



M—the W Watch

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Finally, absentee voting signed into law Filipinos abroad can vote in national election

by Jannis T. MontaÑez

Development Action for Women Network

There will be much more to look forward to in May 2004 other than the next president-elect of the country as millions of Filipinos around the globe reclaim their right to vote in next year's national election.

After the heated deliberation over the so-called "contentious issues" of the Absentee Voting bill, the bicameral conference committee from the Senate and the House of Representatives finally reached an agreement that was sealed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's signing of Republic Act 9189 or "The Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003" last February 13 at Malacañang Palace.

Legislators, government officials, civil society groups, including the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), and migrants themselves gathered for this momentous event. The migrant sector lobbied and waited for 15 years for the bill's enactment.

Under this new law, some seven million Filipinos outside the country can vote for the president, vice president, senators and party list representatives during the national election, beginning May 2004.

Section 5 of the measure, however, disqualifies an immigrant or a permanent resident who is recognized as such in the host country from participating in the national election unless he/she executes an affidavit that he/she will permanently reside in the Philippines not later than three years from the approval of the voters' registration. The affidavit should also state that he/she has not applied for citizenship in another country. If the said voter fails to return to the country as required, his/her name will be removed from the National Registry of Absentee Voters and will no longer be allowed to vote in absentia.

Another important provision of the Act is voting by mail which will only be allowed in not more than three countries - Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada - for the May 2004 election. Qualified Filipinos in other countries should personally cast their votes in the



embassy, consulate, other foreign service establishment or at any polling place designated and accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

A supplemental budget of one billion pesos this year, earmarked to support the preparations of concerned government agencies and offices led by the COMELEC, has yet to be finalized.

Intensive preparation

After the President's formal signing, advocates look forward to another critical phase, that is, the formulation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) to effectively implement the provisions of this "landmark piece of legislation." As of this time, the COMELEC committee on absentee voting, headed by Commissioner Florentino Tuazon is still in the process of completing the draft of the IRR, which will be submitted to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee for approval as mandated by the law.

With the issuance of Department Order No. 06-03, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Overseas Absentee Voting Law Secretariat, chaired by DFA Undersecretary Arturo Brion, was also created to direct, coordinate and oversee DFA's participation in the implementation of RA 9189, particularly, through its coordination with the COMELEC in undertaking or supporting election activities or operations, and in working with other concerned government agencies to ensure a coherent and integrated approach in its implementation of the Act.

Women's vulnerability and strength in the migration scene

Going beyond the confines of the home, Filipino women of today assume a lot more challenges and responsibilities. In addition to managing the household, they now trudge a path alongside with men in providing for the economic needs of the family.

From a domestic life, Filipino women are now very much part of the labor market. Worth noting is their active participation not only in the local labor market, but in the international labor market as well.

The male-dominated overseas labor force of the 1970s shifted to a female-dominated one in 1990s. A large percentage of these are domestic workers and entertainers who are mostly deployed to Hong Kong and Japan, respectively. For the period of January to September 2002 alone, there was a record deployment of 104,845 Filipinos to Hong Kong and 77,099 to Japan, consistently making them the second and third top destination countries of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) for the past years.

The demand for female overseas workers has been growing steadily. The feminization of migration has raised much concern over the risk and vulnerability of migrant women to abuse and violation of their rights.

Just recently, our domestic workers in Hong Kong, together with other foreign domestic workers from Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, protested the implementation of a HK\$400 (\$51)-wage cut by the Hong Kong government. This

would reduce their salaries to HK\$ 3,270 a month that will have a big effect on their remittances to their families back home. This prompted President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to appeal to the Hong Kong government not to reduce the minimum wage. She even sent a number of officials there to discuss the matter, but to no avail. This led to the decision to suspend the deployment of Filipino domestic workers to Hong Kong, a move that earned the ire of the workers themselves who are set to lose their jobs, the major source of income for the economic needs of their families.

Looking closely at the issue, our domestic workers can only choose the lesser evil. Either way, they stand to lose the battle. And the most that they can do now is to find another job or clamor for a just wage, both of which are beyond their control.

On the other hand, our women entertainers or what the government calls, the "overseas performing artists" (OPAs), have also been in the eye of controversies lately. This was triggered by reports of alleged irregularities at the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), concerning the testing and issuance of fake Artist Record Book (ARBs) to OPAs. The controversy led to the resignation of TESDA Director-General Dante Liban who was accused of irregularities by various groups, including industry leaders and the TESDA employees themselves. As a prerequisite to getting an entertainer's visa for



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Japan-bound OPAs, talents must first undergo intensive skills training in TESDA-accredited training centers and pass the testing before finally securing their ARBs.

The system has generated irregularities, such as the allegedly rampant cheating and buying of fake ARBs in exchange for a large sum of money. It has become notorious for cashing in on these women migrants even before they leave the Philippines. These are the same women who would face even more risks with the kind of "hostessing work" they have to do in Japan. In the end, all the efforts and resources spent in training to become "performing artists" come to naught. The "dohan system" or going out on afternoon date with their male customers, wearing sexy clothes and sitting beside or in the lap of their customers, flying booking or the transfer from one club to another, receiving their salaries only at the end of their six-month contracts and other forms of contract violations are usually heard from the OPAs who have worked in night spots in Japan. From pre-departure to their job sites, the rights of these women are severely violated.

These sad realities befalling our women workers here and abroad are not new. The continuing trend of female migration holds the prospect that other women may end up like Flor Contemplacion and Maricris Sison.

In the annual celebration of March as Women's Month, the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch

(PMRW) joins the whole world in the fight for equality and respect for women migrants. Their contribution to the family and the world of work, here and abroad, speak of their hard work in building homes and communities. In responding to the need for workers in the global labor market, more preventive and protective measures are critical to ensure that women's basic rights are protected.

Despite being rendered vulnerable by their overseas work, women themselves have been at the forefront of initiating reforms and programs that promote the protection of the rights of women migrants.

In all sectors of the society, women themselves are now empowered to be catalysts of change. We have a woman president and several women officials who are privileged to hold key positions. It is our hope that their awareness of the needs of women - in their roles in the family, in paid work outside the home and the wider community, could lead to needed changes.

Thus, the PMRW challenges their competencies as women leaders. May they have a caring heart, one that is sensitive and mindful of the needs of other people, a mind capable of making intelligent and sensible decisions, and a spirit that is strong, willing and determined to stand for what is right and just. These are the kind of women officials that this nation needs and not leaders that are submissive to the whims and needs of receiving countries in this migration phenomenon.

M[—]the Migrant Watch

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GRO, not entertainer: Gov't accused of SEX trafficking

by T.J. Burgonio

Last March 5-7, 2003, the Philippine Daily Inquirer came out with a special report on the plight of our women iOverseas Performing Artists (OPAs) in Japan. The Migrant Watch is reprinting the second of this three-part series that exposed the alleged irregularities in the government's deployment program of OPAs to Japan.

(Second of three parts)

WILMA is a music trainer at a promotions agency in Manila. A folk singer who performed in Japan in the 1980s, she teaches basic singing to women with a single objective: Get them to pass the performance tests at training centers accredited by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda).

If they do, they are issued an artist's record book, the ARB being the sole requirement for an entertainer's visa to Japan.

Wilma has no illusions about her "students."

"They get singers or dancers here, but the work awaiting them in Japan is that of a GRO. That's how it is," said Wilma, who is related to the agency owner and, for that reason, requested the use of an assumed name. Her relative's agency has been supplying at least eight Japanese club owners and promoters with "guest relations officers" — the hotel industry-inspired code for sex workers — the past 10 years.

Is Tesda aware that her agency sends GROs, not entertainers, to Japan? "Of course," she said. "All this training of talents is a charade."

In looking for a talent, Wilma's agency follows simple criteria: The applicant must be attractive and relatively young, that is, aged 18-24, because "that's what the Japanese club owners want." The company is not strict about its own rules; many times, she said, it accepts 17-year-olds.

She also said the agency's talents were being auditioned in Manila by Japanese club owners themselves. Some talents are "reserved" for certain clubs even before they pass the evaluation test.

During such auditions, Wilma said, the talents are not required to sing or dance; they only need to show up in sexy clothes, and pose before their future employers.

A source inside Tesda said it sometimes happened that applicants were asked to strip down to their underwear or fondled by the club owners.

"While still being trained, they're already picked by the Japanese as long as they're attractive. Those Japanese, they're very eager to do the auditions; they even outdo one another in vying for the most attractive," Wilma said.

Contract between the talents and the Japanese club owner are signed right after the audition, she added.

The training course could last from two weeks to a year, depending on the ability of the talent. "The reason for their training is for them to acquire an ARB, and not for them to be skilled singers or performers," she said.

Her agency, one of the more than 300 training centers accredited by Tesda, sends an average of four women to Japan each month to work as GROs with a starting monthly salary of \$700-\$1,000. The talent gets at least 50 percent of her monthly salary; the rest goes to the promotions agency owner.

Once the results of the skills performance tests are released, and the ARBs and the visas are issued, the trainees are booked on the first available flight to Japan. Their plane fare and their board and lodging are deducted from their salary, Wilma said.

Government as pimp

All this, Carmelita Nuqui said angrily, means that the government has been legitimizing sex trafficking through its issuance of the ARBs.

The executive director of the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) did not mince words. "This is sex trafficking because the women are being sold by the club owners and the government which processes their documents," she said.

DAWN is a nongovernment organization which provides counseling and alternative jobs for former entertainers in Japan.

Nuqui further charged that the government was deceiving the women by certifying them as performing artists. "Working as a performing artist is a very good job. Women are attracted (to this idea) only to find out that when they arrive in Japan they will do other kind of work," she said.

By her own reckoning, Nuqui, who goes on mercy errands to night-clubs during her four trips to Japan every year, said that more than 90 percent of Filipino women working in Japan had ended up as commercial sex workers.

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Women's group like DAWN have been vigilant in advocating the rights of women migrants

Magna Carta for Seafarers revisited

Fr. Savino Bernardi, cs
Apostleship of the Sea ñ Manila

The National Seafarers' Convention is already several months old. Looking back then, the need for change was evidently felt. Despite the noble intention and purpose of the Convention, the manning agencies, ship owners and some government agencies did not participate in this important event. Thus, it became even more evident that the maritime "house" is not in order.

With the solemn presentation of a Magna Carta for Seafarers to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to conclude the Convention, the event became even more significant for the seafarers who had much hope and expectation that this will entail better benefits and services for the seafaring community.

The Magna Carta cites the necessary improvements and protective measures for sea-based workers who have been dissatisfied by the performance of the various government and private agencies, concerning maritime education, training, assessment, job application, deployment, and respect of contract, among other concerns.

The criticisms and suggestions by the community itself and the observations coming from the government and NGOs were also regarded as significant inputs of the measure. The soundness of these inputs stands on the six (6) International Consultations that were made prior to the Convention and the several workshops conducted during the event itself. Other comments of the participants were also presented as recommendations.

Developments under the Office of the VP

Months after the consultations, the seafarers and advocates await concrete results and developments from these activities and from the Magna Carta itself. Foremost of which is the handling of tasks concerning the Filipino seafarers and the Maritime Employment Industry that was entrusted to the Office of Vice-President Teofisto Guingona, with the assistance of Dean Merlin Magallona through a Presidential Order. Consequently, the coordination on matters arising from the proposed Magna Carta is also now in the hands of the Vice-President.

With this development, it is reassuring to know that things are moving in different fronts. Under the Chairmanship of Dean Magallona, the initial draft of the Magna Carta was submitted for review to ten (10) lawyers of the Institute of International Legal Studies

at the University of the Philippines. The ten lawyers were assigned to study specific fields in preparation for the final draft that will be submitted to the Government in July 2003. To date, two meetings concerning this matter were already conducted.

From these meetings, some specific proposals have emerged such as: a) encouraging unionism among seafarers; b) strengthening

the collective bargaining power of seafarers; c) strengthening the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration's (POEA) control power over the manning agencies; and d) examining closely the maritime educational curriculum vis-à-vis professional standards and the on-job-training (OJT) requirements.

In the meantime, the Vice-President has been convening a series of meetings with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), NGOs and manning agencies in order to have more specific suggestions and recommendations.

A Technical Working Group is also tasked to prepare and submit to both the Senate and the House of Representatives a consolidated Bill of the three proposed legislative measures: the Magna Carta, the proposed bill by House Speaker Jose de Venecia, and another by Congressman Augusto "Boboy" Syjuco.

DOLE and POEA tasks

Last January 24, 2003, President Arroyo issued Administrative Order No. 56 which mandates the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to establish within three (3) months a One-Stop-Shop that is meant to simplify the procedures and unify "under one roof" the 15 government agencies involved in the processing of seafarers' documents.

POEA, on the other hand, still has to finalize the new rules and regulations on the seafaring industry after more than two (2) years. It is hoped that the Board will soon agree on the few remaining disputed matters on this.

While there is nothing new in the already expected delays and procrastination, the voice of the seafaring community will continue to call on the government to fully address their concerns until that voice prevails and is heard loud and clear. There is still much to be done and more to accomplish, but hopefully, at the soonest time.



AOS and some PMRW members in a meeting with Vice-President Teofisto Guingona

National Migrants' Sunday

‘Reach Out to OFWs and Their Families’

In 1987, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), through its service arm, the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI), started the celebration of National Migrants' Sunday (NMS) to promote greater awareness and understanding of migration issues. Celebrated every First Sunday of Lent, the annual celebration is marked by remembering migrants and their families in the Sunday liturgy in a special way. Local churches

may also choose to carry out other activities, such as forums and discussions on migration-related themes.

This year's celebration of NMS fell on March 9. Bishop Ramon D. Arguelles, ECMI Chairperson, officiated a mass at Our Lady of EDSA Shrine. President Gloria Arroyo, Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas, POEA Administrator Rosalinda Baldoz, OWWA Administrator Virgilio Angelo, NGO representatives, and migrant families were among the special guests



Bishop Ramon Arguelles, ECMI Chair, responds to a query at the press conference following the mass



Pres. Arroyo mingles with OFW families at the mass in Our Lady of EDSA Shrine

at the mass. This year's theme, "Reaching Out to OFWs and Their Families," takes on a special significance with the launching of 2003 as the Year of OFW Families. One of the highlights of the event was the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the CBCP and OWWA to cooperate on programs to promo-

te the welfare and empowerment of OFW families. A little more than half of Filipino families – 8 million out of 15.3 million families – are affected by migration. Supporting migrant families is an important step in ushering better migration outcomes.

by Fr. Paulo Prigol, cs (ECMI)

Deployment ban imposed over HK wage-cut issue



Asian Migration News
March 15, 2003

On 5 March President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered a temporary ban on the deployment of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. The order came following the decision of the Hong Kong government to reduce the minimum wage of foreign domestic workers by HK\$400, for contracts signed or renewed starting 1 April. The President also instructed the Labor Department to conduct a review of existing policies on the deployment of Filipino domestic workers in other problem areas. Arroyo's move, however, was not well received by the Filipino workers in Hong Kong, as well as the Philippine Association of Service

Exporters, Inc. (PASEI). The Society of Hong Kong Accredited Recruiters of the Philippines (SHARP) urged the government to lift the temporary ban on the deployment of Filipino workers in Hong Kong. SHARP will also file a petition asking President Arroyo to reverse the order suspending the processing of contracts and other documents of Hong Kong-bound domestic workers. Arroyo's order has affected at least 7,000 workers ready to leave for Hong Kong with approved contracts and work visas.

A survey and signature campaign will be launched among the 154,000 strong Filipino domestic

workers in Hong Kong to determine their stand on the ban issue.

Sen. Manuel Villar, Jr. asked the Labor Department to compel the Hong Kong government to provide more social benefits, like free medical services, to Filipino domestic workers in exchange for the new tax levy deductible from their salaries.

Despite the ban, Labor Undersecretary Manuel Inson is confident that the Philippines will keep its share in Hong Kong's domestic workers market. There are 153,000 Filipinos in Hong Kong they account for 64 percent of all foreign domestic workers in SAR.

GRO, not entertainer. Gov't accused of sex trafficking

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"During my visits, I never saw performing artists the way the government or Tesda had pictured OPAs (overseas performing artists) to be. The nightclubs I had visited never had any stages, where the women could perform," she said.

"The women just sat at the tables in their skimpy clothes. Some sat on the laps of the customers; others had their arms wrapped around the Japanese men."

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) issued at least 8,496 ARBs until May last year, when Tesda took over the responsibility of issuing ARBs. In a period of eight months, Tesda chief Dante Liban signed at least 55,000 ARBs.

Nuqui said the prevalent practice of "dohan" (an afternoon date, which turns into an occasion for paid sex) and the so-called "flying booking" violated the provisions of the ARBs themselves.

"We have 200 women under our custody and all of them had experienced 'dohan.' They had different quotas to meet. This is a violation of the ARB because your kind of work is specified there," she said.

Flying booking, or club owners transferring the entertainers from one club to another, is also a breach of the ARB. "The club owners always want to have fresh faces in their clubs by transferring the entertainers from one workplace to another. But this is a violation of the ARB because your specific workplace is specified there," she said.

Nuqui also said that the club owners' practice of having the entertainers clean up the clubs after work, allowing them only two days off each month, and releasing their salary at the end of the contract were also violations of the ARB's terms.

Po Gratela, national chair of Migrante International, said the ARBs, which are supposed to protect women entertainers by specifying the terms of their contract, had only abetted the trafficking of women to Japan.

"ARBs should be abolished. They said it's supposed to protect our women, but since 1995 it has never protected the women going to

Japan from sexual exploitation," he said in a phone interview.

Cathy's case

Cathy was 17 when she was issued an ARB. She got hers, however, without going through the training in singing and dancing that is required by law, or taking the talent test at a Tesda-accredited testing center. She didn't have the time.

Two days after she was recruited by the Fortune promotions agency, she was already booked for a job in Japan as a GRO. That's why her agency had to buy her ARB, she said. She said she didn't know how much it cost.

In her first month in Japan, she managed to resist the sexual overtures of her Japanese customers. Angered by this, she said, the club owner forced himself on her.



Since then, the young recruit from Visayas has yielded to the advances of her customers, agreeing to go out with them on a "dohan." "I had no choice," the tanned, petite Cathy, now 18, said.

She came home at the end of her six-month contract; last September, however, she flew back to Japan. The INQUIRER reached businessman Antonio Antonio,

who was identified as the owner of Fortune. Mr. Antonio said he was no longer involved in the business; he had distanced himself from the agency several years ago, he said, and it was now being run by his brother-in-law. But he strongly denied Cathy's allegations.

(Reprinted from the Philippine Daily Inquirer - March 6, 2003)

MIGRANT WORKERS CONVENTION ENTERS INTO FORCE

by Maruja M.B. Asis (SMC)

July 1, 2003 is D-Day when the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families enters into force. This is a long-awaited development for the world's 150 million migrants – migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers, permanent immigrants and others – who live and work outside in a country outside of their birth.

After more than a decade of campaigning, the Convention obtained the 20th instrument of ratification on March 14, 2003, thanks to Guatemala. The UN General Assembly adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession on December 18, 1990. The instrument provides for the protection of the human rights of migrant workers regardless of their legal status.

To date, it has been ratified or acceded to by the following 21 States: Azerbaijan, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, Guinea, Mexico, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Uganda and Uruguay.

A 10-member Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families will monitor the implementation of the Convention. The election of the Committee members by the States parties is slated to take place before the end of the year. The struggle for the protection of migrants' rights will move on to another realm following the implementation of the Convention.



Finally, absentee voting signed into law

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The Secretariat inaugurated its office at the DFA last March 13. A hi-tech database system that includes the OAV Environmental Mapping Database, Overseas Filipino Associations Database, and Electronic Verification System Design, among others, was launched at the event.

This early RA 9189 is already experiencing birthing pains. Some sectors have criticized certain provisions of RA 9189 that they considered unconstitutional, particularly, the one allowing an immigrant or permanent citizen of another country to vote under certain conditions. Some critics say this is not enough to grant him/her the right of suffrage. Senator Aquilino Pimentel, one of the principal authors of the absentee voting bill, said otherwise, citing constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas' affirmation that granting the right to vote to emigrants was valid since their affidavit would indicate they had not applied for citizenship in another country and therefore, had not renounced their Philippine citizenship.

At the height of criticisms and the inevitable difficulties that have emerged from the intensive preparation, especially the budget allocation and required time to get everything done, migrant advocates like the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW) vow to remain vigilant in protecting the voting rights of Filipinos abroad.

"It's a much-awaited victory for us migrant advocates, but most importantly, for our workers abroad who have long helped our economy through dollar remittances but were never given the chance to take part in our previous national elections. Migrant advocates like us and the migrants themselves and their families will not allow anything to get in the way of fully implementing and achieving the purpose of this law, before, during and after the May 2004 election," PMRW President Carmelita Nuqui remarked. Section 28 of the measure mandates Congress to review RA 9189 within two years following its first im-

plementation in May 2004. This will become the basis for making necessary amendments to the systems, policies and procedures of

overseas absentee voting. This development augurs for an interesting and historical moment not only for the migrant sector, but

also as a test of the country's political maturity. Stay tuned and most of all, stay vigilant.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE "OVERSEAS ABSENTEE VOTING ACT OF 2003"

1. Effectivity of the law	May 2004 and subsequent elections
2. Right to vote	All overseas Filipinos who are at least 18 years old and have not renounced their Filipino citizenship; including immigrants and permanent residents of other countries but have to execute an affidavit indicating that they will return to the Philippines not later than three years from the approval of their voters' registration
3. Elective positions	President, vice president, senators, and party-list representatives
4. Registration	Personal
5. Application to vote in absentia	Personal or by mail to the embassy, consulate or other foreign establishment in the country where he/she has indicated his/her address for purposes of the election
6. Casting and submission of ballots	Personal; at the embassies, consulates and other foreign establishment in the country where he/she temporarily resides; or at any polling place designated and accredited by the COMELEC
7. Voting by mail	Under certain conditions; for approval by the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee. For the May 2004 election, only in three countries: Japan, United Kingdom and Canada
8. Counting and canvassing of votes	On-site, within the premises of the embassies, consulates and other foreign establishments
9. Special Board of Election Inspectors	Ambassador or consul-general or any career public officer posted abroad and designated by the COMELEC (as Chairman), and two qualified Filipino citizen voters deputized by the COMELEC in the absence of other government officers (as Members)
10. Special Board of Canvassers	Lawyer, preferably of the COMELEC (as Chairman), a senior career officer from any of the government agencies posted abroad (as Vice-chairman) and a qualified Filipino citizen voter deputized by the COMELEC (as member-secretary) in the absence of another government officer
11. Formulation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations	By the COMELEC in coordination with the DFA, DOLE, POEA, OWWA, and CFO; in consultation with NGOs and accredited Filipino organizations
12. Security measures to safeguard the secrecy and sanctity of ballots	By the COMELEC's Committee on Absentee Voting; accredited major political parties, citizens' arms and NGOs to assist and intervene in appropriate cases, in all stages of the electoral process
13. Joint Congressional Oversight Committee	SENATE - Chairman of the Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendments, Revision of Codes and Laws, and 7 other senators designated by the Senate President HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - Chairman of the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms, and 7 other Members of the House designated by the Speaker 4 out of 7 the members from both Chambers should come from the majority and the 3 others from the minority
14. Mandatory review of the law	Within two years following the 2004 election from which the necessary amendments will be based

PMRW's call is for peace

The US-led combat troops in the Gulf have invaded Iraq. The UK, Spain and several other countries have pledged full support for the war as the "coalition of the willing." Estimates of the costs of the military operations and post-war reconstruction run from US\$ 27 billion to US\$ 1.92 trillion.

However, the world does not want this war. What is the war for? What are the objectives? Who profits from it? And there could be so many other questions...

In the past weeks, we have witnessed millions of peoples around the globe, from all walks of society, taking to the streets and conveying the same message: "no to war." However, some leaders have chosen the slogan "yes to war."

If there is a sector very much affected by this war, it is the sector of migrants and their families. The around 1.5 million Filipinos in the Gulf area now are wondering what is going to

_____ by Fr. Paulo Prigol, cs (ECMI)

happen to them and to their jobs. The families left behind are now anxious, thinking of their relatives in the Middle East.

The economy has already been affected just by speculations about the war. Now that the war is underway, only time will tell the real economic price that we will pay because of these military actions. Definitely, remittances from the Middle East area will drop considerably and this will affect the Filipino economy.

In this scenario, PMRW advocates for peace and strongly say no to war. PMRW joins with all sectors of society and the Church in reminding government leaders of their primary duty: the promotion of peace and order. PMRW also says to the Filipino government that it is not ready to pay the price that the OFWs and their families will suffer. Therefore, let us join hands to promote peace.



the Migrant Watch

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