PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ WITH DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS UNDERSECRETARY BERNARD OLALIA AND OVERSEAS WORKERS WELFARE ADMINISTRATION-REPATRIATIONS AND ASSISTANCE DIVISION CHIEF FALCONI MILLAR

OCTOBER 2, 2024 [1:33 P.M. – 1:53 P.M.]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong hapon, October 2.

This afternoon, we will be briefed about the possible impacts of the most recent escalation of the conflict in Israel and the voluntary repatriation of Filipinos from Lebanon. We are joined by Department of Migrant Workers Undersecretary Bernard Olalia and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Repatriations and Assistance Division Chief Falconi Millar to brief us on the latest matters pertaining to assistance to Filipinos in Lebanon, Israel and the Middle East. Good afternoon, Usec. Olalia and Chief Millar.

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Good afternoon, ma'am.

OWWA-RAD CHIEF MILLAR: Magandang hapon po.

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Good afternoon, everyone. The main responsibility and task, of course, of the Department of Migrant Workers is to ensure the safety of all Filipino workers in Lebanon per instruction and guidance by no less than our President. And in line with this responsibility, the DMW and the OWWA, as an attached agency, continues to coordinate with DFA in ensuring the safety of all workers, Filipinos in Lebanon.

In particular, we have a very active MWO or a Migrant Workers Office in Beirut, Lebanon. It's headed by a labor attaché and six other staffs, and we will augment this MWO staffs by sending a veteran labor attaché. In fact, he is already on his way to Beirut, Lebanon – LabAtt Adam Musa, a veteran labor attaché who have held positions in the past, with experience in providing assistance to Overseas Filipino Workers.

Our MWOs in the Middle East are also on standby mode and they are willing to provide augmentation team also to MWO Beirut in case the situation worsens. We have one shelter in the MWO of Beirut and in relation to that one shelter, our labor attaché secured three additional shelters in case Filipino overseas there would be willing to signify for the voluntary repatriation. There are presently 101 Filipino workers in our shelters ready to be repatriated.

The challenge is that we do not have flights 'no. The supposed September 25 flight which will facilitate the repatriation of 15 of our OFWs did not push through because the flights were cancelled due to the conflict and as a consequence, we are trying to provide for chartered flights 'no. We're talking to some of airline companies so that the chartered flights will be able to accommodate, for example, no less than 300 Overseas Filipino Workers from Beirut.

The other challenge there is to secure, of course, the landing rights of our chartered flight 'no care of the office of MWO in coordination with the Lebanese government.

The other challenge is the exit permits of some of our workers. Apart from documented OFWs, we have undocumented OFWs who need to secure travel documents. And once they were given travel documents, we will help them in securing also exit visas or exit permits from the immigration of the Lebanese government.

The DMW is also studying the possibility of other routes. Apart from air route, we will be assessing the sea and the land route should the case or the situation there worsens.

So, all in all, we are ready to assist our OFWs there. Around 63 is ready for repatriation, awaiting for flights. And per instruction of the President, we will be adopting a whole-of-government assistance. We will provide for all forms of assistance coming from both the DMW and OWWA, together with the other agencies that will be onboard like DFA, DOH, and of course, TESDA. Each worker will receive no less than P150,000 financial aid coming from the DMW and the OWWA funds.

That will be all.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Undersecretary Olalia. Chief Millar, would you like to add?

OWWA-RAD CHIEF MILLAR: Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat. Sa ngalan po ng ating Administrator, Admin Arnell Ignacio, ang OWWA po ay katuwang ng DMW at ng atin po sa Lebanon sa ating ginagawang proseso sa pagri-repatriate ng ating mga Overseas Filipino Workers.

Gaya po ng nabanggit ni Usec. Olalia ay mayroon na po tayong 111 na awaiting na repatriation sa post sa Lebanon at lahat po ng means ay ginagawa po natin – nakikipag-cooperate po tayo sa ating post under the One-Country Team Approach, kagaya po ng binanggit ni Usec. Olalia.

Magandang hapon po sa ating lahat.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Maraming salamat. Okay, we open the floor to questions. Katrina Domingo, ABS-CBN.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN.COM: Sir, good afternoon. Sir, Iran recently launched a barrage of missiles towards Israel. Ano po iyong status ng mga OFWs there? May nasugatan po ba? May nasaktan? May gusto na rin po bang magpa-repatriate?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: You know, our OFWs were already advised on the contingency plans and what to do in case of attack 'no. Sa Israel, wala po tayong problema dahil may mga tinatawag po tayong bomb shelters 'no. Simula po noong nag-atake doon, wala na pong nasaktan na Filipino overseas workers sa Israel. Ibahagi ko na rin 'no. Pati po sa Lebanon, wala pong ni isa na Filipino tayo na nasaktan.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Tristan Nodalo.

TRISTAN NODALO/NEWSWATCH PLUS: Hello, sir. Good afternoon po. So, ini-explore po natin iyong paggamit ng chartered flights para ma-repatriate iyong mga Filipinos. But in the event talaga na mahirapang makapag-land iyong mga airlines or iyong itsa-charter nating flight, are there any other options like land travel, border-to-border travel or iyong iba po kasi ay, as I read the news,

mayroong gumagamit ng yate na para makalabas ng Lebanon? So, ano pa po iyong ibang option that we are trying to explore?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Yeah. The original flight that will accommodate 15 Overseas Filipino Workers sana na makabalik was on September 25, but that did not push through because the flight was cancelled 'no. So, we took the liberty of chartering a flight 'no. So, mayroon na po tayong kausap at hopefully 'pag nabigyan po tayo ng landing rights, we will land our chartered flight there and sana iyong sitting capacity niya, we have an available 111 ready to be repatriated ay maisama na natin pauwi 'no.

But should the air route be impossible because puwede pong isarado nila iyong airport doon sa Beirut eh, mayroon na po tayong alternative 'no – iyong land route natin naka-ready na going to Damascus. Pinag-uusapan na po namin iyan. Nakaantabay na po lahat ng MWOs natin sa Middle East to provide for augmentation, help the MWO in Lebanon kung papaano natin sila dadalhin sa safer ground sa Lebanon.

Apart from that, sabi ko nga po iyong yate, yes, mayroon na rin po kaming kinakausap 'no na mga maritime vessels. Hindi lang namin—we are not at the liberty to disclose kung sinu-sino iyon but nandudoon na po iyong ating options.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Melvin Gascon, Philippine Daily Inquirer.

MELVIN GASCON/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Good afternoon, sirs. Ano po ang latest na assessment po ng DMW after the latest escalation po ng pagpapaulan po ng missiles ng Iran? And then iyon pong threat na sinasabing gaganti iyong Israel, ano po ang assessment ninyo? Ready na po ba tayo or are we at the brink of imposing mandatory evacuation?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: We already anticipated those events 'no. In fact, our contingency plans in Israel, Lebanon and Iran includes iyong ganiyang the situation will become worse 'no. That's why we have men on the ground; they work around the clock. At iyong mga staff po natin, dinagdagan na nga po natin both in Lebanon and nearby post natin to be able to provide safest route to evacuate and ultimately facilitate the repatriation of our OFWs both either in Lebanon or in Israel.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Racquel Bayan, Radyo Pilipinas.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sir, for clarification lang po. One hundred eleven po iyong nasa shelter po natin, tama, then 63 ready na po para makabalik, kung mayroon man. Sir, paano naman po iyong mga Filipino na wala doon sa shelter, kumusta po iyong communication natin sa kanila?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Iyan, isa pong challenge iyan. Tama po kayo 'no, we have 111 OFWs in four of our shelters; 63 po iyong nasa Hotel Monteverde; and then inilikas po natin kasi iyong nandudoon sa shelter natin sa MWO because we don't want them in harm's way kaya inilikas natin sila on safer shelter. Iyong isang shelter po natin 16. So kung bibilangin po natin ito, 111 lang pero ang total po ng nagpapa-repatriate kasama po iyong ready for application for exit permits – halos 110 po yata iyon eh iyong ina-apply-an natin ng exit permits – so, 200 po iyan.

Iyong iba po, wala sa shelter because we already coordinated with them. We have their identities, their numbers, their contact numbers and the planned route kung papaano po sila dadalhin sa airport kung iyon po ang gagamitin natin.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: And, sir, aside from repatriation, may iba pa po bang mandate si Pangulong Marcos kaugnay doon sa mga Filipinos sa Lebanon?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Tulungan po natin sila. After their facilitated repatriation, pagdating po dito, we will be adopting a whole-of-government assistance – hindi lamang po pinansiyal, hindi lamang po lahat ng klase ng tulong, kung hindi iyong psychosocial services din dahil dumanas po sila nang katakut-takot na stress. Alam po natin iyong kanilang naranasan doon, and all of our government agencies involved will be there to help them as soon as they arrive safely here in the Philippines.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Maricel Halili, TV 5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV 5: Sir, magandang hapon po. So, sir, iyong mga Filipinos natin sa Lebanon kung willing silang magpa-repatriate pero married sila sa ibang lahi, are you going to allow their husbands or wives to join the repatriation?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: We did that in the past. Kung maalala ninyo po sa Sudan, iyong mga kababayan po natin na doon na nakapag-asawa at may mga anak na po, we allowed the inclusion of their beloved relatives, spouse and children. Kasama po iyan sa mandato natin kasi considered OFW family na po iyon ‘no. So, we will allow them and we will accommodate them.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Sam Medenilla, BusinessMirror.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Good afternoon. Kanina pong umaga, nag-issue po ng statement iyong DMW na mga 430 na iyong na-repatriate from sa Lebanon. Sa ngayon po, ilan pa po kaya iyong projected nating remaining Filipinos doon sa Lebanon?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Tama ka, Sam, ‘no. Actually, it’s 430 plus 28 iyong dependents nila so more or less po nasa halos 450 na po iyon ‘no. And our repatriation efforts began even before na nag-actual conflict po at lumala ngayon. We started way back in October of 2023, nakakamahigit 60 batches na po tayo ng repatriation ‘no. Iyon pong dapat na sinasabi ko kanina na September 25, 15 doon ang kasama ‘no kaya lang hindi nga po natuloy dahil na-cancel iyong kanilang flight kaya tayo kumuha ng isang chartered flight.

One hundred eleven, Sam, iyong susunod sana. Kaya we are expecting kapag mayroong landing rights iyong ating chartered plane ‘no, ang capacity noon is more than 300, we will be able to load them there tapos tutulungan po natin silang makauwi lahat.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Sir, iyong mga initial statement po, parang 11,000 daw po iyong estimated. So, ito, iyong minus po iyong 400, mga remaining po doon siguro mga 600 po?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Eleven thousand lahat po ng ating residente na OFWs and mga permanent migrants and temporary migrants sa buong Lebanon po ‘no. Iyong tinutulungan natin particularly nasa south part, iyong malapit po sa border ng Israel. Lahat po sila na-identify na natin at we tried to evacuate them away from the actual conflict ‘no. Iyong karamihan po noong 11,000 nasa taas pa po iyon, so hindi po sila masyadong affected.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Iyon na lang, sir, kung ilan na lang iyong Filipinos na nandoon sa borders na hindi pa na-evacuate, sir?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: No, nasa shelter na po sila. More than 111 po iyong nasa shelter natin and then another hundred plus iyong tinutulungan nating makakuha ng exit permits sa Immigration ng Lebanon para maisama natin sila doon sa 111.

Ang challenge doon, Sam, some of our OFWs na nasa employer pa, minsan ayaw payagan makauwi. Ayaw payagan, kinuha ang passport or itinago ang passport or iniwanan sa bahay tapos umalis iyong employer – iyon na-contact po natin. We reached out with international organizations. We were able to reach out also with the NGOs 'no. Ka-Zoom lang po namin kagabi iyong isang NGO, hindi ko na po babanggitin, at inalam po namin iyong mga na-contact nila at kami po ay nakikipagtulungan sa kanila para kunin iyong pangalan, address, contact number at ililikas po namin sila at nang sa ganoon makuha po natin.

Ang sitwasyon kasi on the ground is sarado na iyong mga kalsada dahil iyong mga debris, nandudoon na sa kalsada kaya nahihirapan po talaga iyong ating mga staff doon. And wala ng public vehicles na puwede mong sakyan, so ang kailangan po talagang magha-hire tayo; tayo na mismo ang lalapit at pupunta po sa kanila.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Eden Santos, Net 25.

SANTOS/NET 25: Usec., iyon pong mga binabanggit ninyong ayaw payagan ng kanilang mga employer, mga ilan po sila?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: A hand full po iyon. Pero ang maganda po, whether payagan sila o hindi, ang sabi namin sa kanila, importante iyong sarili ninyong kapakanan. Sumama na po kayo sa amin at kami na po ang bahalang kumausap sa employer ninyo. Huwag na kayong matakot, kung payagan man kayo o hindi, importante—kahit nga iyong walang dokumento, ang sabi namin, sumama na kayo sa amin, dadalhin namin kayo sa PE, sa Philippine Embassy, kukuhanan natin ng travel emergency documents para they will be able to—

SANTOS/NET 25: Ano po iyon, puwede nilang takasan iyong kanilang employer? Papaano po iyong gagawin nila?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Magpaalam man sila o hindi, ang importante po makuha natin sila. Kami na po ang bahalang makipag-usap sa employer.

SANTOS/NET 25: Pupuntahan po ninyo sila doon sa kanilang mga bahay?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Sa abot po ng aming makakaya.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Ann Soberano, Bombo Radyo.

SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Yes, sir. Sir, linawin ko lang ulit: Ilan po itong mga kababayan na natin na naiipit—iano ko lang iyong kay Eden, sir. Ilan po sila? Sinabi ninyo, iyong bilang po, estimate po ninyo itong mga kababayan natin na naiipit pa po sa mga employers nila?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Opo. Iyon pong Zoom namin kahapon, kagabi, inaalam po namin iyong eksaktong bilang. Pero mayroon na pong na-endorse sa amin, sila po iyong pina-priority namin. Kasi iyong iba nga, iniwanan na; iyong iba kinuha iyong kanilang pasaporte pero gusto na nilang lumikas. So sila po iyong ating inuuna. We reached out to them through the assistance of the NGOs and some international organizations para makuha natin.

SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Mga singkwenta ba sila, sir?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Naku, wala naman po.

SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Wala naman. Mga bente, ganoon po?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Mga lima hanggang sampu po.

SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Kumusta po iyong kalagayan nila, sir?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Okay naman po. Iyong iba, isinama ng employer, kunyari napunta sa bundok. Kaya lang siyempre, kahit ligtas ka doon, kapag iniwanan ka, iyong pakiramdam mo ay nag-iisa ka, wala kang alam kung papaano hahanap pa ng tulong. So, iyon po iyong napi-feel nila.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. We go back to Katrina Domingo, ABS-CBN.

DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, will the DMW recommend a temporary freeze order with regard to the hiring of Filipinos in Lebanon, Israel or Iran?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Yeah, we are no longer allowing the deployment of OFWs to Lebanon because it's already Alert Level 3. When Alert Level 3 is imposed, there is a voluntary repatriation; and under this stage, we no longer allow either direct hire or a returning worker to go back there.

Sa Israel po is Alert Level 2, we still allow the deployment of Filipino workers who are called BMs or Balik Manggagawa, but not direct hires. Hindi po iyong first time na aalis, hindi po natin papayagan.

DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, the October 7 anniversary is nearing in Israel, hyave we received any intelligence information with regard to possible threats that will mark the one year anniversary of the Hamas attack in Israel?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: We haven't received any intelligence report on that, and our DFA or the PE especially is in coordination with the appropriate authorities on this.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. No further questions. Last one, Tristan Nadalo, News Watch.

NADALO/NEWS WATCH: Sir, iyong exit visas, I think, isa po ito sa mga nagpapatagal din sa mga Filipino para makaalis. Are there any move to request sa Lebanese government to waive itong mga exit visas and other requirements for repatriation?

DMW USEC. OLALIA: You are right there, Tristan. The challenge is, government offices in Lebanon are closed. Kaya po ang ginawa ng ating labor attaché, si Labor Alex is, he reached out to this government authorities at nakiusap na lang sila, these are not ordinary times, and therefore, pumayag naman. Pumayag iyong immigration official na i-accommodate po, na i-process iyong remaining natin na mga OFWs na gustong umalis kaya lang walang exit permits from their immigration. So, kahit sarado po iyong Lebanese government offices doon, nakausap po ng ating labor attaché through some connections at ginagawa na po as we speak.

Q: (OFF MIC)

DMW USEC. OLALIA: Probably, a day. A day po kasi tulad sa atin, kapag aalis ka, iyong BI po is in-charge of processing your documents. Ganoon din po sa kanila.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, thank you so much. Thank you, Undersecretary Olalia and Repatriation Chief Millar of DMW and OWWA for prioritizing the safety and welfare of Filipino workers in the Middle East. Maraming salamat. And thank you, Malacañang Press Corps. This concludes our Press Briefing.

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