



M—the Watch

quarterly newsletter of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch

Vol.3 No. 1 • March 2004

www.pmrw.org

Manila, Philippines

Who can truly serve the migrant sector?

by Jannis T. Montañez

Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)

The campaign fever heats up with just a little over a month left for the presidential candidates to sell their programs of government, hoping to convince the Filipino people that he or she is the saving grace to the country's ailing situation.

The challenge lies in us Filipino voters to choose the next leaders not because of their popularity, mass appeal, or sweet promises. Rather, we must entrust our votes to those who have the capability and sincerity to serve and who have concrete programs that will provide solutions and answers to the country's manifold problems.

Unemployment and low-income jobs are among the persisting odds that drive many Filipinos to migrate to other countries and leave their families behind. Migration has become a phenomenon and the typical solution Filipinos resort to in order to get themselves and their families out of grinding poverty. To date, there are over 7 million Filipinos who have found greener pasture in other countries. With our growing population, the number of Filipino migrants will likely increase, as each family strives to feed more children and put them to school. As a solution, however, overseas employment exposes our country men and women to the risk of abuse, harassment and discrimination as foreign workers and residents in other countries. These are important concerns that should be addressed by the next administration. Our dwindling economy needs a president who has the vision, the courage and the will to initiate and implement programs and services that will benefit the Filipino people.

For us advocates, and particularly the overseas Filipinos, who will be voting for the first time - thanks to the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) Law - it would be instructive to study how the presidential hopefuls plan to address migration issues. Expectedly, our candidates acknowledge the significant contribution of our overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to our economy through dollar remittances. We have heard it from them a number of times already. The question is: what will they commit to our OFWs and their families?

If their programs of government are an indication of their understanding of the plight of our migrants, except for some recognition that unemployment is somehow linked to the migration phenomenon,

none of the candidates mentions the migrant sector as a priority. This implies that PMRW will have to exert more efforts in the next administration to advocate for its ten-point agenda for the protection and empowerment of the migrant sector.

A survey of the candidates' records and platforms reveals the following: All the candidates regard investment as a solution to domestic unemployment.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's administration is focused more on overseas employment rather than generating jobs for the Filipino people. The President sees the globalization of our labor force as

page 2



Who can truly ... (from page 1)

something "not necessarily bad," considering the \$8 billion dollars that are annually injected into our economy and the uses of these remittances, such as sending the children of OFWs to school. Arroyo believes that the reputation of our OFWs as good workers also attracts investments to the Philippines. Nothing much is expected to change if she gets elected.

For Fernando Poe Jr., politics should be removed from the country's economic affairs; he said he would work to make our trade and investment regulations more transparent and stable in order to generate more foreign investments. Ping Lacson, on the other hand, believes that economic policies that are investor-friendly, predictable and consistent are what the country needs. He also believes in giving due importance to small and medium enterprises to create more jobs.

Productivity through wealth generation from value-added products is Eddie Villanueva's pathway to economic salvation. Notably, he specifically cited the need to teach our OFWs and their families how to wisely spend and invest their hard-earned money into environment-friendly enterprises to avert the cycle of poverty commonly experienced by our migrant returnees. Villanueva has hit a score for injecting the value of OFWs' investments in his productivity program.

Raul Roco appears to offer more concrete plans, notably linking these to population management. He plans to organize a Presidential Commission for the Management of Global Migration to ensure sustainable benefits, growth and development from the outward and inward movement of Filipinos. Lacson also acknowledges overpopulation as a social problem and as a vital economic issue; Arroyo has articulated her support for modern Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods in curbing population growth. Other candidates' stand on population control is quite safe and general.

Sadly, none of the candidates offers specific plans to promote the welfare of OFWs. All of them recognize the OFWs as dollar earners, but they do not seem to have a good grasp of the vulnerabilities of OFWs during the migration process. Though Poe acknowledges the OFWs as a vulnerable sector, he stops short of elaborating how his government plans to protect them. Villanueva said he would redirect our foreign service corps to look after the interests of OFWs. We would appreciate hearing more specific ideas and plans for migrants' protection, especially because OFWs are exposed to variable working and living conditions. Also notable is the lack of attention to the reintegration phase of migration and the social costs of migration.

With the passage of the Overseas Absentee Voting Law, our *kababayans* abroad will be included in the exercise of choosing our country's leaders. As of March 12, 2004, some 357,782 certified overseas absentee voters will

exercise the right to vote for the Philippines' next president, vice-president, senators and party list representatives. Absentee voting for seafarers already started last March 12 while land-based migrants will begin casting their votes on April 11. It is our hope that migrants and their families will make wise choices and will entrust their votes to men and women who will truly serve the country. Let's keep our fingers crossed that whoever wins the presidential race will fulfill his or her mandate to work for the benefit of migrants, their families and the Filipino people in general.

PMRW to undertake a study on OFWs' pre-migration experiences

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and the Philippine Migrant Rights Watch (PMRW) agreed to undertake the conduct of a study on the "Documentation of Migrant Workers' Pre-Migration Experiences in the Philippines".

This study will examine the experiences of migrant workers in their dealings with the migration industry and related organizations, government agencies and NGOs as they prepare for deployment. A previous study on irregular migration from the Philippines by the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) confirmed a widely known piece of information: that recruitment agencies overcharge migrants for their services. The exorbitant fees charged by recruitment agencies are the most direct costs borne by migrants. Other practices of recruitment agencies – contract substitution, foregoing PDOS, etc. – pose other costs to migrants. Such irregularities must be brought to light so that migrants can be duly warned about potential consequences.

This project expects to generate data on the pre-deployment experiences of migrant workers. Specifically, the study will probe into the transactions departing migrants have experienced with recruitment/manning agencies, government agencies and NGOs. The project aims to document the types and extent of irregularities committed against migrants; measure migrants' level of knowledge about their work, the terms of their contracts, rights, and information on assistance and support in the destination; and identify good practices by the migration industry, government agencies and NGOs in promoting the protection of migrant workers.

The findings from the study are expected to provide policy guidelines in strengthening pre-migration interventions and as inputs in designing information-education-communication programs for migrant workers and their families.

Maruja M. B. Asis (SMC)

It would be worthwhile to understand the range of pre-departure experiences of migrants. It is at this stage wherein interventions to protect migrants are still within reach of the national government and NGOs operating in the country of origin. In other words, interventions at the pre-migration stage would help protect migrants from further abuse in the subsequent phases of migration. Gaps identified in the study would be helpful in guiding policies and programs, particularly in the area of migrants' rights education.



the Migrant Watch

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

Editor

Jannis T. Montañez (DAWN)

Editorial Board

Carmelita G. Nuqui (DAWN), Fabio Baggio, cs (SMC), Maruja M.B. Asis (SMC)

Writers

Fr. Savino Bernardi cs (AOS), Jannis T. Montañez (DAWN),
Ellene Sana (CMA), Maruja M. B. Asis (SMC)

Seafarers cast their votes

OAV preparations for landbased voters ongoing

The Philippines' very first overseas absentee voting (OAV) started last March 12 with the seafarers casting their votes for the next president, vice-president, senators and party-list representatives of the country.

As of March 26, a total of 88 Filipino seafarers cast their ballots in 16 Philippine embassies and consulates, including the Philippine Labor Office in Macau, which administered the voting of the seafarers in their respective areas of jurisdiction. These posts include those in Bangkok, Brunei, Hong Kong, Korea, Phnom Penh, Port Moresby, and Singapore in the Asia Pacific; Chicago in North America; Abu Dhabi, Amman, Beirut and Tripoli in the Middle East; and Madrid, Athens, Berlin, and Hamburg in Europe.

These posts had to adjust and extend their polling hours to give way to the requests of some seafarers who had very limited time to cast their ballots, given the distance of the ports to the posts, and the schedule of their ships.

This reaffirmed what Department of Foreign Affairs-Overseas Absentee Voting (DFA-OAV) Vice-Chair Catherine Maceda said during the forum on "Overseas Filipinos and the 2004 National Elections" organized by the OFW Journalism Consortium last March 19 at the Manila Pavilion Hotel.

"Lahat ng pwedeng gawin, ginawa na yata sa Overseas Absentee Voting, (Everything possible was done for Overseas Absentee Voting)," the Vice-Chair noted in the face of criticisms and complaints about the preparedness of the posts to conduct the election.

Seafarers have until May 10, 2004 to cast their votes while the 30-day period of voting for landbased Filipinos will begin on April 11.

The Comelec and DFA-OAV Secretariat are leaving no stones unturned to ensure the success of the first OAV.

More preparations at the posts

To date, all posts have already received and reported to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) the ballot boxes, ballots, election materials and paraphernalia sent to them. Request for supplemental shipment of ballots has been made by posts, which might encounter problems with delivery.

Venues that will be used as field and satellite voting precincts are being prepared in accordance with Comelec-prescribed guidelines, subject to approval of host governments. Polling precincts within the posts' premises and other designated areas approved by Comelec have already been established.

Following DFA Secretary Delia Domingo Albert's visit to Vietnam in the first week of March, the Vietnamese government granted the use of one government guest house in Ho Chi Minh City as venue for the conduct of OAV. The DFA Secretary herself visited and inspected the facility during her brief stay in the said city.

A total of 468 DFA personnel deputized as COMELEC representatives were trained by the COMELEC/DFA and echo seminars were also conducted by 81 posts and 3 MECO offices in preparation for their participation in this important political exercise.

Maceda noted the creation of election boards with a total of 2,730 members: the Special Board of Election Inspectors (SBEIs), the Special Ballot Reception and Custody Group (SBRCCG), and the Special Board of Canvassers, who are deputized by the COMELEC to secure and safeguard the votes of Filipinos abroad.

Though the posts may have committed mistakes in the past in implementing the OAV, Maceda noted that these have been corrected.

by Jannis T. Montañez

Development Action for Women Network



"When we expect too much during the initial days of implementation, I think that's being impractical," Maceda remarked in response to the criticisms and complaints raised by some sectors.

Citing an incident in the Philippine Embassy in Korea when two legislators from the House of Representatives were informed that their visit cannot be entertained in compliance to the non-partisan policy in the posts, Maceda said this only shows how officials and personnel in the post are aware of the provisions of the law.

"While a congressman may not necessarily run for a position begin elected under the OAV act, we should all remember that they are part of parties, political parties. And while they may not be running for a national position, they may be promoting the candidacy of a person running for a national position. That's not being clueless at all (on the part of the posts). That is in fact, being *masinop*," Maceda further explained. The two legislators were accommodated, nevertheless, after having explained the purpose of their visit.

Secretary Albert herself has also reminded the officials and personnel

at the posts "to ensure the integrity and credibility of the voting process" and that the electoral bodies must "observe attention to details, diligence and transparency in the exercise of their functions."

"Cheating is practically impossible in absentee voting," Maceda assured migrants and advocates during the forum. Poll watchers and the media will be allowed during the actual counting of votes to further ensure transparency.

But some groups seemed skeptical of these efforts. During the forum, Ellene Sana, officer-in-charge of the Center for Migrant Advocacy-Philippines, cited some loopholes in the conduct of the registration and in the preparation for the actual voting, like the lack of preparedness of some embassies and consulates, lack in information dissemination, insufficient number of voting centers, budget constraints, and delayed release of the list of the candidates. The party list came out only last March 12, the day when the seafarers' election started.

She described OAV as a "flawed law" but nevertheless signifies the political empowerment of overseas Filipinos and is regarded as a breakthrough in NGO advocacy.



Shaping the Future of Filipino Labor Migration

World Conference of OFWs Manila, 16-18 December 2004

Three decades of sustained out-migration from the Philippines have created a migrant nation, with about 10 percent of the Filipino population based overseas. The most recent stock estimate puts the overseas Filipino population at 7.41 million (2.74 million immigrants, 3.05 million workers, and 2.74 million unauthorized migrants) living and working in 193 countries around the globe. This recent history of large-scale migration has created various Filipino institutions overseas – communities, media, organizations, and businesses – which provide an important source of identity and support to migrants. These institutions help in linking not only Filipinos based abroad but also in maintaining links to the Philippines. The support extended by overseas Filipinos to various causes in the Philippines – medical missions, financial support in times of disasters, or the participation of overseas Filipinos in EDSA2 – is indicative of the ties that continue to bind overseas Filipinos and those remaining in the Philippines.

Given the importance of labor migration and the large numbers of Filipinos affected by it, various migrant NGOs have emerged in different countries, which aim to promote the protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families. This kind of work requires coordination with homeland institutions, hence the importance of being updated with developments in the Philippines, which have a bearing on migrant workers based abroad. Conversely, migrant NGOs and advocates in the Philippines also need to keep abreast of the conditions of migrants in different countries in order to mobilize necessary actions in the Philippines. Migrant NGOs are working at forging closer cooperation and coordination because of the transnational nature of migration.

The signing of Republic Act 9189 (Absentee Voting Act of 2003) is expected to have implications for the transnational links between overseas Filipinos and the Philippines. To strengthen these links, it is important to promote access to and dissemination of vital information – particularly information provided by an independent source – to support the programs and activities of overseas Filipino organizations, media and migrant NGOs. There is a need for a special forum allowing the OFWs to discuss their problems, assess migration related programs and plan joint ventures in the future. A world conference involving OFW representatives coming from receiving countries could be an essential tool to empower Filipino migrants, enabling them to be more proactive in drawing up new national and transnational migration policies and programs.

Objectives

The conference hopes to provide an avenue:

1. To discuss and analyze issues and concerns that impact on the OFWs and their families;
2. To provide space for migrant NGOs, IOs and GOs to present their programs and services, in order to assess their impact and responsiveness to the OFWs and their families;
3. To initiate, sustain and maintain networking and solidarity between and among OFWs and with/among other stakeholders including GOs;

4. To promote pro-active exchange of transnational information among various stakeholders and to define and forge transnational cooperation and other exchanges.

Topics

The main topics to be discussed during the conference are as follows:

1. International conventions and migrants' rights/migrants' rights education
2. Philippine GOs' commitments to OFWs' welfare
3. Gender dimensions of Philippine labor migration
4. Unauthorized migration and trafficking
5. Emerging trends in the global labor market/the role of the migration industry
6. Migration/integration policies of receiving countries
7. OFWs and overseas Filipinos as political actors (Absentee Voting Law)
8. Dual citizenship
9. Reintegration programs
10. Transnational linkages (Good practices and solidarity projects)
11. Filipino migrants and transnationals as culture bearers (i.e., as bearers of Filipino culture abroad; as bearers of other cultures in the Philippines)
12. Social costs of migration

Participants

The conference aims to invite participants representing various organizations: OFW associations and groups, migrant NGOs in the Philippines, international NGOs dealing with migrants. Representatives of GOs and international organizations are welcome as observers.

Detailed information and registration forms and guidelines are already available in our new webpage:

www.pmrw.org

You can also send your inquiries to:
secretariat@pmrw.org

SCRAP the OWWA Omnibus Policies

Ellene A. Sana
Center for Migrant Advocacy-Philippines (CMA-Phils)

On September 19, 2003, the Board of Trustees of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) approved Resolution No. 038 Series of 2003 instituting the Omnibus Policies of the OWWA.

Article I, Section 1 of the document says that "these omnibus policies are promulgated to provide guidelines on matters concerning Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) membership and its coverage, collection of contributions, and availment of benefits. This document also embodies the policies on fund management, programs and services administration, and corporate governance." This is an admission that for more than two decades of existence, OWWA does not have clear guidelines in the conduct of its work. If indeed this is what the Omnibus Policies intend to do, then perhaps, the OFWs, their families and the migrant advocates should have warmly welcomed its promulgation.

However, upon closer look, the resolution on the Omnibus Policies is not just about clarifying the guidelines for OWWA. Rather, it will actually institutionalize basic

concepts that could be quite detrimental to the interests of the OFWs.

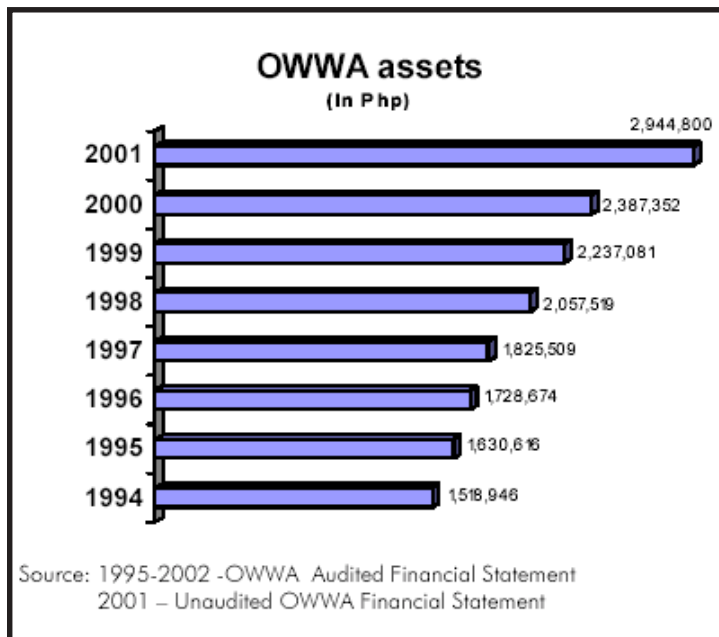
What is Wrong with the OWWA Omnibus Policies?

A membership-based OWWA

The Omnibus Policies institutionalize the concept of membership that is solely based on the payment of contribution of US\$25 which is valid for two years or upon expiration of the work contract. The membership concept severely limits the OWWA beneficiaries who can avail of its programs and services. This is in contravention with the legal mandate of OWWA that is to provide "social and welfare services to Filipino overseas workers, including insurance coverage, social work assistance, legal assistance, placement assistance, cultural services and remittance services." The law does not make a distinction between paying and non-paying OFWs in order to avail of OWWA services and programs. The OWWA Omnibus Policies does.

Who pays the US\$25 contribution to OWWA?

The OWWA Omnibus Policies likewise institutionalize the collection of OWWA contribution of US\$25



or its equivalent from the OFWs when again, the law is clear in saying that "in no way shall the fees be charged or collected from the worker."

Lip-service support to reintegration program

The OWWA Omnibus Policies commit OWWA to a reintegration program for returned OFWs. But this commitment rings hollow to the ears because as per definition, OWWA beneficiaries are only those who are members, who in turn are those who pay the contribution and have active work contracts. Hence, all returned migrants are automatically disqualified to avail of reintegration programs and services. The OWWA Omnibus Policies are not even consistent in their entirety.

Confidential minutes and documents of the Board of Trustees

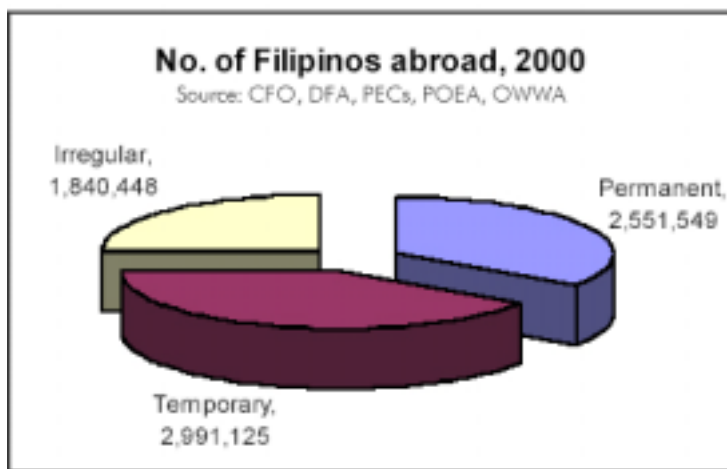
The OWWA Omnibus Policies likewise states that the "minutes, transcripts and tapes" of the Board of Trustees "are classified

and confidential and are not for public circulation unless otherwise authorized by the Board/Administrator."

This is in clear violation of the constitutional right of the people to information on matters of public concern. This also violates the government's full disclosure policy. How can the OFWs be able to make informed decisions on issues that affect them when information is not made available to them? Worse, the right to information is denied them.

Attendance of proxies of Board Members with full voting rights

The OWWA Omnibus Policies allow board members to designate permanent alternates with full voting rights. This provision de facto amends the composition of the Board of Trustees, which is set by law and therefore is contrary to law.



Scrap the ... (from page 5)**No consultation with OFWs**

The Omnibus Policies came as a big surprise to the OFWs and migrant advocates. Prior to their promulgation, serious questions had already been raised against OWWA in regard to the suspension of General Fund Assistance Program (GFAP) and other services and also on the pending transfer of Medicare to Philhealth. OWWA has not yet provided the OFWs with satisfactory answers to these concerns and here comes another big blow, in the form of the Omnibus Policies that will institutionalize some basic flawed practices that can only result to more marginalization of the migrant sector.

Taking Action**Formation of SCOOP**

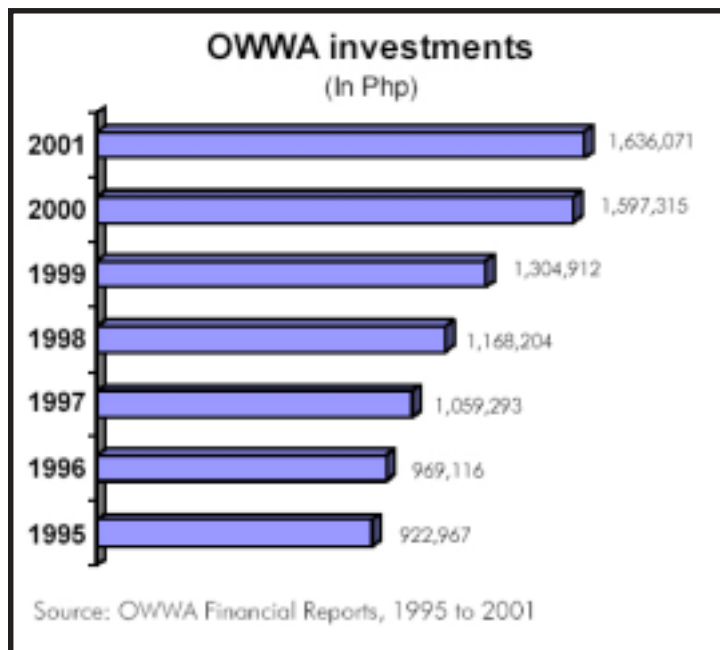
At the end of the last quarter of 2003, migrant NGOs, church-based groups and advocates and OFW organizations nationwide and abroad led by the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW) banded together and formed a coalition - Scrap the OWWA Omnibus Policies (SCOOP) - to oppose the Omnibus Policies in more concerted and effective way with a broad-based constituency.

SCOOP campaign

SCOOP activities kicked off with a public forum under the auspices of PMRW to discuss the Omnibus Policies. It was followed by a press conference and an on-line petition informing and seeking more support from the global community of OFWs and overseas Filipinos. Next was lobbying members of Congress to take up the issue. Akbayan representative Mayong Aguja delivered a privilege speech in November. Congress representative Krisel Lagman-Luistro followed suit and authored a resolution urging President Arroyo to suspend the implementation of the Omnibus Policies. A similar resolution was filed by Senator Manny Villar in the Senate. PMRW also had separate dialogues with OWWA staff and Administrator Virgilio Angelo. We also submitted the SCOOP Petition Statement, together with the Petition Statement on OWWA initiated by the OFWs in Saudi Arabia in the previous year, to OWWA and Congress.

In December 2003, another SCOOP letter was sent to OWWA and DOLE seeking clarification on the major provisions of the Omnibus Policies. This was followed by a dialogue between SCOOP/PMRW and DOLE Secretary St.

Tomas, OWWA Administrator Angelo and DOLE Undersecretary for Reintegration Program Danilo Cruz on January 29. The meeting was requested by OWWA Administrator Angelo. During that meeting, DOLE-OWWA expressed agreement with SCOOP on three of the questionable provisions of the OWWA Omnibus Policies. In the Congress, the House Committee on Labor and Employment convened a committee hearing on the issue on February 3, 2003. Periodic on-line updates were issued to keep the OFWs informed. On February



15, I had an opportunity for a face-to-face consultation with the OFW leaders in Hong Kong under the auspices of the Philippine consulate. Land-based representative to the OWWA Board, Ms. Cora Carsola facilitated the discussion.

Gains and Losses

From all these activities, SCOOP and DOLE-OWWA came to an agreement on three provisions:

1. Reintegration program: To include now "current OWWA members and returned OFWs."
2. Proxies with full voting rights to the Board: DOLE-OWWA clarified that the provision only applies to government agencies represented in OWWA and not to the individuals appointed by law;
3. Confidentiality of documents of the Board of Trustees: DOLE-OWWA stand corrected on the matter.

We failed to agree, however, on the matter of OWWA membership and the payment-collection of the US\$25 contribution.

Complaint in Court

After having exhausted the administrative remedies to no avail, SCOOP finally brought the matter to the court for final arbitration. On February 18, 2004, the PMRW, together with two individual returned migrants as complainants,

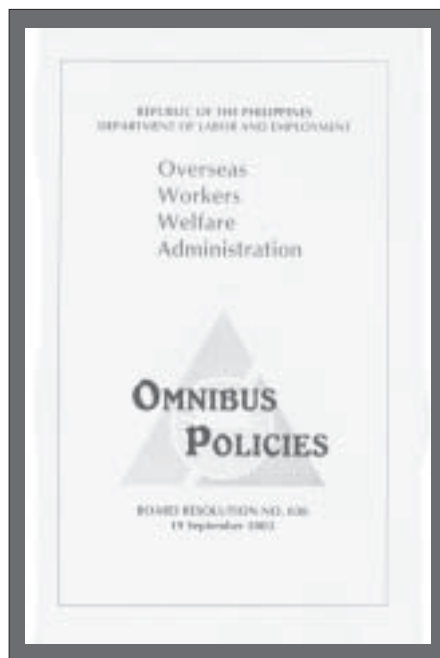
filed a complaint case before the Pasay Regional Trial Court to request the court for the following:

1. To stop the implementation of the questionable provisions of the OWWA Omnibus Policies;
2. To stop the mandatory collection of the US\$25 or its equivalent from the OFWs as contributions to the OWWA fund and to collect the amount instead from the employers of OFWs as provided by law.

On February 26, the first hearing was set. In her testimony, OWWA Board Secretary Atty. Evelyn Llanes stated that OWWA does not collect from the OFWs but from the employers/recruiters. This position is consistent with the information in the OWWA website in the FAQ portion, albeit it is a bit vague.

Current Status

Congress has adjourned without taking decisive action on the proposed resolutions. It is now up to the court to do the final arbitration. In the meantime, we must continue our vigilance. We must prepare ourselves for the next round of lobby-advocacy work with the new government and new Congress for the restructuring of OWWA and the demand for transparency for effective, efficient and responsive delivery of services to OFWs and their families.



THE 18TH NATIONAL MIGRANTS' SUNDAY Celebrating Filipinos as a "gift" to the world

Fr. Savino Bernardi CS
Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI)

On February 29, 2004, the 1st Sunday of Lent, the Church all over the Philippines celebrated the 18th National Migrants' Sunday. All communities throughout the country were invited to remember in prayers and through special events our nation's "migratory reality." Repeatedly, our government has recognized overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as "modern heroes" for the sacrifices they make for their families and for our country. With their "cultural and religious virtues," Filipinos have silently but effectively contributed towards building a better, more harmonious and peaceful world through their presence. Religious and civic leaders abroad often commend them as instruments of evangelization and inspirational models in cultivating a culture of peace.

Filipino migration is an awesome reality. There are some 7.54 million Filipinos living and/or working in about 200 foreign countries. Of this number, some 2.74 million are permanent residents; 3.04 million are OFWs; and 1.76 million are undocumented migrants. Of the total Filipino population, close to 10 percent have migrated abroad; over 60 percent are women among the new hires. Altogether about 8 million Filipino families are directly affected by the absence of one or more significant member. Indirectly, almost all Filipinos are affected by this enormous "exodus" of people which is set to continue for many years to come. In 2003, the nation saw the departure of 652,000 Filipinos seeking employment in foreign countries, as well as some 216,000 seafarers and about 70,000 left as permanent migrants. Consequently, 2,570 are leaving daily; 2.57 return dead or are missing at sea. The economic impact of this migration is enormous: US\$8 billion in annual remittances, freeing 500,000 job places to the younger employment-seekers, and a chance of small entrepreneurial investments for returnees.

In Manila, the celebration took on a very special and solemn expression with the participation of His Excellency Gaudencio Rosales, Archbishop of Manila, the main celebrant at the Eucharist. His Excellency Bishop Ramon C. Arguelles, Chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI), Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, President of the

Philippines, clergy and religious representatives from various Catholic communities, NGO representatives, and some 5,000 representatives from parish communities - some coming from as far as La Union, Bulacan, Batangas, Laguna, Cavite and Antipolo - enlivened the celebration.

In keeping with this year's theme, "*Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo*," the celebration highlighted the Filipinos' migratory presence as a "*gift to the world*." The opening, "Parade of Flags," indicated the world wide outreach of Filipino migration. In its unfolding and in recognizing the providential plan of God, Filipino migration is more than an economic boom for the Philippines. Looking at the migration phenomenon from the point of view of faith, Bishop R.C. Arguelles said that the Filipinos are a "contributing force toward a better world and a better Philippines." Bishop Arguelles echoed the recognition Filipinos receive everywhere in the world. Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales expressed the same sentiments in his homily during the Mass.

The event conveyed the message that the Filipino family is the cultural and religious cradle of Filipino values, which needs the constant care, encouragement and strengthening presence of the

page 8



The 18th National ... (from page 7)

Church. For this reason, the celebration was jointly organized by the ECMI and John Paul II International Center for Family and Communication Foundation, Inc. The Foundation tapped a gifted and world-renowned Filipino artist, Charles Alberto Ibay, to share his musical talent.

Charles is a Filipino-American whose parents, originally from Pampanga, migrated to the USA in their early years. Childless for several years, when the Ibays were granted the grace of pregnancy, it turned out to be life-threatening for both mother and child. The doctor advised abortion. But in faith, the parents resisted the advice, choosing instead to accept the will of God and adamantly honoring the gift of life. Charles was brought to life prematurely in the 7th month of pregnancy. However, the excessive administration of oxygen while in the incubator made him blind. A new trial began for Charles' parents: raising a blind child. But their love for life and faith in God was blessed a hundredfold. Since childhood, Charles manifested an extraordinary inclination for music and singing. Now, at 24 years old, he is an internationally renowned musician and singer. Charles delighted the thousands who attended the celebration at the Luneta Park with his performance during the Mass and a special concert after the Mass. Charles has held several concerts in the country, including a very successful one at the Cultural Center of the Philippi-

nes. His two-hour concert at the Quirino Grandstand was free, his gift to the families of OFWs and the poor.

The Manila celebration of the 18th National Migrants' Sunday was a successful event, thanks to the cooperation and contribution of the John Paul II International Center for Family and Communication Foundation, Inc., which also shouldered most of the expenses of the event. ECMI wants to express its gratitude to the Foundation and the cooperation of the Episcopal Commission on Family and Life (ECFL), the Millennium Saint Foundation, Inc. (MSFI), and the Springs of Carmel of the Carmelite Order.



His Excellency Bishop Ramon C. Arguelles, Chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI)

the Migrant Watch

PMRW Secretariat: *Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC)*

No. 4, 13th St., New Manila, Quezon City, Philippines

63-02-7243512 • 7214296 (fax)

www.pmrw.org • migrantwatch@pmrw.org



ENTERED AS THIRD CLASS MAIL
at the Manila Central Post Office
under Permit no. 1464-02-NCR
dated April 22, 2002 postage paid