

2 NEWS, REACTIONS
AND STATEMENTS



3 THE ROUNDTABLE
CONFERENCE



8 WE PUT THE POLICY
INTO PERSPECTIVE



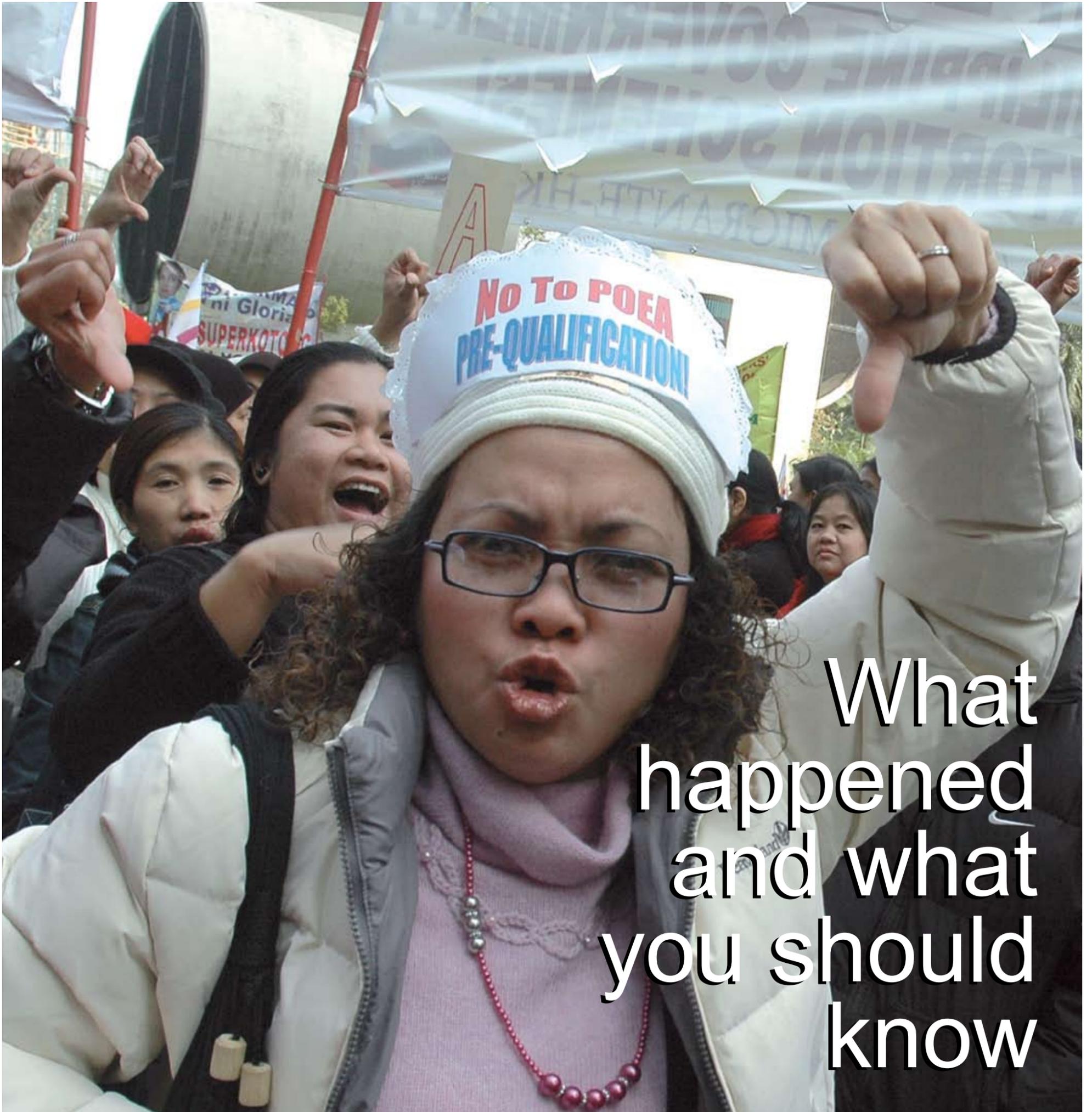
filipino globe

THE SUPERMAID POLICY

Special Report

Eight-page Pull-out Section

February 2007



What
happened
and what
you should
know

POEA gives in to helpers but not to recruiters

Manila eases age and redeployment rules, but ban on placement fee stays

By **Lara Climaco** in Manila

Following massive protests by domestic helpers both here and in Hong Kong over strict rules on working abroad, the Philippine government has backtracked on its sweeping reforms, but remained adamant about consigning placement fees to history.

In a new resolution issued on February 2, the governing board of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) lowered the minimum age requirement for overseas-bound domestic helpers to 23 years, and agreed to issue special rules exempting returning helpers from training requirements imposed under a reform package that took effect on December 16 last year.

In an earlier announcement dated January 19, POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz said that the transition period for the new rules would last until March 1 this year, effectively allowing blanket exemptions for contracts processed before this cut-off date.

Previously, the cut-off date was February 1, based on Memo Circular 11 Baldoz issued on November 29, 2006. However, this was superseded by the POEA Governing Board's Resolution No. 12 issued on

December 28 which set back the new cut-off date to March 1. As a result, around 20,000 helpers were exempted from the new age and salary requirements.

"We have addressed the proposals to the extent that we could, while also making sure that the standards we wish to implement are maintained," said Labor Secretary Arturo Brion, who heads the POEA governing board.

In its February 2 statement, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) said that Brion convened the POEA governing board to discuss the proposals submitted by the recruiters' industry group, the Federated Association of Manpower Exporters (FAME), on the age and training requirements. Previously, Brion had been adamant about the need for sweeping reforms, citing that majority of welfare cases handled by the POEA, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs) involved domestic helpers working abroad.

"We have to act on this matter immediately so as not to prejudice our common objective of strengthening further our programs that would ensure the protection and welfare of our workers abroad,"

Brion was quoted as saying about the latest move to slacken the new rules.

The government's reform package has been met with organized protest actions that kicked off in Hong Kong on January 28 and then almost every day at DOLE's Intramuros office. The protests received widespread media coverage, especially among local tabloids. Some sources said that the actions were part of a well-oiled campaign financed by labor recruiters to reverse the new policy.

Still, Brion stuck to his decision to make it illegal for labor recruiters to demand placement fees from domestic helpers applying for overseas jobs.

"We understand that the no placement-fee policy affects the business of recruitment agencies. Placement fees can be collected from employers, so why burden our workers?" Brion said. "Marami sa mga kababayan natin ang nalulubog sa utang dahil sa placement fee. Napapanahon naman siguro na alisin na natin sa kanila ang pabigat na ito. (Many of our countrymen are saddled with huge debts due to the placement fee. It's about time we remove that burden.)"

Father Edwin D. Corros, executive secretary of the influential Catholic Bishops Conference of the

Philippines' Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (CBCP-ECMI), echoed Brion's views.

In a statement issued last January 23 on behalf of CBCP-ECMI chairman Bishop Precioso Cantillas, Corros said: "The prohibition to collect placement fee from the household workers prior to or during their employment has been what we were advocating for the longest time. We hope that this would apply as well to other OFWs. The employer should pay for the placement fee of their workers if that is necessary."

He noted that many in the Catholic Church have been working on uplifting the sorry conditions of domestic helpers in view of widespread abuses by some recruitment agencies and employers. Corros also offered the services of CBCP-ECMI's network of pastoral workers and chaplains overseas in helping the government monitor progress on the policy reforms.

Other groups, such as the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW) and the Association for Professionalism in Overseas Employment (ASPROE) also supported Brion's stance.

"Placement fees pose a heavy burden to aspiring migrant workers and they are a primary source of

abuse and exploitation to applicants before they leave the country," the PMRW said in a statement

In a separate statement of support, ASPROE, which is composed of non-fee charging licensed recruitment agencies, said that "the foreign employer who needs the help of industrious, innovative and long-suffering Filipinos to run their household and business affairs must compensate the agencies".

The International Labor Organization (ILO) and a Saudi Arabia-based workers' group have also joined those who have rallied behind DOLE's reform initiatives.

"I suppose we have to support anything that gives out a higher price on domestic workers. One has to think long term as long as it goes towards a good direction," Linda Wirth, ILO regional director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, told the BusinessMirror, a local business newspaper. The ILO, by virtue of its Convention No. 181, frowns on the imposition of placement fees on workers.

In Saudi Arabia, the largest host country to overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the Middle East, a group of OFWs also welcomed DOLE's reform package for DHs.

"Marami ang gaganda ang antas ng buhay habang maprotektahan ng naturang programa ang kapakanan ng mga domestic helpers na aming mga miyembro (This program will improve the quality of life and welfare of domestic helpers who are our members)," Rosendo Aristeo Espiritu, president of D'Heroes Group, said in a letter of support sent to Brion. The association includes Filipino drivers, waiters, laborers, barbers, beauticians, food crew members, salesmen, nurses, therapists, and dentists.



According to a report by the Philippine embassy in Bahrain, the number of undocumented Filipino workers going to the Middle Eastern country "via irregular channels" was on the rise.

Employers and recruiters in Bahrain accused of bypassing minimum pay

By **Letty Geronimo** in Manila

More Filipino domestic helpers are being brought to Bahrain on tourist visas by employers unwilling to pay the US\$400 minimum pay.

Labour Attaché Alejandro Santos confirmed that Filipinos travelling to Bahrain and other Middle Eastern countries as tourists were being scrutinized by immigration officials after a report by the Philippine embassy based in Zinj, just outside Bahrain's capital city of Manama, to the Manila home office.

It said the number of undocumented Filipino workers going to Bahrain "via irregular channels" was on the rise. The report did not specify the figures.

"Their number is increasing and it's alarming," welfare officer Attorney Venus Bravo told the Gulf Daily News.

"We have about 13 women, all from Mindanao, at the embassy's shelter, some of them minors and all brought to Bahrain as tourists by an unregistered recruitment agency in Bahrain and an unlicensed Filipino recruiter in the Philippines."

The women, the youngest aged 17, were brought to Bahrain to work as housemaids for Bahraini families.

They were each supposed to be paid 50 Bahraini dinar (US\$132).

They said they flew to Bahrain on fake passports, and their dates of birth were changed to hide their real age and identities. "These workers want to return home and they cannot as yet, because their passports are with their employers," said Bravo.

"Their employers say they will not release their passports unless they are reimbursed the money they spent in getting them to Bahrain."

The embassy was investigating the case, she added.

Sources said employers only needed to pay about 60 Bahraini dinar to change a tourist visa into a work visa.

"There are also employers who only renew the worker's visa every three months, paying about 25 Bahraini dinar each time," said one source. "This really isn't illegal and is widely practised in Bahrain."

"Even if the worker is interviewed at immigration in the Philippines, he or she just needs to show his or her return air ticket and off they go."

"Once in Bahrain, they get a refund from a travel agent here since they no longer need to return to the Philippines for the time being."

OFWs in Saudi welcome policies, but recruitment may be hit

By Chito Manuel in Jeddah

The Philippine Consul General to Jeddah, Penedosina Lomondot, said the recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers in the Kingdom was entirely a matter between the Saudi sponsor and the employee in the absence of a government-to-government agreement on minimum wage for domestic helpers.

In effect, Lomondot implied that Saudi Arabia remained an open

market and domestic helpers still had the option to seek employment in this Middle Eastern country despite Manila's new so-called Supermaid policy.

What may prevent recruiters from getting job orders from their Saudi principals are the conditions being imposed by the POEA, such as the capacity of prospective employers to pay the placement fees, the provision of the location map of the house of the sponsor, and the personal

appearance of the employer or employers before the POEA or its representative overseas prior to hiring a helper from the Philippines.

Also, there were reports in the local press that the Philippine Embassy in Riyadh stood firm on implementing the new conditions for hiring domestic workers despite mounting protests in Manila and complaints from Saudi recruiters.

Lomondot told the Filipino Globe that the feedback they got

from Assistant Labor Attache Des Dicang, now back at the home office after completing his tour of duty at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Jeddah, is that they were under heavy pressure from maids who wanted to work in Saudi Arabia.

"Sa papers lang yan. Gusto naming umalis papunta sa Saudi," the helpers were quoted as having told Dicang of the new policy. Penedosina said he fully supported the new policy because it would

protect both employer and employee.

"Hindi sayang ang pera. Magbayad man ng malaki, dapat pulido. Wala nang tatakbo dahil siguradong marunong ang katulong. Kasi pag walang alam, sa amin din sa consulate ang takbuhan ng mga katulong," he said. "Tataas ang respeto sa ating bansa kasi we'll be sending quality workers," he added.

Gina Abitona, a leader in the overseas Filipino workers' community, said during an interview from Riyadh that the Supermaid policy was an idea whose time has come. Abitona, the treasurer of the group Tulong at Pag-asa Para sa OFWs (Help and Hope for OFWs) said the policy could finally solve the problem of runaway maids and curb potential abuses against them.

"Para sa akin, okay ito. Mabuti ito para sa kapakanan ng mga domestic helpers," she said.

FAST FACTS

The reform policies on the deployment of Filipino household service workers

What is the Philippine government's reform package on the deployment of HSWs?

As early as July 2006, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) had been moving to implement fully Memorandum Circular No. 11 series of 1999, requiring all outbound household service workers to acquire a certificate of competency issued by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda).

This policy direction became the precursor for the sweeping reforms mandated by the POEA Governing Board on 24 October 2006 through a series of resolutions that overhauled the system:

Resolution No. 04: Reverted the minimum age requirement for household workers to 25 years old, regardless of gender, repealing the 1998 mandate that reduced this to 21 years old and the 2001 mandate that further scaled down the minimum age threshold to 18 years old.

Resolution No. 05: Raised the minimum monthly wage requirement for HSWs to US\$400.

Resolution No. 06: Prohibited the collection of placement fee from DHs, whether collected prior to their deployment or on-site thru salary deduction.

Resolution No. 07: Required pre-qualification of foreign placement agencies, on top of the existing rule on foreign principals, by the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLO) subject to their attendance and completion of an orientation on Philippine culture, policies, and their responsibilities; having an adequate holding and coordinating facility for



HSWs; and verified written undertaking on the humane treatment of the Filipino workers, their free access to family and the Philippine embassy or consulate and vice-versa, as well as their culpability for any violation.

Resolution No. 08: Required HSWs seeking overseas work to first secure a National Certificate for Household Service Workers (NCII-HSW) issued by Tesda and attend the country-specific language and culture orientation conducted by OWWA.

Resolution No. 09: Extended the scope of POLO verification to include individual employment contracts and subsequent job orders of low- and semi-skilled female workers, to prevent the misuse of these manpower requests and further ensure workers' protection and welfare.

Resolution No. 10: Suspended the issuance of new licences to agencies seeking to recruit HSWs to prevent cutthroat competition amid low deployment of new-hires in the industry.

On 24 November, the POEA Governing Board followed through with Resolution No. 11 setting the effectivity date of the reforms on 15 December 2006 for newly-hired HSWs and 1 February 2007 for vacationing or returning domestic helpers.

How has the Philippine government responded to mounting pressure to reverse its reform package?

TRANSITION: On 29 November 2006, POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz issued Memo Circular No. 11 allowing a transition period up to 15 February 2007 which specified conditions under which the "old rules" may

apply. Based on that circular, the "old rules" would apply to HSWs and low- and semi-skilled female workers whose work permits or entry visas were issued by the host government prior to 15 December 2006; and to HSWs and caregivers or caretakers returning overseas on the same contract and even under new contract, so long as these were processed before 1 February 2007.

NEW CUT-OFF PERIOD: Almost a month later, during the course of the POLO conference that gathered all labor attaches in Tagaytay City, the POEA Governing Board issued Resolution No. 12 setting back the cut-off period to 1 March 2007.

RECRUITERS' RESISTANCE: On 27 January 2007, amid growing opposition to the reform policies, Labor Secretary Arturo Brion was adamant that the government had not caved in to recruiters' call to reverse the policy reforms. "We are not insensitive to the concern of our household service workers and of the recruitment agencies.

That is why we are submitting their proposals to the (POEA Governing) Board... But as of now, we are firm in our conviction that it is high time for us to enhance the protection and welfare being afforded to our domestic helpers abroad.

SELECTIVE CONCESSIONS: On 2 February 2007, Brion finally conceded, announcing that the POEA board had issued a resolution relaxing at least two of the provisions being opposed by recruiters. The latest resolution lowered the minimum age requirement from 25 years to 23 years old. The board also ruled that only newly-hired HSWs were required to undergo Tesda's competency assessment, and the language and culture training from OWWA. The board, however, stuck to its recommended US\$400 minimum monthly wage rate, as well as the no-placement fee policy.

Compiled by Lara Climaco

The bumpy flight of the Supermaid Program

By Lara Climaco

What is the Supermaid Program?

It seeks to raise the profile of Filipino domestic helpers or household service workers (HSWs), in view of rampant abuses and exploitation of mostly female workers in this sector, especially in the Middle East. It was announced by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the course of the Beirut crisis in July to August last year, which led to the massive repatriation of Filipino OFWs – most of them domestic helpers – from Lebanon.

The Supermaid Program was designed to be a skills-upgrade training for domestic helpers, aimed at transforming them into highly-skilled home managers, with proven capabilities to plan and organize work, use mathematical concepts and techniques, respond effectively to difficult or challenging behavior, and respond to emergencies, aside from the usual chores of providing care and support to children and pets, and maintaining a healthy and safe environment.

A Supermaid or certified home manager is deemed to enjoy decent pay abroad, dignity and pride in their work, and fair treatment by employers.

How does one become a Supermaid?

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) has designed a 116-hour training curriculum for the Supermaid. This may only be taken after acquiring the national certificate for household service worker, or NCII-HSW, which requires completion of a 300-hour training course on domestic duties or, for experienced domestic helpers, competency assessment by Tesda or any of its accredited centers.

Under the Supermaid curriculum, 16 hours would be spent developing the basic competencies of planning and organizing work and using mathematical concepts and

techniques – under which domestic helpers would learn how to set work objectives, plan and schedule their activities, implement their plans, and assess their performance, aside from developing their analytical skills from relearning math basics.

Beyond that, prospective helpers would receive 16 more hours of training on responding effectively to difficult or challenging behavior and developing negotiation skills, which are considered their common competencies. These will then pave the way for training on core competencies: 40 hours of training on providing care and support to children; 16 hours on maintaining a healthy and safe environment; 24 hours on responding to emergencies; and four hours on providing care to pets.

Where can Supermaid training be acquired?

According to the Tesda Women's Center, there are about 30 Tesda Technology Institutions, both private and public, which are capable of offering the Supermaid program. However, only the Tesda Women's Center has actually offered the home manager course, though private institutions are welcome to offer the course in exchange for a fee after it has complied with Tesda's program registration requirements. Tesda and the POEA plan to offer the home manager course overseas, particularly in Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and Cyprus where there are large numbers of Filipino domestic helpers.

How many have attended the Supermaid program?

As of December last year, 27 candidates have attended the course and 25 of them have received certification as a Supermaid. A success story is Mary Joy Buñol, an Ilongga, who landed a job in a royal household in Malaysia after receiving her certification as a home manager, according to POEA.



A meeting of minds amid a search for solutions

In a first of a series, the Filipino Globe convenes a roundtable discussion on the reform policies regulating the overseas deployment of domestic helpers

Since late last year, we have noted the growing confusion and unease back home in the Philippines and abroad – particularly in Hong Kong – over the recently promulgated package of reforms governing the overseas deployment of the rechristened Filipino household service workers (HSWs).

In response, we at Filipino Globe decided late last month to organize a forum on the issue, with the hope of bringing together government officials from the Philippines and the local consulate, as well as the various individuals, affected businesses and non-government organizations working with the Filipino community in Hong Kong.

We also took it upon ourselves to prepare a Special Report that will hopefully clear the clogged communication channels, answer key questions, report on the various news events engendered by this issue, and separate the grain of facts from the chaff of poor information.

Despite the limited time and the even more limited logistics, we were glad that concerned government officials in Manila were able to join the forum by conference call on Sunday, 4 February, in our office at the Lippo Centre in Admiralty.

They were led by Secretary Augusto Syjuco, the director-general of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda); POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz; Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Deputy Executive Director Adam Musa; Vivian Tornea, the head of the OWWA policy and program



development office; Executive Director Irene Isaac, of Tesda's qualifications and standards office; and her colleague, Augusto Capiro, executive director of their agency's competency assessment and certification office.

Despite their heavy workload, Consul-General Alejandrino Vicente, Consul Kira Danganan, and Labor Attaches Bernardino Julve and Nida Romulo ably represented the men and women behind the Philippine Consulate General in Hong Kong. From the community groups in Hong Kong, we had Daphne Ceniza-Kuok, Jhosie Manjares, Lori Brunio and Edna Aquino – all officers of the Filipino Community Services and Information Network (Filcomsin); Paterno de Guzman and Lany Flores, the vice-chairman and auditor, respectively, of the Filipino Catholic Group; Elmer Estrella of Emry's Employment Agency, representing the recruitment sector; and interested individuals Pastor Ed Villarosa, Teresita Medina and Socorro Manalo.

The forum, moderated by Filipino Globe executive editor Rex Aguado and the paper's marketing adviser, Therese Necio Ortega, touched on a broad swath of subjects with candor and sobriety, even as an estimated 3,000-strong protest march passed by down on the street from Chater Road in Central en route to the Philippine Consulate in Admiralty, where rallyists took turns criticizing the reform package.

Through almost two hours of discussions (the entire proceedings of which can be accessed at our website – www.filglobe.com – and the gist of which is only barely touched here for lack of space), what emerged was an apparent admission by some of the concerned government officials that the implementation of the new policies were patchy, if not in total shambles, and that the consultation process was less than perfect. In effect, the officials did acknowledge with humility what the various NGOs have been complaining all along – that although the general idea behind the policies were noble

and known to most, the details of the implementation were hatched without their knowledge, much less consent, leading to what many deem to be onerous requirements.

The confusion that marked the first few weeks of the policies was very apparent in the testimonies from NGOs and the recruitment industry at the forum, with these groups saying that the missteps have led to delayed flights for outbound helpers, HSWs stranded in Manila because of incomplete papers, growing job losses due to contract cancellations, and new monstrous forms of graft and corruption as petty pencil-pushers from state agencies involved in implementing the new policies and mendacious recruiters preyed on the confused and hapless HSW job applicants.

The various NGOs are now busy documenting these cases to be brought to the POEA and OWWA, on the assurance from the government panel at the forum that those found guilty will be prosecuted. Some sectors remain leery of those official guarantees, but others are willing to give the authorities the benefit of the doubt.

Some groups working for workers' rights have also forwarded a raft of suggestions to government officials on how to further exorcise the reform package of lurking evils, especially in the training and assessment areas where NGO representatives say they have found rules and standards so murky as to be almost impenetrable – much less comprehensible to ordinary HSW applicants. Official assurances were also given in this area, and it is hoped that our officials were not simply going through the motion of public relations.

The debate is far from resolved,

with some groups in Manila, Hong Kong and other key overseas markets for HSWs planning more protests in the following days and months to press for the scrapping of the measures – this despite the decision of the Department of Labor and Employment and the POEA to grant on 2 February certain exemptions from some of the package's provisions. As this issue unfolds, and as public passion over the reform policies rise and ebb over the weeks ahead, we hope that the assurances given by some government officials at the forum will lead to a more equitable and rational resolution of the differences.

For one thing, it is encouraging to hear Syjuco and Baldoz talking about lessons learned from the events of the past few weeks.

We are heartened by their promise to open new communication channels, widen consultation procedures, improve the dissemination of key information, and implement practical but enlightened related programs, such as more scholarships and other financial assistance to returning and prospective domestic helpers who wanted to comply with the HSW requirements.

We would like to believe that these were no mere rhetoric and that our officials are serious about serving the real interests of and listening to the legitimate grievances of overseas Filipino workers.

The various NGOs and interested entities must now help ensure that our officials keep their words. Through all this, Filipino Globe will be here to document, enlighten and promote better understanding in the community. That, after all, is our role – no more, no less.

VOICES

Excerpts from the ongoing debate over the reform policies for household service workers (HSWs)

“They – the HSWs (household service workers) – should in no way be misused to gain dubious political leverage or advantage by any sector relative to the conduct of the elections in the near future. Misusing our OFWs for dubious political intents, we believe, would not only cheapen but constitute a disservice to these noble, sacrificing persons whom we honor – both in national spirit, and under our laws – as our modern day heroes.

“Instead, we call on the responsible sectors to support us in this effort, that is, to improve globally the protection, conditions, and welfare of our OFWs particularly the most disadvantaged among them, who are the HSWs. The matter of ensuring better conditions for our HSWs is not only long overdue, but simply essential at all times, reinforcing human dignity and helping to stimulate the progress of the OFW host, and local, economies.

“We are puzzled as to why some sectors would oppose such essential and overdue measures, and even use the HSWs for politically oriented activities, but somehow, we are inclined to be enlightened on the apprehension facing the HSW recruitment industry that the reforms could be detrimental to business.”

**Secretary Arturo D. Brion
Department of Labor and
Employment
13 February 2007**

“Don’t confuse the public by your misuse of statistics and by clouding the facts. Instead of this dubious disinformation campaign, why don’t you, if you are genuinely interested in the good of our HSWs as you claim, help instead in exposing the extent of abuses against HSWs abroad, the fatal instances, incarcerations, hospitalization, distressed women workers, including the social costs and undesired effects upon their families at home?”

“In this sense, they give the impression that they seem only out to protect their businesses against erosion of their capacity for wholesale deployment of underage HSWs at measly salary rates and conditions that are at times inhuman.

“In this light, the government can only lean more to protect the innumerable HSWs we have abroad against inhuman conditions, and their families against the painful social costs, rather than coddle and yield to a few profitable recruiters bent on opposing the standards at whatever cost.”

**Secretary Arturo D. Brion
Department of Labor and
Employment
Reacting to strong opposition
from recruiters
12 February 2007**

“For over two decades now of sending our Filipino women overseas to work as household workers, their situation has never really improved. Many advocates for migrants in the Catholic Church had been appealing for the protection of their rights and promotion of their welfare as they are considered the most vulnerable workers considering their specific working environment.

“We recognize that while there were many attempts in the past to safeguard their situations, those systems however had always

been abused by many exploitative recruiting agencies and several employers. We believe that the recently declared reforms covering the household workers will not necessarily resolve all the problems surrounding their deployment. Nevertheless, these would improve their worsening conditions, such as the case of those OFWs working in Lebanon or somehow would lead the Philippines to graduate from sending household workers who are less skilled in protecting and preserving their rights.

“The reforms are not that all perfect, but we wish to praise those parts that deserve commendation. The abuse to the system would most likely to happen again, but we could only hope the new reforms would empower our women household workers from now on.

“We observe that while we could have good policy bills for our workers, the lack of monitoring work is where most of our workers fall victim to the exploitation of abusive employers and agents. We recommend to our government to strengthen the aspect of monitoring in the site and in the country. I think, the Filipino communities overseas and our network of pastoral workers and chaplains are most willing to be of help on this aspect of monitoring when our government officials would consistently show sincerity and dedication in their assistance to our distressed workers at the site.”

**Father Edwin D. Corros, CS
Executive Secretary
Episcopal Commission for the
Pastoral Care of Migrants and
Itinerant People
Catholic Bishops Conference of
the Philippines
23 January 2007**

“ASPROE fully supports the POEA

Governing Board resolutions ... relevant to the deployment overseas of Filipino household workers, and fully subscribes to the reasons stated ... The resolutions are vital to the overseas Filipino household workers’ welfare, well-being and empowerment.

“The resolution prohibiting the collection of placement fees from household workers whether collected prior to deployment or through salary deductions is relevant and far-reaching ... The requirement of placement fees from these workers, while legal, may not be necessarily moral and just.

For where is justice in collecting money from people who have so little money to begin with, for people who have barely enough to survive? The foreign employer who needs the help of industrious, innovative and long-suffering Filipinos to run their household and business affairs must compensate the agencies, not the Filipino household worker who is merely seeking the opportunity for a better life...

“The requirement for the household workers to secure a certificate of competency from Tesda and the completion of a culture-specific language and culture orientation course are necessary components to the skills-compensation equation...

“ASPROE believes in the primacy of the human being as expressed through industry, enterprise and labor. It believes in the importance of developing and nurturing the economic and social health of the nation. It has no doubt that the resolutions and their expeditious and vigilant implementation will help in the fulfillment of these cherished and noble aspirations. ASPROE calls on everyone concerned to support these resolutions as well.”

Rene E. Cristobal

**President
Association for
Professionalism in Overseas
Employment Inc. (ASPROE)**

“For all the hype of the government on its supposed ‘reforms’ on the POEA guidelines, careful look would reveal that these are deceptive changes that only aim to cover up extortion of OFWs that remains at the core of the guidelines...”

“(The exemption announced by the POEA on 2 February) is just a ploy to dampen our anger. If our contracts are terminated or completed and we process new contracts with new employers, we shall still be treated as new hires and thus covered by the guidelines...”

This is just a bait but we will not bite. We know the burden of paying the long list of fees of the government and we will not let other OFWs experience worse.

“If they are indeed for the increase of wage and for the abolition of placement fees, why package it with new fees... We challenge the government to make true the wage and placement fee provisions without the accompanying extortion for the assessment and training... Total scrapping of the guidelines is the sentiment of OFWs that the government must heed.”

**Dolores Balladares
Chairperson
United Filipinos in Hong
Kong (Unifil-Migrante-HK)
4 February 2007**

“Migrant worker’s protection is not the basis of the POEA guidelines but ensuring the sheer marketability of human labor and its subsequent dollar returns.

“Who would not get angry when the government earns so much from the OWWA funds yet no satisfactory service has been given to those who pay them?”

“While the case of the dubious transfer of OWWA funds to PhilHealth remains unresolved, the OFWs and their families are confronted once again with a government-imposed scheme to make money for the upcoming elections.

“This money-making scheme has got to stop and the women migrant workers will not stop until the POEA guidelines are ultimately scrapped.”

**Cynthia Abdon-Tellez
Chairperson
Gabriela Women’s Party
Hong Kong Chapter
4 February 2007**

“There are still a number of concerns on the package of reforms contained in the new policy which the changes have not fully addressed yet. Until these are fully addressed, we remain firm in our view that the new policy will not be able to fulfill its stated objective of enhancing the protection and welfare of HSWs.

“We urge the POEA and Tesda to cancel all fees required for the acquisition of Tesda Certification (NC2) by HSWs. The P1,000 assessment fee should be fully subsidized by the government



The risk of an undocumented OFW

By Herbert M. Sancianco

It was in early November 1993 when I had my first overseas assignment as group product manager for a Saudi food-processing company. On my second day there, I decided to visit the Philippine consulate in Jeddah as a courtesy call. I went there with the help of a new-found friend who knew some people at the consulate.

We were barely 20 minutes at the office of the chief consul when a distressed Filipina rushed in, looking utterly panicked and shouting for help. She was barefoot and blood was dripping from a cut on her left shoulder. Somebody sat her down and, trying very hard to control her trembling, "Maria" said between sobs that her female Saudi employer bit her on the shoulder after she tried

to defend herself from the Saudi woman's attacks – all because she was not happy with the late-afternoon meal that Maria cooked for her and her family.

This was not the first physical or mental abuse that she had had to endure at the hands of her employer, Maria said. She'd been slapped, or food had been thrown at her face. The sad part was that she had only been working for this Saudi family for just three months. Worse, she was an undocumented worker. Maria said she ran from her employers' house for about four blocks to the consulate, as she could not take the abuse anymore. She just wanted to go home.

Maria had barely finished telling her story to the consulate staff when her female employer showed up to claim her and take her back to their house – without any trace of remorse

for the physical injury that she had allegedly inflicted on the Filipina helper.

Amid the chaos and the tension and Maria's growing desperation, it was my Arabic-speaking Filipino friend who stood up and told Maria's employer that she could not drag Maria back to her house as helper's wounds had to be treated first. My friend also warned the Saudi woman that because blood was drawn, she and her family were in danger of getting their heads chopped off according to Shariah law. Nobody was exactly sure if this was the case, but it was enough to scare Maria's employer, who left the consulate without Maria.

Sadly, the consulate was not prepared for such a crisis. Eventually, my friend called up a Filipino doctor he knew and he arrived a few minutes

later to tend to Maria's wounds.

Poorly trained to handle such crises in those days, the staff members at the consulate were a total disappointment. My friend later told me that, with his help, Maria was eventually sent back to Manila and had to abandon her belongings at her Saudi employers' house. She had to rely on clothes and supplies donated by other kababayans who heard of her plight.

I look back at this event with much sadness and outrage. It only reminded me that such abuses were always possible if not rampant because of the illegal working status of some overseas Filipino workers, especially those working in places where help is scant and the host country's policies towards migrant workers are oppressive. It was sheer exploitation, if not outright slavery.

Perhaps if the Supermaid policy had been already in place at the time, I am sure Maria and hundreds more like her wouldn't have had to undergo such horrific experiences. She would have been well prepared to do her job and her rights would have been better protected, with her employers legally under obligation to look after her interests and well-being.

I know there are a lot of Marias out there who went through this ordeal. We still read about them, and we never cease to be horrified and saddened. Isn't it about time for a real change?

Herbie Sancianco is a professor in the post-graduate school for continuing education of De La Salle University College of Saint Benilde. He is a former OFW in Saudi Arabia and Vietnam.

CATEGORIES OF HIRING CONDITION	NEW POLICY REQUIREMENTS						
	Training at Tesda-accredited training centre*	Tesda-accredited assessment*	Submit Tesda NC2 certification*	Minimum age at 23	OWWA language and culture seminar certification*	Placement fee	Minimum US\$400 monthly salary
New hires with visas, job orders or contracts approved or verified before 16 December 2006 but processed at POEA before 1 March 2007	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New hires with no experience working as a maid, and with visas, job orders or contracts approved or verified after 16 December 2006	√	√	√ (1)	√	√ (2)	X	√
New hires with some experience in the Philippines working as a maid, with visas, job orders or contracts approved or verified after 16 December 2006	Optional	√	√ (1)	√	√ (2)	X	√
Domestic helper who is only vacationing in the Philippines and will be returning to her current employer abroad under the same contract	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Person whose last job abroad as a maid was before 2006 and whose new DH contract was processed before, on or after 1 March 2007	Optional	X (3)	X (3)	X	X (4)	X	√
Helper who was fired or failed to finish her overseas DH contract in 2006, but was able to finish one full contract before and has a new DH contract processed before, on or after 1 March 2007	Optional	X	X	X	X (4)	X	√
Helper who was on her first overseas DH contract in 2006 but was fired or unable to finish it. She has a new contract processed before, on or after 1 March	Optional	√	√	√	√	X	√
Helper who successfully finished her contract in 2006 and was able to process a new contract before 1 March. She is going back to the same country	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Helper who successfully finished her contract in 2006 and was able to process a new contract before 1 March. She will be working in a different country	X	X	X	X	√	X	X
Helper who finished her contract in 2006 but was only able to process a new contract on or after 1 March. She is going back to the same country	Optional	X (3)	X (3)	X	X	X	√
Helper who finished her contract in 2006 but was only able to process a new contract on or after 1 March. She will be working in a different country	Optional	X (3)	X (3)	X	√	X	√
Returning and former domestic helpers who are processed on or after 1 March this year, and who are going back to the same country of employment	Optional	X (3)	X (3)	X	X	X	√
Returning and former domestic helpers who are processed on or after 1 March this year, and will be working in a different country in their new contracts	Optional	X (3)	X (3)	X	√	X	√

LEGEND:
X – Exempt
√ – Apply

*Generally, applicants who have household-work experience can opt not to undergo training at a Tesda-accredited centre, and they can go straight for an assessment. However, if they fail the assessment for the third time, they are required to undergo training. The training and assessment centres are required to charge fees prescribed by Tesda, which also offers scholarships and financial-aid to qualified applicants. The OWWA language and culture training is offered for free. For more details, visit your local Philippine consulate or embassy, or check www.poea.gov.ph

NOTES:

(1) Worker is required to submit an NC2 except for those bound for countries which require a prescribed skills training as condition for visa issuance (e.g. Taiwan, Canada)

(2) Worker is required to submit an OWWA certificate except for those bound for countries which require prescribed language and culture orientation as condition for visa issuance (e.g. Canada)

(3) Worker is exempted from submitting the NC2 unless employer requires skills assessment

(4) Worker is exempted from submitting the OWWA certificate unless returning to a country with a different language and culture as determined by the POEA

SOURCES: FILIPINO GLOBE RESEARCH, POEA AND DOLE

Lawmakers launch probe into alleged irregularities

Investigation will focus on prequalification requirements and reports of petty bribery involving government workers

By **Beting Dolor** in Manila
Contributing editor

The House of Representatives, through its committee on overseas workers affairs, has announced it would conduct an investigation based on the growing number of complaints from domestic helpers over the deleterious impact of the government's reform policies on the deployment of domestic helpers abroad.

Representative Edcel Lagman, committee chairman, has filed House Resolution 1498 calling for an investigation into the new policy's prequalification requirements.

Lagman also said they would look into complaints from a number of domestic-helper applicants that some government workers were seeking petty bribes to fast-track the release of certificates issued by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda).

This came as an estimated 3,000 Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong held a protest rally on the first Sunday of February, amid plans by their peers back home to conduct even bigger demonstrations against the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) in the coming days and weeks.

The would-be overseas Filipino workers are up in arms against the labor department's proposal that



According to some critics of the reform policies, even before the Supermaids earn their first dollar abroad, they would already be deep in debt because of the excessive cost of training required of them.

would require them to undergo more than 200 hours of training and an assessment program prior to deployment.

That program is intended to upgrade their skills so they can become "Supermaids" who can command a minimum salary of US\$400 anywhere they are deployed, but more specifically in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East.

"We are not against the training program," a hopeful overseas Filipino worker (OFW) who called herself Ella told Filipino Globe. "Kung ikabubuti namin (if it is for our benefit), why should we complain?"

What she and thousands like her are angry at is the estimated cost of the training program of between P10,000 and P15,000 (around US\$200 to US\$300). There is also an assessment fee of P1,000 (US\$20) to be charged by Tesda.

"Sobra 'yan (that's too much)," she said.

So even before they earn their first dollar abroad, the Supermaids would be deep in the red already. Millions of OFWs since the first wave of deployment in the 1970s have been grumbling about the layers of fees and all other cash-outs that they have to shoulder before leaving the country.

Cases of illegal and unlicensed

recruitment activities also remain rampant.

The Federated Association of Manpower Exporters (FAME), meanwhile, said they were supporting the call to conduct protest rallies nationwide to force DOLE and POEA to lower the fees.

Aside from Metro Manila, the women and men seeking jobs as domestic helpers abroad will also stage mass actions in Tuguegarao, Cagayan de Oro, Davao, Iloilo and Zamboanga.

FAME, the umbrella organization of employment agencies that specialize in deploying domestic helpers, said four new rules were "killing" the industry.

These are: the increase in salaries for domestic helpers, from the present prevailing rate of US\$200 to the US\$400 base pay for Supermaids; the adjustment in the minimum age of OFWs, from the present 18 to the proposed 25 years; the mandatory Tesda assessment before deployment; and the proposed ban on the collection of placement fees from OFW applicants by licensed recruitment agencies.

FAME head Ed Mahiya said the new rules would serve as the "Calvary" of OFWs, especially domestic helpers.

Prospective domestic helpers who are waiting for jobs abroad appeared split on the Supermaid scheme, which had been supported on various occasions by no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. In fact, the president was the first to use the term "Supermaid" during her State of the Nation address last year.

Those who had worked abroad and who are seeking to renew their contracts generally favor the program, except for the training cost. Those who have never worked abroad only want to leave the country for a job overseas, even at a salary lower than the prevailing rate of US\$200 a month.

"Para ano pa ang mataas na sweldo kung mawawalan naman kami ng trabaho (What good is a

high salary if we do not get those jobs anyway)?" said one.

Domestic helpers from poorer countries like Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and even from the outlying provinces of China could grab jobs from their Filipino counterparts as they are more than happy to still receive US\$200 a month or lower.

But Filipinos remain the favored pick for housework, as most of them are college graduates, speak English well, and have good work habits.

The POEA took note of the Hong Kong rallies, as the latest one reportedly gathered around 3,000 supporters, up from the 2,000 reported at the first rally on January 28.

Labor Secretary Arturo Brion, who heads the POEA governing board, said they would continue to talk with FAME and other industry leaders, adding that the steps being taken by the government were intended to help, and not hinder, the industry.

There are about 120,000 Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong, forming the single biggest bloc of workers of any nationality in the city.

Hong Kong remains a favored destination for Filipino maids since it is considered less risky than the Middle East, and the work environment less strict than Singapore's. Also, the flight to and from Manila is short, at a little more than one hour.

On the negative side, the Hong Kong government has been going the opposite direction where pay is concerned, lowering on two occasions in recent years the minimum wage for all domestic workers.

Elsewhere, the Filipino domestic helper does not have the same problem where minimum wage is concerned. In such places like Italy and Britain, their average pay is around US\$1,000 a month.

'Extortionist' recruiters face charges as POEA clarifies rules

By **Lara Climaco** in Manila

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is preparing to file charges against unscrupulous recruitment agencies that have extorted money from domestic helpers in Hong Kong, which may have fueled massive protests over a reform package that raised the helpers' minimum wage to US\$400 and enforced stricter rules on their overseas deployment.

POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz has revealed that the agency uncovered the extortion scheme during a consultation meeting last January 31 presided by Mina Gabor, a member of the POEA governing board representing the women sector, with some non-government organizations (NGOs).

During that meeting, Baldoz said that Daphne Ceniza-Kuok of the Filipino Community Services and Information Network (Filcomsin) in Hong Kong reported that some recruitment agencies had started to

require returning helpers to undergo training and skills assessment, and in at least one case, an agency required an applicant to undergo assessment four times, paying P1,000 each time.

Based on POEA pronouncements and circulars, such training or assessment, or both, would have applied to returning workers on February 1, but was later moved by Baldoz to March 1, and has been scrapped altogether by the POEA governing board in its February 2 resolution.

"I suspect that the recruitment agency also owns the training and assessment center or taking a commission from the center for every referred worker if it does not own the center," Baldoz observed.

With the POEA governing board's latest resolution, only newly-hired helpers are required to undergo competency assessment with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) and the language and culture training from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA).

The POEA is yet to issue the "special rules" that will apply to returning workers, although it is clear those rules will no longer require the Tesda competency certificate for household service worker (NCII-HSW), which precipitated the skills assessment earlier required on these workers. With its latest resolution, the POEA governing board has also eased the minimum wage requirement for helpers returning overseas under existing contracts processed before March 1 this year — the new cut-off date under a transition period.

Before this cut-off period, domestic helpers will be allowed to return abroad even under new contracts stipulating wages below US\$400, so long as they had worked or finished their contracts as domestic helpers abroad in 2006.

In contrast, those who had worked as domestic helpers before 2006 must comply with the US\$400 minimum wage rule, even if their contracts were processed before March 1.

continued from page 5

through DOLE considering the existing and future revenues generated from the Filipino migrant workers sector to the Philippine economy...

"Set strict and consistent standards and regulation of assessors, trainers and training centers accredited by Tesda... We seek the setting up of an independent stakeholders' body composed of migrant rights advocates and representatives of credible HSW associations who will regularly monitor and receive feedback on the performance of private Tesda assessment centers from HSW-trainees..."

"Institutionalize the ways and means of involving the representatives of the HSW community to identify the training needs of their sector and to act as trainers for their peers, especially in the case of returnees..."

"Specifically for Hong Kong, we urge POEA and OWWA to change the current language requirement of Cantonese for Hong Kong-bound domestic workers and replace this with a more flexible provision stating that the language assessment will be based on the

specific language required by the employer...

"We urge DOLE and the POEA leadership to set the examples among its staff and personnel in valuing meaningful consultation and dialogues with migrant workers organizations and migrant rights advocates.

We are very concerned that the current representation and "voice" of the migrant workers in the governing bodies of POEA and OWWA are inadequate in many ways.

We urge a review of these representations by setting clear and better criteria and a more transparent selection process with the end view of appointing more and better qualified representatives from the migrant workers in these bodies."

Filipino Community Services and Information Network (Filcomsin) – Hong Kong
14 February 2007

ABOUT FILIPINO GLOBE CONFERENCES



From time to time, and whenever there are important issues concerning overseas Filipino workers, Filipino Globe will seek the views of public officials and the

community to forge a better understanding of these issues through meaningful and constructive dialog. Filipino Globe Conferences hope to serve that purpose

by providing a regular forum for round table discussions. This special report is the result of discussions on the most pressing issue facing us today.

filipino globe

THE SUPERMAID POLICY

Special Report

Eight-page Pullout Section

February 2007

We need a middle ground

FT OGAMPO
AGENDA

There is absolutely no doubt in our mind that Representative Ferjanel Biron was motivated by the best of intentions when he introduced a House bill that would seek to confer “due recognition” to the nation’s new heroes, the overseas Filipino workers.

“The state,” Biron stressed, “must recognize the role that OFWs play in nation-building and the contribution they bring to the development of the economy.”

But as is usual in this benighted country, an implosion suddenly occurred in some government factotum’s brain that could possibly derail the smoothly functioning system that has been in place all these years.

A Supermaid program was recently launched by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) purportedly to upgrade the service rendered by our Filipino domestic helpers abroad to enhance their competence and minimize abuses by their employers.

The program pegged a 25-year-old minimum age and additional requirements in training skills. It also imposed a minimum wage of US\$400 monthly and prohibited recruitment agencies from collecting placement fees.

Expectedly, the program, euphemistically called a reform package, spawned a raging controversy from concerned sectors. The United



Filipinos-Migrante Organization denounced the program as a form of “super-extortion” by the state, citing the cost of training fees (P8,000 to P10,000) plus a P1,000 fee for two training certificates.

In Hong Kong, where an estimated 121,000 maids comprising nearly 52 per cent of domestic workers abroad, strident protests were vehemently dramatised.

And the Federated Association of Manpower Exporters, whose members stand to lose a lucrative source of income should the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration stay the course, is mounting a last-ditch effort to at least deflect the Supermaid government policy.

It is against this background that Biron’s abiding concern and interest

for OFWs’ welfare must confront the acid test.

His proposed legislation is a noble cause but necessitates sweeping amendments to make it more palatable and acceptable to his peers. In its present form, it hardly stands a chance; it is simply not doable.

The present dispute should be right down his alley and bespeaks persuasively of his fervent concern manifested in his putative legislation to improve the lives of our OFWs.

We are not suggesting that he wade into the fray. He could devote his talents and energies and considerable clout as a member of congress to find a middle ground, so to speak, to defuse the explosive situation obtaining, without abandoning the cause he has decided to champion.

Si Flor, si Sarah, si Thelma at Delia

TEO ANTONIO
SA KABILANG DAKO

GINimbal ang bansa noon, sa balitang bibitayin si Flor Contemplacion sa Singapore. Nagkagulo ang mga pinuno ng embahada at DOLE. Tinadtad sila ng tulgisa mula sa mga kolumnista sa lahat ng pahayagan.

Naging pambansang pagluluksa ang mapait na sinapit ni Flor, isang “domestic helper” at dahil mahigpit na ipinatutupad ang batas sa Singapore ay hind naging handa ang ating mga pinuno sa gobyerno.

Kaya’t nang may nagyayaring pagpapataw ng batas sa Saudi Arabia sa kabataang Sarah Balabagan, nagtulong-tulong ang embahada at nasa pribadong sector na maligtas si Sarah.

Sinaksak at napatay ang among Arabo dahil nagtangka siyang gahaisain. Kung napatay man ang walanghiyang amo ay dahil ipinagtanggol niya ang sariling dangal.

Nagising ang lahat at tinutukan ang kaso at anumang halagang babayaran sa korte ay magkaroon ng abugado ang gobyerno na nakakaintindi ng batas sa Saudi Arabia.

Nailigtas at nakauwi si Sarah Balabagan at ula roo’y marami tayong natutuhan sa mapait na karanasang sinasapit ng ating OFWs sa mga batas at patakaran at ibang kultura sa ibayong dagat.

Mula sa masaklap na karanasan nina Flor, Sarah at ibang katulad nina Delia Maga, Thelma Sioson at ibang kababayang manggagawa sa ibang bansa, nagkaroon ng iba-ibang kurokuro at mungkahi na dapat asikasuhin ng mga opisyal ng bawat embahada sa bawat bansa ang mga batas at patakaran magtatanggol sa karapatan at kalagayan ng ating OFWs.

Noon pa ma’y marami nang pagtutol at pagtuligsa sa napabayaang pagtrato sa ating milyon-milyong manggagawa sa ibang bansa.

Sinasabing sila ang “makabagong bayani” dahil sila ang nagpuno sa nasasaid na kaban ng bayan, ang pondong nagpapalugos sa sisinghap-singhap na ekonomiya at pinaghahati-hati ng kanya-kanyang interes na pampulitika at pang-ekonomiya ng mga lider ng bansa.

Sa kasalukuyan, ang bilyon-bilyong “remittances” ng ating “overseas workers” ay naging malaking bahagi ng pambansang pondo.

Ang halos siyam na milyon o higit pa, na OFWs sa buong daigdig ay malakas na puwersang nagpaangat ng kabuhayan ng bansa.

Masasabing ang nandadayuhang

“manpower” ng bansa ang maituturing na “economic power” sa kasalukuyan. Kaya’t mas tungkulin sa ngayon ng gobyerno na pag-ukulan ng proteksyon sa pagpapatupad ng mga batas at patakaran magtatanggol sa kanilang karapatan at mag-aangat ng kanilang kalagayan sa buhay.

Sa pagpapatupad ng Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) na magkaroon ng pagsasanay at pagsusulit ang mga “super maid” o “domestic helper” at pagbabayad ng limang libong piso o higit pa, masasabing ito’y masusing pinag-aralan.

Dumadako na ang ating pamahalaan sa pagbibigay ng kalinga at proteksyon sa mga susunod na generasyon ng mga domestic helpers upang mapangalagaan ang ating mga kababayan upang hindi maapi at malapastangan sa ibang bansa.

Ang pagpapatala sa nais na maging



Dapat lingapin ang ating mga domestic helper ng mga batas at patakaran magtatanggol sa kanilang karapatan bilang tao

“certificated supermaid” ay inilalagay nila sa kahandaan at dokumentadong pagpunta sa ibang bansa para magtrabaho.

Maiiwasan natin ang pagdami ng mga biktima ng mga ilegal rekruter at kahit ang mga lehitimong rekruter ay masusubaybayan sa pag-alis ng nakadokumentong manggagawa sa ibang bansa.

Kung noo’y isinagawa ang patakaran na ang mga “entertainer” sa Japan ay kukuha ng pagsasanay at pagsusulit sa Tesda ay upang wakasan ang masaklap na sinapit ng ating kababaihan na maging “exploited” at “sex slaves” at umuuwling pasa-pasa ang katawan at malamig na bangkay bunga ng pagiging biktima ng sindikatong yakuza.

Dapat lingapin ang ating mga “domestic helper” ng mga batas at patakaran magtatanggol sa kanilang karapatan bilang tao. Ang halagang limang libong piso o higit pa, kung ikukumpara sa dinudugas ng mga ilegal rekruter na 20 libo at nabibigo pang makapagtrabaho sa ibang bansa, ay masasabing proteksyon sa ating mga kababayan.

Coping with the new realities

HERBIE SANCIANCO
THINKING ALOUD

When I read about the protests brewing about the Supermaid policy several weeks ago, I was curious to know why this was being challenged by the very people who are supposed to benefit from it. I decided to look it up by downloading a copy of the controversial memorandum through the internet.

After reading the document, I have come to believe it is not such a bad policy.

I am glad that the government has finally done something to legitimise

the skills and image of our domestic helpers.

I cannot help but shake my head at the sight of very young or very old Filipinas going to work as domestic helpers abroad. I particularly take note of the former age group who, by observation, are in their late teens and clearly only have native talent learned at home. In many cases, they are the exploited ones, their skills are often challenged. By undergoing supervised training, they stand a better chance in the workplace.

The minimum age of 25 years old is just about right, given that emotional maturity is key to coping with the pressures of working in a foreign country.

In an ideal world, mediocre workers are the jobless ones.

The same can be said about the unprepared compared with the qualified domestic helper.

While there is really no perfect DH, someone with the proper training and emotional maturity can earn a respectable report card at the end of the day.

The minimum salary of US\$400 should be seen positively. The usual US\$200 is a pittance, particularly now that the Philippine peso is growing stronger by the day.

Placement agencies should recognise the changes and adapt. By going into more value-added services, their business can survive the new realities.