

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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PRESS BRIEFING
OF DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS SECRETARY SUSAN OPLE
THE DARCY HOTEL, WASHINGTON D.C.
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MODERATOR: Okay. Good afternoon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome to our regular press briefing. We have DMW Secretary Susan Ople – Ma'am, good afternoon. You have opening statement po? Please go ahead.

DMW SEC. OPLE: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for the invitation. Lyon lang.

MODERATOR: Okay. Guys, questions! Ace Romero from Philippine Star...

Q: Secretary, you were mentioning a while ago about the OFWs from Sudan – they spoke with the President, tama po?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Hindi. Una—siguro number one, even while we were in Cairo, in Aswan assisting iyong mga nagku-crossover from Sudan into the Egyptian border, the President was in touch with us, with the DMW and also with the DFA asking for updates. And yesterday before the 'meet and greet' with the US-based employers, he once again asked about our workers coming home from Sudan. So basically, I think around 70—more than 70 have already left. Teka lang ha, I'll read it na lang para hindi ako magkamali.

Nag-land na sa Riyadh ang 77 workers – ito iyong out of the 340 na batch. And then they will be assisted by the Migrant Workers Office in Riyadh until they board for Manila. So ito iyong isang flight na via Riyadh; there's another flight tomorrow bearing 83 OFWs. So nag-land na today iyong commercial plane with 77 OFWs, and then tomorrow another 83 OFWs for the 4 P.M. flight to Manila via Riyadh.

We are also engaged in talks with Philippine Airlines, apparently the Philippine Airlines has a partnership with Egypt Air so we are still exploring whether for the remainder of the OFWs due for repatriation, if we can just engage PAL and Egypt Air for a chartered flight via Dubai naman.

All OFWs have received 200 dollars care of the DMW while they are in Egypt, and then livelihood package, financial assistance of initially P50,000 and then through OWWA regional offices. Iyong initial na P50,000 will be coming from the DMW's direct aid to the worker; another P50,000 will be given by OWWA to the families of the workers. So hopefully with the P100,000 humanitarian assistance, these workers will be able to start afresh.

When we were meeting with them sa Cairo and also doon sa Abu Simbel, Aswan, the issues they have raised were: One, iyong naisyuhan ng travel documents, they were asking if they would also be able to apply for new passports. And of course, the answer is yes through the DFA ano. Second, iyon ngang financial assistance and we assured them that they will be receiving financial assistance once they come home. Third would be jobs, and iyon ang inaayos natin ngayon.

Saudi Arabia is very much interested also in looking at the profiles of the workers. In fact, this will also be one of the topics that we will be discussing. Undersecretary P.Y. Caunan and Undersecretary Bernard Olalia will be going to Saudi Arabia as my advance party, as my advance team this month. *Kailan ba ang alis ninyo P.Y.? [May 17 po.]* – May 17, because our talks with the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development will be on May 24.

So to sum up, the President is very much concerned and is always updated on the results of our repatriation efforts. Number two, there are employers in the US and also in the cruise ship industry and in Saudi Arabia that are very much interested and would like to see the profiles of our workers from Sudan. And, number three, livelihood assistance is in place to provide them with a fresh start in life.

MODERATOR: Okay. Follow up, Ace.

Q: Secretary, kailan po ba matatapos iyong—iyong evacuation po ba tapos na o mayroon pa tayong i-evacuate as we speak? And kailan po matatapos iyong pagpapauwi noong mga Filipinos, paghatid sa kanila sa Pilipinas?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yeah. The good news is that, I think nasa 600-mark na tayo 'no and maybe even more. Kasi iyong iba doon naman dumaan sa Port of Sudan crossing over to Jeddah, may iba na nakasakay sa Greek airline so iba-ibang exit routes 'no. I heard mayroon din na nag-landing sa Jordan.

When I was there, ang sabi ni Ambassador Tago sa akin was that—or hindi pala si Ambassador Tago, it was the Embassy staff sa Cairo who told me na nasa 777 initially iyong nagri-request ng help or nag-reach out sa Philippine embassy. So may mga naiwan pa, I think the best source kung ilan sila, nasaan sila and anong plano nila would still be the DFA.

MODERATOR: Okay. Marlon Ramos from Philippine Daily Inquirer.

Q: Hi, Sec. Ople. Iyong mga workers na ito who are coming from Sudan, mga ilan/gaano sila karaming nag-express ng interest na magtrabaho doon sa mga US companies [unclear]?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Ngayon kasi papauwi pa lang iyong bulk. Kung maalala ninyo may 340 – so 76 nasa Jeddah na, tapos another 80-plus tomorrow, pareho pala via Riyadh. And then iyong sa chartered flight mga more or less 300 iyon. So, actually we need to give them time to rest and then kukunin namin iyong profiles nila.

There were some workers who told me that they are interested to work elsewhere, not in Sudan. May mga nagsabi naman sa akin na their companies have branches in other countries. In fact, specifically iyong isa sabi sa akin, Ma'am puwede bang dumiretso na ako ng Djibouti kasi may branch iyong company namin doon. Pero sabi nga namin, uwi ka muna, try to spend time with your family and then kapag decided ka na, then we will help you out with the contract and all that.

Q: Simula po noong dumating si Presidente dito sa US, marami na pong meetings with the US companies. Mga ilan na po iyong nadyi-generate or possible na ma-generate na trabaho para sa mga migrant workers natin?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Iyong nakausap namin ay top employers iyon. Ang sabi noong nasa cruise ship industry and labor attaché Saul will provide you with the names noong mga nakausap ni

Presidente. Sabi nila, we now have 150,000 existing employees, which represents 1/3 of their workforce – collectively ha. Ito iyong mga cruise ship companies based in Florida. But they are looking at hiring 75,000 more in the next three to four years.

For the healthcare industry, they are now, iyong nandoon lang na naka-meet ni Presidente, they have 50,000 nurses and other medical professionals under their employ. But they said that the demand is great. The only challenge really is the supply of visas. So, limited din iyong visas for foreign health professionals. Kaya hindi lang naman din iyong problema iyong mayroon tayong deployment cap, kung hindi maski dito sa US ay mayroon din naman sila na mga visa supply limitations.

Q: Ma'am, going into this official working visit, what were your specific objectives as DMW Secretary?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Yes. Well first of all, iyong of course to introduce the department to the Filipino community. Kaya ang gusto talaga ni Presidente, every time there is a FilCom event, nandoon kami, and then we spend time with the FilCom leaders in case they have questions about our programs and services.

Second, it's putting together the top American employers and giving them the chance to listen to our President. And they came out of the meeting really inspired and especially because the President said, "You are not just giving jobs to 200,000 workers. You are actually giving opportunities to 200,000 families and 200,000 communities". And doon parang maganda rin iyong naging realization nila about their contribution as employers being recognized by no less than the Philippine President.

Third, we had a meeting which is why I was late, we just had a meeting with several anti-human trafficking organizations based here in the US and we sought their help in the fight against human trafficking and then I learned that many special visa na pala for domestic workers hired by the diplomats and members of international organizations. Ang tawag nila is A3 and G5. And under that visa category, the state department would invite the foreign domestic workers of diplomats and IO or International Organization officials periodically to appear before the state department. So, they can check on their work conditions, quality of life, and whether their labor rights are being upheld.

So, this is something new to us and we would want to incorporate that in our pre-departure seminar because under the DMW, we can provide employment contracts under a direct hiring scheme for domestic workers as long as their employers are diplomats or members of the international community, so iyon. They also informed us that, basically, they are interested to work with us. In case we need pro bono lawyers to assist victims of human trafficking in the United States from the Philippines.

My third meeting, kanina lang, I came from the US State Department. I met with Kelly Rodriguez who is the special representative on International Labor Affairs and we discussed the need to protect our workers employed in various US military installations outside the Philippines.

Q: Hello po, Sec. Good afternoon. Balik po tayo doon sa mga Pilipino sa Sudan. Sa almost 600 po na mga Pilipino na naiulat po ninyo earlier, may status na po ba kayo kung ilan ang mga undocumented Filipinos na sumama na sa repatriation?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Kasi ang nagbigay ng travel documents nila, ang puwede lang magbigay would be the consular officials. So, si Ambassador Tago and si Vice Consul Bojer Capati, sila iyong nag-cross sa Sudan border to be able to give this travel documents. Sa amin naman, doesn't really matter kung documented or undocumented, the department is mandated to assist them. Iyong sa Islamic students mayroon din kasi, mga Islamic students na ang goal, pag-graduate nila ay magtrabaho sa mga Madrasas sa BARMM. So, ang bilin ni Presidente, dapat kung ano ang kalinga sa OFWs, ganoon din ang kalinga sa Islamic students. So, we immediately contacted the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos and also the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

So iyong livelihood package for OFWs, ang magbibigay for the Islamic students would be DSWD and iyong aalalay naman sa students para matapos iyong kanilang pag-aaral would be NCMF. Sasalubungin sila pagdating sa airport.

Q: Kailan po matatapos ang repatriation po sa mga Filipinos natin in Sudan?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Iyong good news is more than half na. Marami na, marami na tayong nailipat, thanks to ano, I mean, I would like to credit talaga iyong ating Philippine Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, especially Ambassador Ezzedin Tago for all the hard work.

But may iba na they want to stay on. Iyong iba nagbabaka-sakali pa rin na huhupa iyong gulo. Of course, hindi naman natin mapilit sila if that is their personal decision. But if they would ask our advice, the best way really or the best time for them to leave is now. And we also welcome news that the United Nations will be stepping in soon. Ang panawagan natin based doon sa nakita ko, based sa mga conversations ko with the evacuees from the civil war na mga kababayan natin, there really needs for humanitarian corridors and safe zones para iyong mga gustong makaalis gustong umalis and then iyong mga gusto namang maiwan, may access pa rin sa pagkain, sa gamot, sa tubig and other basic essentials. So we do hope that the UN will step in and establish these humanitarian corridors and safe zones as soon as possible.

MODERATOR: Okay, questions! Wala na? Parting statement, Ma'am, if you have any?

DMW SEC. OPLE: Okay, we have met with the US-based employers. The prospects for employment are very bright. They truly appreciate the excellence of the Filipino worker and they also appreciate the encouraging word of our President. And sabi nga ng ating Pangulo, iba na iyong overseas worker ngayon, dati umaalis dahil kailangan na kailangan kumita. Ngayon it seems na umaalis din sila because it's how they are designing their life; they have options. And a lot of those coming over are really skilled professionals.

So iyong sa amin lang, we will continue to live up our mandate of protecting them and working with the US government din in ensuring that their rights are upheld at all times. Okay? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Secretary Ople, thank you, Malacañang Press Corps.

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