offers. And we still have thousands of students graduating every year with only less than a hundred jobs available, yet most graduates seek employment first in our country before deciding to go out if they are not successful in seeking employment there. And you will see the private companies seeking the best out of those applicants. And the government taking whomever they want, so what brain drain are they talking about?

Effect on the family structure? We heard a lot of bad things that happened, but it is because we seldom hear news of good things or effects that happened from these OFWs. And still the bad things are more thrilling to learn or hear about rather than the good things that happened.

The only thing now that is needed, is for our government officials to realise the good things or effects of having its constituents all employed, whether within the country or outside the country. And if that is so, then they would act in protecting these assets of theirs, since these are the ones who bring the bacon or the pork that they will chop and make it to a barrel.

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*Perla Vega*

MOTHER Founder & CEO, Los Angeles, California  
16 years as OFW and counting....

Those who are hired abroad should really make the most of the opportunities to earn dollars, since Filipino workers are preferred in many field of occupations, and work at home are scarce and don't pay well. Sabi ko nga, sana lahat ng interesadong Pilipino makapag-abroad naman para ma-uplift ang economic situation nila. Of course, gusto ko pa rin sa Pinas and there's no place like home. Kapag tapos na ang aking employable years I will settle at home.

Having worked for a good part of my life abroad (2 years in Switzerland, 12 years in Saudi Arabia and now, my second year in the US), among the sad observations that I believe should be addressed, including the following:

**Social cost.** We have a very serious problem of broken homes as well as negligent heads of families, resulting from "out of sight, out of mind" and "long absence makes the heart grow colder". As a preventive measure, can we not ask employers, particularly in the Middle East to include the families (spouse and children) of their contract workers to be brought with them in their place of work.

**Quality of Education.** I think our Department of Education should be reinforced to do something about this. Also, can professional associations initiate a move to sponsor deserving kids and send them to schools having higher standards of education? I think if some catalysts would take the lead, many people will be motivated to do the same. It is very sad that many nurses can't even pass the English language tests, and if they get employed pending this, they are either demoted which is demoralizing, or worse, are sent home!



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Sana tulungan din ninyo kami sa aming advocacy on women protection, e.g. we need to reach out the media, particularly those showing international shows, to stop making women a commodity, e.g. making them display their "wares" as sexy dancers on game shows, etc. This will definite help promote respect, if not prevent most forms of abuses to women.

### ***Duane Sta. Ana***

OFW in Saudi Arabia since 1995

32 years old, from Cardona Rizal; married with two kids

No, Hindi okay para sa akin ang labor migration bilang isang development strategy. The government should train its sight on other things that will help our economy grow. On top of the list should be alisin ang corruption sa gobyerno, then kung ano pa mang program ng government like, payamanin ang export, agrikultura, palakasin ang small and medium business, etc, etc... Pero talagang on top of the list ang corruption; alisin lang ang corruption sa gobyerno di na namin kailangan pang umalis ng bansa, para ma-homesick, ma discriminate, di makita ang paglaki ng mga anak. Totoo na may nagtatagumpay na OFW's gaya ng sabi ni ka Jerry Tel-e. However, sa tingin ko the negative factors still outweigh the positive...

**Discrimination.** Nasabi ko na rin lang ang discrimination.. I feel this is true.. Dito sa saudi, wala kang makikitang project manager ng talagang mega project, hanggang project engineer/supervisor lang ang inaabot ng mga Pinoy rito kahit mas qualified ang mga Pinoy kahit kaninong Puti or Arabs. Be it in education and experience (or in my case sa mga nae-encounter kong kumpanya). Bakit? Kasi TCN tayo as in Third Country National... Imagine mas magaling ka pa sa boss mo.. Pini feed-an mo siya ng impormasyon na mula sa utak mo then kanila ang credit. Bansa nila ang uunlad at yayaman.. Pero utak ng pinoy ang gumana.. Ang mga Puti, kahit tubero lang ang

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napag aralan niya sa home country niya, then nag abroad, natuto ng konti, pwede na siyang project manager based on experience, pero Pinoy pa rin ang "assistant" niya.

**Immorality and infidelity.** Nangyayari talaga ito rito sa Saudi.. At di lang sa Saudi pati na rin sa mga naiwan sa Pilipinas...Nasisira ang foundation ng family with the distance between them

**Savings.** Karamihan sa mga nag aabroad ay umaalis sa dahilang para guminhawa ang buhay. Oo, guminhawa ang buhay nila noong nasa labas ng bansa ang isa sa kanilang kapamilya dahil sa ipinapadala, **me problema rin naman kasi ang mga naiwan sa Pinas eh..** Pag napadalhan, isip mo buhay milyonaryo.. Pero tingnan natin kung me naipon.. Wala... Kaya pag uwi nila, balik uli sa dati.... There are OFW's na poong taon ng ofw, pero hanggang ngayon nangungupahan pa rin... Meron namang me vision at pagkaalis pa lang umutang na ng bahay. Sa gitna ng pag o-OFW niya, natanggal; anong nangyari sa inutang niyang bahay, ma iilit din.. (What I mean is.. walang security ang pagiging ofw.)

**Factor sa Family.** Based on my experience, mahirap lumaki ng walang tatay. My father is a "pioneer" OFW. 1968 pa lang nasa labas na siya ng bansa. Vietnam pa lang noon.. Hanggang sa magretiro or should i say napolitika siya rito sa saudi 1998 (tinanggal siya while on vacation dahil raw sa cost cutting kuno ng kumpanya, pero alam ko ang dahilan, me ipapasok na tao yung bagong GM ng kumpanya niya/namin at pwesto ni papa ang napili). So inadvertently nauwi siya ng wala sa panahon. Buti na lang at credit rin sa nanay ko at medyo may napundar na rin na negosyo at pangkabuhayan kami.

To go back, during my formation years (elementary schooling) I am always on top of my class and shows a lot of promise (without sounding conceited-ayon iyon sa mga naging teachers ko nung elementary). Di pa ako pala aral noon, but then,



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since kulang nga siguro sa guidance, personality wise, tahimik lang ako at laging may tanong, kaya nung panahon ko ng high school where the hormones are racing, rebelling without a cause at kung ano ano pang pinag daraanan ng isang Teener. I got curious with a lot of things. Away (suntukan), cigarette, liquors, i used drugs (but never an addict :-)), girlfriends, etc. at totally ng I dont care about school na.. Pero awa ng Diyos, naidaos ko naman high school ng walang back subject at 4 na taon pa rin... Pero nung college, undecided ako kung anong course kukunin ko, kaya every semester iba ang course ko.....Pero di pa rin ako nag papapasok nun... Hanggang makapag asawa ako ng maaaga, nabuntis kasi GF ko. (Misis ko na siya ngayon).

To conclude the factor sa family drama ek ek: Kung nasa Pilipinas lang siguro tatay ko noon, maiga-guide nya ako kung anong course ang gusto ko.. Ang nanay kasi, kayang kayang sigawan at malambot puso non eh. (hi Mama!). At sa tingin ko ay cycle lang. Eto naman ako.. nasa abroad. I'm afraid na ganon rin mangyayari sa mga anak ko.. Lalu pa at me plano rin si Misis na umalis uli ng bansa (she's a nurse)...

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***Donato Villaflora***

OFW since 1985 (21 years and counting...)

Instead of Department of Labor or OWWA, let us suggest to create a DEPARTMENT OF OFWs na ang mga nakapwesto ay former OFWs din. Pati mga staff sa opisina, messenger, teaboy, janitor, etc. ay mga certified OFWs din. Pwede rin dagdagan yung representative na OFWs sa congress both lower & upper house.

Ang may maling serbisyo sa nangangailangang OFW sibakin agad. Ano sa palagay ninyo? Di ako mapalagay eh! Gusto ko na ayaw ko.

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***Vener/ Ruben***

Saudi Arabia, 3 years as OFWs and counting

This is a serious matter that the government should give protection on all the OFWs working abroad, especially for Domestic Helpers in the Middle East, as we all know. Many of our OFW Women have encountered such Sexual Harassment, maltreatment & Unpaid Salaries most of them are Domestic helper, just because of lack of Protection. These are the major problems most OFW women have encountered. I remember and still fresh in my mind when we visited BK (a center for distressed OFW women). That time they numbered about 98 people with two babies. Majority of them suffered sexual harassment from their Employer.

Our concern is to give protection to OFWs especially women before going and to work in the kingdom or to any part of the Middle East.

Secondly I would like to address these to all Government Officials, Diplomats, Welfare Officers and the like. Please, itrato naman ninyo kami nang maayos, bilang kaibigan o maging parte ng pamilya. Sana kung hindi man namin maabot ang mga standard ninyo, please kayo naman ang bumaba para maabot kami!

Ito po ang tunay kong nararamdaman.

Every OFW in any part of the world has his/her own domestic problem. But in the Middle East it is worse, compared to the adjacent countries such as Hongkong, Taiwan, U.S., etc.

We OFWs in the Middle East have encountered and suffered different problems such as Molestation, Sexual Harassment & Unpaid Salaries. These and these are the common problems and complaints from OFWs to the government to stop this unethical and misconduct that these men do.



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First the government should give proper training, Orientation and the Rights of our migrant workers going abroad especially to the Middle East, as well as the selective deployment of workers. Because some of them upon arriving in the kingdom are asked by their employers to sign a new contract which is written in Arabic only. As a first timer abroad if you refuse not to sign, they will force you or threaten to send you back to the Philippines, which most of OFWs couldn't do anything just because of the money and placement fee from the agency. Why does the government let these things happen? Because they have some data on how many domestic helpers from the kingdom escape from their employers everyday. I remember when Mrs, Gloria Macapagal said, "I **will create more Jobs or one million jobs.**" But you damage a million lives.

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***Jun Ybanez***

6 years as OFW and counting  
had vacation only once; separated from wife  
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Kadalasan sa hindi, ang mga OFWs, bago umalis ng Pilipinas pumipirma ng dalawang kontrata. Isa ay otintikado ng pamahalaan at ng KSA chamber of commerce. Ang isa naman ay pabor sa employer. Wala bang kaparusahan ang mga ahensyang gumagawa nito? Nagagamit ito ng mga ganid na Saudi.

Pambansang industriyalisasyon pa rin ang solusyon sa kawalan ng hanap buhay diyan sa atin. Ang labor export program ng ating gobyerno pansamantala lang ang tulong nito sa kabuhatan. Sa kabuhatan, pagbansot ito ng industriya ng bansa. Sa kaso ng mga OFWs palakasin pa ang tinatawag na relasyong bilateral ng KSA at Pilipinas kaugnay sa mga proteksyon ng mga OFW.

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Kung paano, alam yan ni Kagalangalang Patricia Santo Tomas.

***Antonio Labitigan***

13 years as OFW and counting  
Jubail. Saudi Arabia

We cannot expect anything from the current Government. OFWs should not rely on the government but from themselves. If there is anything that our government can do, it is to implement strictly our laws regardless of personalities that are involved! Some advocacies came out but only mouthing empty words, which amount to nothing! OFWs Community Groups should be strengthened so that they will be heard in proper the forum with the support of related government agencies whatever they are involved with.

Labor export? Limit the exodus of migrant workers especially of professionals before it's too late!

***Bong Garan***

15 years as OFW and counting  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

As whole it's a fact that labor migration really sustained our existence while it helps and keeps afloat our economy.

**Ganito tayo ngayon.** Nasa situwasyon na halos araw - araw ay libo-libong manggagawa ang nais pumunta ng abroad na kung ating sisilipin ay siya namang karapatan ng bawat Pilipino upang mabuhay nang ayon sa kanilang personal na pangangailangan.



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Ang kawalan o kakulangan ng oportunidad na makapaghanap-buhay ng tama sa sariling bayan ang isang dahilan kung bakit ang isang katulad ko ay naririto ngayon sa ibang bansa. Ang mga problema sa sektor lang ng paggawa ay isa ng malaking dahilan kung bakit dapat bang mag-abroad ang maraming Juan at Juana? Sa kasalukuyang panahon ang kalakaran at umiiral na patakaran sa lahat ng establisimento ay ang contractual hirings na kung saan ang bawat baguhang manggagawa ay walang pag-asang maging regular. The government attracts and encourages foreign investors to pour their investments in our country with handsome packages in exchange for job opportunities to every Filipino. But at the end of the day we were deceived, exploited, underpaid and our rights were mum by our very own government.

**Ganito kami ngayon sa abroad.** When we say abroad, generally it doesn't mean a bed of roses. Marami sa ating mga kababayan ang maganda ang kalagayan and at the same time it's alarming na marami rin sa atin ang less fortunate which we categorically call distressed workers. This is a factual scenario and a lot of OFWs can agree on this, particularly in KSA.

We can say that we Filipinos can face any challenge, masipag, madiskarte, matalino at kahit saan mapadpad ay makaka-survive. And I fully agree on this but up to what extent we can hold on to our "balls"

Life is not as easy as it is sa katulad naming mga OFWs lalo na at tumagal ka na sa pag-aabroad. We get the benefits out of it. At the same time we pay for the costs. We earn the money, send to our families to meet their needs but still there is a big gap to fill in dahil na rin sa taas ngayon ng pamantayan ng poverty line.

How can an OFW working as a service staff earning SR400 to SR600 and a domestic worker who works almost 24 hours a day 7 days a week serving more than 1 family survive?

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We know that in KSA (I'm not sure), house helpers and drivers are not covered by the labor laws that entitle them to benefits received by workers in other sectors.

Shall we just say that instead of sitting at home, this is better than nothing?

Paksain natin ang tunay na kalagayan ng ating mga kapatid na domestic helpers (kasambahay) specifically dito sa Middle East.

Marami na ang nagbuwis ng buhay, nawalan ng karangalan at ng katinuan na kung saan sa kanilang pagbalik sa Pilipinas ay hindi na makakilos ng tama dahil sa traumatic experiences na naranasan nila bilang OFWs.

Sa ganitong scenario, ano ang dapat nating asahan sa ating gobyerno o sa mga attached agencies nito concerning the social situation and welfare of migrant workers?

Where is RA 8042, which was created for us? May mga bilateral o multilateral agreements ba ang ang ating pamahalaan with any host / receiving countries stating the parameters wherein the rights of both parties will be protected in case of any disputed situation.

How does our government cater to the needs of OFWs in times of their distressed situation?

Here in KSA, I can say blatantly that the concerned attached agencies that are supposed to look and assist us are inutiles.

Maraming programa tungkol sa kapakanan ng OFWs ang inilalatag sa atin ng pamahalaan ngunit karamihan sa mga ito ay mga hilaw na panukala lamang. Subok na natin sila sa



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kanilang pagli "lip-service" at kakulangan ng aksyon sa bawat problemang inilalapat sa kanila.

Banggitin natin ang OWWA na kumukulekta sa atin ng \$25 to be a certified member so that we can avail of their package of benefits. Napakabagal ng kanilang proseso sa pagseserbisyo sa atin sa kabila ng katotohanan na sa atin nanggaling ang nakakalulang halaga ng pondong hawak nila na hindi maipakita at maipaliwanag ng tama kung saan nila ginagamit ang pera na galing sa dugo at pawis ng bawat OFW.

May mga malinaw bang polisiya ang pamahalaan para sa katulad kong OFW na handang maglaan ng kaukulang assistance sa oras ng aming kagipitan dito sa ibayong dagat?

Kuntento na lamang ba ang pamahalang ito na tawagin kaming modern-day heroes? Economic saviours or simpleng mga OFWs na gatasan ng gobyerno upang mabuhay ang ating ekonomiya. Nasaan ang mga binabalangkas nilang hakbang upang magkaroon kami ng kasiguruhan or on-site protection program sa lugar ng aming gawain? (Lahat ng panukalang ito ay singaw lang sa hangin)

**Paano tayo Bukas (Sa ating pagbabalik)?** Gaano kahanda ang ating pamahalaan sa isang biglaan at malawakang pagbabalik ng mga OFWs?

Nakita na natin ang kanilang pagkilos noong mga nakaraang kaguluhan sa Iraq at sa mga karatig bansang Middle East at dito natin nakitang malaki ang kakulangan ng kanilang serbisyo.

In times of sudden turmoil or war in a host country where there's a big concentration number of OFWs, how does the government handle the crisis? May mga trabaho bang puwedeng ialok sa atin ang pamahalaan o kailangan na lumabas muli tayo ng bansa?

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Ano ang mga alternatibong maari nating gawin habang tayo ay naghihintay sa muli nating paglalakbay patungo sa ibang bansa? Kailangan bang ire-tool natin ang ating mga sarili upang maging angkop sa panibagong oportunidad na naghihintay sa atin sa ibayong dagat?

A doctor enrolled at a caregiving school to become a caregiver in New Zealand. Itinago na ng guro sa loob ng aparador ang kanyang diploma at mga medalya dahil hindi na niya ito kailangan sa kanyang bagong hanapbuhay bilang kasambahay o DH sa isang dayuhang pamilya sa Hongkong.

This does not reflect the whole OFWs pero ito ay nagsisilbing kirot sa ating mga puso. I do believe advancement and improvement are two parallel lines to success. Pero sa kaso nina doktor at ni titser na naging caregiver at domestic helper ay wala ang advancement -- degrade to survive ang resulta.

### **Mga Reaksyon o Panukala**

Hindi dapat iasa o gawing kasangkapan ng gobyerno ang labor migration sa pagbalangkas nito ng mga paraan o estratehiya kung papaano uunlad ang ating bansa.

Bigyang pansin at tutukan ng isang concerned agency ng ating pamahalaan ang pagdedeploy ng mga manggagawang kababaihan partikular ang mga kasambahay (DH) upang maalis ang pang-aabuso sa kanila. (Bigyang diin kung ito ba ay maaaring gawing selective deployment or totally ban).

Higpitan ang mga ahensya at huwag palusutin ang mga illegal recruiters na laging nambibiktima ng mga future OFWs at OFWs.

Pairalin at higpitan ang pagpapatupad ng mga batas na sumasaklaw sa usapin ng mga migranteng manggawa at ng kanilang mga pamilya.



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Magkaroon ng maka-OFW na mga bilateral or multilateral agreements sa lahat ng host countries na nagsasaad ng mga panukala na maaaring sandigan ng bawat OFW sa panahon ng kagipitan.

Dapat higpitan ng pamahalaan ang pagmomonitor sa mga attached agencies na nakadeploy sa iba't ibang bansa na siyang responsible sa mga usapin at problema ng mga OFWs.

Dapat ding tutukan ng DOLE at DFA ang mga mabagal na aksyon ng mga opisyal na nakatalaga partikular dito sa KSA.

Hinihiling din na sibakin sa puwesto ang mga incompetent attaches and case officers dito sa KSA upang magkaroon ng pagkakataon na makapagsilbi ang mga taong may integridad at puso para sa mga migranteng manggawa.

[baronia@skynet.net](mailto:baronia@skynet.net)

Filipino neurosurgeon in Canada

Number one---The concept of sending children away for jobs so that family can survive is pathetic! No head of a country except perhaps the Philippines (not even India or China promotes migration for job seekers!) is proud to encourage OCWs! It is very sickening! Imagine meron pa tayong POEA, mga pronouncements na ang OCWs ang bagong bayani!

So anything they say "good" (sic!) that comes out of this OCW thing is just icing for a bitter pill, a nice paint job for rotten furniture or a big covering wall along the streets where squatters abound, a never endless bickering among the lawmakers of useless laws and the seemingly nice statistics of rising GDPs.....Kita mo kahit sa kultura natin ngayon, ang lalakas ng mga beautification centers, BELO, boobs lifting,

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whitening solutions, etc...although I am not saying they are totally unGOOD!!!!

Kasi po, kung di mo kayang buhayin ang pamilya mo or pagandahin ang kalagayan ng pamilya mo sa pamamahay mo despite the education and improving economics, eh bakit mo pinapaalis????

Yung mga nice speeches ng mga winners/contestants natin about seamen working everywhere, etc....eh bakit di ka magtayo ng seafaring company ---eh magaling ka palang maging seamen???, Magaling kang teacher, eh bakit hindi dito mag-aral ang mga puti???? At pinapadala mo pa sa kanilang bansa? Magaling ang mga nannies, eh bakit not create a company here and dito na lang nila ipadala ang mga damatan nila? Magagaling ang mga maids, nurses and now, pilots, eh bakit di mo sila masupalpalan ng pera para mag-stay dito sa Pilipinas?....Yung mga kongresista at senador, mga abugado superlaking sweldo sa walang kakwenta-kwentang trabaho-dada na lang ng dada, milyon na ang kita, kahit mga senior citizens natin gustong maging US citizens----

So down the line, my dears ---overall, what's happening is just a continuum of what I would say, the NEW anyo ng semi-feudal, semi-colonial society in the era of GLOBALIZATION and IT century.

Instead of raw products (prior to and during the era of U.S.-Russia cold war), now in the era of U.S-WB/IMF as the non-contestable BOSS, the Philippines being so dependent on them, we have changed the anyo of the raw products that we export (kasi po ubos na, forests are kalbo na, etc.) we are now exporting very cheap labor....Malaysia, Thailand and even Vietnam, I bet some citizens migrate to other countries BUT OCW is never an OFFICIAL policy of their states!!!! So, sa mga political scientist sabi nila, si Marx di na-foresee about the labor





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export.. So its MLMTT-D-T (Marxist Leninist Mao Tse Tung-dick thought!)

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## Feedback from forum participants

**Carrie Tharan**, Founding Member, Migrant Forum in Asia -- The topic is very important, very timely pero kulang ang panahon ng pagtatalakay at pagsusuri. Maganda ang pag-imbita ng OFWs and families at government representatives. Very clear na magkaiba ang pagtanaw. Maraming salamat po.

**Batis-Aware** -- Wala na tayong magagawa sa gobyerno na ang tagal-tagal na hangga ngayon hindi nila maintitidihan ang mga hiling ng mga OFWs. Parang wala na tayong magagawa? Sa CMA na lang kami may pag-asa! More power!

**Faye L**, Akbayan International Committee -- I agree with Michelle (daughter of OFW) and I share with her the same dream –soon enough we see no more family disintegration because we have “a government” that truly addresses the issues of labor migration in its truest sense.

**Leo dela Rosa**, SPID/CIU -- You cannot change society. Just change yourself and improve your lot and family and if God or your luck smiles at you, thank Him!

**Sister Teresa Luna**, DC, Daughters of Charity -- Very enriching forum! Everyone is open-minded. I hope I'll be given another opportunity to participate. There were many things in my mind which were clarified by our speakers. Congratulations to the organizers and the very knowledgeable resource persons. God Bless you all!

**Sister Eva Pabaria**, DC, Daughters of Charity, JPSCD -- Saludo kami sa mga OFWs, ang ating mga “Bagong Bayani”. Our prayers for you all. Saludo din kami sa CMA for this morning's affair. Very enriching and educational. Thank you very much.



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**Sister Mercelita Cataina**, DC, Daughters of Charity -- Thank you so much for the advocacy. For me personally it is very informative. Sana marami pang ganitong pag-uusap at information so that our brothers and sisters will be informed. At upang marinig din ng ating gobyerno ang mga hinaing ng mga migrant workers. More power to CMA. God bless.

**Lourdes Arches**, Women Health -- Kitang-kita ang difference in perspective ng gobyerno at civil society.

**Mila**, Peoples' Mend -- Very interesting forum. Sana ay may susunod pa. Salamat sa CMA.

**Roy A. Quismoro**, MIAA-SMPP -- To strictly implement and monitor laws regarding migrants especially the illegal recruiters. They are the cause of migrants' dreams' failure.

**Rod Cruz**, SMPP-CIU -- This is an age-old problem and the solution is within us. A stronger government in terms of economy will give us more job opportunities and to people is to discipline yourself by being satisfied on what you have.

**Rey A. Lontoc**, SMPP -- Kung laging pagtatalunan ang isyu, hanggang kailan ba masusuluyunan. Hangga't ang pagsagwan natin ay iba't ibang direksyon, hindi kailanman usad ang ating bansa. Ang ganito tayo ngayon ay baka maging ganito pa rin sa habang bukas.

**Luz Domingo**, CATW-AP -- Mag-create ng maraming trabaho ang ating gobyerno para wala ng mga OFWs ang aalis ng Pilipinas. Hindi totoong mapili ang Pilipino. Huwag nilang isisi ang kanilang kahinaan.

Sa mga nasa abroad na, lalo sa sa mga kababaihan na maging mapagmatyag, magiit at maging matapang para sa kanilang karapatan. Ang pangunahin mong maaasahan ay ang sarili mo.

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**Mabs Licmoan**, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) -- As mentioned in the discussion, the government should take a more pro-active role in promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers. The government should not get used to thinking that there is a lot of migrant NGOs who will provide the assistance and support to migrant workers. Given the migrant remittances reaching up to as high as US\$9.5B, the government should find ways of tapping these resources to help in the economic development. Reintegration programs should enable the families as well as the migrant workers to contribute in the local economic development.

**Sister Aida V.**, Apostleship of the Sea-Manila -- It is sad to see how our government, though they don't admit and notwithstanding their efforts to uplift our country and the plight of our migrant workers, took migration and the export of our people as their main strategy for development at whatever cost.

**Bernice Roldan**, Unlad Kabayan -- I am very happy to have been invited to this forum. Like what the Usec of DFA said, as well as the chair of CMA, I like the dialogue format. I'm still new in Unlad Kabayan, and I am still learning about the nature of such advocacy work but I'd like to assure you I share your ideals of not wholly relying on migration for national development. I myself is the daughter of an OFW. My mom has been working in the US for almost 20 years. Like what one of the resource speakers, Michelle, said, I look forward to the day when Filipinos won't be forced to work abroad. Again, I'm glad I attended and learned a lot from the dialogue and shared experiences here.

**Pacita Dungca**, OFW Family Club -- To support OFWs



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## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Sr. Eva Palencia - Daughters of Charity
2. Sr. Teresa Lirio - Daughters of Charity
3. Rose Trajano - Kanlungan
4. Rodrigo Cura - Samahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Paliparan ng Pilipinas (SMPP/MIAA)
5. Ronica Elumba - Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)
6. Joseph Richardson Tana - Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, House of Representatives
7. Sr. Aida Virtudez, SJBP - Apostleship of the Sea (AOS-Mla)
8. Dennis Jay Miguel - OFW
9. Julie Javellana - Arab News
10. Niña Belmonte - Kanlungan
11. Reynaldo Lontoc - Samahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Paliparan ng Pilipinas (SMPP/MIAA)
12. Roy Quismoro - Samahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Paliparan ng Pilipinas (SMPP/MIAA)
13. Jeremiaah Opiniano - Institute for Migrations and Development Issues (IMDI)
14. Jonie Minguilla - Action for Health Initiatives (Achieve)
15. Cristy Virtusio - Kanlungan
16. Bing Zapanta - OFW Family Club
17. Pacita Dungca - OFW Family Club
18. Faye Laguio - Akbayan
19. Atty. Chris Lomibao - Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, HoR
20. Lalaine Lumpas - YMCA of the Phils
21. Dennis Estopace - Business Mirror
22. Ginger de Guzman - Kanlungan
23. Lourdes Arches - Woman Health
24. Jillian Roque - PSLINK
25. Vim Santos - Peoples' Global Exchange (PGX)
26. Mila Arbozo - Peoples Movement for Empowerment and Development (PMEND)

27. Dione Villaluna - PLU
28. Virgilio San Diego - Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, House of Representatives
29. Mabs Licmoan - Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
30. Bernice Roldan - Unlad Kabayan
31. Junar Tamayo - Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, HoR
32. Henry Rojas - Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA)
33. Babie Lloren - Batis-Aware
34. Luz Domingo - Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)
35. Byron Bocar - Akbayan
36. Rose Bocar - Akbayan
37. Sr. Marcelita Catarina - Daughters of Charity
38. Mar Babiano - CMA
39. Alex Tinsay - GMA 7
40. Rene Magbanua - GMA 7
41. Vergel de Dios - GMA 7
42. Anamie Ganapin - CMA
43. Leonardo dela Rosa - Samahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Paliparan ng Pilipinas (SMPP/MIAA)
44. Vit Hernandez - Ang OFW Ngayon
45. Noel Esquela - CMA
46. Imelda Rebata - Kanlungan
47. Edna Co - UP-Ateneo
48. Josua Mata - Alliance of Progressive Labor
49. Joanne Barriga - Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
50. Mirko Herberg - Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
51. Sixto Carlos - CMA
52. Fely Villasin - Intercede Canada
53. Loida Bernabe - Kanlungan
54. Kit Melgar - Akbayan
55. Edna Dalinoc - 56. Michelle Bolos
57. Asteria Suguitan - OFW in HK
58. Usec. Esteban Conejos - DFA-OUMWA
59. Dir. Noriel Devanadera - POEA
60. Admin. Marianito Roque - OWWA



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61. Ellene Sana - CMA
  62. Anna Navarro - CMA
  63. Irynn Abaño - CMA

