



M—the Watch

quarterly newsletter of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch

Vol.3 No. 3 • September 2004

www.pmrw.org

Manila, Philippines

PMRW talks about trafficking in Japan

In response to trafficking issues confronting migrants in Japan, the Inter-Agency Task Force of the Prime Minister's Office Coordination Mechanism on Trafficking in Persons visited the Philippines last September 13-14 to meet officials and representatives from the government and civil society.

The nine-member delegation was led by Mr. Shigeki Sumi, Deputy Director-General of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two officials from the Japan Embassy in Manila, Labour Attache Tomoaki Noguchi and Consul Hiroshi Kiba organized the visit, including the delegates' meeting with the Philippine Migrants' Rights Watch (PMRW) last September 13 at the Japan Embassy in Pasay City.

Fr. Edwin Corros and Sr. Teresita Montañano of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines- Episcopal Commission on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (CBCP-ECMI), Fr. Fabio Baggio of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), Fr. Savino Bernardi of the Apostleship of the Sea-Manila (AOS-Manila), and Jannis Montañez of the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) took part in the discussion which particularly focused on the problems faced by many Filipino women, especially those working in Japan as entertainers.

Among the issues raised were: the lowering of minimum age for Filipino entertainers from 21 to 18 years old which makes the exploitation to Filipino women even more possible; the "vulnerable category" given to entertainers as guest

workers in Japan; the proper treatment to women victims; and the increasing number of Japanese-Filipino children.

Sumi said they rarely received complaints from Filipino women who were exploited by their employers. PMRW cited the confiscation of passports and other documents, close monitoring by the employers, and the language barrier as possible problems why many women do not complain.

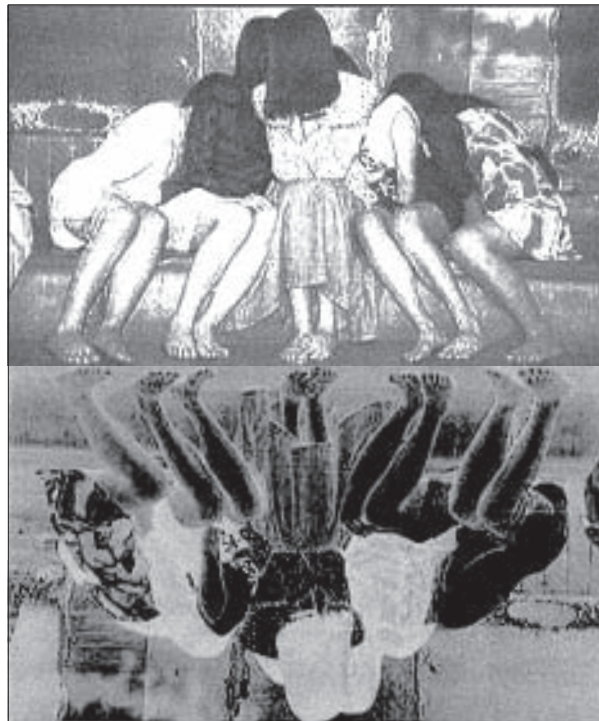
Sumi likewise noted that there was no single case of a Filipino victim who took advantage of the escrow bond, especially those who were not fairly treated and compensated by their employers.

Fr. Corros cited the long judicial process prior to getting the claims as one possible reason why many opted not to avail of such benefit. Not to mention the corruption and politics surrounding the escrow bond.

Measures to address the problems

One of the delegates, Mr. Nobuo Kikuzawa, Police Superintendent from the National Police Agency, assured everyone that the police are informed and

prepared well on how to handle complaints from entertainers and other migrants who are abused or exploited by their employers. His office has likewise instructed all the 47



by Jannis T. Montañez

Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)

PMRW Talks ...

prefectural police to intensify investigation on trafficking in persons to accelerate arrests of traffickers.

Sumi shared other concrete measures being taken by Japan to combat trafficking in persons, one of which was the protection given to victims at their shelters or what they call the Women's Consulting Offices. Each prefecture has one shelter and is usually located at the capital of the province. Sumi noted that victims can stay there and get proper treatment without being immediately reported to the Immigration Bureau as visa violators. The shelters also have counselors who can communicate with the victims in English.

Fr. Bernardi recommended a close check of the establishments where these women are working so the authorities themselves will see their actual condition. Fr. Baggio, on the other hand, stressed the need to involve NGOs in doing the investigation of trafficking cases.

A stronger information campaign was likewise recommended to inform potential victims of their rights and the privileges they can avail of.

Japanese-Filipino children

Fr. Bernardi also raised during the meeting the

Japanese-Filipino children's right to citizenship and recognition by their Japanese fathers.

Montañez cited the cases handled by DAWN (a number of which were referred by the Japan Embassy in Manila) where many former entertainers seek help to find the fathers of their children for recognition and support. Montañez noted that it is difficult for DAWN to ask the fathers to legally recognize their children because these men already have their own families who are not aware of their extra-marital affairs which led to having these children. There are a few Japanese-Filipino children who receive support from their fathers while many are single-handedly supported by their Filipino mothers.

Sumi said they are aware of these problems. He cited Japan's policy in acquiring citizenship but did not give any specific program that can address the problem on the children's need for paternal recognition and support.

Continuing effort

The discussion between the Japanese delegates and the PMRW members ended on a positive note as Sumi's group assured everyone that the inputs shared will be considered in their future discussions and inter-mini-

serial meetings to come up with concrete and effective solutions to the trafficking problem in Japan.

PMRW, on the other hand, will closely monitor develop-

ments in the hope that more genuine and concrete efforts will be made by the Japanese government in response to Filipino women's vulnerability to trafficking.

PMRW study on the pre-migration experiences

The data collection for the study on the "Documentation of Migrant Workers' Pre-Migration Experiences" has been completed and the report is now being prepared. The study was undertaken by the Scalabrini Migration Center, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Philippine Migrant Rights Watch (PMRW).

The first weeks of the project were devoted to familiarization of the project staff to the materials and discussions relevant to the research, organization of activities, collation of relevant literature and materials and communicating with respondents in the government, NGOs and industry associations.

Interviews with key informants in government agencies, NGOs providing pre-departure orientation seminars and some members of the migration industry were an important part of data collection. This part of the study sought to collect information on their assessment of the factors and processes that shape the experiences of aspiring OFWs. In general, the project received cooperation and support of respondents from the government and NGO side. It was very difficult to secure the cooperation of recruitment agencies, except for a few.

The major part of the study was the collection of data from OFWs themselves: their dealings with government agencies, NGOs, recruitment agencies, training centers, medical clinics, testing centers and the like, as well as their preparations for their eventual departure. The project administered a five-page, 78-item questionnaire to about 1,000 participants attending the PDOS conducted by some NGOs and the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA). The survey also included PDOS participants conducted by POEA and/or OWWA in Cebu City and Davao City. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among several groups of departing workers: nurses, entertainers, band members, professionals, domestic workers, factory workers, engineers, caregivers & unskilled workers. Additional interviews were carried out with some 43 OFWs to obtain more detailed information on fees and financial requirements attendant to seeking a job overseas.

The results of the study will be presented in a dissemination-forum scheduled on 12 November 2004 at the Richmond Hotel, Mandaluyong City. The different stakeholders – government, NGOs and migrant organizations, international organizations and the media – will be invited to the event. The proceedings of the forum will be part of the final report. The ultimate objective of the project is to use the results of the study that would contribute to a safer environment for OFWs at the pre-departure stage.

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Children left behind are doing fine, reveals study

Cecilia Ruiz-Marave (SMC)

"Hearts Apart – Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children," the report on the 2003 Study on Children and Families, was launched last September 24, 2004 at the Multipurpose Hall of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). Participants from government agencies, the NGO community, the academe, and the media attended the launching.

The nationwide research was conducted to assess how parental absence due to labor migration affects the well-being of their young children left behind. The research project was jointly undertaken by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People/ Apostleship of the Sea-Manila, the Scalabrini Migration Center, and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration.

A total of 1,443 children from public and private schools were interviewed for the study.

The survey focused on young children aged 10-12 years who belonged to "intact" two-parent families (as a rough indicator of the parents' marital relationship). This criterion was adopted in order to control the variations in family situations.

Dr. Maruja Asis, Director for Research and Publications of the Scalabrini Migration Center presented highlights from the study. The findings confirm that parental absence does create



displacements, disruptions and changes in the caregiving arrangements for the children left behind. The absence of one or both parents leaves an emotional mark on the young children, especially when their mothers are away. However, contrary to popular belief, the study found that despite the emotional displacement, children of migrant parents are not disadvantaged compared to children of non-migrants in many aspects of well-being. Apparently, when the family is stable, it can withstand the problems associated with separation imposed by migration. Technology, such as the use of cellphones has also helped in maintaining a feeling of solidarity among family members across the miles.

As expected, children of migrants fared better compared to children of non-migrants in terms of socio-economic indicators. In the elementary years, children of migrants also exhibited better scholastic performance than children of non-migrants. In terms of physical health and socio-psychological measures, children of migrants appeared to be as well-adjusted as children of non-OFWs.

As a whole, data from the survey reveal that young children of OFWs belonging to "intact" two-parent families appear to be managing well for now. However, data from the focus group discussions among adolescents indicate some challenges ahead.

One interesting finding of the study that has implications not just for the family but for the country as a whole concerns the children's future migration intentions. Close to half of the children – and some 60 percent among the children of OFWs – expressed intentions to also work abroad in the future, indicating that labor migration will continue. The children's choice of career at this stage, which seems to be affected by what appears to be marketable abroad, does not bode well for the country's development.

Copies of the report were distributed to participants at the launching ceremony. The report is also posted at the Scalabrini Migration Center website at www.smc.org.ph.

Hearts Apart

Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children



OFWs and OWWA's Questionable Omnibus Policies

EDITORIAL

The Omnibus Policies of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) is not a perfect document. According to certain OWWA officials, it attempts to clarify, guide and direct its members and their beneficiaries concerning its programs and services as part of its commitment for service excellence. This is the usual defense given by the OWWA officials when migrant advocates begin to call their attention to how such a document came out without prior consultation with its own clientele, meaning the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and other sectors working with them?

One of the salient points questioned by migrant advocates on the Omnibus Policies is the compulsory membership fee of \$25 for each contract. The collection of membership contribution emanated from Letter of Instruction (LOI) No. 537. According to OWWA, the employer hiring an OFW should pay the \$25. However, in reality it is the OFW who is paying the required fee. It is common knowledge that workers, including some seafarers, are the ones paying the membership fee. No employer is willing to pay for this OWWA contribution, according to OWWA Administrator Marianito Roque, except for seafarers.

With the \$25 from every overseas Filipino worker, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas was happy to announce that the OWWA fund has now reached eight billion pesos this

year. It even aims to increase the fund to ten billion pesos. With such pronouncement, there is a strong hint that the Labor Department will do its best to send more Filipino workers abroad, rather than to strive to create more jobs in the local market. That is perhaps the pressure Sto. Tomas gets from the President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who promised to

the seafarers, a significant component of Filipino workers deployed every year. With the more than 800,000 contracts processed each year by POEA, over the years, it is not surprising that the OWWA fund would accumulate to P8 billion.

OWWA's increasing fund is certainly good news! Such resources could hopefully produce and deliver more or

bursement takes too long, due to backlogs in responding to earlier applications. Moreover, according to an insider, many of those working in the Medicare Department are not familiar with the work itself, being political appointees.

Is there still hope for better OWWA services after the flawed omnibus policies? If OWWA officials agree that the omnibus policies are not perfect, it is the hope of PMRW that such policies be corrected, keeping in mind the migrants' welfare in fine-tuning these policies. Meanwhile, PMRW continues its battle in court against OWWA, questioning the legality of the \$25 collected from every departing OFW, contrary to the law's provision that it should be paid by the employer. In the meantime, OFWs continue to be victims of this questionable practice. Since they have to go through POEA en route to landing a foreign job, they have no choice but to pay the membership fee out of their own pockets.

What lessons can be learned from this experience? There are laws, but the government does not execute them. There are officials who violate these laws, but the government allows them to go scot-free. The way the Omnibus Policies were formulated without any consultation is tantamount to imposing these policies on their intended clients. This is another case of taking our "modern day heroes" for granted.



produce ten million jobs during her term. The labor chief attributed the increase of the OWWA fund to the prudent measures imposed by OWWA's Board of Trustees, which she has chaired since 2001. What about the amount that was derived from the accumulated contribution of workers since it was established in 1977? Where has the fund gone? When you have about 3.15 million Filipinos working abroad in 2003, if each one paid \$25, the total amount would add up to approximately P4.33 billion. Excluded from the number are

better services. This is where the quandary lies. Many beneficiaries of OWWA members complained that it takes ages for medical assistance to be approved after a request has been filed to OWWA's Medicare Department. We have observed that it takes the intercession of someone from within before a reimbursement could be released. What will happen to those cases that have no connection within OWWA? Will they ever get their medical reimbursement? It was discovered that the processing of medical reim-

Fr. Edwin Corros
ECMI

Round Table Discussions with Foreign Missions

Maria Celeste A. Marasigan
Conference Secretariat (PMRW)

PMRW, through the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), has been preparing for the first ever world conference of OFWs/representatives of OFW organizations on December 16 to 18, 2004 at the Bayview Park Hotel Manila. The conference, "Shaping the Future of Filipino Labor Migration," aims to provide a forum for OFWs to discuss challenges facing them and to identify solutions to address these problems.

Part of the intensive preparation was the conduct of round table discussions (RTDs) with representatives from foreign missions of receiving countries. Titled, "The OFW's Migration Process: Detecting Problems and Identifying Solutions," the RTDs were held at the Mandarin Oriental Manila in Makati City last July and September.

Discussions were organized by region: EUROPE (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom); the AMERICAS and OCEANIA (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America); ASIA (Brunei, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan); and the MIDDLE EAST (Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates).

Though not all receiving countries were represented, the RTDs still turned out to be enriching as those present provided relevant views and

insights during the thematic discussions on documentation requirements, visa application process, migration policies and unauthorized migration and trafficking.

European mission representatives present during the July 13 RTD were: Dr. Martin Brook, First Secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy; Mr. Lars Loberg, Charge d'Affaires of the Royal Norwegian Embassy; and Mr. Hans Peter Wyss, Consul and Head of Chancery of the Embassy of the Swiss Confederation.

The RTD for the Americas and Oceania last July 20 was participated in by Ms. Peta Dunn, First Secretary of the Embassy of Australia; Mr. Charles Godfrey, Counselor of the Canadian Embassy; and Mr. David Donahue, Consul General of the Embassy of the United States of America.

Mr. Joseph Chang, Director of the Consular Division of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office joined the September 22 discussion for the Asian region while Mr. Joseph Assad, Honorary Consul of the Consulate General of Lebanon, Mr. Jamal Abdulla



Jassim Al-shamlan, Second Secretary of the Embassy of the State of Qatar and his translator, Mr. Khaldoun Asad, the Embassy's Media Officer, represented the Middle East region during the September 24 RTD.

The discussions led to a better understanding of each country's systems and policies on visa processing. There were also fruitful discussions on the problems and issues concerning Filipino applicants and migrants. The foreign mission representatives were also enlightened on OFW concerns that they were not familiar with. They are all looking forward to the

December Conference and have also expressed their interest to participate in similar dialogues in the future.

For other foreign missions who failed to make it to the RTDs, PMRW obtained their feedback on the issues tackled in the RTDs through meetings of PMRW representatives with the Ambassadors/other embassy staff or by sending their written responses to the issues raised in the RTDs.

The reports from the RTDs and interviews will be compiled into a final report, which will then be presented to the guests and participants of the OFW Conference in December.

A number of migrant organizations have already registered for the event. The lineup of speakers and resource persons will also be finalized soon.

For more information about the Conference and registration procedures, please visit the PMRW website at www.pmrw.org.



9th NATIONAL SEAFARERS' DAY CELEBRATION

"Filipino Seafarer: Aim High, Reach Higher"

The Celebration, as in the previous years, was held as the major concluding event of a week-long series of activities, spearheaded by MARINA, for the National Maritime Week on 20-25 September. The chosen theme for this year 9th National Seafarers' Day Celebration was: "Filipino Seafarers: Aim High, Reach Higher". The former President Fidel V. Ramos in 1995 and again in 1997 mandated the Apostleship of the Sea to spearhead the organization of the event. The response of the various sectors to this yearly event has since grown from a few hundreds to more than 8000 participants this year.

The Celebration started at 6.30 a.m. with two simultaneous events: The Memorial at Sea for the deceased seafarers during this past year, attended by their family members and generously assisted by the services of PCG who provided a ship to carry the family members to Manila Bay for

prayers and a floral memorial; and the Grand Parade. This started from M.T. Kalaw Street, Ermita, with the participation of all maritime sectors and scores of seafarers and families. Floats and bands made it spectacular and attractive as it proceeded to Quirino Grand Stand where the major program of activities continued till 12 noon. The maritime floats in the Parade attracted the admiration of the crowd for their artistic interpretation and awards were given to AIMS (1st), FEATI (2nd) and NAMEI (3rd).

Once the Parade marched onto the Quirino Grandstand, the Philippine Navy Drum and Bugle exhibited a truly magnificent and entertaining performance often applauded by the more than 8000 participants packed into the Grandstand for the morning celebration. Later in the program, the



Philippine Merchant Marine Academy (PMMA) from Zambales gave another entertaining Silent Drill. Once again, the seafarers were honored by the presence of Her Excellency, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Philippines, who attended the celebration of the Holy Mass with her daughter Lulie. The main Celebrant of the Eucharistic Celebration

was Bishop Precioso Cantillas, Chairman of the CBCP Commission on Migration and Bishop Promoter of the Apostleship of the Sea. Accompanying the President at the Celebration were also Hon. Lito Attienza, Mayor of Manila, Hon. Patricia Sto. Tomas, DOLE Secretary, Hon. Jose Brillantes, Undersecretary of OUMWA-DFA, Hon. Vicente Suazo, new MARINA Administrator, Hon. Marianito Roque, OWWA Administrator, Atty. Brenda Pimentel, Regional Coordinator of the IMO Office in the Philippines and several other heads of the Maritime Industry. After the Mass, the President conferred the Outstanding Seafarers of the Year Award (OSYA) to selected four (4) nominees. The award is divided in two categories: (1) for Deeds of Valor at Sea and (2) for Outstanding Contribution to the Maritime Education, Training and Industry. Capt. Ernest S. Menorca and 3/O Lugent T. Ortillano received the Valor Award for saving lives at sea, while Capt.



Wiliardo P. Abuid, Sr. (posthumously) and Capt. Gregorio B. Sialsa had been chosen for their outstanding contribution to the Maritime Education, Training and Industry. AOS congratulates the four of them chosen from among a score of nominees.

Awards were also given to talented nautical students as winners in the Song-writing and Oratorical Contests: Alejandro R. Sambrano, Jr. of the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS), in the Song-writing Contest by the title "Minimithing Pangarap" (A Dream I long for) and Mark Rodolfo C. Cayetano of the Philippine Maritime Institute (PMI), Manila, in the Oratorical Contest with his piece entitled: "Challenges for a Filipino Seafarer". Both presented their winning compositions.

Other special incentives included the "Adopt-a-Grad Project" promised by Magsaysay Maritime Corp. as a reward to schools with highest number of participants (PMI, FEATI and

AIMS) and Scholarships for children of seafarers.

The Seafarers' Day is organized in recognition of the outstanding status of our Filipino seafarers in the maritime industry nationally and more significantly worldwide where they number 25% of all seafarers.

This yearly event is meant to create a conscious awareness of, and express national gratitude to our seafarers for their great economic contribution to our country and the role they play in this international and national maritime profession.

The Organizing Committee, over the years, drew the cooperation of all government and private agencies in the maritime education and employment sectors to bring it to its present magnificent display of a national proud event. In fact, the Organizing Committee of the celebration is composed of representatives from all partners: the schools, the agencies, the industry, the unions, the training centers, MARINA,



POEA, OWWA, CFO, DFA, PCG, PN, PPA, and various social and religious NGOs in solidarity with our seafarers and their families. All the maritime schools and agencies throughout the country have also been notified of the occasion and have been urged to make all efforts to mobilize their community for the event.

All AOS wants is for Filipino seafarers to maintain and strengthen their "numero uno" accreditation in the world. The onboard places are now for the brightest,

more experienced and more dedicated seafarers who want to make of it truly a life-long career and for which they try their best to professionalize it into becoming officers – not just a dash to the sea for a good salary! Thus the reason of the theme: "Aim high, reach higher".

Of course, if this is what is required from the seafarers, they deserve also from all stakeholders (educational institutions, training centers and maritime agencies) relevant education, higher standards, better learning environment, honesty and a fair play in job-providing agencies, and a share of burdens and sacrifices from them as well. The continuous praising of them as heroes must also carry prizes together with prizes. All are partners in the success story of our Filipino seafarers. In a true spirit of "bayanihan", all will benefit.

At the end of the day, the Organizing Committee hopes not only to have provided a grand and entertaining occasion as a tribute to our seafarers, but a most special moment of unity and a spirit of solidarity and concern among all the players as a pledge by all to "aim high and reach higher" together.



Fr. Savino Bernardi, cs
AOS Director

Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)

"Empowering Women and Children for a New Beginning"

DAWN is a non-government organization established on February 6, 1996 to assist Filipino women migrants from Japan, especially the former entertainers, and their Japanese-Filipino children (JFC) who were abandoned by their Japanese fathers.

Social Services

Foremost among DAWN's direct services is the case management and legal and para-legal assistance to returning entertainers and Japanese-Filipino children. Members are likewise provided with health and educational assistance and lessons on Japanese culture and language. DAWN also conducts therapeutic workshops and counseling sessions for women and children to help them open up, accept and get over the painful past and move on. They are closely monitored and are given other forms of intervention as needed. To date, DAWN has assisted about 227 women and 277 Japanese-Filipino children.

Alternative Livelihood

Since DAWN does not encourage Filipino women to go to Japan and face the risk of being trafficked, it likewise gives them a better alternative to earning a living, that is through Sikap-Buhay or SIKHAY, the organization's alternative livelihood project since 1996. It has a three-pronged objective: to serve as therapy for the women; as training ground for entrepreneurial development and management; and as a vehicle for advocacy for the continuing plight of migrant women.



Research and Advocacy

DAWN further establishes its role in the society through extensive informa-



tion campaign, advocacy programs and partnership-building. Among the effective means it utilizes are: its quarterly newsletter (SINAG), DAWN web site (www.dawnphil.org), research, conferences, fora and study tour on migrant issues, lobby work in Congress and meetings with concerned government and private agencies. DAWN also has its own 41-minute video documentary titled, "Where Do I Belong?: Former entertainers and Japanese-Filipino children."

DAWN is also an active member of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), the OFW Journalism Consortium and the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW)

the Migrant Watch

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