

19 November 2012 - The Philippine Embassy in Hanoi has encountered a number of cases where Filipinos who enter Vietnam as tourists have ended up in severe working and living conditions.

A 32-year-old Filipina came to Hanoi on November 4 to check her prospects as an English language teacher at the Blue Ocean Language School, which alleged to be associated with Lincoln School of Management. From the airport, she was driven 100 kilometers from the city, her passport confiscated and was immediately made to teach a class of about 20 students without a contract and a work permit.

"I was not allowed to go anywhere. From the classroom, I had to return to my room and the building was locked. I was even asked to wear sexy clothes," she told the Embassy. She escaped on November 12 and managed to seek the Embassy's help in retrieving her passport. Her case is not the first, according to the Embassy.

"I advise Filipinos wishing to work in Vietnam to carefully check the background of the employer, review the terms of their employment contract, go through proper channels including the POEA and secure a work permit," according to Ambassador Jerril Santos, Philippine Ambassador to Vietnam.

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is the agency tasked to oversee the deployment of Filipino workers overseas. With the assistance of the Bureau of Immigration, it has stepped up its procedures of issuing and monitoring overseas employment certificates to help stem human trafficking and illegal recruitment.

Recent media reports that Vietnamese schools are recruiting English language teachers have increased the phenomenon of tourists-workers among Filipinos in Vietnam. Vietnamese authorities are reportedly embarking on a pilot project to hire Filipino English teachers who are described by those supportive of the plan as "among the best in the region" but as "cheap English teachers" by those critical about it. Apart from the pilot project, several schools have independently advertised in the Internet of their need for English teachers.

Teachers in Hanoi attest to the existence of three tiers of salaries for English teachers. Native speakers receive more than twice those received by Filipinos while Vietnamese receive a measly 2% salary of native speakers. The discrimination is also evidenced by the fact that Filipino teachers are reportedly being asked to wear colored contact lenses, dye their hair blonde and make their skin fairer in order to approximate the look of native speakers.

The Philippine Embassy said that there must be an orderly process of recruiting these teachers to ensure that only qualified ones are deployed. “We also want to ensure that they have favorable working and living conditions in Vietnam,” Ambassador Santos added. END