

Presidential Communications Operations Office

Presidential News Desk

REMARKS OF
PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE
ON MIGRANT LABOR GOVERNANCE AND THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR
SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION

[20 April 2021]

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

We all agree that migration contributes to growth and development in both origin and destination countries. But this comes with costs and challenges to both sides.

To be truly sustainable and transformative, migration must work for all stakeholders. This is our collective challenge and our shared responsibility.

The Philippines recognizes the sovereign right of each State to adopt its own migration policy. But there are universal liberties and moral standards we must adhere [to] at all times.

We cannot justify the denial of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms to any individual, regardless of status.

This is why the Philippine Government strongly calls for the complete abolition of the Kafala system – sooner rather than later.

The Kafala system is unjust [and] exploitative. It places thousands of migrant workers, particularly household workers, in the most vulnerable situation – unseen, unheard, and unable to defend their dignity as a human being.

We are all familiar with many painful stories of abuse – from inhumane working conditions to non-payment of wages; from restriction of movements to denial of healthcare; and from sexual exploitation to outright murder.

For the Philippines and Filipinos, these tales are realities that hit us hard.

This has got to stop.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed migrant workers, especially those under the Kafala system, to an even more precarious position.

As the world went into lockdowns, many were driven into destitution with no job, no social safety nets, and no money to send back home.

This cannot go on.

We must address the structural inequalities that push migrant workers to this grim reality. Our pandemic responses must be inclusive with no room for any kind of discrimination.

No one must be left behind as we march towards recovery.

I welcome the reform initiatives of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and - of course - Bahrain.

I am hopeful that Saudi Arabia's Labor Reform Initiative will significantly improve the working conditions of migrant workers in the Kingdom, including the 800,000 Filipinos.

Certainly, the Philippine Government assumes its part of the responsibility in ensuring that our people live in safety and dignity, wherever they may be.

As I have said before, the Filipino is not a slave to anyone, anywhere. I dream of the day when working abroad becomes a choice and not a need for my countrymen.

My Government remains committed to our country's long-term vision of providing a stable, comfortable, and secure life for all Filipinos in their [very own] land.

But while this remains a vision, the Philippines strongly advocates and works with all partners to realize the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

We continue to bravely speak against the ills of the Kafala system.

We will be relentless in our efforts to dismantle this unjust structure.

And we will never tire from seeking greater cooperation with all those who want these inequities and suffering to end, once and for all.

This is the right thing to do. This is what is expected of us. And this is the only way to move forward.

Thank you.

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