



SUMMARY

Rights Corridor Dialogues has invited Ricardo Casco, Labour Migration Specialist/Consultant, formerly – International Labour Organisation (ILO); International Migration Organisation (IOM); Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) to a one-on-one interview on the much talked-about topic in the Philippines today – the creation of the Department of Overseas Filipinos (DOFil), a centralized all-migrant service institution, on Friday (May 07).

The online discussion was streamed live on Rights Corridor Facebook page and uploaded on Twitter and Rights Corridor website. [Watch full video.](#)

Listening in to the one-on-one interview of Mr. Casco, who later gave their takes on the interesting topics were distinguished personalities both from the Philippine government and non-government organisations and the academia, including Philippine Ambassador to New Zealand, Jesus “Gary” S. Domingo; Philippine Consul General in Dubai and Northern Emirates, Paul Raymund Cortes; Philippine Labour Attache in Dubai and Northern Emirates, Felicitas Bay; Director of the Overseas Filipinos Program at PhilHealth, Chona Yap; former International Labor Organization (ILO) Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Thetis Mangahas; Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of the Philippines, Jean Franco; Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) Executive Director Carmelita Nuqui; Sinapan Samydorai, Regional Coordinator of Taskforce on ASEAN Migrant Workers; Dr. Stefan Rother, researcher and lecturer at the Department of Political Science, University of Freiburg, Germany; Dr. Sophie Henderson, migration policy researcher and environmentalist.

OBJECTIVE

The one-o-one interview and forum titled: *“Reorganising Labour Migration Governance in the Philippines: Which Way?”* aimed to discuss the Philippine state’s proposed establishment of a centralised all migrant- service institution, which raises critical questions about the true nature and effectiveness of the Philippine state model and the domestic and foreign policy objectives of the government, as well as its implications on migrant welfare protections during COVID19 pandemic and in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Casco identified media influence, lack of evidence based engagement and irregular migration as some of the core issues persistently faced by the Philippine state in managing labor migration. “Migration is a sensitive issue. It is ever a cross-cutting. There are so many cultural

ramifications. In many occasions we've been so unilateral and that becomes the basis of our regulations. We have so much due public expectations," said Casco.

Casco stressed that government agencies in the Philippines as well as the diplomatic missions abroad have already been performing their functions well in protecting the rights and welfare of overseas Filipinos that having a new agency is no longer necessary.

"I find it so hard to believe that there are those who perceive that the domestic labour administration needed to be separated from the overseas employment. Overseas employment only happens when your domestic employment fails. And when overseas migrants come home, we need to reintegrate them. How could you separate them?"

Consul General Cortes pointed out that the negative assessment of overseas Filipinos of the services rendered by the mission posts and the Philippine Overseas Labour Offices (POLOs) in general have resulted in the conception of a new migration agency, despite that fact that the Philippines continues to be recognised by other governments to be a good global model in terms of promoting and protecting the rights and welfares of Filipino migrant workers.

"I agree that for a lot of countries let's say in Dubai, many just look up to the way the Philippines has come up with a system of helping its nationals. The European countries are even very, very surprised of how we have come to terms on how to help (our countrymen) effectively and efficiently, at that," said Consul General Cortes.

For her part, Labour Attache Bay said that admittedly the existing governmental system needs some fundamental reforms. "Maybe, we need to address the issue of trying to figure what is not working in the current system instead of creating a new department."

"We also have to put merit in fitness in the job. I guess that is one (reason) why some people criticise or questioned the people in the government. So I think there should also be an "up-skilling" of the people in government should the the DOFil be established for people to fit in their job in DOFil," said Atty. Bay.

Expressing a strong opinion against the DOFil creation, Ms. Mangahas, said that the timing is not good. "We are global leaders but leadership is not static. You have to consistently and constantly improve yourselves to be able to retain that leadership position. And I think in recent years, I'm not sure if we have kept the edge when it comes to new programs and new initiatives that are realistic and achievable."

"At some point, I should say, the true success factor is if we don't need an overseas employment programme. The fact that it continues to exist, then maybe it's an unrealistic goal; that you would want it to be smaller rather than bigger at this point in time," said Ms. Mangahas.

Ms. Nuqui, who is also part of the migrants' watchdog Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), said her groups were among those who opposed the idea of creating a new agency when it was first conceptualised by the Duterte administration in 2016, along with other government departments –

Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Budget and Department of Finance, citing the issue of funding as one of the main concerns.

“The position of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch is not to have DOFil. For PMRW, we think that if the issue is to improve the coordination of the OFWs between the different (government) departments, then we can always do that. Instead of creating a new one,” stressed Ms. Nuqui.

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