



THE Migrant Watch

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Manila, Philippines

PMRW Launches “Migrants’ Stories, Migrants’ Voices” with a Bang!

The Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW) recently launched its latest publication. Entitled “Migrants’ Stories, Migrants’ Voices,” the book was made available to the public during a launch held on March 6, 2007 at the Scalabrini Center for People on the Move (SCPM). The book is a compilation of various experiences of OFWs and their families left behind. It presents twelve stories written by migrants and members of their families.

The event was attended by top officials of the government from DOLE, DFA and other agencies like NLRC and CFO, partner NGOs, foreign volunteers, and the migrant workers. Before the program started, a dinner for all the attendees was served. It was also a time to have fellowship with the attendees present. The program formally started with the warm welcome of hosts Ms. Ediza Pumarada, Scalabrinian Lay Association (SLA) President and contributor to the book, and yours truly. It was then followed by a prayer led by Fr. Savino Bernardi, and welcome remarks of Fr. Edwin Corros of CBCP-ECMI, also a contributor to the book.

“The book tells the heartbeat of every migrant and their families left behind and this shows the gravity that it takes on

Lance Alexander S. Velasco

PMRW Secretariat

our society and we should then realize the dynamics of this phenomenon,” said Fr. Edwin.

DOLE Assistant Secretary Rebecca Calzado, who represented Secretary Arturo Brion, read the Secretary’s message. She stated that stories such as the ones shared in this book inspire and bring light on the phenomenon of migration among Filipinos. The stories, according to Assec Calzado, encourage the government, through its offices like DOLE, to help and address the concerns of the Filipino migrants. She also shared with the audience some of the current projects that DOLE is implementing for migrants, particularly the inauguration of their Migration Information Resource Center, a central library of DOLE on the phenomenon of labor migration. She stated that the current publication of PMRW is a great addition to the pool of resources that they would have in their library. She also mentioned about the inauguration of a Re-Integration Center for OFW returnees that will help make good use of the funds and skills they absorbed in their former workplace. She said that though the government makes unpopular choices, such as the Household Service Workers reforms, she ensured all that these are for the common good of the Filipino migrants.

Assec Calzado’s message was followed by a presentation of DAWN’s *Teatro Akebono* of an excerpt from the musical play entitled “Iba’t- Ibang Mukha ni Misty.” The women members of DAWN showcased through the musical the experiences of Filipinas working in Japan and the trials they face. The presentation highlighted the vulnerability of Filipino women



PMRW Launches...

migrants. It also touched on the support to migrant returnees of organizations like DAWN that help in uplifting and empowering women.

After the presentation, some of the contributors gave short messages. Nelson Pastor Ajos, who worked in Papua New Guinea as a Material Specialist for 11 years, said that living overseas has a deep impact on the social aspect of society. He read a poem he wrote about leaving home, for the audience to contemplate on. Mary

warmth of the audience in accepting their stories. She expressed hope that through these stories, migrants would find hope despite tragedies and problems they might face. Mike Bolos, CMA board member and a former migrant worker from Saudi Arabia, shared the dynamics of migration and his experiences as well. He said that such experiences are lessons in life. Ediza Pumarada shared the sentiments of a wife of a migrant worker. She emphasized on the need for lots



Joy Barcelona, a former entertainer in Japan and current coordinator of DAWN's Alternative Livelihood program, appreciated the

of understanding and unconditional love among family members.

The sharing of the authors was followed by the formal launching of the book led by

PMRW President, Carmelita Nuqui. Copies of the book were given to all who were present in this special event. This was followed by special song and dance numbers presented by the *SCPM Housemates*.

Before the program ended, SMC's Father Fabio Baggio then gave sincere words of thanks to the attendees. This was followed by the signing of books by the authors.

This book has elicited mixed reactions from the migrants. Some of them find the stories to be a guide on what life would be on the other side of the world, while others see themselves in the stories. Others were inspired and encouraged to share their stories in the future. This just

shows how other people long to hear about the experiences of migrants. The stories, according to those who have read the book, make them realize the hardships that their migrant loved ones go through, which they take for granted. This has made them treasure the importance of their loved ones even more. The book is indeed an eye-opener to all on what migration is all about in the eyes of those affected by this. The book is currently available at the PMRW office. Those who wish to avail of copies may contact PMRW at (63-2) 724-3512 or e-mail us at migrantswatch@pmrw.org.

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PMRW Secretariat: Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC)
4, 13th St., New Manila, Quezon City, Philippines
63-02-7243512 • 7214296 (fax) • migrantswatch@pmrw.org

Editor

Lance A. S. Velasco (PMRW Secretariat)

Editorial Board

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Ellene Sana (CMA), Lisa Garcia (DAWN)



National Migrants Sunday in Antipolo

By Edwin Corros
CBCP-ECMI

Antipolo, Philippines, February 25, 2007. As early as 11:30 in the morning, unmindful of the simmering heat from the mid day sun, families of migrants started descending from their rented vehicles, some carrying placards, posters and streamers indicating messages of support and solidarity to Filipinos overseas as they approach the gate of Assumption College in Antipolo, where the highlight of the 21st National Migrants Sunday (NMS) celebration is held. Over four thousand people packed the multi-purpose auditorium of Assumption-Antipolo to attend the activities for the annual event dedicated to the Filipinos overseas and their left behind families. The Antipolo City Band led the various delegations marching to the Assumption College grounds, followed by the *higantes* (giant dolls) and the statue of our Lady of Good Voyage (Birhen ng Antipolo) which came in a procession all the way from the Antipolo Cathedral accompanied by the parishioners from six parishes of the

Vicariate of Our Lady of Good Voyage. Just like in the past, the statue of our Lady had made her prominence felt at the 21st National Migrants Sunday.

Following CBCP's declaration of 2006 as the Year of Social Concerns, ECMI has chosen, "*Social costs of migration, a deep concern for the Church,*" as its theme. Globally, migration has become a great concern because of the multifaceted problems it brings to the social, cultural, political, religious and economic aspects on both the sending and receiving countries. The Philippine international migration phenomenon is no different. It has become the concern of different sectors and institutions of society because of the alarming ambivalent characteristics and flows of migration. Poverty and the lack of decent job opportunities in the country often are the immediate reasons why most Filipinos forcibly leave their family behind for overseas employment. Statistically, Filipinos overseas had reached at least 8 million, or



approximately 10% of the country's current population. Nobody can deny the truth about the positive impacts it brings to the families of migrants. It has helped lots of parents to afford children better education, enjoy material benefits and a little comfort of quality living because of the dollar earnings. Looking at it on macro perspective, the government admits that the dollar remittances generated by labor migration contributed a lot in the buoyancy of the economy which earned the Filipino migrant workers the title, "*modern day heroes.*"

The church recognizes these and other positive consequences of migration, however she continues to look more deeply on the social costs that come with it that will inevitably harm the nation, and above all the families. For instance, the number of Filipino women and men who have been victimized by unscrupulous agents to human trafficking, illegal recruitment and other forms of exploitation had never ceased after more than three decades of labor migration. At the back of each of these victims are members of the

family waiting to be fed and clothed. The feminization of migration affects especially the children left behind who miss the nurturing love of their mothers. The children long for their parents' love and care who, ironically are taking care of others' children. There are instances when even the individual and family value systems are somehow twisted. More often than not, the physical absence of parents within the family is being substituted by financial and material reward to children that cultivate many to become materialistic and bum. Furthermore, the prolonged absence of either the husband or the wife in the family shakes the couple's bond and marriage. Estrangement of relationship, marital infidelity, and family breaks-up leading to dysfunctional family are likely consequences of migration. Nobody even talks about those OFWs who have returned mentally deranged due to their incapacity to cope up with pressures while working or residing overseas. Others come home in a box while still others are sick from industrial disease or worst



National Migrant ...

from the most dreaded HIV and AIDS. The immensity of all these current social costs remains unquantifiable for the current generation as society continues to look at Filipino migration mainly from its economic perspective.

At the NMS celebration, opening the program proper were the youth of St. Rose of Lima from Teresa, Rizal with an interpretative dance of the doxology. St. Rose of Lima Parish is the seat of the diocesan migrants' ministry of Antipolo. Bishop Precioso Cantillas, SDB, DD of Maasin Leyte and chairman of ECMI arrived at the venue as early as 12:30. He delivered the opening message where he emphasized to his listeners to value the sacrifices of the Filipinos overseas and their families as he reminded them of their responsibilities of



being in such migration experience. Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, DD of Lipa, Batangas delivered his own solidarity message reminding all present of the lessons that should be learned from EDSA Revolution. Incidentally, February 25 is the EDSA I's 21st anniversary. Bishop Gabriel Reyes, who hosted the celebration and presided the Eucharist, had praised several times the OFW and their families, particularly in their

contribution to the economy of the country. In between the messages given by important Church personalities, dance numbers were executed by the youth to depict the various realities of the life of overseas Filipinos. Thanks to the youth's participation that had never run out of creative ideas to showcase through dance the sad and joyful experiences of Filipinos caught in the drama of migration.

What made this NMS very meaningful this year was the presence of the three bishops who had helped the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI) of the CBCP develop. Bishop Gabriel Reyes was the first ever chairman of ECMI since its creation in 1987. He was followed by Bsp. Ramon Arguelles and was followed by Bsp. Precioso Cantillas, the current ECMI chairman who assumed such office last August 2004.

The delegation from far away Batangas, who came in droves, was led by Fr. Jojo Gonda, the archdiocesan minister for Migrants and Mission. The Batagueños visited the Antipolo Cathedral in the morning as pilgrims prior to their attendance at the NMS activity in solidarity with Antipolo Diocese. At least three other Batagueño priests came with the people from Lipa and other parts of Ba-



tangas. In an initial evaluation made by the pastoral leaders of Antipolo, the celebration of the NMS in their diocese was a great success. In fact, it was one that was held without hassle from anyone despite its short preparation. "Everyone has cooperated well," remarked Fr. Joey Bautista who could not hide his joy for the warm support he received from the lay leaders of Antipolo diocese.

Delegates from Manila and Calocan also came to express support and solidarity to the diocese of Antipolo. The relatively peaceful and smooth flow of the celebration could be attributed to the visible presence of the security guards of the school and local police office. Government agencies from OWWA and Philhealth had put up their booth along with the corporate sponsors led by Pioneer Insurance, Banco de Oro and Globe Telecoms. Guest artist Jorge Javier has brought the house down with his typical jokes and solidarity message for the OFWs and their families. He serenaded his listeners with a beautiful song dedicated to the overseas Filipinos.

In other places of the country, the dioceses of Alaminos in Pangasinan, Bayombong in Nueva Viscaya, Cebu, San Fernando in Pampanga, Lipa, Batangas, Novaliches and

Manila had conducted distinct activities to celebrate NMS. The Bayombong diocese has reported that it was able to capture at least five thousand OFW family members in Nueva Viscaya. In a different conduct of NMS, Novaliches has invited the youth to watch "Ina, Anak, Pamilya" not only to raise awareness among the children of migrants, but also to raise funds for the ministry for migrants.

At Nuestra Señora de Guia at Ermita, a shrine dedicated for the Filipino migrants and their families President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has joined the Eucharistic celebration presided by Auxiliary Bishop Padillo. In a simple gesture of solidarity to the NMS celebration, a hundred balloons were set free symbolizing the many sufferings experienced by overseas Filipinos and their families.

In an annual event to promote awareness on the issues and concerns affecting the Filipino overseas and their families ECMI continues to bring the highlight of its celebration to other parts of the country. It must be remembered that the 19th NMS celebration was brought to Lipa Archdiocese in Batangas while the 20th NMS celebration was held in San Fernando, Pampanga.

Celebrating Women

EDITORIAL

by Lisa Garcia (DAWN)

From the first time that International Women's Day was celebrated in 1917 up to today, we can say that there has been enormous progress in promoting women's rights and in changing the perceptions of women. Women are making their presence felt in all sectors of society. We've had several women heads of States. Women are likewise excelling in all fields, including those that used to be dominated by men. Indeed, there is so much to celebrate about women! Filipino women enjoy considerable rights compared to women of other nationalities. Throughout history, Filipino women have made their mark in different fields. We celebrate the heroism of Mechora Aquino and Gabriela Silang. We pay tribute to our many women leaders like Maria Kalaw Katigbak, Senator Leticia Shahani, Dr. Helen Benitez, Justice Cecilia Munoz-Palma, Dr. Patricia Licuanan and others who have helped advance women's rights. Recently, a woman graduated on top of the 2007 class of the Philippine Military Academy. The latest surveys also show that Filipino women are better off than their counterparts in other parts of the world. The Philippines obtained a positive ranking in the Gender Gap study

conducted by the World Economic Forum. Of the 115 countries included in the study, the Philippines ranked number 6. In the recent MasterIndex™ of Women's Advancement survey, the Philippines again scored high, meaning that Filipino women executives enjoy a high level of advancement opportunities.

While it is true that we have a high female participation in the labor force let us also examine their working conditions. Are they getting the same pay as men for equal work done? Let us also ask the working wives and mothers who take on the bulk of household chores in the house how they are. Females also comprise about 60% of new hires among overseas workers. Most of them are engaged in work in the household and entertainment sectors, two of the more vulnerable job categories.

As we celebrate women's day and women's month, let us also remember other women who are deprived of their rights. Discrimination against women still persists largely because of ignorance of women of their rights. Many women are still marginalized and suffer various forms of abuses and harassments. Millions of women all over the

world still remain in various forms of bondage. Many are still deprived of their rights, including the right to suffrage. There are several thousands of women and girls trafficked annually.

As we celebrate International Women's month, we pray that more and more men would be more aware of the legal and birth rights of women; that more men would show appreciation and gratitude to the contributions of women in society; that more men would show respect to women.

There is much to celebrate today and at the same time there is still a lot of work ahead in promoting the rights and welfare of women around the world.



Congress Bicameral Committee Repeals Deregulatory Provisions of RA 8042

The Critical Role of the Government

Lance Alexander S. Velasco, PMRW Secretariat

After several years of lobbying for the amendment of Republic Act 8042 or the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, Congress finally approved the Bicameral Conference Committee Report repealing sections 29 and 30, as well as amending section 23, paragraph b.1 of the said law.

On January 29, 2007, a bicameral committee meeting was held to consolidate and iron out other issues pertaining to the House and Senate versions of the amendments to R.A. 8042. The Senate was represented by Committee on Labor, Employment, and Human Resources Chairman Senator Jinggoy Estrada and Senator Lito Lapid, while the House of Representatives was represented by Congressman Edcel Lagman, who is House Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs Chair, Committee on Labor Chair Roseller Barinaga, Partido ng Manggagawa representative Rene Magtubo and AKBAYAN Party List representative Mayong Aguja. Others present during the bicameral conference meeting were POEA Administrator Rosalinda Baldoz and migrant advocates and NGOs, including members of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW).

Section 29 on comprehensive deregulation plan on recruitment activities and Section 30 on the gradual phase-out of regulatory functions of RA 8042 run counter to the intent of the law which is to establish a higher standard of protection and promotion



of the welfare of migrant workers, their families, and overseas Filipinos in distress. It will deprive migrant workers of existing protective measures and mechanisms leaving them to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment abroad on their own.

Time and again, the PMRW has called on government to implement policies that would establish a higher standard of protection and promote the empowerment of migrants and their families, including the repeal of sections 29 and 30 of R.A. 8042.

In an earlier statement issued by the PMRW, its members said that, "Deregulation would only be sensible and effective in an environment where there is perfect information available to OFWs and prospective migrants and where overseas migration is taken as an option. Our level of development is such that migration is more of a push phenomenon rather than an option for Filipinos. Until then, government regulation of the migrant industry is critical to protect migrant workers from abuse and exploitation."

It is an admitted fact that there is a continuing increase in the number of Filipinos working overseas, a surge of vulnerable skills overseas, the problem of illegal recruitment, human trafficking and the prevalence of welfare cases and recruitment violations. These circumstances, as well as the present state of the economy make the continued government intervention imperative in order to provide protection to our migrant workers.

The repeal of sections 29 and 30 and the amendment of section 23 b.1 are indeed welcome developments for our OFWs and overseas Filipinos.



Forum-Workshop on Overseas Absentee Voting Organized by CMA in Preparation for 2007 National Election

The Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) Philippines in cooperation with the Consortium for Electoral Reform and Halal held a forum workshop on overseas absentee voting (OAV) on Upholding the Integrity and Sanctity of the OAV ballot last March 16, 2007 at the Max's Restaurant in Intramuros, Manila. The forum aimed to bring together in a dialogue the COMELEC, DFA OAVS and OAV advocates, to review the processes and mechanisms of the OAV particularly on ensuring the integrity of the ballots, and the mobilization of overseas Filipinos (OFs) and OAV advocates for voter education and information dissemination.

The Forum discussed the latest figures and updates regarding the OAV. Commissioner Florentino Tuason, Jr., the chairperson of COMELEC's Committee on Overseas Absentee Voting enumerated the major changes and improvements in the implementation of the OAV Law for the 2007 National elections:

- (1) Longer registration period from October 2005 to October 2006 with registration centers at POEA and NAIA as well as during PDOS (Pre-departure orientation seminar) for seafarers;
- (2) expansion of voting by mail from 3 major posts in 2004 to 59 posts; and
- (3) flexible voting arrangements for seafarers.

Ambassador Generoso Calonge, Vice Chairperson of the OAV Secretariat of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said that there are

143,155 new registrants in 2005-6 in addition to the 364,187 registrants in 2004. Posts that registered the highest were the Middle East and Hong Kong. The list of qualified overseas absentee voters is available at the Comelec website at www.comelec.gov.ph/coavsearchsql/webforms/2007oavlist.aspx.

They also discussed the different mechanisms of OAV. Among these are the positions the voters may vote for such as the 12 Senatorial candidates and a Party-List representative. Another is the methods of voting such as personal and postal voting. Also discussed was how seafarers may vote and the counting process for such votes.

CMA's legal counsel Atty. Henry Rojas congratulated Comm. Tuazon and Atty. Bait Valmonte for their efforts and passion in relation to the OAV implementation which cannot compare with local elections. Atty. Rojas said that the criticism after the 2004 elections and this election that OAV turn out was low is neither true nor fair. In fact, he added, it is one of the highest turn outs in the world. Based on his studies of absentee voting in other countries, Atty. Rojas said that while the expansion of postal voting will increase accessibility, it also has the possibility of lower turn out as per the experiences of other countries.

Ellene Sana of CMA said that the political empowerment of



overseas Filipinos is not limited only to casting of the ballots under the overseas absentee voting law. It is also about being vigilant and making sure that the sanctity and integrity of the ballots are protected and not compromised in any way. It is for this purpose, that the Consortium for Electoral Reforms (CER) and HALAL were invited to the forum to share their projects as election monitors for 2007.

Ramon Casiple, Convenor of CER, a national coalition of 45 electoral reform organizations, presented their project *Bantay Eleksyon 2007*, which will conduct a comprehensive monitoring of the 2007 elections, from electoral preparations to post-proclamation protests. Their focus will be on the performance of the COMELEC and its deputized agencies. Bantay Eleksyon invites volunteer-monitors for OAV.

Roberto Verzola of the Halalang Marangal or Halal (Network of Citizens for Honest Elections and Truthful Statistics or No Cheats) Project explained that they

will do a citizens' audit for 2007 May elections. Its Convenors' include former Sen. Wigberto Tanada, Retired General Gudani, Retired COMELEC Commissioner Mejol Sadain and other NGOs. Halal was set up to count precinct level votes which seems difficult in the case of overseas absentee votes unless they are able to partner with OAV organizations. This transparency provides for maximum citizen intervention. Similar to Bantay Eleksyon, Halal welcomes volunteers for OAV election audit.

Participants in the forum workshop included OF rights-advocates from Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, San Francisco and Guam, USA, friends from the media and member organizations of the Philippine Migrants' Rights Watch (PMRW).

The forum workshop was organized with support from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas and the Olof Palme International Center.

Ellene Sana (CMA)

International Catholic Migration Commission

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) works internationally, regionally and in 40 countries around the world with refugees, migrants, people who have been trafficked, and internally displaced people, with special attention to the most vulnerable among them. ICMC has an explicit mandate to work for the rights of migrants and their families, and has done so for more than 50 years directly and through its network of 172 members worldwide. In line with that mandate and with the special importance that Catholic social teaching gives to labor, ICMC has devoted a large amount of its operations, policy and advocacy work in recent years specifically to helping migrant workers and members of their families.

Some of ICMC's achievements and specific work for migrant workers and their families include:

- *Ongoing operations* in counter-trafficking and rescue; return and reintegration programs for victims of trafficking and other migrants; income generation, livelihood and community building; psycho-social counselling for victims of torture and trauma, and services for extremely vulnerable individuals. In the Asia region, a number of these programs are based in Indonesia, Pakistan and Timor Leste. In the Middle East, ICMC continues its support of the rights and, in some

cases, the rescue of domestic workers, a majority of whom are from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. ICMC also participates on fact-finding visits to refugees in Malaysia, Thailand, India and Nepal, and related follow-up.

- ICMC was one of only 5 NGOs chosen worldwide to speak at the *High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development*, held by the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2006. ICMC underlined that "human rights are practical. They solve problems. Respect of human rights maximizes the contribution of migrants to development." ICMC promotes this perspective in all fora.
- ICMC accelerated its work with institutions and processes created to protect migrant rights. It continued to promote, directly as well as in several international coalitions, greater ratification and implementation of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*. ICMC worked with ICMC members in North, Central and South America and North Africa on testimony to the UN Migrant Workers Committee about the situation of migrants in Mexico and Egypt, and with the Geneva representative of the Philippines regarding the preparation of their upcoming report to that Committee.

Separately, ICMC worked with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, providing input for example on his recent visits and report regarding the experience of migrants in South Korea and Indonesia. Members and field operations of ICMC also contributed to the development of a number of NGO statements presented to the UNHCR Executive and Standing Committees in March and September, including in particular concerns about the treatment of migrants in transit.

- ICMC published *When They Were Sold*, a book on trafficking in Indonesia and, the *Do-it-yourself Toolkit* on strengthening the rights of migrants and their families under all 7 of the UN human rights conventions.

International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)
37-39 Rue de Vermont, Case Postale 96
CH-1211, Geneva, Switzerland
(t) 41-22-919-1020
www.icmc.net

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PMRW Secretariat: *Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC)*
No. 4, 13th St., New Manila, Quezon City, Philippines
Tel. (63-2) 7243512 • Fax (63-2) 7214296
www.pmrw.org • migrantswatch@pmrw.org

