

# New Migrant FOCUS



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Another knockout punch for our new economic heroes was delivered by no less than the President himself, Erap Estrada.

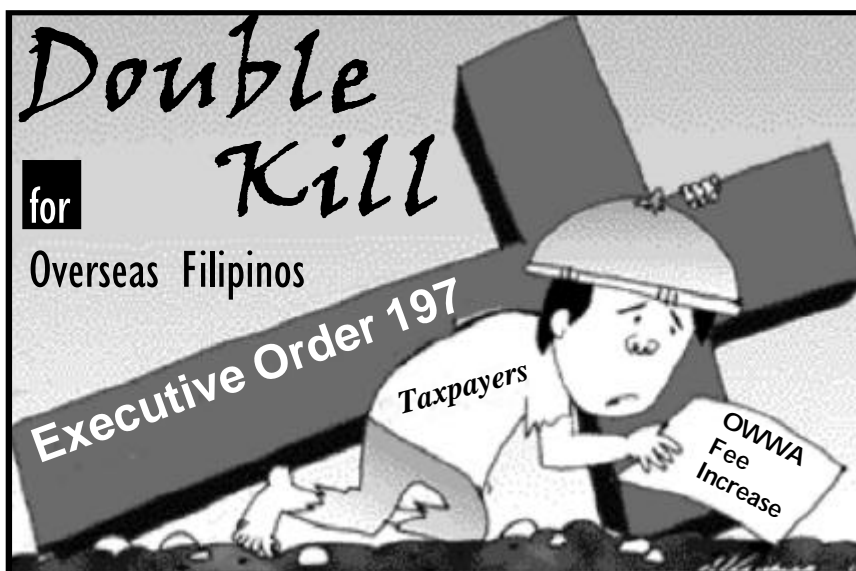
Effective August 1, 2000, the Philippine Consulate General increased their fees for Authentication and Notary services to HK\$212.50 from HK\$170.00. Because of the increases, other consular services will also increase. For example, the authentication of employment contracts for domestic helpers increased from HK\$255.00 to HK\$297.50 because of the HK\$85.00 "verification" fee on top of the authentication fee. Increase of fees in notary services was reflected in fees for securing Power of Attorney, Affidavit of Loss and other affidavits.

These increases in consular fees will adversely affect migrant Filipinos in Hong Kong and in other countries. In Hong Kong where the majority of Filipinos are working as domestic helpers and considered as the lowest paid among the territory's expatriate community, the increases are an additional burden for them. With all the numerous fees already being collected from migrant Filipinos before and after leaving the country, the least the government can do is lower the fees. And because OFWs are regular applicants of numerous government "services", they are the ones to receive the worst of this presidential order.

The increase in fees is the result of President Estrada's Executive Order 197 (EO-197) issued last January 13, 2000. EO-197 authorizes all government agencies to increase fees and other charges by not less than 20 percent to increase government revenues. This executive order covers all government agencies locally and overseas through Philippine diplomatic posts.

According to one congressman, the increase in fees was not meant to recoup administrative expenses in the processing of permits and affidavits but to profit from their issuance. Clearly, this executive order is a direct attack on Filipino people's livelihood.

With the implementation of Overseas Workers Welfare Administration's (OWWA) Resolution 99-016 just around the corner, migrant Filipinos will get a double kill from the Estrada government. Ironically, it comes



together with his hypocritical proclamation of the year 2000 as the year of the OFWs (overseas Filipino workers). According to one newspaper article, OWWA Resolution 99-016 seems to be the OWWA's answer in compliance with Erap's EO-197.

Because of this, the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), an alliance of 25 migrant organizations, is gearing for a bigger battle in the coming months. UNIFIL is currently gathering signatures from Filipinos in Hong Kong to oppose the impending implementation of the OWWA Resolution 99-016 more commonly known as the annual collection of US\$25 (HK\$200) OWWA membership fee. The resolution was supposedly implemented last July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 but was deferred due to pressures from organizations spearheaded by UNIFIL. OWWA is aiming to implement the notorious resolution starting January 1, 2001.

The campaign against the said resolution is gaining momentum in Hong Kong and is becoming popular among the Filipino community. Aside from UNIFIL, the Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society (ATIS) and the Cordillera Alliance (CORALL), two major federations of Filipino migrant organizations in Hong Kong, also support the campaign. UNIFIL is now going to include EO-197 as one of their major campaign together with the OWWA Resolution.

With the Estrada government aiming to collect P24 billion in fees and other charges, there are possibilities that increases will soon cover most of the government "services" at home and abroad. The government's exactions from migrant Filipinos will intensify and soon, they will also feel the financial pressure from their dependents in the Philippines.

We migrant Filipinos should therefore participate in all efforts to counter all of Erap's eruptions. To defend our livelihood is just even if it would mean the ouster of the country's president.

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## EDITORIAL

## How Long Will the List Go?

The list gets longer and the government is not doing anything about it.

Joselito Alejo is a native of Malolos, Bulacan. He was a former driver in the Philippines who tried to make ends meet with his meager earnings. He was forced to work in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in order to support his family. He was detained for trumped up charges of killing his employer and is currently facing death sentence. He tried to seek the help of the Philippine government representatives but was given the usual turnarounds and token gestures of assistance.

The list gets longer while the government proudly announces year 2000 as the Year of Migrant Filipinos.

Mary Jane Ramos is currently languishing in jail in United Arab Emirates. She is facing the death penalty by beheading. Her case was brought to the attention of Migrante International by her friend. Despite the request for immediate actions, the government still has to answer to the demands of Migrante International and Ramos' families.

The list gets longer while the government intensifies its extortionist schemes on Filipino migrant workers with the EO 197 and the OWWA Resolution 99-016 to supposedly improve the non-existent services it should be providing to them.

Darius Pileo died thirteen days after working at the Chung Hwa Chemical Factory in Taiwan which manufactures photo films. Danilo Tagactac and four other Filipino compatriots were hospitalized due to chemical exposure which is also the suspected cause of Pileo's death. The government, meanwhile, instead of helping the victims and protecting the rights of migrant workers in Taiwan have collaborated with the Taiwanese government by agreeing to go through the Taiwanese Council of Labor Affairs before assisting distressed Filipino migrants. Moreover, they have planned to legalize the broker's fee which has made the lives of Filipino migrants in Taiwan miserable.

The list gets longer while the government touts the migrant workers as the "New Economic Heroes" because of the billions of dollars worth of remittances which have been saving the ailing economy for decades.

More than 39,000 migrants from the Middle East are still awaiting for their just compensation due to the Gulf War. Though, the United Nations has already released US\$5.5 billion for them, the government continues to withhold their money. Worse, DFA Undersecretary Benjamin Domingo even earned US\$363,000 worth of bank interest in his personal account from the fund which rightfully belongs to the migrants.

The list gets longer while the government remains lethargic on the sufferings of migrant Filipinos all over the world.

Glenda Giron-Lorio, Felicidad Til-Adan, Sarah Balabagan, John Aquino, Delia Maga, Flor Contemplacion, stranded workers in Riyadh and hundreds of jailed OFWs in the middle east and other parts of the world.

While the list gets longer, the government continues to sink down into the pits of hypocrisy. Its declaration of protecting the rights and wellbeing of migrant Filipinos remains to be a mere lipservice in the face of the mounting cases of human rights abuses against the OFWs.

While the list gets longer, migrant Filipino have no other recourse but to fight back.

*Excerpt from Migrante-International  
Press release  
August 24, 2000*

### Estrada administration ignores stranded workers in Saudi

The hundreds of stranded workers in Saudi Arabia are being ignored by the Estrada administration, says Migrante International.

In 1997, more than 2,000 stranded workers took actions in their hands by occupying the Philippine embassy offices in Riyadh. Because of their mass actions, the government was forced to pay for their repatriation.

But today, the government is deaf to their needs. Instead of ensuring that their basic needs are met while stranded in Saudi or seeing to it that they are repatriated immediately - the government leaves the workers to their own resources. So, many wander the streets of Saudi looking

for a place to sleep or food to eat. Some even go so far as having to sell their own blood just so they can have money for food.

"We slept on concrete floors inside sweltering rooms with no ventilation. I also had to sell my blood for food," said Narsisso Dela Cruz, a former driver in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Dela Cruz returned to the Philippines at the end of July, after almost four months stranded in Saudi. While there, he was also jailed for 28 days.

Migrante International said the 29 migrants on Saudi death row and the hundreds of others who remain stranded is a slap in the face of the Filipino people. How many more must die or suffer in the streets of Saudi before they are reunited with their loved ones in the Philippines, said Mr. Legaspi.

Migrante International vowed to continue to heighten its campaign for the stranded workers and those in death row until justice is attained by them and their families. #

*According to Migrante International, there are at least 596 stranded workers in Saudi (as of May 4, 2000) and currently, it has a partial list of 127 names of stranded workers.*

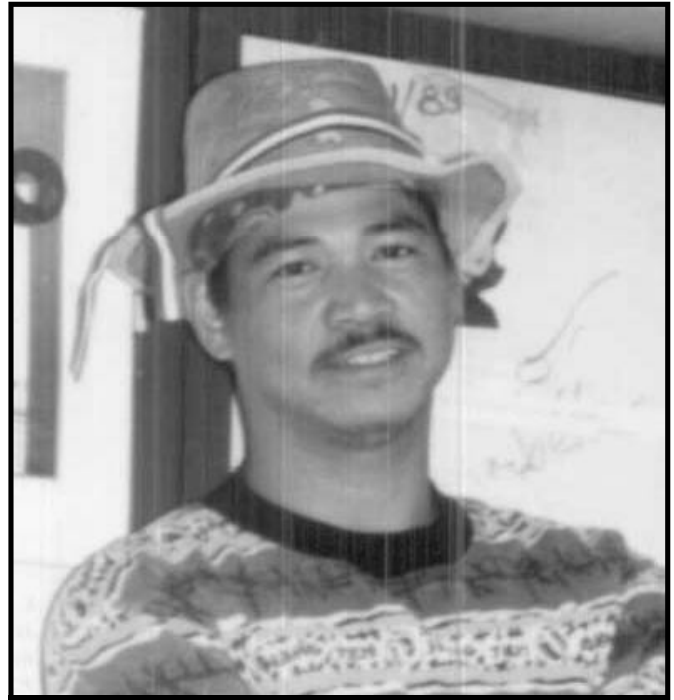
# Kampanya upang iligtas ang isang kababayan

Ni Ariel Bagang

*Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrant Filipinos*

**M**araming Pilipino ang ngayo'y nasa bingit ng kamatayan sa Saudi Arabia. Nahatulan silang mapugutan ng ulo dahil sa umano'y kasalang kriminal. Ngunit hindi lahat ng mga Pilipinong nasa death row sa Saudi Arabia ay nakagawa ng kasalanan upang harapin ang malagim na kamatayan. Ilan o kalakhan sa kanila ay napagbintangan lamang. Kasalaukuyang umaabot sa 13 ang bilang ng mga Pilipinong nakatakdang pugutan ng ulo sa Saudi Arabia. Dahil sa kapabayaang pamahalaang Pilipinas, tiyak na ang kanilang kasasapitan.

Isa rito si Joselito Alejo, kasalukuyang nakapiit sa Malaz Jail sa Riyadh sa kasong pagpatay sa isang Saudi national. Si Alejo ay tubong Lumang Bayan, ng Plaridel, Bulacan at mayroong anim na anak. Tumakas siya sa kanyang amo dahil hindi naging maganda ang naging kalagayan niya. Habang stranded sa Saudi Arabia, naging kaibigan niya na si Fahad Al-Otaiba, isang pulis sa Saudi.



Joselito Alejo, tubong Lumang Bayan, Plaridel, Bulacan ay di-makatarungang nakakulong at nakahanay sa death row sa Saudi Arabia

Noong 1997, pinaslang si Al-Otaibi. Hinuli at ikinulong si Alejo sa bartolina ng Malaz jail sa Riyadh noong Agosto 10, 1997. Napilitan siyang tumestigo sa pagpasalang ng kanyang kaibigan dahil pinahirapan. Gayunpaman, dahil ang mga pumaslang ay nakauwi na sa Pilipinas, sa kanya ibinintang ang krimen. At upang lalo pa siyang mapiit sa bilangguan, sinampahan din siya ng kasong drug trafficking.

Katulad ng iba pang mga kaso ng mga Pilipino sa Saudi Arabia at iba pang bansa, hindi tumulong ang pamahalaang Pilipinas sa kanilang kaso. Sa katunayan, mula nang makulong si Alejo, hindi man lang siya nadalaw ng kahit sinong kinatawan sa Embahada ng Pilipinas. Noong Hulyo 1, 1998, sumulat si Alejo, kasama ang kanyang mga kasamahan sa kulungan kay Pangulong Joseph Estrada upang humingi ng tulong. Gayunman, wala ring tugon si Erap.

Anim na beses nang lumapit sa DFA ang pamilya at kamag-anak ni Alejo mula nang makulong. Puro pangako ang kanilang nakuha at pinagpasa-pasahan silang parang bola. Dumating pa sa punto na pinipigilang silang gawing high profile ang kaso ni Alejo sapagkat "makaka-apekto" raw sa kaso.

Kasalukuyang nasa antas ng kampanya ang kaso ni Alejo, kasama ang mga Pilipinong nahaharap sa

death penalty sa Saudi Arabia, sa pamumuno ng Migrante-International. Nabuo noong Hulyo 11, 2000 ang Save Joselito Alejo sa Plaridel, Bulacan. Ito ay binubuo ng mga kamag-anak, pamilya at sumisimpatiya kay Alejo. Bahagi rin nito ang Migrante-International, Kalipunan ng Migranteng Pilipino at Pamilya (KMPP), Kabataang Migrante para sa Bayan (KaMiYAN), at Advocates for Migrants Rights and Welfare (AMRW).

Ang layunin ng kampanya para iligtas si Joselito Alejo ay ang mga sumusunod (1) Iligtas at kagyat na pauwiin si Joselito Alejo at lahat ng di makatarungang nakakulong na Pilipino sa Saudi Arabia; (2) Itulak ang inutil na gubyernong Estrada na aksyunan ang kaso ni Alejo at iba pang Pilipino sa Saudi Arabia; (3) Itigil ang pamumugot ng ulo sa Kaharian ng Saudi Arabia; (4) Bigyan ng kompensasyon si Joselito Alejo dahil sa hindi makatarungang pagkulong sa kanya.

Sunod-sunod na pagkilos na ang inilunsad sa DFA upang usigin ang pamahalaang Estrada sa pagpapabaya kay Alejo ganoon din ang maraming kasong kawalang hustisya sa mga Pilipino sa Saudi Arabia.

\*Ang artikulong ito ay kinuha sa Pahayagang Migrante (June 2000)



## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Know your rights... will be a regular column of our Migrant Focus. It will deal with common and not-so-common problems foreign domestic helpers encounter while working in Hong Kong. Examples and cases that will be mentioned or discussed here are those that we, at the Mission, have handled and are stored in our databank. You can also write to us and we will publish and answer your questions in this section.

### **RAPE IS A CRIME OF VIOLENCE**

You have a right to protect yourself against violence.

Do not feel guilty if an employer tries to sexually harass you. It is his problem not yours. He is guilty, not you.

Because of the employee/employer relationship you will always be at a disadvantage, especially because you live in the house. **Be sure you have a lock on the door of your sleeping area, and the bathroom.** If there is none, ask your employer to get one as soon as you get there. If they refuse, find some way to jam the door if you feel unsafe with the man of the house (or any of the men). Always try to keep a physical distance between yourself and your employer. If he starts to say things which are overly friendly or personal or flirtatious, look him in the eye and say "I don't like you talking to me that way", and walk away. If he doesn't stop then tell the wife! Say, "ma'am I don't like the way your husband talks to me. He doesn't show me respect". You should muster courage to do this.

If the man tries to get you alone, then be sure to stay as close to the door as possible where you can get away to avoid him if you feel threatened. Another thing to do is pick up casually something like cushions or pillow and keep them in front of you so it is more difficult to grab you and you can throw or put them in his face. Tell him loudly and firmly to stop and you will tell his wife. Do not laugh or make joke. Keep serious expression on your face. **Try not to show fear. This is often what they want.**

If he tells you he will kill you if you say anything. Either keep quiet and get away, or tell him he will be had for a murder, and go to the police immediately.

As soon as you think a bad situation is happening, keep a record of the date, time, circumstances, words spoken, actions of you both. Memory gets faulty with time. Be sure to keep saying: "I don't like your behavior; what you are saying, or doing." If you lower your voice and speak firmly you will have more control. Screaming often just excites the attacker. If someone is in the house yell for help. "Help, come quick!" or "Fire!" Before he gets control, move slowly and calmly towards a heavy (as possible) object. An ashtray, for example [ use a lamp only as a last resort – if it is plugged in.]. Reach for it saying "Get your hands off me", "Let me go!" Hit him in the face with the object or scratch his eyes. Hit him across the bridge of the nose (it hurts). You have a right to defend yourself. Grab the phone if you could and dial 999 (when in Hongkong).

If he grabs you, tell him in a loud, firm voice (but not out-of-control yelling) "Get your hands off me. Stop it!" Try to remove his hand if it is on your arm or knee by picking it up with two fingers and a look of disgust on your face. **STAY CALM.** If he has his arms around you or holding your wrist tell him to "Let me go!" and **YELL for help**, even if no one else is there! Another thing is to say "I think I hear your wife", "Is that your wife coming in?" he may pause long enough for you to get away. If you are attacked physically be sure to scratch or scrape his skin so you have his DNA under your fingernails and he is marked.

In an event of a serious attack **go to the Police immediately** and file a complaint. In the case of rape immediately go to the police as you are. **DO NOT TIDY UP.** A rape exam should be done at the hospital.

#### *IT IS IMPORTANT TO*

1. TRY TO STAY CALM AND IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.
2. TRY TO KEEP A DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU.
3. TRY TO REMEMBER HE IS WRONG AND YOU CAN FIND ANOTHER EMPLOYER.
4. DO NOT LAUGH OR MAKE A JOKE. STAY SERIOUS. TRY NOT TO CRY.

Even when any such incident is over and is just being related, the culture of making such a serious matter a joke as a way of relief, of keeping one's senses, will not be a help to those who do not understand the culture. You may be misunderstood so it is best to stay serious. Crying may be a relief as well later on.

5. TELL HIM YOU WILL GO TO THE POLICE.

One of the things being said in self defense lessons for the women is to grab the man's genitals hard and pull. It apparently hurts.

Staying calm and serious and not smiling or joking is one of your least defenses.

Another technique is to do "busy" work if you are called into the bedroom. Don't stand still. Straighten something up on the dresser – don't go near the bed and if you are forced over there, pick up the pillows.

Your employer has no right to molest you. He has the duty under the law to ensure your safety.

Your job may be in jeopardy but a police report will protect your rights. Victims usually give great consideration on losing her job precisely cases are not reported. Or that "losing one's reputation" is losing face altogether. That is understandable. But you may also lose your job should employer decide to get rid of you anyway! And such excuses is what a rapist takes advantage of to carry on with his criminal act.

Get in touch with the MFMW as soon as possible for help, advice and counsel even before something goes as far as rape.

## Numbers 5:11-31

## Humiliation or Protection?

Is your husband the jealous type? Do your calls to him end up in heated arguments because he does not trust you? Every now and then, we hear of migrants' families being broken up because of the husbands' jealousy. We do read also of husbands killing their wives in fits of jealousy. Dreadful things like these have happened to returning migrant women. *Sila na nga yong nagpakahirap sa ibang bansa, ang iginaganti pa ay kawalan ng tiwala.* Worst, in a lot of instances, these suspicions were mere projections. In the final analysis, the husbands had the *liaisons*.

But how was a husband's jealousy dealt with in the Old Testament times? Numbers 5:11-31 gives us the answer.

This legislation specifies the procedures a husband is to follow if there is suspicion on his part of marital infidelity on the part of his wife.

Numbers 5:11-31 stipulates that the husband may bring his wife before the priest if (1) he genuinely suspects infidelity: "*If any man's wife goes astray and acts unfaithfully against him, if a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of the husband, and she is undetected though she has defiled herself and there is no witness against her since she was not taken in the act...*(vss. 12-13)" or, (2) is simply overcome by a "*spirit of jealousy...though she has not defiled herself.*" (vs. 14).

The procedure (vss. 16-28) demands that she undergo an ordeal. The priest makes her drink a potion, a mixture of holy water and dust from the Sanctuary floor, and scrapings from a parchment containing a curse. The curse spells the consequences: if she is guilty, her reproductive organs will swell and she will not be able to conceive (vss. 20-22, 27). If the potion will have no effect on her and she will be declared innocent and she will conceive children (vs. 28)

This law is outrageous by present day standards. Some modern readers find this law as utterly humiliating and disgusting. Presently no woman would be brought to court on the basis of mere suspicion. A *prima facie* evidence must exist before a charge of infidelity can be brought up. But even if there is a remote possibility of the potion taking effect, unless for some psychological reasons it does have *some* effect, this law should invite the readers to reflect on the profound implications this has for women. It should also invite the readers to think of the terror in women where such a practice may still be done in diverse forms. There is more to it than that, though.



# OUR FAITH, OUR STRUGGLE

by Fr. Dwight dela Torre  
IFI, Chaplain, MFMW

In Leviticus 20:10, the adulterers, both the man and the woman, are to be put to death. But in Numbers 5:11-31, the guilty is not summarily put to death. Why?

There are two closely related answers to this question.

1. Leviticus 20:10 and Numbers 5:11-31 differs in that the former deals with cases where the man and the woman are caught in the act. The latter, refers to women whose guilt had been proven by circumstantial evidence — the effect of the potion. "*...If she has defiled herself and has acted unfaithfully against her husband, the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and shall cause bitter pain, her shall body swell, and her thigh shall fall away and the woman shall become an execration among her people.*" (vs. 27)

2. The crux of the matter lies in verse 12, "*...If any man's wife goes astray and acts unfaithfully against him, if a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of the husband, and she is undetected though she has defiled herself and there is no witness against her since she was not taken in the act...*" Verse 12 emphasizes a truth and principle that "the unapprehended criminal is not subject to the jurisdiction of the human court" (Milgrom).

The whole procedure may be stacked against the woman. It is humiliating and disgusting. But the whole procedure protects women who are already in a disadvantaged position, from the excesses of human emotions. The potion, if it affects, is already the Lord's verdict or judgment. The husband cannot just arbitrarily kill her or the mob lynches her. The jurisdiction then over such a case lies not in the hands of fallible men. It lies with God. # Sources: *Women's Bible Commentary*; Jacob Milgrom, *A Husband's Pride and a Mob's Prejudice*, *Bible Review*, August, 1996.

# This Month's TOP STORIES

## MARCOS MILLIONS

The Samahan ng mga Ex-detainees Laban sa Detensyon at para sa Amnestiya (SELDA) believe that the Marcoses only used as an excuse paying the victims of human rights violations when they withdrew billions from secret accounts in HSBC and The Bank of China. SELDA said that they had no intention to pay the victims. SELDA, which includes 4,000 of the rights claimants, is suspicious about the bank accords Pres. Estrada signed during his state visit to China in May. SELDA also noted that the Marcoses had always insisted that they had no other source of funds to pay the rights claimants aside from the disputed \$632-million deposit held in escrow at the Philippine National Bank.

A US firm may be linked to the Marcoses' hidden assets. Merrill Lynch (NY) could be held liable for withholding information that it was managing \$30M Marcos assets. Investigations will be done by the Philippine on the US investment house's belated admission that the assets were invested under the name of a Panamanian firm, Arelma Inc.

## PAYATAS VICTIMS FILE CLASS SUIT

After being sued for P1-B for damages for the Payatas slide, two senators have warned that Quezon City Mayor Ismael Mathay might be absolved for any liability in the tragic trash slide. At a Senate hearing yesterday, it was learned that a Department of Environment and Natural Resources order gives Metro Manila governments three years from Jan. 1, 1998 to Dec. 31, 2001 to convert all open dumpsites into controlled ones. The fateful incident left at least 217 people dead and thousands of families homeless. Residents filed the class suit against QC Mayor Ismael Mathay Jr., MMDA Chairman Jejomar Binay and the lot owners of the dumpsite, and garbage contractors. The damage suit, the first of its kind in Philippine history, was formally lodged at the QC Regional Trial Court by the plaintiff's counsels lead by human rights lawyer Romeo Capulong. "Though we do not believe in the death penalty, we feel that it is not even sufficient to ease the pains of those who lost their loved ones as a result of government negligence," Capulong said. While this is ongoing, the residents of Lupang Pangako are being forced to leave the area to give way to the partial reopening of the dumpsite. But Mayor Ismael Mathay Jr. immediately dismissed the allegations. KADAMAY, the urban poor group claimed that the harassment started shortly after Mathay announced the demolition of about 500 houses located within the so-called "immediate danger zone."

## MASSIVE RECRUITMENT OF CAFGUs

THE OFFICE of the President has released P119.1 million to finance the activation of 10,000 new members of the CAFGU. There are also those recruited and trained by the AFP to be Special CAFGUs but are in effect privatized CAFGUs. According to the AFP, every NPA or MILF guerilla is equivalent to 10 soldiers. This was the conclusion of a paper written by the government to justify its massive recruitment of 30,000 new militiamen under the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGU) to boost the AFP's ranks. This was approved by the president himself and endorsed by the Senate committee on defense. The paper said that the decrease in Cagfu strength "has created large vacuum areas that allowed the NPA to regain their strength by 58 percent in a span of 4 years."

## CAFGUs KILL CULTISTS

Sixteen cultists who belonged to the Catholic God's Spirit were killed by CAFGUs when they resisted arrest. The encounter happened in the cult's colony in Barangay Kimanait, Pangantucan in Kalilangan Bukidnon. This was all caught on camera. The 300-member cult who live in around 70 nipa huts are mostly laborers in the town's sugar and corn farms. Most of them were drawn to this place because of the fertile agricultural lands of the province. Militant groups said the massacre showed that the police and CAFGUs "have turned into bloodthirsty thugs gone out of control." "It's like the Kuratong Baleleng massacre, only on video," said Teodoro Casiño, secretary general of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan. "The bolos of the Bukidnon cultists were obviously no match for the firepower of the PNP and Cagfu teams. This was a massacre, plain and simple," he added. Human rights group Karapatan branded the massacre as an "obscene display of military power" and could have been part of the government's

efforts to condition the public's minds in "accepting a regime of unbridled brutality and fascism." Karapatan lambasted police officials who justified the killings as self-defense, saying that it was clearly "mass murder."

## 100,000 TEACHERS MIGHT LOSE JOBS

More than 100,000 public and private school teachers face losing their jobs because they have not taken or passed the Licensure Exam for Teachers (LET). The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) aired the warning as school officials were thrown in panic and confusion about dealing with the order which threatens to displace thousands of educators and disrupt school operations. The ACT, the biggest group of public school teachers with 150,000 members nationwide, was not against the "professionalization" of teaching, but opposed the order because it was "arbitrary" and it was made without consulting teachers and administrators. The group also thinks that it is "irrational" because the ruling was issued amid the shortage of teachers nationwide.

## BOUNTIES ON MILF'S NOW GOV'T POLICY

MALACAÑANG yesterday said it would not recall the bounty offer on the heads of three top MILF front leaders, and would even consider it a "government policy" from now on. Press Sec. Ricardo Puno said there was "no reason to withdraw" the P9-million reward for information leading to their arrest. The MILF central committee had been forced to indefinitely suspend the talks because of the government's alleged insincerity, filing of criminal charges against MILF leaders, bounty offer, and order that 50 suspected MILF supporters and financiers be investigated. "This is a grim manifestation that the government is now employing threat, coercion and even terrorism against the MILF," MILF said.

## CIA SETS UP IN RP

MALACAÑANG yesterday disclosed that Asia remained a favorite working ground for the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), but said it was not bothered by reports saying Manila was the spy agency's main station in Southeast Asia.

## TIGHT WATCH ORDERED FOR PINOYS BOUND FOR SPAIN

AIRPORT immigration authorities were ordered Friday to strictly screen Filipinos bound for Spain in light of reports from the Spanish government that some Filipino tourists were overstaying there to look for jobs. DFA has called for "comprehensive controls" on Filipinos who travel to Spain as tourists but eventually seek employment beyond their legal stay.

## COADY CASE

The Judge hearing Ma. Remedios Coady (also known as Veronique Anderson) has announced on 23 August 2000 that the conviction on her charge of murder is quashed based on the argument of provocation not being left to the jury. The life sentence has then been set aside.

## BEGGARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS

*What did Erap get from his recent US visit? And would you think we'll benefit from them?*

- Clinton agreed to intensify defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region and to work closer together to fight terrorism and drug trafficking
- Clinton's commitment to boost the benefits of Filipino veterans who fought for the Americans during WWII
- Financial assistance worth \$125.5M
- Pledges of fresh investments from leading American firms
- Signing of two agreements providing for the delivery of helicopters and a Coast Guard cutter to the Philippines and for a \$20M food aid package for Mindanao.
- IMF-WB commitment to release a \$314M package for the presidential fiscal projects aimed at strengthening of the floundering peso.
- Microsoft chair Bill Gates' donation of \$12M worth of computer software for distribution to some 1,000 public high schools

## Statement of MIGRANTE Europe on the death of OFW Leo Begasson in Italy

MIGRANTE Europe expresses deep sympathy with the family and friends of Filipino migrant worker Leo Begasson, who died under mysterious circumstances last August 5 in Slovenia. We also express solidarity with the Filipino community in Rome, which has launched a crusade to seek the truth over Leo's death.

Another Filipino national has died abroad, and under mysterious circumstances. Leo's death has become another addition to the number of Filipino migrant workers who met untimely and unjust deaths that until now have not been given justice.

Leo is a compatriot, who like the more than seven million Filipino migrant workers laboring overseas to support their families, loved ones and the perennially crisis-ridden Philippine economy, has been hailed as the nation's new hero, by the corrupt, bankrupt and mendicant Estrada government.

The Philippine government's neglect and failure to protect the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers and the bureaucratic-laden embassy services that Filipinos overseas find difficult to avail of, is a brutal statement of the fact that the Philippine government is incapable, to say the least, of safeguarding, defending and protecting its citizens overseas.

In this latest episode in the Calvary of Filipino migrants, the OFW Leo Begasson, appears to be a victim of foul play. This according to close friends, the Filipino community in Rome where he had lived for the last ten years, the Filipino religious community, the Italian media and Italian friends of the Filipino community. The purported circumstances leading to his supposed crime and eventual suicide have elicited strong questions that do not justify the sudden closure of the case by the Italian Justice Ministry.

In the same way that Leo's family and friends describe him as someone of average moral character and incapable of committing a heinous crime and ending his life the way the Italian authorities declared in their haste to close the case, and that those possibly involved in the foul play belong to Italy's rich and powerful — all the more calls for a reopening of the investigation to get the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so to speak.

In the midst of this real-life drama/murder mystery that is starting to unfold, the task of the Philippine government and its representative in Rome, Italy, should not merely be to tag along behind what the Begasson family decides to do with their dead son, but to take the lead in encouraging the family to take just action in the name of justice, and to undertake all means necessary within its diplomatic influence, to expose the truth over Leo's death, and if possible bring those involved in the foul play to the bars of justice.

It is pathetic grandstanding for the Philippine government and its embassy in Rome, Italy to merely act to deflect bad publicity that the Philippines, and by extension, its more than 100,000 nationals who work as domestic helpers in Italy, have been getting as a result of Leo's death. In the first place, the good reputation reaped by Filipinos working in Italy was earned through their painstaking hardwork, perseverance and honesty -- without any need for a public relations campaign from the Philippine embassy, and despite the embassy's reported low treatment of domestics.

Shouldn't the Philippine government and its embassy, instead, pursue the case until the end because the truth over Leo's death would be the only way to protect the good reputation of Filipinos in Italy earned through years of honest hardwork? Sweeping the case under the rug, so to speak, would only enforce the cloud of doubt, not only on Leo Begasson's person, but also on the whole Filipino community in Rome.

MIGRANTE Europe therefore demands from the Estrada government to do everything within its powers to get to the bottom of the death of Leo Begasson. We also strongly demand that the Philippine government do the same for other Filipino migrant workers who had met untimely and mysterious deaths while laboring overseas in the holy name of the "Labor Export Policy".

The Estrada government and its representative offices abroad must show the whole world that it is not merely efficient in imposing and collecting exactions from its citizens living and working abroad, but must also prove that it is capable of and is possessed of the will and determination to protect the rights, welfare and interests of Filipino migrant workers.

**The Secretariat  
MIGRANTE Europe  
Postbus 15687, 1001 ND AMSTERDAM  
The Netherlands  
Tel/Fax: (00-31) 020-4284521  
E-mail: MIGRANTE-Europe@zonnet.nl**

## RISE FROM THE TRAGEDY, FULFILL THE PROMISE OF "LUPANG PANGAKO"

*(Unity Statement of the TASK FORCE DAMAYAN, a multisectoral alliance in support of the victims of the recent Payatas. Members of TASK FORCE DAMAYAN include KADAMAY, KMU, Task Force on Urban Conscientization-Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (TFUC-AMRSP), KMP, BAYAN, Anakbayan, LFS, CEGP, UP Diliman Student Council, Gabriela, Salinlahi, Children's Rehabilitation Center, Citizen's Disaster Response Center, Migrante, COURAGE, UCCP, Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR), Pro-Gay, and many more.)*

Disasters, whether natural or man-made, always give us time to pause and seriously reflect on the equally disastrous course of our pitiful nation.

While Luzon was still recovering from massive floods brought about by twin typhoons that hit the country, disaster came to a resettlement town in Payatas on the fateful morning of July 10.

Hundreds were buried alive by an avalanche of garbage, which to some of them, ironically were the source of their livelihood.

All of us were horrified and moved to tears by the heart-wrenching photographs of faceless children and their parents dug up from the sea of dirt and grime that now symbolizes the shattered hopes and dreams that was "Lupang Pangako" (Promised Land).

But after the last tear has been shed, it is time to collect all the resiliency, dignity and courage that we have left. From the rubble we shall gather every stick of strength and every roof of metal resistance to rebuild the vision of a better life for our poor brothers and sisters.

The tragedy that struck Payatas was, for a long time, a disaster waiting to happen.

It was not a tragedy brought about by stubborn rains, nor by the stubborn refusal of the poor to leave their wretched community. It was a tragedy consciously brought about by the stubborn irresponsibility and criminal neglect to the miserable plight of the poor millions by those who currently wield power in this nation.

And so all the irreverent fingerpointing at the urban poor as harbingers of the tragic fate that befell them should stop. President Estrada and all those who must be held liable should now stand trial for the death of hundreds in Payatas, and the continued death of hundreds more throughout the land by the grinding wheels of extreme poverty.

Because the disaster that came to Payatas only revealed to us the tip of enduring poverty, injustice and degradation suffered by many of our people. This is the greater tragedy that should now be potently addressed.

The hundreds of victims of this unprecedented tragedy cry out for justice. Their cries shall rise from the depths of the murky filth that is their grave. Their cries shall fill our beings with rage.

Those who are criminally culpable should now face the wrath of the poor masses and their allies organized in struggle. For now, only their ouster from power could satiate our aggrieved people.

The people already had enough of this unjust society. It is high time that the tragedy of widespread social poverty be ended.

*Justice for all victims of the Payatas tragedy! Justice for all poor Pilipinos! End the tragedy of widespread poverty, oust Estrada now!*

*(After almost two weeks of rescue operations on the mountain of garbage which collapsed on Lupang Pangako, Payatas, 229 dead bodies have been recovered, 90 more remain missing. There are 667 families or 3142 persons staying in different evacuation centers. Donations are still accepted for the benefit of the victims. You may coordinate through email at [kadamay\\_phils@hotmail.com](mailto:kadamay_phils@hotmail.com). Statements of support and solidarity are most welcome.)*



**Editorial Team:** Cynthia CA Tellez, Norman Uy Carnay, Jun Tellez, Fr. Dwight dela Torre, Azon Amaya-Cañete and Jun Cañete

**Contributors:** Malett S. Balaoro, Jayvee R. Martinez and Estelle Kennelly

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**Address:** St. John's Cathedral, Garden Road, Central, Hongkong SAR

Tel. No. 25228264 Fax No. 25262894

E-mail: [migrant@pacific.net.hk](mailto:migrant@pacific.net.hk)

Webpage: <http://www.migrants.net>

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### Itaguyod at Suportahan ang New Migrant Focus!

Upang higit na maging makabuluhan ang paglalabas ng Migrant Focus, hinihingi ang inyong tulong at kontribusyon para dito. Maaari po kayong magpadala ng inyong mga balita, litrato, tula, sanaysay, kwento, katanungan o kaya'y mga paksang nais ninyong talakayin ng publikasyong ito. Huwag mag-atubiling ipaabot ang inyong mga komentaryo o mungkahing upang mapahusay ang nilalaman at porma ng Migrant Focus.

Anumang suporta, materyal o pinansyal, ay lubos naming pasasalamat. Ang inyong suporta ay makakatulong upang lalong maparami ang sirkulasyon at abot ng Migrant Focus.

Maraming Salamat at Mabuhay ang Migranteng Pilipino!