

# Combating Human Trafficking: The Philippine Experience

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## **I. Introduction**

Trafficking in the Philippines “does not only take place within the context of international labor migration, but also for the purpose of marriage, the local sex industry, and for commercial adoption or sexual exploitation of children.

One major daily reported that in the Philippines, “at least 50 women and children everyday fall victim to human traffickers.<sup>1</sup>” Young women are recruited from the provinces with promises of high paying jobs in cities here and abroad, but most end up in bars in the provinces, as training supposedly, to help them adjust as entertainers abroad. These young women are even forced to have sex with patrons.

According to GABRIELA, an NGO based in the Philippines, there were 400,000 women in prostitution in 1998. This figure excludes the unregistered ones, the seasonal prostitutes, overseas entertainers and victims of external trafficking.<sup>2</sup> One fourth of them are children.

Out of the 200,000 or so street children, some 60,000 sell their bodies. While up to 600,000 women and children are trafficked through the Internet in at least 50,000 websites<sup>3</sup>.

The victims of sex trafficking are usually poor and uneducated women and children who go abroad because they cannot make a living or achieve job security in the Philippines. While some women go abroad to work or marry, others work as "entertainers," a euphemism for prostitutes.

My discussion will focus more on trafficking of Filipino women within the context of labor migration.

## **II. Migration Trends in the Philippines**

The Philippines has a long history of overseas labor migration. From the 15 farm workers who left the Philippines to work in sugarcane fields in Hawaii in 1906, there are now almost 8 million Filipinos scattered in 192 countries all over the globe. In 2004, the Philippine government deployed 933,588 Filipinos for work overseas<sup>4</sup>.

From the United States, the market for Filipino migrant workers expanded to the Middle East in the 1970's. The 1980's marked further market expansion, with a heavy demand for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Entertainers were hired by Japan, medical practitioners were recruited by Canada and the United Kingdom, domestic workers were in demand in Europe, Hong Kong and Singapore.

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<sup>1</sup> See “Trafficking in Women and Children,” by Justice Florida Ruth Romero published in Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 22, 2005

<sup>2</sup> See "RP Has 400,000 Prostitutes," *TODAY*, 25 February 1998

<sup>3</sup> Sources: Gabriela, Institute for Social Studies and Action

<sup>4</sup> POEA

Up to the mid-1980s, the vast majority of migrant workers from the Philippines were men, but by the late 1980s, when the demand for service grew in the international arena, more women workers started to join the migrant work force. This era marked the feminization of migration.

### **III. Feminization of Migration**

In 1975, women only comprised 12% of workers who left for abroad, or some 2,275 women. In 1987, this figure increased to 47.2%, climbed to 69% in 2002, to a high of 75% in 2004<sup>5</sup>. Most of these Filipino women migrants render their services as domestic workers and many others as “Overseas Performing Artists” (OPAs).

In 2004, the number of newly hired service workers - such as domestic workers, household workers, caretaker, waiters and bartenders, etc. - expanded to 112,812 in 2004 from the previous level of 84,021 in 2003. These service workers, about 90% of whom were females, accounted for 36.20% of the total deployment of newly hired workers for the period.

During the same year, there was an increase in demand for professional and technical workers. Hiring of Filipino professional/technical and related workers went up to 92,987 from 78,956<sup>6</sup>. The proportion of service and professional/technical workers still continued to comprise the greater bulk of the total deployment of newly hired OFWs. It must be noted that workers belonging to these categories were women migrant workers, a significant portion of whom were medical workers (nurses and health care assistants), teachers and performing artists.

### **IV. Overseas Migration and Trafficking of Filipino Women and Children**

International sex trafficking remains the third largest source of profit for organized crime after narcotics and weapons. According to the US State Department, an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 women, men and children are trafficked across international borders each year<sup>7</sup>. Of the 600,000-800,000 people trafficked across international borders each year, 70 percent are female and 50 percent are children. The majority of these victims are forced into the commercial sex trade.<sup>8</sup>

Within the context of international migration, trafficking has flourished through the internet, through mail-order brides, through illegal recruitment, and through the deployment of overseas performing artists (OPAs), to name a few.

Mail-Order Brides. Estimates show that there are about 50,000 to 100,000 Filipinas who have signed up to matchmaking sites<sup>9</sup>, seeking romance or maybe a ticket out of poverty. A survey of about 200 different sites showed that about 70% of women listed in Southeast Asia were

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<sup>5</sup> POEA

<sup>6</sup> 2004 POEA Annual Report

<sup>7</sup> US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report 2004. The statistics are the most accurate available, but may represent an underestimation of trafficking on a global and national scale, given the complexity of the nature of trafficking.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters. “After mail-order brides, e-brides,” Philippine Star, 10 September 2005

Filipinas. Since 1986, some 55,000 Filipinas entered the United States and Japan as mail-order brides.<sup>10</sup>

The matching of Filipino women to foreigners through mail-order was banned in the Philippines in 1990 after the passage of the Anti-Mail Order Bride law, due to reports of widespread abuse of Philippine women in other countries. However, that move simply drove the mail-order business underground without significantly affecting the international trade.

Records from the Philippine Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) show that as of 2004, there were 3442 Filipinos married to Korean nationals, and the number continues to increase. Filipino women marry Korean men either through a mail-order bride service or through the Korean Unification Church, founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Moonie brides, as these women who are recruited through the Unification church are called, are often young women who are matched by church members to older Korean men, usually farmers in the provinces. Many of these young brides are shocked to find themselves working long and hard in the fields and at home, serving not only their husbands, but also their in-laws.

Father Glenn Jaron, a priest who runs the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center for Filipino Migrants in Seoul, said that due to language and cultural barriers, most brides end up suffering from abuse and violence.

Illegal Recruitment. The economic situation, socio-cultural context and the political situation in the Philippines have increased the vulnerability to exploitation of women and children. Wanting to earn money to get out of poverty, many women and children fall prey to false promises of jobs abroad by unscrupulous illegal recruiters. In many cases, the jobs promised them abroad are non-existent.

In August 2005, four Filipino women from Mindanao (southern Philippines) were rescued in Labuan, Malaysia. They applied for jobs as entertainers in Brunei but ended up in nightclubs in Labuan, Malaysia. The women claimed that they were sold by their recruiters for 3,000 ringgits (about US\$220) each to a club owner in Labuan. They did not receive compensation for two months, apart from their long hours of job. They were also not allowed to leave their apartment, and there were attempts to book them for sexual intercourse. They claimed that they were all covered under debt bondage.

Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) in Japan and Korea. Filipino entertainers abroad are called overseas performing artists (OPAs) by the Philippine government. This classification includes the composers, musicians and singers, choreographers and dancers, actors and stage directors, circus performers. The 2004 figures of the POEA indicated that 71,480 OPAs left the country to work abroad. Of this figure, 70,619 or 98% left for Japan and the rest were deployed in other countries.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) calculates that Japan's sex industry hosts about 150,000 foreign workers today, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) Japan reports that Philippines, Columbia and Thailand are the top source countries, although the

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<sup>10</sup> Source: ISSA

number of women from Russia, Korea and China has gone up. The 2005 US report cited that a significant number of the 71,084 Filipino women who entered Japan as entertainers in 2004 ended up in sex trade trafficking.

Several researches conducted by NGOs and scholars have documented the experiences of Filipino women entertainers in Japan and these studies attested to their persistent trafficking (DAWN, 1997, 2001, 2003; CATW, 2001; Ballestas, 1991; IOM, 2001; ILO, 2004).

The various tales of abuse and maltreatment abroad as told by the entertainers themselves should be a cause for alarm for a sending country like the Philippines. Cultural presentations, which were usually shown in the 70s and mid 80s by “real Filipino artists” in Japan have already changed in the passing of time. Let me cite to you the cases of Mary Joy and Mildred, both former entertainers in Japan, who are being assisted by DAWN.

Mary Joy was only 21 years old when she left to work as entertainer in Japan in 1995. At that time, one has to be 23 years old to qualify as an entertainer. Thus, she used an anomalous birth certificate and fake passport that were both fixed by her recruitment agency, which is licensed by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). Upon arrival, her passport and Artist Record Book<sup>11</sup> were taken by the manager of the club, which is a clear violation of Article 23 of Japan’s Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law.

She worked in a club in Gunma instead of a hotel in Takasaki as stated in her contract. This is what they call the flying booking practice. She underwent rigorous training in the Philippines but was never asked to dance during her six-month contract in Japan. Instead, she wore sexy clothes and sat beside her customers who would make sexual advances at her. She was also forced to engage in *dohan*, which requires an entertainer to go out on date with their male customers to entice them to become club regulars. Mary Joy said most of their customers mistake their consent to *dohan* as a tacit agreement to have sex. Thus, many of them become more exposed to possible sex trade, prostitution, and even rape. It is because aside from shopping and dining in with their customers, some women are also brought to private places where customers expect sexual services.

With all her documents taken from her by the promoter/club owner, women like Mary Joy have to comply with such practices in sheer desperation to earn and survive.

One time, Mary Joy was also made to stay out of the club by her manager in spite of the cold winter weather when she failed to get a customer for *dohan*. She promised to herself never to go back to such kind of entertainment work again.

When she returned home to the Philippines after her six-month contract, her reintegration process turned out to be difficult. She was subjected to malicious rumor when her Japanese

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<sup>11</sup> The Artist Record Book (ARB) is a document issued to performing artists that attests to their competence for the job. It contains information such as the artist’s name, birthday, thumb mark, color of eyes, height, weight and skills category. It also contains the picture of the artist and the record of his or her training, academic and skills tests, overseas employment and agency involved, and other relevant information that the Secretary of Labor may require. The ARB has been replaced by the Artist Accreditation Card (AAC) in 2004.

boyfriend came over and stayed with her and her family. She too became a victim of false promises by her partner who suddenly stopped communicating with her. Her few investments had also gone nowhere. Wanting to start anew, Mary Joy enrolled for a college degree but was looked down by her classmates and peers for being a former “Japayuki.”

Mary Joy has survived that difficult stage of her life when she joined DAWN in 1997. She is now an active member of DAWN as coordinator of the livelihood program known as Sikhay. She is also an advocate of women’s rights and director of DAWN’s Teatro Akebono’s women’s group. She has enrolled in a state university taking up Entrepreneurial Management, hopefully finishing this March 2005. But not all former entertainers are survivors like Mary Joy. Many of them have still yet to recover from the trauma of their Japan experience.

One of them is Mildred (not her real name). Mildred became psychologically disturbed after going through traumatic experiences which all started when she worked in Japan as entertainer in 1986. Coming from a poor family and the eldest in a brood of four, Mildred left for Japan to work as entertainer using a passport under a different name. She was only 17 years old then. She was supposed to work as a dancer in Osaka but was instead brought to a brothel in Nagoya where she was forced to give sexual services to her customers. When she was transferred to a club, Mildred thought that her agony would end. But she was wrong. With an expired visa, Mildred was again violated in her new work place. Apart from doing janitorial chores, she was forced to sit beside her customers and never performed on stage. One of her customers became her partner whom she chose to go out with on *dohan*. He got her pregnant twice but she had them both aborted. She also discovered that he was having an affair with another woman. Because of her traumatic experiences, Mildred became psychologically ill. On her third pregnancy, Mildred went back to the Philippines in 1994, already shattered and devastated. She was placed in a mental hospital for some time but that did not help her fully recover from the trauma.

Her agony likewise affected her Japanese-Filipino child who had to bear the negative impression made on his mother. This is not to mention the pain he has to endure just like the other JFCs for having absentee fathers, the ridicule and bullying from their peers for being products of mixed parentage with Japanese-sounding names and physical features that further set them apart from the other children.

Mildred is now fine. She is working in a municipal project in one of the towns of Metro Manila. But it took Mildred several years to recover from her traumatic experience. Mildred and her son continues to join the various activities of DAWN.

Mary Joy and Mildred are only two of our countless Filipino women who experienced such sad fate as entertainers in Japan. With such kind of work these women are forced to do, they also face the danger of acquiring HIV / AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases. This is a clear case of trafficking of our Filipino women entertainers in Japan. More so, Filipina entertainers in Japan are also subjected to numerous work violations such as long hours of club work, no day-off or leave even when sick, no health insurance or regular medical check-up and erratic payment of salary. They get paid at the airport prior to their flight back to Manila after their six months contract.

The situation of women entertainers in Korea is no different from the situation of women entertainers in Japan. In both cases, most of them entered the country legally, using an entertainer visa (E-6 in the case of Korea).

With the difficulty of obtaining an entertainer visa to Japan after the implementation of the new Japanese Immigration Policy<sup>12</sup>, it is said that the venue of Filipino entertainers has shifted to Korea.

Shiela, a 26-year old lass from Metro Manila, came to Fr. Glenn's center seeking assistance. She said she arrived in South Korea with a job contract as a singer. In the Philippines, she underwent training that qualified her to carry an artist record book. She entered Korea with the E-6 visa but ended up as a sexy dancer. Wearing a sexy outfit, she performed as one of the "dinky girls" in nightclubs located near the US military bases in the Pyongtaek area. Like most women working in nightclubs, Shiela had to sell at least 200 drinks every month to customers or risk the penalty of not receiving her monthly salary of 550,000 won (roughly US\$550).

We were in South Korea last August 25-29 this year. Together with Fr. Edwin Corros of ECMI and Fr. Glenn, we visited Tongducheon, an area near the US bases, and talked with some of the Filipino women entertainers working there. The women told us that most of them entered Korea using the E-6 visa. However, the work stipulated in the contracts they signed in the Philippines were violated. Many of them have their passports and alien registration cards withheld from them. A portion of their salary is also withheld to stop them from running away, and to coerce them to supplement their income through sexual labor. They also disclosed to us that in most clubs, there is a special area in the second floor or at the back where one can buy short time with a girl.

The living and working circumstances of these women provide the context for them to form relationships with their GI customers in the club. Some women run away from the clubs with their GI boyfriends, to get married or to live together.

We have to take note that the trafficking of foreign women that occurs in many parts of Korea involves US military personnel. Although US military personnel are banned from visiting certain areas in Korea, many still manage to visit clubs and other areas of prostitution.

#### **IV. Government Efforts to Curb Trafficking**

Let me cite some of the efforts made by the Philippine government to combat trafficking. Notable among the efforts of government to curb trafficking is the passage of Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act in 2003. This law was the first one passed in Southeast Asia, and it was hailed as one of the most comprehensive anti-trafficking laws passed.

This law defines trafficking in numerous ways. It makes illegal the "recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring, or receipt of a person, with or without the person's or victim's consent, within or across national borders for the purpose of exploitation such as sexual exploitation,

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<sup>12</sup> The new Immigration Policy of Japan took effect on March 15, 2005. The new law requires entertainers to have at least 2 years of job experience outside Japan or a 2-year formal course in the performing arts.

forced labor services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and removal or sale of organs or other similar acts.” Also, it makes illegal the use of threat or force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position. Introducing for money or other consideration, any Filipina to a foreigner as a possible spouse or offering any Filipina to a foreigner as a prostitute, as well as “maintaining or hiring a person to engage in prostitution or pornography” also fall under the category of “trafficking in persons.”

The Implementing Rules and Regulations of the law even called for the creation of an Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking in Persons, composed of several government agencies and NGOs, with the Department of Justice as the lead agency.

Aside from the Anti-Trafficking law, the Philippines has a Magna Carta for Overseas Workers (RA 8042), the Anti Mail-Order Bride law (RA 6955), an Anti-Child Abuse Law (RA 7610), and is a signatory to international instruments for the protection and welfare of women, children, and migrants.

There have also been efforts to convict and prosecute those who have violated the law. There are several agencies in government that are concerned with overseas migration (DOLE, OWWA, POEA, DFA), including illegal recruitment (DOJ, NBI, PNP, POEA). Although Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said that, “there has been no conviction yet for violation of the anti-trafficking law, owing to the judicial process guaranteeing due process of law, (although) a number have been convicted for trafficking-related offenses.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite all these efforts of the Philippine government, it has still landed in the Tier 2 Watch list of the US Trafficking in Persons report for the second year in a row, because of its “failure to show evidence of increasing efforts to convict traffickers,” and because the efforts made by the Philippine government were not enough. It is about time the government review its policies and enforce proper implementation of laws.

## **V. Role of NGOs in Combating Human Trafficking: The work of DAWN**

NGOs play an important role in helping combat trafficking of persons. Not all services are fully rendered by concerned government institutions, thus the need for civil society intervention. NGOs provide direct assistance to those in need.

DAWN is one of the leading NGOs in the Philippines working on the issues of women and migration. Founded in February 1996, DAWN focuses on assisting returning distressed migrant women from Japan and their Japanese-Filipino children (JFCs) who need to regain and strengthen their sense of dignity and self-worth and reclaim their wholeness. It aims to:

- 1) ensure the immediate reintegration of returning distressed migrant women with their families and the larger Philippine society;
- 2) create alternative livelihood opportunities for returning migrant women as an option to migration;
- 3) generate a strong public opinion against all forms of violence and discrimination inflicted on migrant women and children;

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<sup>13</sup> “RP making gains vs. human trafficking, says Arroyo,” Philippine Star, July 3, 2005

4) build a wide network of support for distressed Filipino migrant women and their families; and  
5) develop DAWN as a competent and self-sustaining support institution for distressed migrant women and their families.

DAWN provides a holistic approach in assisting its clients through its programs: Social Services, Alternative Livelihood, Research, Education and Advocacy, Networking.

The Social Services program serves as the point of entry in reaching out to these distressed women migrants and their JFCs. Foremost among our direct services is the case management and para-legal assistance to women and JFC members.

DAWN started with only 30 women and 42 JFCs in 1996. To date, we have handled about 350 cases of women and 440 Japanese-Filipino children. The number of women and children seeking assistance from DAWN increases everyday. We get referrals from the Embassy of Japan in Manila, some Philippine government agencies, as well as those who have read about us in the papers and heard about DAWN from radio and television programs that have featured the organization. Among the cases we assist are those concerning work contract violations, abuse and harassment in the work place, abandonment of Japanese husband and other marital concerns, JFC's right to paternal recognition and support, as well as the citizenship of the JFCs. DAWN also provides women and children with health care, educational assistance, counseling, airport/travel assistance, Manila-based DAWN Center for women returnees and their JFCs, lessons on Japanese culture and language, workshops and other get-together activities to further support their various social, mental, health, and emotional needs, among others.

Aside from direct services to women and children, DAWN also further establishes its role in the society through extensive information campaign, advocacy programs and partnership building. Among the effective means it utilizes are: print and broadcast media, its quarterly newsletter (SINAG), research, conferences, fora and study tours for local and foreign visitors interested on migrant issues, DAWN web site, and lobby work in the Upper and Lower Houses for the passage of bills beneficial to women and migrants, among others. DAWN-PMRW also lobbied before the Japanese government to intensify and strengthen its efforts to combat trafficking in persons. We are in constant touch with various Philippine, Japanese and other international agencies that are involved in anti-trafficking.

DAWN is also an active member of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), a civil society network that promotes the recognition, protection and fulfillment of the rights of Filipino migrants, and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW-AP). DAWN, PMRW, and the CATW-AP were among the NGOs who actively lobbied for the passage of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which was signed into law in 2003.

One of its major advocacy programs is *Teatro Akebono*, the theater group of DAWN women and children members that perform in the Philippines and in Japan. The stories especially written for the play depict the lives and personal experiences of DAWN members. The program does not only tap the acting and singing potentials of the participants but it has also become their source of empowerment, healing and recovery as it paves the way towards their discovery and development of skills. JFC members of Teatro Akebono also get the chance to discover and

appreciate their paternal roots during their Japan tour and also look forward to meeting their Japanese fathers whom they have never seen or talked to or have lost touch in a long time.

Bouncing back into society after a traumatic or distressing experience abroad is never easy. Thus, DAWN set up its own re-integration program called Sikap-Buhay or SIKHAY, DAWN's major alternative livelihood program. SIKHAY means striving for a better life or self-empowerment. Set up on March 2, 1996, the project serves a three-pronged objective: 1) as therapy for the women; 2) as training ground for entrepreneurial development and management; and 3) as a vehicle for advocacy for the continuing plight of migrant women. It has three project components: sewing, handloom weaving and tie-dye.

To date, DAWN has assisted 105 women in skills training in the different training centers after which they underwent in-house training at DAWN's SIKHAY. Apart from acquiring the skills, women are likewise trained to become efficient and responsible in handling tasks relevant to the program to further prepare them in managing their own projects in the future. As a result, some of them have already found work outside the program or have put up their own businesses.

From the 105 women trained, there are at present ten active Sikhay members, who produce quality items made of batik and other indigenous materials, tie-dyed shirts, as well as hand-woven items, which are marketed and sold in various local bazaars and in other countries especially in Japan through the support of our networks. This is the members' alternative source of income, which help provide the needs of their families.

## **VI. Recommendations**

As the number of Filipinos opting to work overseas increase, their contribution to the economy will also increase. But at the same time, problems related to migration, which includes trafficking, will continue.

Solving the problem of trafficking is as complex as looking at the dynamics of trafficking. What we are looking for is a framework that combines the economic, social and cultural rights of these discriminated trafficking victims. We must not also forget the perspective of poverty alleviation, since we also hope that by alleviating poverty, we could end the vicious cycles of migration and trafficking. After all, the issues of poverty and unemployment that have been plaguing the country partly explains why many Filipino women choose not to complain about the many violations committed against them in their work places in Japan and Korea. They surrender their fate to demeaning circumstances abroad rather than giving up their financial gain, which, notably, also benefit the Philippine economy.

1. ***Migrants in the Labour Market.*** During its inception, the Philippine overseas employment program was envisioned as a temporary program designed to promote economic growth within the country, generate foreign revenues from mandatory remittances, and reduce levels of unemployment and underemployment. To date, overseas employment has become a state policy because of poverty and the lack of decent and gainful job opportunities and livelihood. Migration should be a choice and not a necessity, but in the case of the Philippines, it has become a forced and first option for many Filipinos.

There is a need for the Philippines to focus its energies more on reviving its domestic economy in order to create more jobs and livelihood opportunities for its men and women. Equal importance should be given to the export of labor and local employment as a development strategy. The State should also offer alternatives to overseas employment, like encouraging livelihood projects and extending assistance such as capital formation, counseling and training.

2. ***Migration and Development.*** Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are partners of government in development and nation-building. For many years, their remittances have helped buoyed the sagging Philippine economy.

The primacy of protection and welfare of OFWs remains an indispensable policy and cannot be compromised. The government has the legal and moral responsibility to protect OFWs from the perils posed by overseas employment.

There is a need for the identification of legal and practical mechanisms with which to optimize for the benefit of the country the experiences, trainings, knowledge and information gained by Filipinos who worked abroad upon their return. There is a need to strengthen the re-integration programs for returning migrants. Trade and investment incentives must be extended to them and their families. The government should empower OFWs professionally, thus enabling them to acquire new information, skills and technology useful for reintegration program. Remittances can be tapped to support the creation of cooperatives or source of investments.

3. ***Irregular Migration.*** States should address the factors that promote irregular migration and take action against recruiters and employers who propagate irregular migration.

Information dissemination is necessary. In the Philippines there is a dearth of data on the state of human trafficking because of the following reasons: the underground nature of trafficking, the stigma placed on victims of sexual exploitation, the lack of name for the problem at the community level, lack of awareness of acts of trafficking as violations of human rights, thus the low rates of reporting, lack of awareness that NGOs and government agencies can provide intervention and document the cases. It is therefore necessary to provide information to the people about the issue of trafficking, including the rights of women and children.

With regards to the issue of human smuggling and trafficking, countries should be more vigilant and perpetrators should be apprehended and prosecuted.

4. ***Migrants in Society.*** Migrants contribute to the socio-cultural, political and economic well-being of both the labor sending and receiving countries. As such they must be given due recognition and protection in terms of socio-cultural and economic, political policies and programs.

Migrant integration based on equal opportunities and non-discrimination policies and practices for both citizens and migrants is laudable and paves the way for tension-free harmonious multi-cultural society.

Japan, Korea, or any other receiving country, should also give equal protection to our Filipino women. Though it is clearly stated in their laws that foreign workers are equally protected in their country, this is not what happens in the case of our women. One reason could be the distinction given to entertainers as “guests” and not as workers. Or while it recognizes entertainers as part of the labor force, full and strict monitoring and implementation of the present rules and policies are yet to benefit our Filipino women there.

States should strengthen the pre-departure and post-arrival orientations and comprehensive briefing of migrants from the country of origin and destination, respectively, to facilitate adjustment and acculturation.

5. ***Migration and Human Rights.*** We should also look into the issue of the vulnerability of our women in the migration process. Women, especially those in the domestic service and entertainment industry are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Despite the passage of several laws for the protection of women and migrants, many fall prey as victims of human trafficking. There are many Filipino women working in Japan and Korea as “entertainers” whose jobs do not actually require them to sing or dance. Rather, they perform hostessing jobs.

The Philippines is a signatory to many international instruments for the protection of women, workers and migrants. It is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. The said convention is already being enforced. However, the 33 countries<sup>14</sup> that have ratified it are sending countries; no receiving country has signed it.

We should lobby for the ratification by the receiving countries of international instruments for the protection of migrant workers and their families.

6. ***National, Regional and International Governance.*** The protection of Filipino nationals, wherever they may be should be a paramount duty of the State. With the current overseas situation, it is necessary for government to regulate and monitor the migration industry.

Government has to review its policy on overseas migration because it puts Filipino women at risk when government agencies promote jobs for women overseas workers that carry low pay, low status, and exposure to sexual exploitation and trafficking. Most Filipino overseas workers are employed either as domestic workers or "entertainers." Regulating the "entertainment"-oriented employment of Filipino women in Japan, for example, essentially promotes racist and sexist stereotypes and treatment, since mainly Filipino women perform what are widely regarded as demeaning, socially unacceptable and economically non-viable activities.

We also see the need for more participation of the migrant sector and civil society in governance. Government cannot do it alone. Government’s partnership with the private sector, the unions, the NGOs/Civil Society, and the media in the area of information dissemination and education of the public should also be recognized.

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<sup>14</sup> On September 16, 2005, Lesotho became the 33<sup>rd</sup> country to ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of the Families

The Philippines has many good laws and policies related to migration and overseas Filipino workers and migrants. In fact, its laws and policies are models for other sending countries. We have one of the best, if not the best, anti-trafficking law in the world. However, implementation is very much lacking. Good implementation means the people know and understand the law, the rules are followed and enforced properly, and no one is exempt from it.

At the International level, there is a need to pursue more bilateral agreements with receiving countries. There is the need to pursue bilateral negotiations on social security and health and safety issues with receiving states and likewise multilateral initiatives with UN agencies and donor agencies at the regional and international levels to facilitate social dialogues to address mutual migration issues between and among sending and receiving countries, thereby making labor migration as a potent tool to bring about peace and security to OFWs, their families, their country and the international communities as a whole. Sharing of information and best practices would definitely help in combating trafficking in persons. Broader consultation, cooperation and sharing of information among all stakeholders are called for.

Overseas migration is here to stay. Migration has considerably contributed to the Philippine economy, especially in terms of the billions of remittances sent by OFWs. But the social costs of migration are painful reminders that overseas migration cannot be a substitute for national development. Once the country is developed, then it can provide jobs, competitive wages, and livelihood opportunities to its people. Once the country is developed, then migration would become an option and not a solution or a means to escape from poverty for many. The challenge is therefore for the government to provide meaningful and productive jobs at home that will entice its citizens to stay put and help develop the country.