



**REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES**  
**Senate**  
**Pasay City**

# **Journal**

**SESSION NO. 12**  
Wednesday, August 17, 2022

**NINETEENTH CONGRESS**  
**FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

Prepared by the  
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Senate of the Philippines

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**SESSION NO. 12**  
Wednesday, August 17, 2022

**CALL TO ORDER**

At 3:00 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

**PRAYER**

Sen. Risa Hontiveros led the prayer, to wit:

*Sa Ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak, at ng Espiritu Santo. Amen.*

*Panginoon, nitong mga araw, napapansin po namin tuwing papasok kami sa trabaho iyong aming mga batang Pilipino na pumapasok muli sa unang pagkakataon ng face-to-face classes. Kahapon din po, Panginoon, ay Feast Day ni San Roque, santong patron ng mga may sakit at santong patron din ng mga aso.*

*Para sa kanilang dalawa itong maiikling panalangin, Panginoon.*

*Mula kay Marianne Williamson:*

Dear God,

We place our children in Your hands today, and pray that they be blessed. May fear not penetrate their shield of innocence. May they be surrounded by angels and protected from harm. Place Your light around all the children of the world, and use us to care for them well.

*At panalangin, Panginoon, kay San Roque, kahapon po sana para sa aming mga mahal na alagang hayop, pero dahil si San Roque ay santong patron din ng paghihilom mula sa sakit, isang taos-pusong panalangin ngayong araw, Panginoon, para sa aming mga mahal sa buhay na nagkasakit o nagkaroon ng karamdaman na sila po ay gumaling agad at manumbalik ang buong kalusugan sa kapangyarihan ng Inyong grasya.*

*Salamat po.*

*Sa Ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak, at ng Espiritu Santo.*

*Amen.*



## ROLL CALL

Upon direction of the Senate President, the Secretary of the Senate, Atty. Renato N. Bantug Jr. called the roll, to which the following senators responded:

Angara, S.	Legarda, L.
Binay, M. L. N. S.	Marcos, I. R.*
Cayetano, A. P. C. S.	Padilla, R. C.
Cayetano, P. S.	Pimentel III, A. K.
Dela Rosa, R. B. M.	Poe, G.*
Escudero, F. J. G. *	Revilla Jr., R. B.**
Ejercito, J. V. G.	Tolentino, F. T. N.
Estrada, J.	Tulfo, R. T.
Gatchalian, W.	Villanueva, J.
Go, C. L. T.	Villar, C. A.*
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, M. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.

With 19 senators physically present and five senators virtually present, or a total of 24 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

\*Senators Escudero, Marcos, Poe, and Villar (C) attended the session online because of their exposure to COVID-19.

\*\*Senator Revilla attended the session online because he was still recovering from a medical surgery.

## APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the *Journal* of Session No. 10 (August 15, 2022) and considered it approved.

## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (A)

Senator Cayetano (A) raised an administrative concern regarding the lack of rooms for committee hearings, since Members of the Body are raring to start the committee hearings under the Senate President's leadership.

He stated that previously, the Secretariat did not allow the renovation of senators' offices if the committee rooms would be affected; however, since renovation has been recently allowed, four out of eight committee rooms are presently being occupied by some senators' staff as their temporary office.

He shared that when he first inquired regarding the committee rooms' availability, he was told that there would be available rooms to use after the renovations but when he tried to inquire once again, he was told that the committee rooms are free from Monday to Thursday until September 15, 2022. While there are rooms that are available on Fridays, he feared that he would not be able to secure a quorum since many of the Members would not be available due to their constituency work.

Despite advanced scheduling, he said that more problems might arise due to the lack of committee rooms when the Members begin to conduct more committee hearings, particularly for the General Appropriations Bill. He urged the Body to make all the eight committee rooms operational and to allow the use of the session hall in the morning for big hearings such as the ones conducted by the Blue Ribbon Committee. He likewise suggested to find other venues near the Senate and urged the chairpersons to only conduct two- to three-hour hearings while the logistics is still being fixed.

As he apologized for taking up the time of the Chair, he lamented that only eight committee rooms could accommodate hearings of 41 committees, including the the Commission on Appointments and its subcommittees. As regards other venues which could be used as committee rooms, he suggested to also inquire whether GSIS has conference rooms where hearings could be conducted.

Senate President Zubiri replied that he appreciates the observation of Senator Cayetano (A) and informed the Body that he had already instructed his staff to make the committee room that they are occupying available. He added that he also directed the Secretariat, through the Secretary of the Senate, to look into the matter to ensure that more rooms would be available for the senators committee hearings. He likewise confirmed that the Session Hall could be used for hearings on a first-come-first-served basis, and as long as their hearings will end by 2:30 p.m. in order to give time for the preparation of the hall for plenary session.

For her part, Senator Cayetano (P) sought confirmation from the chairperson of the Committee on Finance regarding the schedule of the budget hearings. Recalling that they usually start every September, she raised concern over the difficulties they may experience in the schedule of the hearings due to lack of rooms. She hoped for the issue to be settled as soon as possible, since the desire of the Body is to always be productive.

Senate President Zubiri assured that he will work on the matter as soon as possible, and that he would talk to the chairperson of the Committee on Finance regarding the schedule of the budget hearings since the National Expenditure Program (NEP) has already been submitted to the House of Representatives.

Senator Villanueva stated that he could relate to the concern, adding that his office has no bathroom which adds to the inconvenience of his office and his staff.

#### **DEFERMENT OF THE JOURNAL**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body deferred the consideration and approval of the *Journal* of Session No. 11 (August 16, 2022).

#### **REFERENCE OF BUSINESS**

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

##### **BILLS ON FIRST READING**

Senate Bill No. 551, entitled

##### **AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN INTEGRATED UTILIZATION AND PROMOTION OF FOLIC ACID FOOD FORTIFICATION AND SUPPLEMENTATION**

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation  
and Futures Thinking**

Senate Bill No. 552, entitled

##### **AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)



**To the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture; Civil Service, Government Reorganization; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 553, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE APPOINTMENT OF ONE MIDWIFE FOR EACH BARANGAY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 554, entitled

AN ACT RECOGNIZING THE FOREIGN DECREE OF TERMINATION OF MARRIAGE AND ALLOWING ITS SUBSEQUENT REGISTRATION WITH THE PHILIPPINE CIVIL REGISTRY, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 209, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE FAMILY CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality**

Senate Bill No. 555, entitled

AN ACT RECOGNIZING THE CIVIL EFFECTS OF CHURCH ANNULMENT DECREE

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality**

Senate Bill No. 556, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT PROGRAM FOR ALL DEPARTMENTS, BUREAUS, OFFICES, AND AGENCIES OF THE GOVERNMENT

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committee on Finance; and Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking**

Senate Bill No. 557, entitled

AN ACT ADDRESSING THE SYSTEM OF PROSTITUTION, IMPOSING PENALTIES ON ITS PERPETRATORS, PROVIDING PROTECTIVE MEASURES AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ITS VICTIMS, REPEALING FOR THE PURPOSE ARTICLES 202 AND 341 OF THE PENAL CODE

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Finance**



Senate Bill No. 558, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE MAGNA CARTA OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture; and Higher, Technical and Vocational Education**

Senate Bill No. 559, entitled

AN ACT PROTECTING THE RIGHT OF ATHLETES TO REPRESENT THE PHILIPPINES AS PART OF THE NATIONAL TEAM AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (P)

**To the Committee on Sports**

Senate Bill No. 560, entitled

AN ACT FURTHER STRENGTHENING WORKERS' RIGHT TO SELF-ORGANIZATION, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE ARTICLES 240[234](c), 242[235], 243[236], 244[237] AND 285[270] OF PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 442, AS AMENDED, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LABOR CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development**

Senate Bill No. 561, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS OF MEMBERS OF THE RESERVE FORCE OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 562, entitled

AN ACT TO ESTABLISHING THE PAGKAIN PARA SA LAHAT PROGRAM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 563, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 16 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7610, AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9231, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE SPECIAL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST CHILD ABUSE, EXPLOITATION AND DISCRIMINATION ACT

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; and Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality**

Senate Bill No. 564, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FOR ALL TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING PERSONNEL IN PUBLIC BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Basic Education, Arts and Culture; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 565, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FOR ALL TEACHING PERSONNEL IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND STATE-RUN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 566, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SPECIAL HEALTH FACILITIES FOR OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS (OFWS) AND THEIR DEPENDENTS TO BE KNOWN AS BAGONG BAYANING FILIPINO HOSPITAL, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 567, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FREE INSURANCE FOR COVERED APPLICANTS OF OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT CERTIFICATES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; Foreign Relations; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 568, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING AND ENHANCING THE SKILLS CERTIFICATE EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM (SCEP) OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (CSC) AND THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS AUTHORITY (TESDA) AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES



Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development**

Senate Bill No. 569, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING SPORTS VARSITY TEAMS IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture; Sports; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 570, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7743, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL, CITY, AND MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES AND BARANGAY READING CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE PHILIPPINES" AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 571, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MAGNA CARTA OF COMMUTERS

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Public Services; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 572, entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS TO USE AND IMPLEMENT AN AUTOMATED AND ONLINE SYSTEM FOR VOTER REGISTRATION, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation; Science and Technology; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 573, entitled

AN ACT INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (SHS) CURRICULUM

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture**

Senate Bill No. 574, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING AN ADDITIONAL CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR FILIPINOS TO AID IN MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND SIMILAR NATIONAL EMERGENCIES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 575, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS ENTITIES TO DISCLOSE SERVICE COVERAGE DATA TO THE PUBLIC

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committee on Public Services**

Senate Bill No. 576, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING FOOD MANUFACTURERS TO DISPLAY COLOR-CODED NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION ON FOOD PACKAGING AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship**

Senate Bill No. 577, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE CREATION OF THE PHILIPPINE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 578, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING HAZARD PAY TO COVERED EMPLOYEES OF THE GOVERNMENT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 579, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING HAZARD PAY TO WORKERS IN CRITICAL INDUSTRIES DURING A STATE OF CALAMITY OR EMERGENCY OR PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY



Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development**

Senate Bill No. 580, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM, INCREASING COMPENSATION AND OTHER BENEFITS FOR BARANGAY HEALTH WORKERS (BHWs) APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 581, entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH) TO SET AND APPROVE THE BED CAPACITY AND SERVICE CAPABILITY OF ALL DOH HOSPITALS

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 582, entitled

AN ACT DEFINING AND PROHIBITING ELDER ABUSE, PROVIDING PENALTIES THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development**

Senate Bill No. 583, entitled

AN ACT ORDAINING THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY, ESTABLISHING FOR THE PURPOSE THE POVERTY REDUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (PRESENT) PROGRAM AND PROVIDING SUPPORT, BENEFITS AND APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 584, entitled

AN ACT TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INCLUSIVE BUSINESS TO SUPPORT AND ACCELERATE INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT



Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 585, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ON-SITE, IN-CITY OR NEAR-CITY RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM FOR INFORMAL SETTLER FAMILIES AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MANDATING THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS PROVIDE LIVELIHOOD ASSISTANCE AND OTHER BASIC SERVICES, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7279, AS AMENDED, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING ACT OF 1992"

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Urban Planning, Housing and Resettlement; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 586, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTING THE MAGNA CARTA OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; and Foreign Relations**

Senate Bill No. 587, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES TO SELF-ORGANIZATION, COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATION, PEACEFUL CONCERTED ACTIVITIES, AND USE OF VOLUNTARY MODES OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committee on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation**

Senate Bill No. 588, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11332, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE MANDATORY REPORTING OF NOTIFIABLE DISEASES AND HEALTH EVENTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN ACT

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Justice and Human Rights**

Senate Bill No. 589, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE NURSING LAW, PROMOTING A MORE RESPONSIVE AND EFFECTIVE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR



Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 590, entitled

AN ACT PRIORITIZING DOMESTICALLY MANUFACTURED VEHICLES IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committee on Finance**

Senate Bill No. 591, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL COASTAL GREENBELT PROGRAM, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 592, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE UNIVERSAL DISABILITY SUPPORT ALLOWANCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 593, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 594, entitled

AN ACT PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND PENALIZING THE ACTS OF ARBITRARY INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

**To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Ways and Means; and Finance**

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Senate Bill No. 595, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTING A NATIONAL LAND USE POLICY, PROVIDING THE IMPLEMENTING MECHANISMS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Urban Planning, Housing and Resettlement; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 596, entitled

AN ACT EXEMPTING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES FROM THE PROHIBITION AGAINST DISCLOSURE OF OR INQUIRY INTO DEPOSITS WITH ANY BANKING INSTITUTION, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 1405, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "SECRECY OF BANK DEPOSITS LAW"

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committee on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies**

Senate Bill No. 597, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE BARANGAY UNIT THROUGH SUPPORT FOR BARANGAY OFFICIALS AND BARANGAY VOLUNTEER WORKERS, AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7160, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committee on Local Government; Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 598, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING RETIREMENT BENEFITS TO ALL ELECTIVE OR APPOINTIVE BARANGAY OFFICIALS WHO HAVE RENDERED A CONSECUTIVE PERIOD OF NINE (9) YEARS OR THREE TERMS OF PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE BARANGAY, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Local Government; Government Corporations and Public Enterprises; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 599, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE VIROLOGY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Science and Technology; Ways and Means; and Finance**



Senate Bill No. 600, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CAPABILITIES, ESTABLISHING FOR THIS PURPOSE THE CENTER FOR DISEASE PREVENTION AND CONTROL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Ways and Means; and Finance**

#### **SUSPENSION OF SESSION**

With the permission of the Body, the session was suspended.

*It was 3:21 p.m.*

#### **RESUMPTION OF SESSION**

At 3:28 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda presiding.

#### **ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS**

The Secretary of the Senate read the following Senate bills which the Chair referred to the committees hereunder indicated:

#### **BILLS ON FIRST READING**

Senate Bill No. 601, entitled

AN ACT REORGANIZING THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS INTO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 602, entitled

AN ACT ENCOURAGING VOLUNTEERISM DURING EMERGENCIES BY PROTECTING VOLUNTEERS FROM LIABILITY

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Justice and Human Rights**

Senate Bill No. 603, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING QUALITY STANDARDS FOR MINERAL, CARBONATED AND OTHER BOTTLED WATER

*98*

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 604, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE MINDANAO RAILWAYS AUTHORITY (MRA), PRESCRIBING ITS POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 4156 ENTITLED "AN ACT CREATING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL RAILWAYS, PRESCRIBING ITS POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES, AND PROVIDING FOR THE NECESSARY FUNDS FOR ITS OPERATION" AS AMENDED BY R. A. NO. 6366, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Government Corporations and Public Enterprises; Public Services; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 605, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE PHILIPPINE BAMBOO INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 606, entitled

AN ACT TO DEVELOP THE RUBBER INDUSTRY, ESTABLISHING FOR THE PURPOSE THE PHILIPPINE RUBBER INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT BOARD, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 607, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING RURAL BANKS IN THE PHILIPPINES AMENDING FURTHER FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7353, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE RURAL BANKS ACT OF 1992, AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 608, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE REGISTRATION, REGULATION, AND OPERATION OF COOPERATIVE BANKS



Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies; Cooperatives; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 609, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE TRANSPORTATION COOPERATIVES DEVELOPMENT LOAN FUND, APPROPRIATING AND SOURCING FUNDS THEREOF AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Finance; and Cooperatives**

Senate Bill No. 610, entitled

AN ACT REGULATING THE PRACTICE OF MICROBIOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Science and Technology; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 611, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 612, entitled

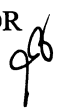
AN ACT PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND MERCHANTS ENGAGED IN INTERNET TRANSACTIONS, CREATING FOR THIS PURPOSE THE E-COMMERCE BUREAU, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 613, entitled

AN ACT CONVERTING THE SATELLITE CAMPUSES OF THE BUKIDNON STATE UNIVERSITY LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF TALAKAG, BAUNGON, LIBONA, MALITBOG, IMPASUGONG, CABANGLASAN, SAN FERNANDO, QUEZON, KITAOTAO, DAMULOG, KADINGILAN, AND KALILANGAN IN THE PROVINCE OF BUKIDNON AND IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF ALUBIJID, TALISAYAN AND MEDINA IN THE PROVINCE OF MISAMIS ORIENTAL ALL IN NORTHERN MINDANAO, INTO REGULAR CAMPUSES OF THE BUKIDNON STATE UNIVERSITY, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR



Introduced by Senator Zubiri

**To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 614, entitled

AN ACT CREATING A DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES, PROVIDING FOR ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano (AP)

**To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 615, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING BAMBOO INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES, CREATING THE BAMBOO INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CENTER, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 616, entitled

AN ACT REGULATING PHARMACEUTICAL OUTLETS ENGAGED IN THE ONLINE SALE OF PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS AND THOSE DISPENSING ONLINE PHARMACY SERVICES, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10918, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "PHILIPPINE PHARMACY ACT"

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Health and Demography**

Senate Bill No. 617, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING ARTICLE 704 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 386 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "CIVIL CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES" AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

**To the Committee on Justice and Human Rights**

Senate Bill No. 618, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A UNIFORM WAREHOUSING AND INVENTORY SYSTEM FOR ALL GOVERNMENT PROCURING ENTITIES, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9184, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT REFORM ACT"

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

**To the Committee on Finance**

Senate Bill No. 619, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 53 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9184, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE  
"GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT REFORM ACT"

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

**To the Committee on Finance**

Senate Bill No. 620, entitled

AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF "MEDICAL DEVICE" TO INCLUDE HEALTH  
APPLICATIONS, FURTHER AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 3720, OTHERWISE KNOWN  
AS THE "FOOD, DRUG, AND COSMETIC ACT," AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO.  
9711, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION (FDA) ACT OF  
2009," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES"

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

**To the Committee on Health and Demography**

Senate Bill No. 621, entitled

AN ACT TO PROMOTE A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Introduced by Senator Legarda

**To the Committees on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking;  
Economic Affairs; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 622, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF NATIONAL  
CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH ENHANCED CULTURAL HERITAGE EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS AND CULTURAL MAPPING, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC  
ACT NO. 10066 OR THE NATIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT OF 2009

Introduced by Senator Legarda

**To the Committees on Culture and the Arts; and Local Government**

Senate Bill No. 623, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PROGRAM

Introduced by Senator Legarda



**To the Committees on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 624, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE LINANGAN NG LIKHANG-BAYAN (INSTITUTE FOR LIVING TRADITIONS) TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION, PROMOTION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY'S COMMUNAL TRADITIONS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10066 OR THE NATIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT OF 2009, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Legarda

**To the Committees on Culture and the Arts; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 625, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION POLICY AND CREATING A NATIONAL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION THEREOF, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Science and Technology; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 626, entitled

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH GUIDELINES AND INCENTIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARKS (STPs) IN THE PHILIPPINES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Science and Technology; Public Works; Ways and Means; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 627, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CAPACITY OF ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7160 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991, AS AMENDED, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Local Government; and Science and Technology**

Senate Bill No. 628, entitled

AN ACT TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY DEFINING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE (NQI), CREATING FOR THIS PURPOSE THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE COORDINATING COUNCIL AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES



Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 629, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE URBAN AND COUNTRYSIDE GREENING IN THE PHILIPPINES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 630, entitled

AN ACT TO DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT FOR AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE POST-SECONDARY LEVEL

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 631, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE PHILIPPINE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7743, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL, CITY, AND MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES AND BARANGAY READING CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE PHILIPPINES," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Basic Education; Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 632, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND PROTECTION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PERSONNEL IN MATTERS OF STUDENT DISCIPLINE FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Basic Education; and Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality**

Senate Bill No. 633, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK FOR FILM AND TELEVISION TOURISM IN THE PHILIPPINES, MARKETING THE INDUSTRY GLOBALLY AND PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT FOR THE SECTOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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Introduced by Senator Angara

To the Committees on Public Information and Mass Media; Tourism; Ways and Means; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 634, entitled

AN ACT TO STRENGTHEN THE PHILIPPINE CREATIVE INDUSTRY THROUGH EXPANDING THE COVERAGE OF THE BALIK SCIENTIST ACT, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE, REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11035, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Science and Technology; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 635, entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO SET AND APPROVE THE BED CAPACITY AND THE SERVICE CAPABILITY OF ALL DOH HOSPITALS

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 636, entitled

AN ACT CREATING A DENTAL UNIT IN EVERY RURAL HEALTH UNIT UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AS PART OF THE PRIMARY APPROACH IN THE DELIVERY OF HEALTH SERVICES AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 637, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE NURSING LAW TOWARDS QUALITY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Health and Demography; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 638, entitled

AN ACT UPGRADING THE MINIMUM SALARY GRADE LEVEL OF NURSES FROM SALARY GRADE 15 TO 19, AMENDING SEC. 32 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9173, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE PHILIPPINE NURSING ACT OF 2002"

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Health and Demography; and Finance**



Senate Bill No. 639, entitled

AN ACT DEFINING AND PROHIBITING SENIOR CITIZEN ABUSE, PROVIDING PENALTIES THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 640, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTING THE MAGNA CARTA OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committee on Migrant Workers**

Senate Bill No. 641, entitled

AN ACT TO ENHANCE PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS BY AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS IN REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7160, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991"

Introduced by Senator Angara

**To the Committees on Local Government; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 642, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8178 OR THE "AGRICULTURAL TARIFFICATION ACT OF 1996," AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 643, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 309 OF THE NATIONAL INTERNAL REVENUE CODE, AS AMENDED, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committee on Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 644, entitled

AN ACT EXEMPTING MIGRANT WORKERS FROM THE PAYMENT OF PREMIUM CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILIPPINE HEALTH INSURANCE CORPORATION, AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11223 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE ACT," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos



**To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Migrant Workers**

Senate Bill No. 645, entitled

AN ACT EXEMPTING THE IMPORTATION OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT FROM CUSTOMS DUTY AND VALUE-ADDED TAX

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 646, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING FULL TAX BENEFITS TO DONATIONS PROVIDED DURING A STATE OF CALAMITY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committee on Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 647, entitled

AN ACT FURTHER PROMOTING RENEWABLE ENERGY, AMENDING THEREFOR REPUBLIC ACT. NO. 9513, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "RENEWABLE ENERGY ACT OF 2008" AND REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7160, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committees on Energy; Local Government; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 648, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11697 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "ELECTRIC VEHICLE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT ACT," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committees on Energy; Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 649, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE CREATION, ORGANIZATION, AND OPERATION OF DIGITAL BANKS, AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8791, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE GENERAL BANKING LAW OF 2000"

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committee on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies**

Senate Bill No. 650, entitled



**AN ACT DECLARING CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY AND ENHANCING RESILIENCY  
AND ADAPTABILITY TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

Introduced by Senator Marcos

**To the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change.**

**PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR TULFO**

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Tulfo delivered the following speech on the plight of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and his acceptance of the Chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Migrant Workers:

Before I speak before you on a matter of personal and collective privilege as we are all used to do, allow me first to show you a piece of reality that some of us do not know and most of us have not seen.

However, let me first warn you.

The video I am about to show in support of my speech may be shocking, disgusting, and maybe even disturbing. It behooves me to mention this as these scenes may not sit well with you and may even remain with you long after I have said my piece, especially, if you are uninitiated to the truth that many of our fellow Filipinos face every day while they are a thousand miles away from home.

Let us watch the video.

**SUSPENSION OF SESSION**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

*It was 3:42 p.m.*

**RESUMPTION OF SESSION**

At 3:44 p.m., the session was resumed.

**PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR TULFO**

*(Continuation)*

*At this juncture, various video clips featuring the abuse and maltreatment suffered by Filipino migrant workers were shown onscreen.*

When the ordinary Filipino thinks of the life of an OFW, they are led to believe that it is a guaranteed means of securing a brighter future for their family. They are led to believe that life abroad is glamorous, comfortable, prestigious, and safe. The agents and recruiters lure them with the sense of progress, a promise of a better life, and a way out of a hopeless situation. All these while the news and other media blasts us with the message that OFWs are our "modern day" heroes. That our OFWs are the ones responsible for saving our economy and keeping our dollar reserves afloat while the world sinks beneath the weight of a global recession.

*"Kayo ang mga bagong bayani, kayo ang magpapaasenso sa atin," ang lagi nating sinasabi habang kumakaway at yumayakap sa mga huling sandaling kasama nila ang kanilang pamilya.*

Happiness in the life of an OFW is never guaranteed. The reality of the situation is that many of our countrymen are habitually abused by their foreign employers. Even more of them need repatriation and are stuck in our embassy's shelters that are ill-equipped to harbor them safely. They are cramped together and made to sleep and eat like animals while our embassies abroad struggle to get adequate funding in order to provide a safe and healthy environment for our stranded OFWs to await the next available flight back home.



Now, to be fair to our brothers and sisters in government, we have mounted a spirited battle against those who abuse and exploit our OFWs. Our embassies have undertaken to operate in foreign lands, sometimes against the wishes of capricious foreigners, in order to rescue Filipinos from the clutches of abuse. But now, I dare say that the effort we have exerted is woefully short and glaringly insufficient. It might be the perfectionist in me that is speaking but for me, one life ruined is already too much.

*Hinding-hindi ko po masisikmurang makakita ng anak na umiiyak sa kaniyang nawalang nanay. Isang ama na napilitang mamalimos para mabayaran ang lamay ng kaniyang anak. At hinding-hindi na natin pwedeng hayaan na mayroong mga kamag-anak na magugulat na lamang na ang nagpapadala sa kanila ng kanilang balikbayan box ay kanilang susunduin sa airport na nasa ataul na.*

I have fought against the abuses our OFWs have faced for my whole career of more than 20 years. I am proud that our OFWs have seen me as a safe harbor whenever they were desperate to send their family members home. But, admittedly, my solutions were only a symptomatic treatment to a systematic problem.

This all changed on December 30, 2021. That day, former Pres. Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed into law Republic Act No. 11641 or the "Department of Migrant Workers Act." This Act, I am proud to say, was sponsored by our current Majority Leader, Sen. Joel Villanueva, an ally in the fight for the rights of our OFWs.

The birth of the Department of Migrant Workers is the rebirth of hope that we may yet fix the system and improve our means to be proactive in the defense of our OFWs and I am more than elated when I was given the honor to be the first Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Migrant Workers.

By the creation of the new Department, and the necessary creation of its concurrent committee in the Senate, we can now focus on providing legislation that would allow our embassies abroad to monitor our OFWs to ensure that abuse is prevented before it is committed. We, standing as one, have the opportunity to pass laws that would authorize our embassies abroad to institute offices dedicated solely to the vetting of prospective employers and the enforcement of the laws that are meant to protect our OFWs.

*Magkakaroon po tayo ng paraan na mapigilan ang panghahalay sa unang pagkakataon na makita nating maaari itong mangyari. Magkakaroon na po tayo ng paraan na mas mabilis masundo ang ating mga OFW na pinagbabantaan na saktan ng kaniyang amo. At magkakaroon na po tayo ng paraan bigyan ng nararapat na representasyon ang ating OFW na may kaso laban sa kaniyang amo upang maramdaman niya ang suporta ng Inang Bayan kahit nasa lupa ng banyaga.*

*Para sa kanila po at sa milyun-milyong OFW, ang pagtanggap ko po ng chairmanship na ito at dala ko ang alaala nila sa bawat araw na ako ay magtatrabaho para sa kapakanan ng Pilipino dito man sa bansa o kahit saan mang lupalop ng mundo.*

*Sa aking pagtatapos, ako po ay magpapakita ng video bilang pruwera na mayroon pa tayong pag-asang baguhin ang lahat ng ito. Mayroon na po tayong pag-asa maging takbuhan ng OFWs sa panahon ng kanilang pangangailangan.*

*Kung kayo po ay binigyan ko kanina ng babala dahil sa mga ipinakita kong video na naglalaman ng mga eksenang marahil ay inyong lubos na ikinagalit at mga eksenang nakakaiyak, ngayon naman po, ako ay magbibigay ng babala na baka kayo ay maiyak sa tuwa. Iilan lamang po ito sa ating libu-libong mga natulungang OFW ang laman ng susunod na video.*

*Sila ay nakakuha ng pagkakataong makasama at makayakap muli ang kanilang pamilya. Atin pong panoorin ang kanilang mga ngiti at pakinggan ang tawa ng makauwi muli sa kanilang Inang Bayan. Please watch the video.*

*At this juncture, a video showing the joyful reunion of Filipino migrant workers and their families was flashed onscreen.*

Our work does not end here, in fact, we have only just begun. Mayroon na po tayong paraan na laging magkaroon ng happy ending ang kuwento ng ating mga OFW. Sa ating pagtutulungan, ito po ay magiging achievable.

To God be the glory.

## REMARKS OF SENATE PRO TEMPORE LEGARDA

At this juncture, Senator Legarda thanked Senator Tulfo for bringing to the fore the plight, needs, and stories of OFWs abroad. She expressed hope that solutions to their problems would be found in the laws and funding allocation that would be provided by the Senate.

## INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

At the outset, Senator Villanueva thanked Senator Tulfo for raising the important issue on the problems and challenges of OFWs abroad. He expressed anger and indignation at the decades-long narrative on the abuse of OFWs but said that he had confidence in Senator Tulfo's leadership as chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers since the latter is a well-known champion of countless OFWs who have approached him for help.

He clarified that while the creation of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) was not meant to encourage Filipinos to work abroad, the government cannot stop them from seeking greener pastures abroad due to lack of opportunities in their homeland.

Asked whether the root cause of the migration of Filipino workers is the lack of local opportunities and jobs, Senator Tulfo replied in the affirmative. He also believed that the government should prioritize the creation of jobs in order to stem the migration of Filipino workers to foreign countries.

Senator Tulfo agreed with Senator Villanueva that people look for jobs abroad due to lack of job opportunities, while others are paid less than the minimum wage or are not paid at all.

Senator Villanueva stated that prior to the pandemic, three to four thousand Filipinos have been deployed to work abroad.

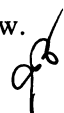
Asked for the recent data, Senator Tulfo responded that the latest report from the Philippine Statistics Authority shows that there are 1.7 million OFWs worldwide.

Senator Villanueva also informed the Body that according to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, the personal remittances of OFWs in June 2022 reached \$3.064 billion or P171 billion, while the cumulative remittances in 2021 amounted to \$34.884 billion, or 8.9% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He pointed out that the contribution of OFWs to the economy is greater during pandemic years. He joined Senator Tulfo in investigating the plight of migrant workers after being inundated with complaints and concerns not only from OFWs but also their families, and emphasized that the government must focus its attention on the OFWs' complaints, situation, and well-being.

Senator Tulfo stated that during his 20 years as a broadcaster, the most common complaints he received were maltreatment, physical abuse, sexual abuse, not being paid on time, insults, verbal abuses and mental abuse.

Senator Villanueva recalled that during his tenure as chairperson of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development in the Eighteenth Congress, the OFWs and their families raised the same concerns of maltreatment, sexual abuse, contract issues, and the *kafala* system, or modern-day slavery for those working in the Middle East.

He said that while the Department of Migrant Workers is still in the transition stage, it is hoped that the new Department would implement the Full Cycle Reintegration Program from—the orientation prior to the deployment, to the orientation in the host country, to the orientation upon their return to the Philippines; the Action Fund; access to the Legal Assistance Fund that would be used even before the establishment of probable cause; and once established, ensure that the provisions of the law would be implemented. He also expressed confidence in Senator Tulfo, being the chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers. He believed that with him at the helm, the Senate would be able to oversee the Department's implementation of the law.



Concerning the *kafala* system, Senator Tulfo informed the Body that employers would profit from expired OFW contracts by selling them to a relative or friend; and, worst of all, the OFW whose contracts were sold were not paid a single centavo by the first employer.

He stated that while the newly formed DMW still requires fine-tuning, he was confident that Secretary Ople was up to the task. He stated that the DMW's aspirations would be realized because of her years of experience working for the welfare of OFWs and her experience dealing with their problems.

Senator Villanueva stated that the Senate, through the DMW, would appeal to Middle Eastern countries to prohibit the practice of *kafala* and for employers to stop confiscating the OFWs' travel documents; to stop the maltreatment; and pay to the workers what they owed.

## MANIFESTATION OF THE CHAIR

Senator Legarda informed the Body that she had filed Senate Bill No. 10, or the "Overseas Filipino Workers Remittance Protection Act of 2022," a bill that should also be prioritized.

## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Senator Dela Rosa delivered the following manifestation in support of Senator Tulfo's privilege speech:

I would like to express my full support for the concern raised by my esteemed colleague, Senator Raffy Tulfo. Justice for our migrant workers is the good Senator's clamor, and I know the Members of this Body demand the same.

Although I am not an OFW myself, *ang ilan sa mga kapatid ko po ay mga OFW, kaya alam ko po ang hirap na pinagdaraanan nila*. It is not easy to live and work away from our family, from our loved ones. It is not easy to get used to the ways of living in a foreign country. *Hindi madaling maging OFW. Lalong mas mahirap maging OFW na inaabuso ng kanilang mga employer*.

This is exactly why, in the Eighteenth Congress, I, together with some of our colleagues here, actively fought for the establishment of the department of OFWs, called the Department of Migrant Workers. But of course, the work does not stop there. In the face of poor labor conditions, abuses, and acts of violence, our OFWs are defenseless and need protection. Truth be told, there is still so much to be done.

In fact, I just came from a meeting this afternoon with over twenty OFWs from all over the world. *Mayroong galing sa Italy, sa France, sa Japan, sa Netherlands, sa Greece, sa Abu Dhabi, and many other countries*. I was not able to receive them here at the Senate because of our new health protocols, but I felt that it was my duty to make sure that I meet with them, to let them know that their Senate is working for them.

*Ang tanging hiling nila ay mapakinggan sila, mabigyang-pansin ang kanilang mga hinaing, at na sa bawat desisyon at polisiya na gagawin ng gobyerno patungkol sa mga OFW, sana ang mga OFW mismo ay konsultahin, tanungin, at hingan ng opinyon*. Because in the end, these decisions and policies that we make on this Floor, from the comforts of our home country, will impact their life, as they continue to make their living on foreign soil.

Indeed, if there is anything more to do for them in the Nineteenth Congress, I will do it—both in my capacity as a Senator and as a public servant.

We currently have almost two million OFWs who need our utmost support and protection, and whose concerns and needs deserve a voice and proper representation.

It is my fervent hope that this Congress shall rise to the occasion and respond accordingly.

*Muli, maraming salamat po sa ating Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Migrant Workers, Senator Tulfo, sa pagbibigay prayoridad sa ating mga OFWs.*



**INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (A)**

Senator Cayetano (A) began by congratulating Senator Tulfo on not only rising to speak about the plight of OFWs, but also on putting together the video. He lamented that, while some government officials genuinely care about OFWs, others lack empathy and treat OFWs as if they are mere statistics. He emphasized that the video was a vivid depiction of the kinds of abuses that OFWs face and that they are more than just statistics; they are real people. He stated that he introduced the Migrant Workers Act in the Seventeenth Congress when it was still an unpopular proposal. However, he stated that it was President Duterte's initiative and Senator Go's tenacious and focused lobbying for a lead agency that resulted in different versions of the measure. While the Senate had its own version, he stated that the House of Representatives' adaptation - Department of Overseas Filipino Workers and Foreign Employment - was on point with Senator Tulfo's sentiments, as the department would, from the start, have a database of countries where Filipinos would have decent jobs, fewer abuses, and fewer problems. He noted that the newly formed agency is solely concerned with workers and not with foreign employment—something that the Senate could improve in the law.

Senator Cayetano noted that about 100,000 Filipino migrant workers are in Mainland China, mostly in Shanghai and in Beijing, while about 150,000 to 250,000 are in Hong Kong. He said that Filipinos workers in such territories are much safer than those who are in countries that follow the *kafala* system as they experience lesser restrictions. For instance, he said that migrant workers in those areas do not have their mobile phones confiscated by their employers and can easily contact the police for assistance as well as leave their employers' residence and seek refuge at the embassy. He surmised that the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) have not been encouraging the deployment of Filipino migrant workers to Chinese territories as consequence of the dispute between the Philippines and China over the West Philippine Sea.

While acknowledging the need for many Filipinos to seek employment overseas, he also agreed with the view that the Philippine government should not only wait to rescue its distressed migrant workers but should provide them with safe employment opportunities. He then suggested the idea of sending more workers to Hungary, which is offering scholarship, and is working on offering employment opportunities, for migrant workers.

He also welcomed the election of Senator Tulfo as chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers, which would be working with the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development, in pushing the concerned government agencies and departments to create and promote employment in safer places for migrant workers.

He informed the Members that, prior to the Ukraine-Russia conflict, he had met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov who told him that Russia was open to giving social protection to its Filipino workers. He also attested that the number of Filipino migrant workers in Russia have grown and that they were well-treated by their host country during the Duterte administration.

In fact, he said that Filipino workers are in demand overseas and supported his observation by disclosing that even the grandson of the King of Bahrain had been raised by a Filipina nanny and could speak Tagalog fluently. He then pointed out that while Filipino nannies or *kasambahay* are sought after and held in high regard by families from the elite or royalty that employ them in the Middle East, there are employers from other countries who look down on Filipino domestic helpers and even abuse them.

Asked on the number of Filipinos working abroad, Senator Tulfo said that there are around 1.7 million Filipino contract workers as of 2020; about 3.5 million Overseas Filipino Workers, including those working without a contract; and a total of 10 million Filipinos abroad, including Filipino-Americans and others who have acquired dual citizenships.

Upon further query, Senator Tulfo stated that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have the most cases of abused Filipino workers based on figures from the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs). As a former Foreign Affairs Secretary, Senator Cayetano confirmed that there are many cases of human trafficking and Filipinos with expired working visas in the UAE, unlike in KSA and Kuwait.



On whether the Philippine government conducts investigations on the working conditions of war-affected countries before allowing the deployment of its migrant workers to such locations, Senator Tulfo replied in the negative. He added that some recruitment agencies that are allegedly in cahoots with other government offices or agencies deploy laborers to such countries despite the possible threat to their lives.

On whether there were particular trends that have been observed in the abuses being committed and on which types of jobs are most at risk, Senator Tulfo replied that most of the complaints he has received come from abused domestic workers. He said that he rarely receives complaints from the skilled workers, probably because they are educated, earn higher salaries, and have better employers.

Based on the official statistics, Senator Cayetano pointed out that the domestic workers in the countries mentioned by Senator Tulfo are those that have reported the highest number of abuses. For this reason, he urged the new Department of Migrant Workers (DMW)—including the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), and other concerned agencies—to study the possibility of banning the deployment of Filipino migrant workers to such countries where they would be most at risk of being abused and exploited. Senator Tulfo noted the request, saying that he will have it included in the committee hearing.

Senator Cayetano recalled that when he was foreign affairs secretary, job recruiters in Kuwait and in the Philippines had opposed the government's plan to ban the deployment of OFWs in Kuwait because the recruiters on both sides charge hefty fees.

He also recalled that after 2018 the two Houses of Congress were able to convince the former president and his Cabinet to double the Legal Assistance Fund from P100 million to P200 million while the Assistance To Nationals Fund was increased from P400 million to P1 billion. In the past, he added that lawyers could not even represent their OFW clients at the police level until the case is already filed in court. However, he said that it was during his term as Foreign Affairs Secretary that the DFA was able to have lawyers on retainer that can readily offer legal assistance to OFWs in distress.

He said that the *kafala* or sponsorship system is another issue in the deployment of OFWs in the Middle East because some employers confiscate the passports of their migrant workers and as such, have almost complete control over the latter's employment and immigration status. He recalled having called a meeting with all agencies and departments concerned with OFWs—including the Department of Education (DepEd), the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO)—to push for the complete abolition of the *kafala* system but to no avail. He hoped that through the committee, the said agencies, as well as the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), could coordinate and discuss how to best promote the welfare of migrant workers.

Still on the *kafala* system, he opined that the hefty amount being shelled out to cover expenses for travel, housing, and other fees for hiring the Filipino migrant worker should not be taken as a license to abuse them or treat them as mere properties.

He also lamented that there are some labor attachés who settle cases of abused OFWs in favor of the employer as had been the experience of his neighbor who was only allowed to return to the Philippines after the labor attaché made him sign a document stating that he would not press charges against his recruiter.

He also raised issues on the inept conduct of Post-Arrival Orientation Seminar (PAOS) and Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS). On one hand, he commended the conduct of the elaborate PAOS that he had attended in Hong Kong and Macau, which properly guided OFWs on finding their community, practicing their religion, and understanding the culture and practices of their employers. On the other hand, he lamented how the PDOS and PAOS had not been taken by some OFWs, including those that had been deployed to Middle East countries, so that they could have been properly guided on the *kafala* system and on the religious practices, culture, lifestyle, and restrictions of Islamic nations and help them cope with their work environment.



He also suggested that emergency contact numbers of the Philippine embassy should be given to Filipino migrant workers prior to their departure.

Senator Tulfo recalled that a few years ago, he went to Malacañang and met with then DFA Secretary Cayetano (A) and Senator Bong Go who was Special Assistant to President Duterte to seek their help for the abused and trafficked OFWs. He expressed his appreciation to them for the assistance that was given to him that time.

On the matter of the passports, he agreed with Senator (A) Cayetano's observation that OFW passports should not be confiscated. He said that there is already an existing policy that passports should not be confiscated because it serves as the OFW's identification card that will enable the Philippine embassy or the police of a receiving country to help an OFW in distress. However, he lamented that some employers do not follow the policy. He said that there are many times where an OFW leaves the abode of an employer or they run away because they could no longer take the abuse that they are experiencing from the employer and then they get arrested by the police because the OFW does not have a passport.

He expressed dismay over reports that some Arab policemen do not believe allegations of abuse by an OFW despite the presence of evidence and indication of abuse such as bruises and injuries. He lamented that Saudi policemen take sides and they allegedly refuse to help the beleaguered OFWs.

Adding to what was mentioned by Senator Cayetano (A), Senator Tulfo criticized that in some cases, he has received complaints that some Philippine Overseas Labor Offices are unable to address or answer the calls of OFWs in distress because they are busy with other matters. He recalled that some years ago, he called a POLO around lunchtime and he was told to call back because the POLO officer was playing billiards and does not wish to be disturbed.

However, with the consolidation of the POEA, POLO, OWWA and ATN into one department for migrant workers, he expressed hope that the new agency would be more responsive to the needs and plight of the OFWs. He informed the Body that the Department of Migrant Workers has activated a hotline where OFWs may call in case of emergency.

He said that he could only imagine the exhaustion and terror experienced by an OFW who singlehandedly serve five families living in a three-storey building and then suffer hunger, abuse and maltreatment in the hands of a foreign employer. He assured the public, especially the OFWs, that he will do his best as chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers.

## INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

At the outset, Senator Hontiveros lauded Senator Tulfo for his maiden privilege speech on an urgent matter regarding overseas Filipino workers. She said that she was moved and impressed with his presentation. She said that Senator Tulfo effectively described the symptomatic treatment of a systemic problem. She said that the videos presented a moving representation of family reunifications, depicting them as truly lifesaving. She said that she agrees with his view that the very important rescue of the long-suffering and abused OFWs, and the rebuilding reunification with their families is part of a systematic problem. She expressed confidence that under his watch as the chairperson of the newly-created Committee on Migrant Workers, in partnership with the newly-created Department of Migrant Workers, there would be an increase in the number of successful rescues of OFWs and reunification of families where he would play an important part of the strategic solution to the systemic problem.

Senator Hontiveros said that she noticed from the video that more women fall victim to abuse in other countries, which only supports the view that migration has become increasingly gendered and women are disproportionately vulnerable to abuse.

She recalled that she served as chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality in the Eighteenth Congress and she was extended help and assistance by OWWA, the *chargé*



*d'affaires* in Syria, and the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs of the Department of Foreign Affairs, when they worked together to investigate the issue of human trafficking.

She also said that she was able to introduce amendments to the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) Law regarding the conduct of gender audits and the appointment of gender focal officers in migrant workers' offices, and thereafter thanked Senator Villanueva for accepting the amendments that she introduced. She expressed hope that the provisions which she contributed to the law would be implemented properly to ensure meaningful gender inclusive programs in the embassies and migrant workers offices.

Relative thereto, she asked how could the new department ensure that it would be able to help and address the repetitive and common issues faced by OFWs particularly on the improvement of Feedback and Complaints Mechanism.

On the matter of gender audit, Senator Tulfo said that the DMW Secretary is a woman. He expressed confidence that she would be sensitive and would not tolerate any form of abuse and violence against women. He also said that as Chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers, he would be consulting with OFWs and experts on the issue of migration and other issues and concerns directly affecting the migrant workers to see to it that he will be doing his best to stop, or at least significantly reduce, the abuses and maltreatment committed against the OFWs.

Senator Hontiveros expressed her solidarity with Senator Tulfo and his intentions to alleviate the plight of OFWs in promoting their welfare and protecting their rights. She said that she is sure that it is also the intention of the new DMW secretary who is known among the ranks of migrant workers, and have been working with them and for the sake of their agenda for a long time.

On a related matter, she requested that the Department of Migrant Workers produce or submit a database about women OFWs and issues related to feminization of labor and feminization of labor migration. She said that she also requested similar data from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Labor (DOLE).

Senator Tulfo assured Senator Hontiveros that he will pursue the gender audit of workers abroad inasmuch as OWWA and the POLOs do not have such data. He said that he will make sure that there will be a system in place to protect the OFWs, especially the women workers who happens to be the majority of workers abroad, particularly in Saudi Arabia where most of the alleged abuse occurs.

In closing, Senator Hontiveros thanked Senator Tulfo. She said that the phenomenon of migration was referred to as the feminization of migration and feminization of labor because of the huge proportion of women belong to the ranks of the OFWs. She committed to support and help the Senate Committee on Migrant Workers in the advocacy on women migrant workers as Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality.

#### **INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL**

At the outset, Senator Pimentel commended and congratulated Senator Tulfo on his speech on the plight of the OFWs abroad. He thanked Senator Tulfo for bringing to the attention of the Body the situation of the OFWs in relation to the newly-created Department of Migrant Workers (DMW).

Senator Pimentel observed that the video presented was both thought-provoking, and hopeful. He said that the concluding video gives hope for a good future not only for our OFWs but for all of us.

Relative thereto, he asked whether the people in the first video about the abused and tortured OFWs have been helped either by the television show of Senator Tulfo or his foundation or by the government of the Republic of the Philippines.

Responding to the query, Senator Tulfo said that the people who were seen in the video were victims of physical and sexual abuse and have been brought home to the Philippines. However, he lamented that some of them





preferred not to file a case against the perpetrators because, in the case of an OFW who was raped abroad by an employer, the policy is that the OFW should file the case where the crime was committed. He said that the OFWs no longer wish to be bothered by legal cases and litigation; that they would just rather go back to the Philippines and be removed from the abusive situation they are in. He said that in some cases, he has helped some of the OFWs who were repatriated by giving them jobs or some source of income.

*At this juncture, Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda relinquished the Chair to Senator Ejercito.*

Senator Pimentel said that he was pleased to hear that the people in the video have at least been helped. However, he expressed concern about the situation where some of the OFWs have been sold. He asked Senator Tulfo whether he has received any information regarding OFWs who have been reported as missing but could have been sold by their employers. He said that he wanted to know how many OFWs have been sold, recovered or found, or could no longer be accounted for.

Senator Tulfo said that his office would not have any information or data regarding OFWs who might have been sold by their employers but he has heard a story where an OFW has been sold by an employer to another employer and when that OFW was already old, the OFW was returned to the former employer who in turn brought the OFW to the employment agency and then to the Philippine embassy.

Asked by Senator Pimentel if the DMW could track and record common problems confronting the OFWs, particularly those unaccounted for because their families do not care or was not aware that they are missing, Senator Tulfo disclosed that in the past, he had been suggesting to enforce a "constant monitoring scheme" because once deployed for instance, in Saudi Arabia, and the recruiter or recruiting agency receives the placement fee, the migrant workers are no longer monitored; they are simply left to fend for themselves.

With a constant monitoring scheme, he said that the Migrant Workers Office would call in to check on the OFWs' condition at least once a month, thereby reassuring them to take courage because they are protected against any form of violence.

Senator Tulfo then narrated the story of a migrant worker who was abused by her male employer three days after being hired; when he told the employer's wife about the abuse, the latter got mad and beat her up so she reported the situation to the recruitment agency which nevertheless doubted the complaint because they find the foreign employer sensible and decent. As the physical abuse became more serious, the OFW sought help from the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) but did not believe her story; when she went back to the recruitment agency, they said that she was just making up stories due to homesickness and even reminded her that the reason why she left for abroad is to work hard and make a living, not be lazy and sad.

Senator Tulfo said that the abuses continued until the OFW died and returned to the Philippines in a coffin. For fear that they would be reported to the authorities, he said that the wife conspired with her spouse to avoid conviction.

Asked where the incident occurred, Senator Tulfo said that it happened in Saudi Arabia.

Noting that the OFWs are the country's new heroes, Senator Pimentel hoped that through the Department of Migrant Workers Act (Republic Act No. 11641), the rights and interests of OFWs would be prioritized, protected and upheld. By law and by policy, he stressed that the OFWs' complaints must not only be given appropriate consideration but also benefit of the doubt. Senator Tulfo acceded.

Senator Tulfo noted that the most unseemly and upsetting incidents would not have transpired had there been constant monitoring of OFWs abroad, and said he believed that pursuant to the new law, the establishment of Migrant Workers Offices would aid OFWs worldwide vis-à-vis their woes 24/7.

Saying that he would review the qualifications of the personnel who are tasked to assess the migrant workers grievances, he pointed out that: 1) they must have active listening skills; 2) they are former OFWs so they could

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quickly develop empathy and sympathy, being in a similar situation before; 3) they are psychologists, so they could immediately evaluate the situation and the reasons why a complaint is being made; and 4) they have extensive experience in social and public services so they could assist not only the OFWs but generally, all Filipinos.

In fully agreeing with Senator Tulfo's statements, Senator Pimentel lauded the latter for assuring his guidance regarding the selection of DMW personnel whose qualifications must not only be basic but that they must possess the insights of being a migrant worker. He further noted that he learned a lot from Senator Cayetano's (A) interpellation because as former DFA Secretary, he was able to relay the standpoint of the foreign employer that the abuse stems from the fact that they are spending too much to hire a migrant worker.

Asked where the huge expenses of the foreign employer went and who benefited from it, Senator Tulfo stated that the profit goes to the recruiter and the foreign counterpart where the OFW was deployed.

To illustrate the income gained by the recruitment agency, he said that the previous rate to hire a domestic worker or *kasambahay* is US\$2,400, inclusive of local travel fees (if coming from the province), food and accommodation for two weeks, and plane fare to the country of deployment, leaving a balance of US\$1,000 to the recruiter, as TESDA and OWWA training/orientation is free. He noted that if the recruiter earns US\$1,000 for every recruit and there are 1,000 workers applying every month, the recruiter would be grossing millions of dollars.

Asked if the local recruiter's business is very lucrative, Senator Tulfo replied in the affirmative. Senator Pimentel then surmised that it seems justifiable to require recruitment/manpower agencies to pay bonds to protect the migrant workers in the event that the former could no longer be found, or the agency no longer exists. He said that the regulation should not be perceived as charging expenses from the local agency or recruiter for government gain, but that it would provide an insurance system—a trust fund or bond in favor of the recruited migrant worker in worst case scenario happens.

Agreeing with Senator Pimentel's statement, Senator Tulfo said that he would formally discuss the review of status and records of all recruitment agencies as well as the implementation of "one strike policy" with Sec. Toots Ople. He said that in case the recruitment agency is found careless which led to the maltreatment, physical abuse or sexual abuse of the migrant worker, their license would be cancelled and they could no longer recruit nor send workers abroad. Senator Pimentel concurred that the recruitment agency would understand the concept of one strike policy under the new government, having known the business, training, rules, and situation of overseas employment.

Saying that the erring agency should be made accountable for their negligence or inaction, Senator Tulfo averred that their recruitment license should be cancelled no matter how much they repent because human life is involved.

For his part, Senator Pimentel expressed alarm about the employer who was sexually abusing the female OFW which he recruited because a repetitive offense demonstrates that he is a recidivist. Senator Tulfo added that after a month the same agency again deployed a female OFW as replacement to the same employer, asked why it kept on happening, the recruitment agency explained that it was just an oversight and that they would investigate the matter and reprimand the erring staff.

Noting that the payment for damages is merely remedial in order to lessen mental anguish, pain and suffering, Senator Pimentel maintained that addressing the psychological trauma brought by an abusive incident is crucial as it could change the course of life or even destroy the life of the victim; hence, applying the one strike policy in the DMW is just proper. He also noted that the Committee on Migrant Workers and the OFWs as beneficiaries of the Committee are in good hands under the able chairmanship of Senator Tulfo.

Noting that the top three countries with the greatest number of complaints are Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait, Senator Pimentel suggested to identify what other kinds of overseas work are involved in the complaints aside from domestic service, and suggested to record them accordingly.



Asked if the *Kafala* or sponsorship system, which means the employer or sponsor has control of the recruited employee's travel documents and passport, is practiced in the three aforementioned Arab countries, Senator Tulfo stated that a thorough screening process would be implemented to ensure that the OFWs, particularly the Filipina migrant workers, would have employers without bad record. Even the recruitment agency must maintain good record, he said.

Saying that not all employers from Arab countries confiscate passports as they are being reminded by the recruitment agencies that confiscating the same is prohibited, he disclosed that some employers still confiscate the migrant workers' passports for fear that they would escape considering that the recruitment agency already received their payment. Another reason for the passport confiscation, he said, was to prevent the migrant worker from reporting the abuse; if they escaped without valid documents, it casts doubt to the authorities and they could be suspected as undocumented. He said that they could even be accused of being a thief or a prostitute, and might be imprisoned.

As to why the deployment of domestic workers to countries with *Kafala* system continued for decades as a matter of policy, Senator Tulfo said that the main reason was money. He noted that not all countries in Asia have *Kafala* system; in fact, employers from China, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hongkong do not confiscate passports and they treat their employees well, so there is less abuse compared to those deployed in Arab countries. He added that the most hurtful words told to a rape victim is saying that they would not have been abused or raped had they not left to work abroad.

Inquired if it is possible that the deployment of domestic workers to countries with *Kafala* system would be prohibited in the future, Senator Tulfo stated that it is everybody's goal and wish—that nobody would have to leave the Philippines to work abroad. Unfortunately, he said that many Filipinos are stuck in the system due to lack of employment opportunities in the country.

Senator Tulfo expressed concern that domestic Filipino workers are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation because some employers conceal their documents. He lamented that they do not even consider fleeing without their documents for fear that the authorities will not believe them.

Senator Pimentel inquired whether Senator Tulfo takes a hardline stance to end the abuse, citing the possibility that one unfortunate incident could destroy the life of a fellow Filipino. Senator Tulfo responded in the affirmative, reiterating his commitment to imposing a one strike policy on agencies found to have neglected the employees they hired. He claimed that a one strike policy would not only prohibit these agencies from recruiting OFWs in the future, but also from applying to a new agency under a different name—whether a relative's or someone else's—as their dummy. He warned that if the agencies found guilty reapply and start a new agency, he will track them down.

Similar to his suggestion during the discussion on the issue on sugar importation, Senator Pimentel believed that the individual names of the offenders and not only the names of the recruitment companies they own should be divulged to warn the public about them.

As to the proposal of Senator Tulfo to impose a one strike policy on recruitment agencies, he averred that an even stricter policy could be enforced, that is the total non deployment of Filipinos with frequently abused occupation to countries where they are frequently abused.

In concluding his interpellation, Senator Pimentel congratulated Senator Tulfo for the latter's thought-provoking privilege speech and for bringing to the Body's attention the coming of a possibly beneficial era of the OFWs under a time where there is already a Department of Migrant Workers and a Senate Committee on Migrant Workers which the latter chairs.

#### MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

At this juncture, Senator Cayetano (P) stated that she was next in the list to interpellate on the privilege speech of Senator Tulfo. However, she said that she gave way to Senator Go as the latter would only deliver a short manifestation on the matter.

## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GO

At this juncture, Senator Go expressed his manifestation of support on the privilege speech delivered by Senator Tulfo:

I just want to associate myself with the privilege speech of the gentleman from Isabela, Sen. Raffy T. Tulfo.

I welcome our collective effort to put to light the concerns of our migrant workers.

Last Congress, naipasa natin ang Department of Migrant Workers *sa tulong ng ating mga kasamahan sa Senado*—si Majority Leader Joel Villanueva *at sa lahat ng Miyembro ng Eighteenth Congress na nag-sponsor nito. Isa po ako sa pangunahing may-akda. Unang-una po, medyo wala pa masyadong pabor.* Then finally, *nakumbinsi po namin ang mga kasamahan natin na mabigyan ng sariling departamento. Isipin ninyo, 11 million Filipinos tapos wala silang sariling departamento.*

So *ngayon*, this Congress, we are indeed moving towards the right direction with the creation of the Senate Committee on Migrant Workers that will be led by a very capable chairperson.

I commend my fellow senator, and I am with him in trying to give a happy ending to the stories of our modern-day heroes. *Kinukundena ko po ang violence against our OFWs. Sa katunayan po, may tinulungan tayo noong nakaraang taon mismo sa inyong tanggapan. Nanawagan din po ang mga masahista na sexually abused sa ibang bansa para makamit nila ang hustisya. Finally, convicted na po iyong mga illegal recruiter.*

*Nakipag-ugnayan po tayo sa tanggapan ng Raffy Tulfo in Action, along with Sen. Alan Peter S. Cayetano, kung saan lumapit ang ating mga OFWs. Pumunta po ako mismo sa inyong programa. Kung maalala ninyo, sa pamamagitan ng inyong programa marami po kayong natutulungan na mga kababayan natin dahil wala silang malapitan. Humihingi ng tulong sa Facebook, sa radio, sa telebisyon, para lamang makahingi ng saklolo.*

*At naalala ko nga iyong mga masahista. Ang reklamo nila, aside sa trabaho ay pinapa-extra service sila. Bawal bang saibihin dito iyon? Kung ano iyong extra service na ipinapagawa? Isipin ninyo lalaki, masahista. So, pinapamasaha sila noong lalaki, pinapa-extra service pa sila. Hindi po natin tinigilan iyon. Binigyan natin ng private lawyer until na-convict iyong mga illegal recruiters. Napakabastos.*

*Nabanggit nga po ni dating Pangulong Duterte na kung pupunta sa ibang bansa, talagang iilan ay naabuso ng employer. Iyon ang nakakalungkot doon lalong-lalo na sa ating mga kababayang Pilipino na inaabuso. Hindi lamang iyong mga lalaki, kundi iyong mga babae rin na nagtatrabaho roon.*

*Napakahirap, hindi nababayaran ang lungkot na mapalayo sa pamilya, ngunit kailangan nilang magtrabaho sa ibang bansa para may ipangtustos sa kanilang mga pamilya. Proteksiyunan natin sila. Tulungan po natin sila. I am happy na mayroon tayong sariling departamento na nakatutok sa ating mga modern day heroes. Eleven million iyan, isipin natin, tapos wala silang sariling departamento na lalapitan nila. Hindi na sila kailangang magmakaawa.*

*Trabaho naman ng DMW ay proteksiyunan at ipaglaban ang kanilang kapakanan lalong-lalo na sa legal side na mayroon silang matakbuhan na mga abogadong magkakaso agad—kakasuhan iyong mga illegal recruiters.*

*Simula lamang po iyan. A step towards the right direction wika nga. Now that we have a committee dedicated for this special concern. And please take note that 10% of our population are overseas Filipinos. We hope that we can revisit our laws and pursue necessary legislation para maiwasan na po ang pang-aabuso sa ating mga kababayan na nasa malalayong lugar.*

*Babanggitin ko na rin po na mayroong isang OFW na nagngangalang Roderick Aguinaldo na nakakulong, na-detain sa Bahrain. Hinatulan po ng kamatayan. So, sinulatan po ng dating Pangulong Duterte, nakiusap po ako kay Ambassador Aguiluz na sumulat po at mag-appeal po doon sa King ng Bahrain. Na-downgrade po to life imprisonment. Finally, sumulat ulit at nag-appeal, na-pardon po siya at nakauwi. Sana po iyan din iyong isa na*



*maasikaso ng ating bagong departamento.*

*Ngayon po, si Roderick Aguinaldo, nabigyan natin ng bagong trabaho. Wika nga, kahit nakabalik siya rito, hindi pa po tapos ang ating trabaho sa gobyerno na mabigyan sila ng trabaho. Nahanapan po natin siya ng trabaho sa Philippine Ports Authority (PPA).*

Another case itong kay Rose Policarpio, acquitted of murder sa Saudi Arabia dahil napatay niya ang kaniyang employer dahil din po sa isang kaso na naabusong po iyong kababayan natin. Death penalty dapat at natulungan po ni Ambassador Alonto na makauwi, at natulungan din po natin pagbalik dito na makapagtrabaho sa National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

And finally, another case, at paano po kaya natin sila matulungan? Isa ito sa pinakamalaking problemang nakikita ko na maaaring ni minsan hindi po kayang sagutin ng ating gobyerno o ng departamento.

Iyong case po ni OFW Malik Darimbang na na-repatriate po ito, pero natulungan natin. For six years po, siya ay na-stuck sa Saudi dahil mayroon po siyang kaso. Ang problema, ang kailangan pong danyos na kanyang ibabayad sa napatay niya was \$40,000. Wala pong pondo ang gobyerno na pambayad sa mga ganoong kaso. Ito iyong tinatawag na “blood money.” Mabuti na lamang po at may nahanap tayong kaibigan, tumulong rin po at nag-sponsor. Isa po itong kababayan nating Muslim, Senator Padilla, si Marik Darimbang, natulungan nating mabayaran iyong kaniyang blood money. Finally, nakauwi na rin po siya dito sa Pilipinas; from Syria po ito.

Iyon po ang nakikita ko. Sana pagtuunan na rin po natin ng pansin iyong mga walang pambayad sa mga ganoong kaso. Iyon lamang po. Kaisa po ninyo ako dito sa hangaring ito and I commend you for your privilege speech. And I look forward to working with you on this endeavor, lalong-lalo na po para sa mga mahihirap nating OFW na walang matakbuhan—mga helpless, at mga hopeless; walang matakbuhan kung hindi ang ating gobyerno.

At this juncture, Senator Tulfo thanked Senator Go for the latter’s manifestation of support to his privilege speech.

## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TULFO

Senator Tulfo recalled elevating the case of the massage therapists who were sexually abused while being forced to do extra service to Malacañang after discovering that behind it was a syndicate with connections in the military and the PNP. He thanked Senator Go, the Secretary of the Presidential Management Staff (PMS), Senator Cayetano (A), and the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), for assisting him and resolving the case in less than two months. He confirmed that the illegal recruiters were finally convicted, speculating that their connections with the military and PNP were unable to assist them because the case had been escalated to Malacañang.

On the meaning of “extra service,” Senator Cayetano (P) believed that there is nothing wrong with making it clear what it is, especially since it is considered an offense and an assault, usually against women but also against men. She then read an Internet definition of extra service: “Sexual services means any form of sexual conduct, including intercourse, penetration or any other touching of any person for the purpose of sexual gratification, arousal, aggression, degradation of others, and similar purpose.” She expressed regret that the massage therapists, whose jobs are supposed to be decent and legitimate, were subjected to abuse by their recruiter, who required them to provide extra service, or engage in sexual activities that were outside the scope of their jobs.

## INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

Senator Cayetano (P) congratulated Senator Tulfo in delivering an insightful and enlightening privilege speech. She then stated that, while it is the reality, she could barely look at the images because they were so painful to see. She stated that the video presented by Senator Tulfo reminded her of a similar very disturbing video shown to her in private to which the late Sen. Nene Pimentel Jr., commented on her inability to view the same due to its disturbing nature. As a mother who has lost a child, she said her heart bleeds for the families who must endure such hardships while watching their loved ones suffer.

As she deduced from Senator Tulfo’s privilege speech and the various interpellations that his speech is primarily

concerned with the welfare of OFWs, she recognized Senator Tulfo's sincere desire to protect OFWs from the speech he delivered.

She then inquired as to Senator Tulfo's knowledge of the treaty on migrant workers, the full title of which is "The United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families." Senator Tulfo responded that he was unaware of it, but that he would check his records to learn more about the treaty. Senator Cayetano (P) explained that it is a comprehensive international treaty that addresses the protection of migrant workers, their rights, and the rights of family members.


As to the reason why he asked Senator Tulfo on his knowledge about the treaty, she shared a backstory from 2009, when she was president of the Women Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. She stated that she had many opportunities to travel around the world and chair various meetings, one of which was a joint meeting held in France's national assembly with European Union member-states on the topic of migrant workers. Senator Tulfo, she said, should read the press release dated December 16, 2009 if he wants to learn more about the meeting.

Continuing her story, she stated that during the conference, she listened to all of the European countries' exploration on how they were committed to protecting the welfare of migrant workers, including Filipinos, and that she concluded the meeting with a presentation about OFWs, their plight in various countries, and the families they left behind to serve others. She stated that after her presentation, she informed them of the existence of the aforementioned convention on the protection of migrant workers, which none of the participants had signed despite their lengthy speeches about protecting them. Given this, she stated that if Senator Tulfo had been aware of the treaty, she would have asked him a follow-up question about the countries that have signed the treaty.

While lamenting that the majority of treaty signatories were countries known to send their citizens overseas for work, such as the Philippines, Senator Cayetano (P) noted that countries known to accept OFWs were conspicuously absent, adding that she could name only three from the list. She also mentioned that only a few countries signed the treaty, namely: Argentina; Armenia; Bangladesh; Benin; Burkina Faso; Cambodia; Cameroon; Chad; Chile; Comoros; Congo; El Salvador; Gabon; Gambia; Ghana; Guatemala; Guinea-Bissau; Guyana; Haiti; Indonesia; Jamaica; Lesotho; Liberia; Madagascar; Mexico; Montenegro; Morocco; Mozambique; Palau; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; São Tomé and Príncipe; Serbia; Sierra Leone; Tajikistan; Togo; Turkey; and Venezuela.

Senator Tulfo surmised that the entity was a waste of time because it failed to reach out to OFWs. Furthermore, he maintained that the agency was never mentioned once in his dealings with OFWs in distress, which shows that the OFWs themselves were unaware that an entity that could act on their behalf existed. Senator Cayetano (P) clarified that the convention was a contract, not an entity. In that regard, she stated that it was up to the convention signatories to keep their promises. She did, however, emphasize that the aforementioned signatory countries were in a similar situation as the Philippines, lamenting the difficulty of enforcing the agreement against those who had internationally known cases of migrant worker abuse but were not signatories. She believed that, while it was understandable for OFWs to be unaware of the treaty, it was the responsibility of signatory countries to enforce it because it was their global obligation.

At this point, she informed the Body that the convention aimed to ensure that migrant workers have access to the following: 1) the right to liberty and security of person-Article 16; 2) effective protection by the State against violence, physical injury, threats, and intimidation, whether by public officials or private individuals-Article 16; 3) treatment not less favorable than that which applies to nationals of the State of employment in terms of remuneration, including overtime, hours of work, weekly rest, holidays with pay, and so on-Article 25. She also cited the following violations of the aforementioned provisions: 1) migrant workers who were physically abused and imprisoned as being deprived of the right to liberty and security of person; 2) distressed migrant workers who were denied proper assistance by authorities who were supposed to help them as being deprived of effective State protection; and 3) migrant workers who should enjoy the same remuneration as to hours of work, overtime rendered, and holiday rates as that of locally hired workers. Furthermore, she stated that the same treatment should be applied to other employment terms such as minimum age of service, work restrictions, and any other matters that may be considered as employment terms under national law and practice.



She then emphasized the treaty's importance to the Members and inquired if Senator Tulfo would be willing to discuss the matter with Secretary Susan Ople. She believed that the convention was a useful tool that could be used to ensure the safety of OFWs in their dispatch countries. Furthermore, she believed Senator Tulfo prioritized their safety, as evidenced by his answers during previous interpellations by other senators.

She then raised the possibility of Filipino migrant workers receiving the same benefits provided by the Philippine government's Social Security System (SSS) from countries that entered into Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with the Philippines through its security agency. She mentioned several countries that have signed SSAs with the Philippine government, including the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium.

Concerning the physical abuse issues in comparison to the aforementioned countries, she stated that there were fewer reports of exploitation compared to Senator Tulfo's examples from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, she stated that SSAs have yet to be established in Middle Eastern countries.

Senator Tulfo responded that even though Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were signatories to conventions promoting the welfare of migrant workers reality was far from ideal. He surmised that most employers in the aforementioned Middle Eastern countries would have a difficult time enforcing the agreement because of the prevalence of passport confiscation, maltreatment, and rape. He also brought to the attention of the Body Senator Pimentel's earlier suggestion to review the contracts entered into by the Philippine government and consider a gradual deployment ban of OFWs to countries with a high record of abuse. He expressed hope that the recommendation would reduce issues of maltreatment among the country's migrant laborers. He hoped that the Philippine government would require countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to sign possible future agreements on the subject.

Senator Cayetano (P) believed that suggesting the idea to the aforementioned countries is a step in the right direction. However, she shared Senator Tulfo's concern that exploitation of Filipino migrant workers may still occur. On that note, she confirmed that, currently, no Middle Eastern countries have signed any treaty or convention protecting the rights of migrant workers. She also expressed concern that because Middle Eastern countries regard women as property, unlike how Filipinos view women in terms of identity, personal safety, and security, among other things, she saw respect as the crux of the problem, posing a threat to the liberty and safety of women OFWs. Using Senator Go's earlier example, she concluded that even male Filipino migrant workers may not be completely safe from abuse.

Finally, she lauded Senator Tulfo for bringing the issue to the attention of the Body and wished him success in his pursuit of justice for the OFWs.


## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Padilla stated that as a Muslim Filipino, he was embarrassed that the countries mentioned in the preceding discussions—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait—were all Muslim countries.

He stated that the video presentation brought him to his knees as he witnessed the nation's OFWs being physically abused and maltreated. He then apologized and sought his fellow senators' understanding on the matter.

He clarified that the abuses depicted in the presentation were not Islamic teachings. He stated that the Prophet Muhammad taught that everyone, including household helpers, deserve to be treated equally, and that Islam condemns physical violence, advocates respect, and forgives wrongdoings. In that regard, he believed that Filipino migrant workers have the right to equal treatment, including the receipt of their wages on time, being treated with kindness, and receiving financial assistance.

He lamented the current state of OFW deployment, in which most workers are able to leave the country without being properly oriented to the culture and traditions of their destination countries. He stated that it would be prudent



to adapt to the way of life of the receiving nation, particularly if it is one of the Middle Eastern countries. As an example, he stated that, unlike in the Philippines, Filipinos in Saudi Arabia must become accustomed to the State and religion being one and the same, with no clear boundaries established.

He stated that the example of physical exploitation mentioned earlier by Senator Go involving sexual favors in exchange for money is not an acceptable practice in Muslim countries. He urged the Members to make a distinction between Arabs and Muslims in terms of the act, urging the Body not to associate Muslims with it. He also expressed shock to learn of some Ramadan examples, and vehemently denied that the examples mentioned had anything to do with Islam. At this point, he reiterated his apology on behalf of his Muslim brothers, stating that the examples provided were carried out by a few unscrupulous individuals.

He sought Senator Tulfo's assistance in calling out the recruiters he believed to be responsible for the situation. He expressed confidence that Senator Tulfo could request that basic instructions in the receiving country's language be conducted so that the country's migrant workers do not easily fall prey to deceptive schemes. He also lauded Senator Tulfo for his earlier statement that those found to be negligent in their duties would have their respective licenses revoked.

Senator Padilla also agreed with the suggestion for the government to cancel the licenses of the recruitment agencies if they are proven to be negligent in their responsibilities to the OFWs, adding that they should also be imprisoned. He expressed hope that there should be a law that would place shared responsibility between the OFWs and the recruiters, since such heinous acts would not have happened if the recruiters had not been remiss in their responsibilities toward their clients.

He then apologized for all the wrongdoings committed by his Muslim brothers but clarified that such acts are not condoned under Islam.

## INQUIRY OF THE CHAIR

Senator Legarda opined that mentioning terms such as "Muslim" or "Islam" does not necessarily mean that the evil acts perpetrated by some Arab employers are related to their religion. She then asked if it is proper to use the word "Arab countries" instead of "Muslim countries."

Senator Tulfo clarified that he never mentioned the word "Muslim" or "Islam" in his speech as it is a very sensitive issue. He also said that Senator Padilla need not apologize for the abusive acts of some Arab employers as they are beyond his control.

In response, Senator Padilla recalled that the word "Ramadan" which is one of the five pillars of Islam, had been mentioned during the period of interpellations. He maintained that he should ask for forgiveness because of the belief in Islam that those who commit sins should seek forgiveness. He appealed to the Members to discuss the issue in the context of race and not religion.

Senator Tulfo agreed with the view of Senator Padilla and clarified that he had mentioned the term "Ramadan" in a positive way as part of Islamic tradition. He said that Senator Cayetano (A) had talked about the bread that was served during Ramadan as being part of the Muslim way of fasting which had been misinterpreted by some OFWs as food deprivation.

Senator Padilla said that whether the discussion about Ramadan was in a negative or positive way, he believed that it was still inappropriate. He then requested the Members to avoid using religion-related terms during discussions on such issues and instead identify the abusers by their race.

Senator Tulfo believed that the Body should avoid using the word "Ramadan" in connection with whatever the Arab countries has so that no one would be offended.

At this juncture, Senator Legarda said that she fully understood the sentiments of Senator Padilla, recalling that similar issues over the utilization of words and language sensitivities or religion had also been raised even



in the 80s and 90s when she was still a young journalist. She suggested that it would be best to name the countries and the regions geographically rather than referring to people in terms of their religion.

She likewise recalled that as a young journalist, she ensured that terrorists were not called Muslim terrorists, since people should not be branded or labeled according to their religious beliefs.

As regards the earlier query of Senator Cayetano (P) about certain Social Security System (SSS) treaties which benefit Filipinos abroad, Senator Legarda said that as the chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the past Congresses, she had sponsored some social security conventions, which are as follows: social security conventions with European Union (EU) states, such as Spain, Germany, and Sweden; the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) between the Philippines and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the MLAT between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China (PROC); and the Consular Agreement with the PROC. She said that she wanted the OFWs to be aware that there are mutually beneficial treaties and conventions that would affect their stay in those jurisdictions.

At this juncture, Senator Villanueva recalled that there was actually a law that prohibits the use of languages that would discriminate religious affiliations.

He also welcomed the fact that there was one senator who represents the Muslim community.

## INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR EJERCITO

Senator Ejercito thanked Senator Tulfo for exposing the many abuses against OFWs, who are not mere statistics but are human beings.

Relative thereto, he underscored the plight of OFWs who remain in detention overseas for committing crimes but were and are unable to post bail because they cannot afford the legal fees.

Asked on the number of OFWs who are detained due to lack of legal assistance, Senator Tulfo replied that he did not have the exact figures but had received several complaints from migrant workers who are languishing in prison regardless of whether they are guilty of the crime. He said that since the Philippine Embassy could not immediately address their legal needs, the imprisoned OFWs end up being beaten or maltreated in the detention centers. He said such OFWs seek assistance from their families in the Philippines, who, in most instances, have to raise the money for them.

He disclosed that he had already helped at least twelve OFWs and was able to raise the blood money for three or four migrant workers so they could return to the Philippines.

Senator Ejercito lamented the irony of hailing the OFWs as modern day Philippine heroes but are not provided much-needed assistance when they are accused of some crimes.

He disclosed that one such migrant worker who suffered an ill fate overseas was Bong Gabriel, the Filipino composer and musician behind the song, "*Ang Aking Awitin*." He said that the singer was accused of a certain crime in Hong Kong and had been languishing in jail for several years already due to his failure to post bail. He lamented that it was such a waste of talent.

In relation thereto, he recalled having filed a bill in the Seventeenth Congress on "Expanding the Use of Legal Assistance Fund," to provide aid to distressed OFWs abroad.

Although it had not been passed in the Seventeenth Congress, he said that the measure was also filed by Senator Dela Rosa in the Eighteenth Congress and had been passed in the Senate but not in the House of Representatives. He stated that he was planning to refile the bill in the Nineteenth Congress, so that the government can provide distressed OFWs with much-needed legal assistance. He then asked whether Senator Tulfo would support such a proposal to which the latter replied in the affirmative.



Replying to the earlier query of Senator Ejercito on the number of OFWs in detention around the world, Senator Tulfo said that to date, about 3,827 Filipinos are being detained in 52 countries. He gave the assurance that he would find out how many had been given proper legal assistance as well as their current situation and the assistance that the government had extended to their families, among others.

Senator Ejercito reiterated his intention of refiling his bill and expressed hope that he would get the support of his colleagues in expanding the use of the Legal Assistance Fund for the OFWs.

## MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR REVILLA

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the manifestation of Senator Revilla on the privilege speech of Senator Tulfo was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*;

Allow me to associate myself with the good senator from Quezon City's pronouncements, and deliver a manifestation amplifying the matters raised.

*Kahindik-hindik at karimarimarim ang ating natunghayan ngayong hapon. Mapait, masaklap pero ito ang katotohanang hinaharap at iniinda ng mga kababayan natin sa ibang bansa. Kadalasang tanong sa kanila ay, "Anong pasalubong mo?" Sa gitna ng dalamhati at pagod sa trabaho, minsan lamang may magtanong kung kamusta sila. Tinitii ang pagod, hindi na iniinda ang gutom, binabalewala ang mga sakit. Even worse, they become susceptible to abuses under the hands of cruel employers who treat them less than animals. Hindi tayo pwedeng magbulag-bulagan na lamang.*

A usual sight in our airports and seaports *ay mga amang maluha-luhang nagpapaalam sa kanilang mga pamilya; mga anak na humihiling pa ng isang huling mahigpit na yakap mula sa kanilang mga ina.* These are the sacrifices that many of our *kababayans* endure in order to give their families a better future.

The great migration – that is how some have tagged the diaspora of Filipinos seeking greener pastures in other countries. *Malungkot mang tanggapin na kailangan nilang lisanin ang kanilang sariling bayan upang makahanap ng mas magagandang oportunidad sa ibang bansa, hindi naman maitatanggi na ang kanilang pag-lisan ay may malaking ambag sa Pilipinas at sa ating ekonomiya.*

*Ang kanilang ipinadadala at inuuwing dolyar ay ang nagtutulak sa ating ekonomiya at mismong nagpapadalo sa mga programa ng pamahalaan.* According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the total remittances sent by OFWs from April to September 2020, which was at the height of the global pandemic, was still a staggering P34.77 billion.

*Bilyong piso po ang inuwi nila sa bayan, kaya marapat lamang na hindi simpleng pagpupugay at pasasalamat ang ating ibigay, kung hindi mga programang sisiguraduhing maayos ang kanilang kapakanan.*

As we receive, we must be able to give back. *Bilang pag tanaw ng utang loob sa mga bagong bayani ng lipunan, kapit-bisig nating isulong at itaguyod ang kanilang mga karapatan at interes.*

*Hindi nasusukat ang halaga at buhay ng ating mga OFWs sa dolyar na tinatanggap nila bawat katapusan ng buwan.* No one should be subjected to the wrath of abusive employers under most exploitative work conditions on the convenient excuse that they are paid and bound by their contracts. *Hindi nila bayad ang buhay at dangal ng mga Pilipino.* This is why we must endeavour to keep fighting for their rights. *Bigyan ng ngipin ang mga batas upang siguraduhing hindi na muli magiging biktima ng mapang-abusong mga dayuhan ang ating mga kababayan.*

I assure this newly constituted Committee of my full commitment and support in the crafting of meaningful legislation that would uphold, protect and promote the rights and welfare of Overseas Filipinos Workers.

## MANIFESTATION OF THE CHAIR

Senator Legarda associated herself with all the good intentions of Senator Tulfo's speech and the lingering problems that had been brought before the Body. She expressed hope that the speech would move the senators



to act collectively and individually so that they could help the more than 3,000 OFWs who are in trouble in different parts of the world.

### **REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEE**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator Tulfo as well as the interpellations and manifestations thereon, to the Committee on Migrant Workers.

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS**

Upon nomination by Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the following senators were elected to the committees hereunder indicated:

#### ***Committee on Culture and the Arts***

*Vice Chairperson* : Binay

*Members* : Gatchalian Padilla  
Poe Angara

Pursuant to the adoption of Senate Resolution No. 8 which resulted to the increase in membership of certain committees and upon nomination of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the following senators were elected to the committees hereunder indicated:

#### ***Committee on Accounts***

*Member* : Tulfo

#### ***Committee on Cooperatives***

*Member* : Binay

#### ***Committee on Foreign Relations***

*Member* : Binay

#### ***Committee on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation***

*Member* : Tolentino

#### ***Committee on Health and Demography***

*Member* : Marcos

#### ***Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs***

*Member* : Padilla

#### ***Committee on Sports***

*Member* : Lapid

### **CHANGE OF REFERRALS**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva and pursuant to the adoption of Senate Resolution No. 8 which amended Section 13 of the *Rules*, thus dividing the Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture into two separate



committees, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of referral of the following from the Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture to the newly-created Committee on Culture and the Arts while retaining the secondary and tertiary committee referrals as may be applicable:

1. Senate Bill No. 117 (Amending Republic Act No. 10066, or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009);
2. Senate Bill No. 242 (Cultural Education Program Act of 2022);
3. Senate Bill No. 244 (Philippine Culinary Heritage Act of 2022);
4. Senate Bill No. 490 (Department of Culture Act of 2022);
5. Senate Bill No. 492 (Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale Act of 2022); and
6. Senate Resolution No. 86 (Restoration of Cultural Heritage Sites and National Landmarks Damaged by the 7.0 Magnitude Earthquake)

Still in line with the adoption of Senate Resolution No. 8, and upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of referral of the following from the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development to the newly-created Committee on Migrant Workers, while retaining the secondary and tertiary committee referrals as may be applicable:

1. Senate Bill Nos. 46, 86, 137, and 216 (Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers);
2. Senate Bill No. 215 (Defining the Crime of Illegal Recruitment Committed by a Syndicate);
3. Senate Bill Nos. 223 and 265 (Overseas Filipino Workers Credit Assistance Act of 2022);
4. Senate Bill No. 344 (Business Incentives for OFWs Act); and
5. Senate Resolution No. 31 (Reported Lack of Access of Filipino Migrant Workers to Social Protection Programs).

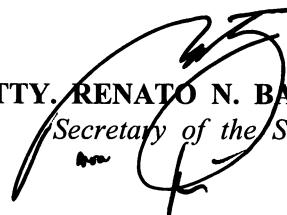
#### ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, August 22, 2022.

*It was 6:24 p.m.*

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

ATTY. RENATO N. BANTUG JR.  
*Secretary of the Senate*



Approved on August 23, 2022