

Second Global Summit of Filipinos in Diaspora

27 February 2013, Dusit Thani Manila

I wish to congratulate the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) and its co-organizers, the Global Filipino Diaspora Council (GFDC), the US Pinoys for Good Governance (USP4GG) and Youth Leaders in the Diaspora (YouLeaD) for successfully convening the Second Global Summit of Filipinos in Diaspora.

This initiative has been a milestone in championing the contributions and achievements of more than nine million overseas Filipinos.

The Philippine Government is actively engaging overseas Filipinos to participate and be involved in issues of national concern. As early as thirty (30) years ago, the Philippine government has recognized the potential of overseas Filipinos as partners of government towards national development, and has created the CFO with the mandate to provide services to overseas Filipinos. The CFO is the lead agency in creating and managing comprehensive, integrated programs in order to maximize the potential contributions of overseas Filipinos to the country's development. In particular, the CFO has commenced the Diaspora to Development Initiative which has specific programs for overseas Filipinos. Among these programs are the *Business Advisory Circle*, which assists overseas Filipinos set up business partnerships in the country, the *Alay Dunong Program*, which systematizes the skills and technology exchange between overseas Filipinos and the mother country, the *Diaspora Investment*, a program where new financial instruments are developed for overseas Filipinos to invest in, and *Return and Reintegration*, a program to assist returning overseas Filipinos to successfully reintegrate into local life. Other programs are the Diaspora Philanthropy, Balik-Turo Exchange Program, Global Legal Assistance Program, Medical Missions, and Arts and Culture Exchange.

[\[1\]](#)

Our foreign service posts are partners of CFO in communicating with and mobilizing overseas Filipinos to participate in these programs.

In addition, Posts are taking a pro-active approach to encourage overseas Filipinos to actively participate in the country's overseas voting and dual citizenship program. Posts have been vigorously engaged in the recently concluded Overseas Absentee Voting Registrations [\[2\]](#) , making almost a million of Filipinos abroad eligible to participate in the forthcoming National Elections. Posts are also promoting and processing applications for dual citizenship to enable natural-born Filipinos to retain or reacquire their Filipino citizenship and enable them to enjoy rights and privileges of Filipino citizens

In line with the Third Pillar of Philippine Foreign Policy, the Philippine Government continues to prioritize the welfare and protect the rights of Filipinos abroad. In fact, the promotion of the interests and protection of the rights of overseas Filipinos has been an integral part of how the Department of Foreign Affairs conducts international relations, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

In cooperation with other government agencies and international organizations, the Department of Foreign Affairs has repatriated a total of 14,203 OFWs from areas affected by civil strife or natural disasters from 2011 up to the present. In particular a total of 3,457 Filipinos were repatriated from war-torn Syria, since the uprising began in 2011. Despite the ongoing crisis in Syria, the Philippine Embassy in Damascus continues its operations in order to evacuate the Filipinos who remain in the country and ensure their safety and well-being.

Since 2006, 746 Filipinos who fell victims to piracy have been released and repatriated, through the joint efforts of our Embassies abroad, manning agencies, principals and other concerned government and non-government agencies.

In the past year, 122 Filipinos who were victims of human trafficking and illegal recruitment were assisted by the Department of Foreign Affairs through our Embassies and Consulates abroad. Sworn statements obtained through the Foreign Service Posts have been forwarded to the appropriate government agencies in the Philippines for investigation, case buildup and filing of charges against the traffickers/recruiters.

In an effort to provide better legal assistance to overseas Filipinos, the Department is also revising the Guidelines for the Utilization of the Legal Assistance Fund. In 2011, 129 OFWs were provided legal assistance from the Legal Assistance Fund, while 541 OFWs were assisted

in 2012. With the revised guidelines, we hope to maximize the use of the Fund and improve the assistance extended to overseas Filipinos in enforcing and protecting their rights and obtaining redress for their injuries.

The Department continues to monitor death penalty cases of Filipinos abroad and to provide appropriate legal and consular assistance. In 2011, 28 OFWs with death penalty cases were assisted. In 2012, there was a total of 130 OFWs with death penalty cases, and of these, 40 were subsequently commuted to life or fixed term imprisonment.

Needless to say, these are only some of the few things that we do. As the Philippines continues to prioritize the rights and welfare of our *kababayans* abroad, I would like to highlight several initiatives which the Philippines has pushed for in the national and regional level to empower our overseas Filipinos.

The *Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP)*, in partnership with our posts, has conducted financial learning campaigns or FLCs [\[3\]](#) since 2006. The FLCs aims to educate our overseas Filipinos, as well as their beneficiaries on how to utilize remittances in order to increase savings and how to direct the funds to investments such as business ventures. To date, at least 52 campaigns have been held benefitting more than six thousand overseas Filipinos and their families.

The FLC program has also been staged in other countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Another initiative is the PhilPaSS REMIT System. Launched in 2010, this innovative remittance system has been successful in minimizing the remittance costs of Filipinos abroad, providing a safer and faster credit to the accounts of beneficiaries, as well as providing an efficient feedback mechanism in informing the remitter of the status of the remittance.

Given the success of this initiative, the Philippines has urged ASEAN to develop an ASEAN-wide system for migrant workers which could also be complemented with financial planning education for migrant workers to maximize their savings and investment options.

The protection of the human rights of our overseas Filipinos is also of utmost importance especially vis-à-vis combating trafficking in persons. As a starting point, the Philippines convened the 1st ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) National Consultation Meeting on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) from a Human Rights Perspective in September 2012. This consultation has gathered government experts, civil society organizations and representatives from foreign missions to brainstorm on the best practices in implementing a rights-based approach in addressing the issue of trafficking in persons.

The Philippines is bringing this initiative to the regional level through the Regional Workshop on Trafficking in Persons: From a Human Rights Perspective which is slated in July 2013.

As the Lead Shepherd of the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, the Philippines, together with Indonesia, has also been working on the finalization of the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP). The ACTIP aims to provide a framework for regional cooperation to counter, prevent and suppress trafficking in persons, particularly paying attention to women and children.

To further intensify efforts towards promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers in the Philippines and in the region, the Philippines adopted a new Qualification Framework [\[4\]](#) which contains sets of training regulations for Filipinos that prescribe competency standards for various qualifications. The Qualification Framework is targeted to align with international qualifications framework to support the national and international mobility of Filipino workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of Philippine qualifications with those of other countries.

The Philippines also ratified in August 2012 the International Labour Convention No. 189 on decent work for household service workers (HSWs). The Philippines is the first Asian country to commit itself to the respect and implementation of the new ILO labor standard that was adopted at the International Labour Conference in Geneva on 16 June 2011. [\[5\]](#) This historic document is one big step in our fight against discrimination and abuses of HSWs.

I would also like to stress the importance of reintegration programs for our overseas Filipino workers. One of these is the Php 2 Billion OFW Reintegration Program Fund. [\[6\]](#) From June 2011 to August 2012, 410 loan applications of 432 OFW beneficiaries were approved, amounting to P 261.71 million.

The “Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay!” Program ^[1] is also another initiative wherein beneficiaries receive a package of entrepreneurial assistance in the form of training provided either by Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) or the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and a Php 10,000 capital to start a home-based business.

As exemplified by these programs, the Philippines has been a consistent pioneer in ensuring that overseas Filipinos are well taken care of and are a valuable part of the Philippine economy and society. The expertise and experience they bring back to the country can only be countered by equally excellent services and mechanisms that will ensure their welfare and protection.

I am confident that we will continue to work tirelessly through mutual cooperation and innovative actions to secure that the diaspora of Filipinos will continue to benefit the country and that we will maintain the stature of the Philippines as a staunch advocate of the rights of migrant workers in the world community.

Maraming Salamat!

^[1] www.cfo.gov.ph

^[2] *The total number of new OAV registrants for the 2013 elections reached 398,554. Adding this figure to the stock total of 589,830 results in the grand total of 988,384 2013 registrants* .

^[3] *Source: BSP inputs for the 21st ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in November 2012.*

[4] Executive Order 83 signed by President Aquino on 1 October 2012 institutionalized the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF). The Framework aims to adopt national educational standards and levels. TESDA, DepED and CHED were tasked to craft detailed descriptions for the qualification levels.

[5] NEDA inputs for the 21st ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in November 2012.

[6] DOLE, Inputs to the President’s SONA, 07 June 2012.

[7] DOLE, <http://www.bwsc.dole.gov.ph/bwscweb/news-and-features/be-your-own-boss-with-a-easy-to-pay-loan-from-the-p2-b-reintegration-program-fund-baldoz-urges-ofws> (Accessed 18 September 2012).