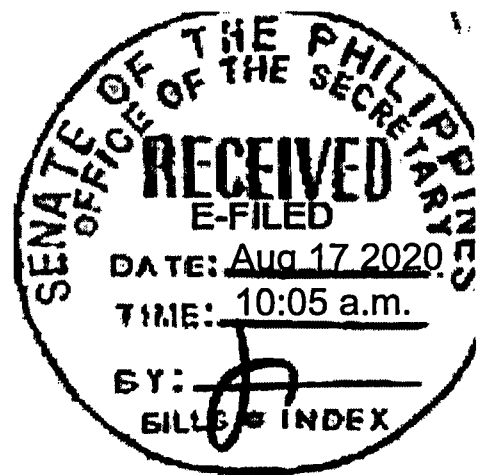


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE )  
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES )  
Second Regular Session )



SENATE

P.S. Res. No. 497

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Introduced by SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA

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**RESOLUTION**  
**DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT**  
**AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE STATUS OF THE**  
**OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKER (OFW) REPATRIATION AND**  
**ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AMID**  
**REPORTS OF CONTINUED DELAYS AND INEFFICIENCIES IN THEIR**  
**IMPLEMENTATION**

1           WHEREAS, Article II, Section 18 of the 1987 Constitution declares, in part, that  
2 the State “shall protect the rights of workers and promote their welfare”;

3           WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 3 of the same also declares, in part, that the  
4 State “shall afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and  
5 unorganized”;

6           WHEREAS, Section 2 of Republic Act No. 10801, otherwise known as the  
7 “Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Act”, states, in part, that “it shall be the  
8 State’s responsibility to protect the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)”. It likewise  
9 provides that the “Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) shall be one of  
10 the principal agencies of the State to serve and promote the rights, interest and welfare  
11 of the OFWs and their families”;

12           WHEREAS, Rule XIII, Section 5 of Republic Act No. 1022, which amended  
13 Republic Act No. 8042, otherwise known as the “Migrant Workers and Overseas  
14 Filipinos Act of 1995” states, in part, that “[t]he OWWA, in coordination with DFA,  
15 and in appropriate situations, with international agencies, shall undertake the  
16 repatriation of workers in cases of war, epidemic, disasters or calamities, natural or  
17 man-made, and other similar events without prejudice to reimbursement by the

1 responsible principal or agency within sixty (60) days from notice. In such case, the  
2 POEA shall simultaneously identify and give notice to the agencies concerned”;

3 WHEREAS, Section 10 of the same law provided for the establishment of  
4 National Reintegration Center for Overseas Filipino Workers, tasked to come up with  
5 a “mechanism for their reintegration into the Philippine society, serve as a promotion  
6 house for their local employment, and tap their skills and potentials for national  
7 development”;

8 WHEREAS, with COVID-19 having an unprecedented impact on global  
9 economies, businesses and workers, the International Labor Organization (ILO)  
10 estimates that nearly 2.2 billion workers, representing 68 per cent of the global  
11 workforce, are living in countries with recommended or required workplace closures.<sup>1</sup>  
12 The Philippines has one of the largest diasporas in the world. Roughly a tenth of the  
13 country’s population consists of Filipinos abroad. They have left their homeland to  
14 work for the promise of greener pastures. In 2019, “remittances from OFWs reached a  
15 record high of \$33.9 billion, equivalent to about 10 percent of the country’s gross  
16 domestic product (GDP)”;<sup>2</sup>

17 WHEREAS, the Philippines is in the midst of an economic recession brought  
18 upon by the COVID-19 pandemic evidenced by a 0.2 percent shrinking in the economy  
19 for the first quarter of 2020.<sup>3</sup> The decline in economic production is expected to  
20 continue as British bank HSBC, in a recently published forecast of the Philippine  
21 economy, predicted a 3.85 percent average decrease in the Philippine economy for  
22 2020;<sup>4</sup>

23 WHEREAS, Section 3 (e) of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the  
24 “Bayanihan To Heal As One Act”, declares that there is a need to “undertake a program  
25 for recovery and rehabilitation including a social amelioration program and provision

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<sup>1</sup> International Labor Organization. (April 2020) *Policy Brief: Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents*. Retrieved July 1, 2020, from [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_743268.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_743268.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Rivas, R. (17 February 2020). *OFW remittances hit record high of \$33.5 billion in 2019*. Retrieved July 1, 2020, from <https://www.rappler.com/business/252043-overseas-filipino-workers-remittances-2019>

<sup>3</sup> Rivas, R. (7 May 2020). *Philippine economy shrinks for first time in 22 years*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.rappler.com/business/260156-gross-domestic-product-philippines-q1-2020>

<sup>4</sup> Masigan, A. J. (14 June 2020). *Why the IATF’s strategy did more harm than good*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.bworldonline.com/why-the-iatfs-strategy-did-more-harm-than-good/>

1 of safety nets to all affected sectors” because the COVID-19 pandemic “has caused and  
2 is continuing to cause loss of lives and disruption to the economy”;

3 WHEREAS, among the hardest hit sectors here in the country are OFWs. In a  
4 recently held Senate hearing, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)  
5 Secretary Silvestre Bello III stated that they expected OFW remittances to be reduced  
6 by 30 to 40 percent this year as migrant workers continue to be displaced. DOLE also  
7 revealed that around 400,000 OFWs have already been laid off in various countries  
8 hit by COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> Some analysts have estimated that the number of displaced OFWs  
9 could reach as high as 1 million by 2021;<sup>6</sup>

10 WHEREAS, the ILO has noted in its policy brief issued on April 2020 that  
11 “[m]igrant workers’ inclusion in national COVID-19 policy responses can help to  
12 ensure the realization of equality and social justice”;<sup>7</sup>

13 WHEREAS, the OFW experience abroad amid the pandemic is nothing short of  
14 dire. On 2 June 2020, Secretary Bello noted that there were now over 340,000  
15 displaced OFWs worldwide. These individuals had either been terminated from their  
16 employment or could not report for work due to the lockdowns imposed;<sup>8</sup>

17 WHEREAS, in order to cope with the situation, stranded OFWs have resorted  
18 to extreme measures to survive, such as reportedly selling their own blood<sup>9</sup> in order to  
19 buy food and allegedly scouring garbage bins for leftover food and vegetables to eat;<sup>10</sup>

20 WHEREAS, as of 29 June 2020, according to the data from the Department of  
21 Foreign Affairs (DFA), there are now a total of 8,467 total confirmed cases for COVID-  
22 19 among OFWs across 59 countries/regions;<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Domingo, K. (24 June 2020). *DOLE expects 30-40 pct cut in remittances after COVID-19 displaces 400,000 OFWs*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/06/24/20/dole-expects-30-40-pct-cut-in-remittances-after-covid-19-displaces-400000-ofws>

<sup>6</sup> Aben, E. (3 June 2020). *Over 1m Filipino overseas workers set to lose jobs*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1683931/world>

<sup>7</sup> *Supra* Note 2.

<sup>8</sup> Aguilar, K. (2 June 2020). *DOLE: Almost 200k displaced OFWs refuse to return to PH*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/188079/dole-almost-200k-displaced-ofws-refuse-to-return-to-ph>

<sup>9</sup> GMA News. (24 June 2020). *Stranded OFWs in Saudi forced to sell their blood to survive*. Retrieved June 30, 2020, from [https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/pinoyabroad/news/744064/stranded-ofws-in-saudi-forced-to-sell-their-blood-to-survive/story/?fbclid=IwAR3qoKMvbXMx4IOcMzQBrJmiTFyaNpK9\\_6USjoo4yrOq7oPcCyXyF8v-36c](https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/pinoyabroad/news/744064/stranded-ofws-in-saudi-forced-to-sell-their-blood-to-survive/story/?fbclid=IwAR3qoKMvbXMx4IOcMzQBrJmiTFyaNpK9_6USjoo4yrOq7oPcCyXyF8v-36c)

<sup>10</sup> ABS-CBN News. (18 June 2020). *Ilang OFW sa Saudi Arabia namumulot ng basura para may makain*. Retrieved June 30, 2020, from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/06/18/20/ilang-ofw-sa-saudi-arabia-namumulot-ng-basura-para-may-makain>

<sup>11</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs. (29 June 2020). *Number of COVID-19 Cases among Filipinos Abroad as of 28 June 2020*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from

1           WHEREAS, the number of confirmed cases for OFWs constitutes almost a  
2 quarter of the total number of cases of infected Filipinos according to data released by  
3 the Department of Health (DOH) on the same day;<sup>12</sup>

4           WHEREAS, upon repatriation, a significant portion of displaced OFWs have  
5 fared no better here than abroad as they have, at times, experienced degrading  
6 treatment from the government agencies mandated to take care of their health and  
7 well-being. These include OFWs undergoing prolonged quarantine procedures due to  
8 delays and inefficiencies in testing and processing of documents<sup>13</sup>, having to camp  
9 underneath a flyover for days at a time due to vague and contradictory policies  
10 concerning stranded individuals,<sup>14</sup> and having to deal with limited job prospects and  
11 potentially extended periods of unemployment upon their return;

12           WHEREAS, seemingly oblivious of the true nature of the plight of OFWs who  
13 are forced by the global pandemic to come home, OWWA through Administrator Hans  
14 J. Cacdac has failed to realize that assistance to the OFWs entails more than just short-  
15 term programs when he said that the P 5-billion allotment and cash allocation which  
16 the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has released on 24 June 2020 to  
17 augment the Emergency Repatriation Fund of the DOLE-OWWA will be utilized for  
18 “food, accommodation and transport of the repatriated OFWs.”<sup>15</sup> There is an apparent  
19 lack of true understanding that the plight of the OFWs only begins with repatriation –  
20 that they would need further assistance to rehabilitate and reintegrate themselves back  
21 to the society upon return to the Philippines. Bringing them home is but a step, not the  
22 whole process;

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<https://www.facebook.com/dfaphl/photos/ms.c.eJwzNDMzMzc1NTE1MDQxtTSx1DOECpiYWRgamRmaIQTAKkwNAAVsCjg~.bps.a.1578521805635981/1666755450145949>

<sup>12</sup> Department of Health. (29 June 2020). *DOH COVID-19 Bulletin #107*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialDOHgov/photos/pcb.3451829454828282/3451822281495666>

<sup>13</sup> Tomacruz, S. & Gotinga, J. (31 May 2020). *OFWs struggle through prolonged quarantine in gov't 'VIP treatment'*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/262298-ofws-struggle-coronavirus-quarantine>

<sup>14</sup> Subingsubing, K. (13 June 2020). *Stranded OFWs slept under flyover*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1290857/stranded-ofws-slept-under-flyover>

<sup>15</sup> Nicolas, B and Medenilla, S. (01 July 2020). *DBM OKs release to OWWA of P5-billion funds*. Retrieved July 1, 2020, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/07/01/dbm-oks-release-to-owwa-of-p5-billion-funds/> from

1           WHEREAS, the situation for OFWs in the Philippines is fraught with too much  
2 risk and uncertainty that around 191,000 displaced OFWs have chosen to forego a  
3 return to the country and take their chances abroad instead;<sup>16</sup>

4           WHEREAS, the evident distrust and lack of confidence from a large contingent  
5 of displaced OFWs abroad in the government's capacity to take care of their needs  
6 during this time of pandemic is indicative of its overall failure to adequately address  
7 the needs of the Filipino people, OFWs included, arising from the COVID-19 outbreak;

8           WHEREAS, months after the implementation of the repatriation program, the  
9 concerned agencies have yet to come up with a coordinated and holistic approach to  
10 assist displaced OFWs who have signified interest to return to the Philippines to be  
11 with their families amid the pandemic;

12           WHEREAS, the national government should conduct a thorough review of the  
13 policies and practices concerning the repatriation and assistance programs being  
14 extended to OFWs during this time of crisis;

15           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE, to direct the  
16 appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the status  
17 of the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) repatriation and assistance programs of the  
18 national government amid reports of continued delays and inefficiencies in their  
19 implementation.

*Adopted,*

  
REILA M. DE LIMA

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<sup>16</sup> Gonzales, C. (3 June 2020). *191,000 of 340,000 OFWs displaced by COVID-19 choose not to return to PH — DOLE*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/188117/191000-of-340000-ofws-displaced-by-covid-19-choose-not-to-return-to-ph-dole>