

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS SECRETARY SUSAN OPLE
APRIL 25, 2023

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Good afternoon again, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome to our second press briefing today, April 25.

Around 400 Filipinos are affected by the heightened hostilities in Sudan. And to give us an update on the situation of Filipinos there, we have Department of Migrant Workers Secretary Susan Ople. Good afternoon, Secretary Ople.

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yes, good afternoon. I just came from a meeting with the President and we discussed the situation of our OFWs in Sudan. I informed him that I will be leaving tonight with Undersecretary Hans Cacdac to oversee the welfare operations of the department in making sure that those who are able to cross the border would be given financial assistance upon crossing kasi marami sa kanila wala talagang dala at all, and may mga bata din kasi eh, may mga kababaihan tayo so we want to make sure that there are proper facilities.

Then, I spoke with one group that is just waiting for their bus. They will be leaving—umaga kasi doon, they'll be leaving a few hours from now and ang kasamahan nila mga 20 na mga bata ano including a 7-month old baby. So the President's directives were: Number one, to get all of them to safety as quickly as possible; number two, it shouldn't matter whatever papers they have or if they don't have any papers at all.

To quote the President, "*Kung marunong mag-Tagalog, marunong mag-Bisaya, marunong mag-Ilocano, marunong ng iba't ibang dialects sa atin, Pinoy iyan*" so, we will help and it doesn't really matter if they are in possession of a passport or any identity card, aayusin na lang namin pagdating sa border. Of course, the DFA will take the lead on that.

Number three, ang sabi rin niya na to work with everyone – meaning, right now the administration is working with all governments including also with international partners such as the UN and IOM just to be able to bring our kababayans to safety. We are looking at three exit points – one would be via... from Khartoum, by land and then exit via as one into Egypt, that's a land trip.

The second one would be by land to Port Sudan and then, by ship to Jeddah. The third one would be by air through Djibouti in cooperation with the US government because they have a US base in Djibouti. So the DFA and also with the help of the Department of National Defense are working out the details for such assistance, bilateral assistance to be given to our kababayan.

My flight is tonight. There's another team that will be joining me tomorrow, headed by Labor Attaché Adam Musa who was a veteran in repatriation efforts in Libya. And then, on Thursday, Administrator Arnel Ignacio will be also leading the OWWA team which would include some nurses to join us. So ang immediate kong task would be to set up our welfare assistance stations in the various border points, and also to assist and provide any support needed to Ambassador Ezzedin Tago whom the President himself said has been doing a very good job in maintaining open communications with our kababayan in Sudan and working out certain arrangements to be considered as confidential right now to bring them safely home.

With that, I'm open to questions.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, let's start with Kat Domingo.

KAT DOMINGO: Good afternoon, Secretary. Ma'am, you mentioned that upon crossing the Sudan border, they will be receiving financial assistance. How much are we talking about po?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Two hundred dollars per worker.

KAT DOMINGO: Okay. And, ma'am, saan po iyong destination ninyo for flight later?

DMW SEC. OPLE: We are trying to explore the possibility that those who wish to be hired instead of coming home—kasi naiintindihan naman natin iyong iba ayaw umuwi kasi iniisip nila, wala rin naman kaming trabaho doon so might as well stay and then tignan natin kung baka humupa iyong sitwasyon, ano. But we are looking at and exploring the possibility of temporary jobs for them in Saudi Arabia. We are working this out and we will have more ... we will have more concrete information once we are able to work this out.

KAT DOMINGO: Ma'am, so you will be stationed in Saudi Arabia? Sabi ninyo po, you're leaving tonight, going where po?

DMW SEC. OPLE: I'm leaving tonight for Cairo. We are working it out with our partners in Saudi Arabia if there is a possibility that because most of the workers based in Sudan are skilled professionals, we are trying to explore the possibility of temporary jobs in Saudi Arabia if that will be allowed by their government.

KAT DOMINGO: Thank you, ma'am.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Ivan Mayrina, GMA 7.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Secretary, you mentioned a word—a number, 400 Filipinos. Ano ho itong mga 400 na ito – are these the ones who signified their intent to be repatriated? I understand from Usec. de Vega of DFA na the number could be higher?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yeah. Let me read na lang what I got from the DFA. So, according to Usec. de Vega 725 Filipinos have contacted the Philippine Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. Of that number 327 as of now are requesting repatriation. Will the numbers rise? Based on our experience, based on my experience ‘no as an OFW advocate – yes, the possibility is that the numbers will rise.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Any further questions? Okay, Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Hi, ma’am. How soon, ma’am, na expect natin na makakabalik sila dito sa Pilipinas once na makalabas na sila ng Sudan at masundo ninyo doon?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Actually, iyong pagbabalik sa Pilipinas may regular flights from Cairo, may regular flights for Jeddah; kung nasa Djibouti naman sila, I mean it’s a US base – so mas madali nang mag-coordinate for their flights home. It’s really bringing them to safety from Khartoum that’s difficult. So, right now we want to take advantage of the ceasefire na na-declare to bring them to safety.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Chona Yu, Radyo Inquirer.

CHONA YU/RADYO INQUIRER: Ma’am, ano pong assistance ang ibibigay ng government sa mga Filipino na uuwi dito, kasi sabi mo nga pagdating dito walang trabaho?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yes, we’re matching, there’s a team inside the DMW that is undertaking job matching kasi mayroon naman kaming mga profiles, we were able to get with the help of the DFA din and with our embassy and also with the help of OWWA. So iyong mga nais magtrabaho upon return, we will help them find jobs and we also allocated financial aid to their families.

So, wala silang dapat intindihin na uuwi sila walang-wala and all that. I’m not at liberty to announce right now kung magkano iyong financial package for the families ‘no, gusto lang namin unahin iyong workers na may naghihintay naman pagtawid nila huwag nilang isipin na “Naku, wala akong pambili ng gamot, wala akong pambili ng damit, wala akong pampalit na damit and all that; saan ako titira?” Kami na ang bahala doon, makatawid lang sila talaga, kami na ang bahala, kami na ang sasalo and direct assistance of 200 dollars for each.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. I think we’re done. Thank you very much, Secretary Ople. We wish you and the team and all our kababayan a safe journey.

DMW SEC. OPLE: Thank you. Wish us luck.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Malacañang Press Corps.

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