

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS SECRETARY SUSAN “TOOTS” OPLE
JANUARY 10, 2023 (12:55 P.M. – 1:21 P.M.)

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Good afternoon, Malacañang Press Corps. Happy New Year! Great to be back.

We have a few announcements and let me start with a wonderful announcement. Nanumpa na si Atty. Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil ngayong araw, January 10, kay Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. bilang bagong kalihim ng Presidential Communications Office matapos maging tagapangasiwa ng ahensiya sa loob ng halos apat na buwan.

Bago maging kalihim ng PCO, namuno si Secretary Garafil bilang unang hepe ng Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) sa ilalim ng PBBM administration at dating state solicitor ng Office of the Solicitor General. Unang nagsilbi ang PCO Secretary bilang media director at public relations officer ng dating Pangulong Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo; siya rin ay isang journalist sa loob ng halos sampung taon sa iba't ibang pahayagan at news wires tulad ng Malaya, The Philippine Daily Globe, Central News Agency at Associated Press. So, lets' congratulate Secretary Garafil.

So today there was a Cabinet meeting. It was the continuation of the last meeting of 2022. The President met with the entire Cabinet and heard the presentations of the remaining twelve departments – we had the Department of Justice, DILG, Department of Agriculture, Education, Labor and Employment, DSWD, Agrarian Reform, Health, Migrant Workers, DENR, DOST and DOE.

Now, some highlights: Department of Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla presented achievements in 2022 and plans for 2023. He highlighted the justice department's theme of “Compassionate Justice” in keeping with the directive of the President who asked that he check on legal representation of prisoners based on the President's experience in Ilocos Norte where he remembered that many prisoners did not have access to lawyers.

And moving on to the Department of Education, the Secretary/VP Inday Sara Duterte presented the plans for inclusive learning, support for teachers, improving the curriculum. The DepEd will be presenting a revised K-12 curriculum for basic education in January 30th. The theme of DepEd is, “Bansang Makabata at Batang Makabansa.”

The DSWD, it should be noted that the President has asked the DSWD to always remain ready and on heightened alert as it seems that the rains, the season are not letting up so we must remain vigilant.

And before the end of the meeting, the President wanted all the departments heads to remember, to know what each other is doing and to maximize the synergy in order to work together to achieve the 8-point socioeconomic agenda.

And now, we move on to the spotlight of today. Ngayong hapon, makakasama natin ang Secretary of Migrant Workers na si Secretary Susan ‘Toots’ Ople para bigyan tayo ng impormasyon sa kaniyang ahensiya.

DMW SEC. OPLE: Thank you, Daphne. Thank you for inviting us sa Department of Migrant Workers. Bibigyan naman kayo [ng kopya] ng accomplishment namin, so siguro just to emphasize a few figures, some may not be in the slide presentation.

For the first time we were released our first ever budget for the first quarter. Thank you to DBM and of course our legislators. So 566 million for the first quarter of this year; our total GAA budget is 15.8 billion. So broken down into OSEC 4.1 billion; OWWA 11.7 billion for frontline services to our OFWs. This year, we will also be establishing 16 regional offices. We also need to fill-up around 1,000 vacancies; so doon po sa gustong magtrabaho sa Department of Migrant Workers, pakiabangan na lang po iyong aming announcement ng vacancies which we will also need to clear and coordinate this information with the Civil Service.

We will also be adding four Migrant Workers offices. Off hand, we are looking at Bangkok, Thailand. We are also considering Guam and two more TBD (to be declared) because we are assessing the needs of our workers. And we are looking at employability, foreign employment opportunities, the size of the OFW population, as well as welfare cases in those countries, vulnerability of our workers in those countries. So we have criteria for choosing which countries or territories deserve or are in need—siyempre lahat of them are in need 'no, but those that we will prioritize for this year.

Okay, coming soon, new rules for the land-based and sea-based workers with ease of doing business as one of the guide posts. Gusto sana namin iyong rules na iyon simplified and easy to read, hindi na kailangan ng abogado para maintindihan. Iyong previous rules kasi, they were all published and they were all formulated under POEA, so ngayon we have to come out with our own rules which is why after this meeting I have a dialogue with our recruitment agency owners to discuss this and other matters as well.

All right, scholarships, 37,949 through OWWA. These are the children of our OFWs. We are also emphasizing the need for socio-cultural and educational activities and support for children of OFWs based sa instruction ng ating Presidente. So for last year, we were able to provide such activities to 9,778 OFW children. We are in discussion with DepEd on how to develop in-school programs in support of OFW children. For example, support for text books support for mental health – iyong mga ganoong klase.

One of our key objectives is to increase the number of deployed OFWs for this year. From July to November of last year, 486,673 lang iyong na-deploy natin – for the land-based, nasa 352,911; sea-based, 219,869. The good news is that there are several emerging markets. We have invitations pending for bilateral labor talks with Romania, Hungary and Portugal. We are also looking into the possibility ... I met with the Minister of Labor and Welfare of Hong Kong yesterday, Minister Chris Sun, and he broached the possibility of exploratory talks on the deployment of Filipino caregivers to Hong Kong – but early, early stage pa ito. We need to send a team to Hong Kong to meet with his team as well.

We are also closely working with the DOJ on illegal recruitment and human trafficking cases. Of course, we are all familiar with the situation in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. We continue to remain at to maintain a tight watch on the online illegal recruitment and trafficking of our workers to those places.

Kanina, after my presentation, the President also, again, stressed the need to help our seafarers. So tomorrow afternoon, at 4 P.M., we will have a virtual signing of a memorandum of

understanding with several organizations of foreign ship owners based in the EU, as well as international maritime organizations to form the first ever International Advisory Committee on Global Maritime Affairs (IACGMA) to be headed by yours truly. And we have discussed with the following departments the idea of them also joining as advisers, as part of the council. And so far, we have received positive messages from the DFA, from DOTr, and MARINA.

And also the DENR because of the net zero campaign of the International Maritime Organization for decarbonisation and new technologies to power the ships. And lot of training will have to be undertaken for that, so ang tawag nila doon just transition. So, DENR will also be joining the IACGMA.

Kaunti na lang. OFW Hospital: From July up to December. The OFW Hospital in Mabalacat, Pampanga was able to provide free medical consultations, and also with the help of OWWA, to over 6,000 family members. And around 1,500 OFWs directly benefited from 21.8 million cash assistance as medical coverage for dreaded diseases. For more information about that, I would invite you to get in touch with Administrator Arnell Ignacio of OWWA.

Shelters, we are sending a team to Kuwait to look at how we can decongest the shelter there. We are tapping also the social welfare attachés of DSWD who are now part of the department for their expertise on how to upgrade our shelters overseas for overseas workers. Mahalaga po na very humane, dignified and comfortable, and safe ang ating mga residences, temporary residences for our distressed OFWs across the globe.

So, with that I think, we will just share our presentation with the help of PCO; and if you have any questions.

JOB MANAHAN/ABS-CBN NEWS ONLINE: Good afternoon po, Secretary Ople. May update po ba regarding doon sa pag-release ng back pay doon sa Saudi workers?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yes, oo. Nakaligtaan ko iyon. Iyong sa unpaid salaries, dapat sana December kami tutuloy but upon the request of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD), iyon ang aming counterpart sa Saudi Arabia, they requested for more time to arrange our visit dahil iyong sa unpaid claims ay hindi pala sa kanila iyon nakaatang, so they wanted time for certain arrangements to be made so that when I go there I will be able to meet with the right person in the Office of the Crown Prince.

So, as of yesterday they promise that they will give us the itinerary and schedule for the Saudi trip within the week, so we are waiting for that. But definitely ang agreement is that that is number one in the agenda.

JOB MANAHAN/ABS-CBN NEWS ONLINE: Follow up lang po. May estimate po kaya kung magkano iyong matatanggap ng mga OFWs natin? Tapos, aside po doon sa na-mention, may timeframe pa po kaya na tinitingnan?

DMW SEC. OPLE: I want to be very cautious and prudent, Job, na ang gusto ko kapag nakausap ko na at saka kami magri-release ng information kasi alam ninyo, emotionally-charged iyong issue. Yesterday, I met with some of the claimants, and kasi nga may mga kung anu-anong lumalabas sa Facebook, so sabi ko, "Medyo chill lang, alam ko mahirap dahil marami ang umasa noong Pasko," pero the ball kasi is really in Saudi Arabia's court eh.

So I want to be quite prudent and responsible. Wala akong sasabihin about it until we finally meet in Saudi Arabia with the officials that are tasked to work this out with us, until then hindi muna kami magbibigay ng any specifics, out of respect na rin sa aming kakausapin sa Saudi Arabia.

KAT DIMINGO/ABS-CBN: During President Marcos' state visit to Indonesia in September, the Philippines filed or asked the Indonesian government for an executive clemency for Mary Jane Veloso. May we get an update on that case?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yes. Per agreement with the Department of Foreign Affairs, kasi iyong institutional memory doon sa kaso na iyon lies with them, and I think during the visit of the President to Indonesia it was Secretary Manalo who raised this issue with his counterpart. So, we will have to defer to the DFA pagdating doon.

And just as an FYI, on Friday, the Executive Secretary will be convening a meeting. To be present on that meeting are the Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, myself and, of course, the ES to discuss transitional matters. For example iyon nga mga death row cases, iyong pag-transfer ng ATN (Assistant to Nationals) work from the ATN officers of our embassies to our migrant workers attachés, the kind of training that's needed to capacitate them in preparation for that very delicate job. So, sa Friday po iyon. We will be discussing those matters.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Secretary, magandang hapon po. Secretary, doon sa nabanggit ninyo na 1,000 opening na positions sa DMW, ilan po doon iyong plantilla positions, at saka ilan po iyong iha-hire ninyo na COS?

DMW SEC. OPLE: I think those are all plantilla items. Kasi, don't forget we're a new department, and magsi-set up kami ng regional offices. I think, majority ng mga empleyado na iyong na-subsume namin wala kaming inalis eh, except for those na talagang may ibang career plans 'no. But most of them really were absorbed by the DMW, and yet kulang pa. So, we are going to issue specific details regarding what kind of vacancies are there. We have formed a screening panel, and we will be working closely with the Civil Service Commission regarding this.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Secretary, can you give us at least an idea on anu-ano iyong mga positions na io-open?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Of course, may need kami for lawyers, may need din kami for even entry level staff, iba-iba eh, something as basic as iyong social media team namin. So kung mayroon ditong aplikante, please let me know.

Need din namin ng writers, so but siyempre mas klaro pati kung anong salary grade iyong mga qualifications, lahat iyan ilalabas namin in the spirit of transparency and inclusivity and even iyong mga ex-OFWs, if they want to apply or even if they are abroad and they want to apply. I mean, the door is open, iyon na nga, ano lang, siyempre competitive iyan and we want a very professionally- run department. So, iyong padrino system, puwedeng ano muna, we will look at the qualifications of each candidate.

ALLAN FRANCISCO/PTV: Hi, Ma'am. Good afternoon. In the previous state visits of President Marcos sa ibang bansa, priority po niya binibisita niya iyong mga Filipino. So, are we expecting that when he visits Switzerland, he will also do the same visiting the Filipino community, Ma'am?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yeah, I'm sure na si Daphne will brief you, probably, kasi forthcoming na iyong Davos eh, probably in your next briefing, kasi ayaw kong pangunahan. I mean, I know the answer, pero baka hindi dapat magmula sa amin.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Hi, Sec. You mentioned that there are ongoing bilateral labor talks with Romania. Hungary, Portugal and even Hong Kong may ini-expect din po tayong possibilities doon. How much of these talks can be directly attributed to the President's visits in different countries in the last few months. And this year, anu-ano po kaya iyong mga magma-materialized o iyong mga magbubunga sa mga agreements na na-forge dito sa mga nakaraang pagbisita na ito that will open up jobs for Filipinos?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yeah, alam mo, a lot of it really can be attributed to the President's popularity. But we also have to shout out as well doon sa reputation, excellent reputation ng Filipino workers. But the visits that we have had to pave way for a lot of these new conversations. For example, iyong Singapore, we signed a joint statement or communiqué with the Minister of Health. But this March, we have to go there to finalize the implementation protocols naman, kasi they would like to hire more Filipino health workers.

Iyong sa Portugal naman, ang initial discussion namin, is that, I will be also, I need to go there during this first quarter and iyon naman tourism sector din ang isa mga kinakailangan nila. For the President's visit in Japan, we will also be renewing a bilateral labor agreement. This will be a very busy year for the DMW, kasi iyong mga bilateral labor agreements na existing and about to expire were with DOLE. So, now we have to renew na kami na iyong signatory. So, iyon and let's not forget na dahil na-lift na namin iyong Saudi Arabia. I think initially, we are looking at 6,000 new hires for Saudi Arabia alone, for now until March, nagkakaproblema na lang sa boking ng flights, dahil nasabay sa holiday season. So doon nagkakahirapan. But these numbers will continue to grow.

Meanwhile, we are also expanding and strengthening our reintegration program for OFWs who want to stay here for good. And kausap na namin si Go Negosyo; kausap din namin ang DICT; si Miss Tessie Sy of SM; the other day, Sir Mon from San Miguel also; and Bank of Commerce also came to visit us. So, we are putting together all these reintegration partners. So that iyong mga pabalik na OFWs can just pick and choose kung sino ang gusto nilang makausap to seek advice, whether they want to put up a business or they want to seek employment. Then, at least klaro na kung sino ang mga partners ang puwede nilang i-prioritize.

USEC. EUGENIO: Okay. Maraming salamat po, Department of Migrant Workers Secretary Susan "Toots" Ople. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps.

DMW SEC. OPLE: Thank you very much. Happy New Year.

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