

“An affront to women and justice” Rape victim in Dubai, jailed

IN A TRAGIC twist of justice, a woman migrant worker who was raped got the imprisonment sentence.

Grace (not her real name) was allegedly raped by an Emirati identified as Khalifa Hassan Khalifa on May 16 in a desert area in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 50 kms from Dubai. She was hospitalized for 10 days after which she pursued the case against Khalifa. However, she was the one who was put in jail on May 26 on trumped up charges of Illicit Relationship (Adultery), and Under the Influence of Alcohol.

According to the accounts of Grace and her companion Liezl, they were coming home from a party on the morning of May 17 when the car of Khalifa stopped by them. He introduced himself as a policeman and offered to take the two home. On their trip, however, the two realized that they were going away from Dubai. Liezl managed to jump out of the window and sought assistance. Grace, however, was snatched back by her hair by Khalifa so she couldn't get away.

Ten minutes later, Liezl and the police found Grace unconscious. Khalifa was apprehended later.

Upon recovery, Grace immediately acted to pursue her case against Khalifa. She approached the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) for financial assistance but was denied by the said office. Grace and her friends were forced to raise the necessary funds among themselves that grace needed for her legal defense.

However, during the trial, Grace's lawyer did not appear. The trial was conducted in Arabic which she did not understand. She was forced to sign charges brought against her and was eventually imprisoned.



HK OFWS call for Justice for Grace on the ouster of negligent officials

During her whole ordeal, not a shadow of any official from the Philippine Embassy in UAE was seen save for a lone visit of Consul Renato P.O. Villa, Labor Attaché Vicente Cabe, and Social Worker Delia Parani.

Last month, Grace's case was reported to the national office of Migrant Sectoral Party in Manila by its chapter in Dubai. Immediately, MSP took actions to condemn officials in Dubai who did not even lift a finger to assist Grace in seeking justice for her predicament.

Even Foreign Affairs Secretary Blas Ople and Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas were forced to react. However, their comments earned further the ire of migrant workers and advocates when they said that they knew about the issue but chose not publicize it supposedly to “protect the victim and not to prejudice the case” because it is a “matter of policy and simple decency”.

As critics put it though, the issue is not whether it was publicized or not but whether the Philippine government did

Global Protests Held Against WTO

GLOBAL PROTESTS MET the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in Cancun, Mexico.

Member organizations of the International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS) together with its allies and friends organized a worldwide series of marches to demand an end to the WTO and its devastating policies especially to underdeveloped economies.

On September 13, protest actions were held in Europe, Nepal, New Zealand and in the Philippines.

Meanwhile in Hong Kong, ILPS members together with the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body (AMCB) organized a mass action on September 12 to maximize the Mid Autumn Festival which was also a holiday for foreign domestic workers. The rally, attended by 200 individuals, was held in front of the United States Consulate with



protesters carrying a big picture of the mooncake with the words “JUNK WTO” inside.

On September 13, migrant groups also joined the anti-WTO protests led by local organizations.



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their best for an OFW who is in need of urgent assistance. Clearly they did not.

After Migrante International and MSP exposed the irresponsible officials in Dubai, the government then frantically tried to come out with a plan on how Grace could be helped. Even DFA Undersecretary Rafael Seguis was forced to go to Dubai in order to troubleshoot the government's clear blunder.

However, upon their return, they, without Grace's permission, publicized to the media Grace's identity that she expressly requested groups not to mention.

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) immediately released a

petition that was signed by various migrant groups and advocates in 26 countries. The said petition called for the immediate release of Grace, the prosecution of the real criminal, and the necessary compensation for the victim. The groups also called for the removal from office of embassy officials in Dubai, Secretary Ople, Secretary Sto. Tomas and Undersecretary Seguis.

(MSP, Migrante International, APMM and allied groups worldwide are conducting an intense campaign for the release of Grace. If you wish to support the campaign, please contact the APMM.)

“Maintaining and continuing good deeds” MCA’s holds 3rd AGM

THE MACAU CORDILLERANS Association (MCA) held its Third Annual General Meeting at Hacsa on September 28, 2003. The event gathered 32 members and advocates and other migrant groups.

The three major resolutions that were discussed and subsequently approved were: 1. to support the one year pilot project of the Morrison Chapel council's pastoral fellowship for migrants and its partnership with APMM serving the Asian migrants in Macau; 2. to mobilise members and non-members to register for the OAV, and; 3. to support the formation of

a Macau chapter of the Migrante Sectoral Party.

Buhay Bangcawayan, APMM Macau coordinator and Women's Program Coordinator stressed the importance of collective actions as the good deeds that migrant workers can do for themselves, for the families and for the community. She underscored the benefits that can be gained by migrant workers through the maximization of the electoral arena that was opened to overseas Filipinos with the Absentee Voting Law and the Dual Citizenship Law.

HK Pinays seek ouster of embassy officials in Dubai, Ople, Seguis and Sto. Tomas

“AS FEES OF the Philippine government for OFWs get higher, its pathetic services get to victimize more and more of our kababayans.”

This was declared today by the Hong Kong chapter of Migrante Sectoral Party (MSP) as they protest the Philippine government's “gross criminal neglect” of an OFW rape victim in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Grace (not her real name) was reportedly raped by Emirati Khalifa Hassan Khalifa on May 16 in a desert area in Sharjah, UAE, 50 km from Dubai.

The protesters that included Grace's *kababayans* from the Cordillera region, trooped to the Philippine Consulate office and handed in a petition seeking for immediate actions to facilitate Grace's release from prison and the resignation of embassy officials in Dubai.

“The inaction of these officials denied justice for Grace. They must resign immediately,” Balladres declared.

MSP-HK said that Grace's case is a “classic showcase of a government whose only concern is to extort money from their nationals abroad without a commensurate service that is its responsibility.”

“OWWA money is our money. If the likes of Grace cannot even get a dime, for who then are these collections for?” Balladares asked.

“There is no excuse for what happened to Grace. Lest government services for OFWs drastically improve and officials like Ople and Sto. Tomas are removed, more Grace will be victimized,” she concluded.

Newsbriefs

4% OAV registration turnout a “success” - DFA & COMELEC

DESPITE THE LOW registration rate, the foreign affairs department's Overseas Absentee Voting Secretariat and the Comelec declared the exercise a “success.”

World Bank urged to champion migrant workers' protection

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH called on the World Bank to encourage states that send or receive migrants to adopt and implement the protections contained in the Migrant Workers Convention. The World Bank should help end the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers in the Persian Gulf and beyond, Human Rights Watch said as the international financial institution prepares to hold its annual meetings in Dubai.

“The World Bank knows that migrants are key to economic development, but they're not paying attention to the dark side of that issue,” said Rory Mungoven, global advocacy director for Human Rights Watch.

What's next after registration?

An initial review of the OAV registration process and the tasks ahead

THE OVERSEAS ABSENTEE
Voting registration ended last 30 September and according to the latest data of the Department of Foreign Affairs, it recorded a total 344,443 overseas Filipinos registered worldwide. This is 4% of the estimated eight million Filipinos overseas and about 20% of the 1.7 million target set by the Philippine government.



MSP-HK gathered their members and friends for a day of thanksgiving on their hardwork for two months

The DFA also said that the last remaining days of the OAV registration figures increased more than 520 percent from a daily registration average of 2,118 during the first 10 days of registration to 13,147 during September 25 to 28.

The combined results of Hong Kong (88,677) and Saudi Arabia (97,544) comprised 54% of the overall total registered worldwide. The other half of the overall registration results were shared by other countries in Asia, Europe, Middle East, Africa and the American continent.

However, the actual result of registration was far below the estimated number of Filipinos who are qualified to register. MIGRANTE Sectoral Party (MSP) blamed the Philippine government for its low turnout. According to MSP, the low turnout can be attributed to the lack or inadequate system of information dissemination of the diplomatic posts, as well as delayed budget distribution and low budget allocation.

In fact, even before registration started, MSP chapters in many countries abroad continuously demanded for massive and systematic dissemination of information at different Philippine diplomatic posts abroad, immediate release of budget and increase in budget allocation.

But all these demands fell in deaf ear. The allocated budget to the diplomatic posts was released weeks after the registration started. As a result, the diplomatic posts relied mainly on the

support of the Philippine community for the printing of information materials and other means of information dissemination.

Due to lack of information dissemination, migrants, especially those who are staying abroad with discrepancies in their travel documents or passport and those whose passports are being withheld by their employers/sponsors and brokers were reluctant to register. They had no idea whether their condition will be permitted to register or not and what would they need to do in order to register. Others who have no proper working documents feared arrest and deportation if they are caught by the local authorities.

Immigrants or Filipinos who already acquired residency status in the country where they live are confused if they can register.

There were also instances where migrants had to spend more than US\$100 in transportation in order to reach the Philippine Embassies or Consulates and register. These happened for Filipinos working in some countries in Europe like Italy where more than 200,000 Filipinos can be found as well as in the US where millions of Filipinos are present.

Some also did not register because they do not believe that elections will bring any good to migrants.

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Taiwan gov't hounds illegal migrants anew

APMM, Taiwan groups appeal to strike out penalties

Migrant advocates in Taiwan from Church NGOs, labor groups and the academe have endorsed a letter of appeal addressed to the Taiwanese authorities against the crackdown on undocumented migrants in the island. The crackdown was ordered by the Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) and covers a three month period from September 1 to November 30.

During this period those who surrender would not pay any fines imposed on migrants as a penalty and a bounty of NT\$2,000 was again resurrected by the CLA to those who report on the runaways. A TV advertisement was even commissioned by the CLA to remind migrants not to run away when they encounter problems with their employers or brokers but to come forward to the authorities concerned to air out their complaints. The CLA had even planned to send letters to the families of the migrants so that their loved ones would come out and surrender.

Migrants run away because of abuses committed to them by employers or brokers alike. This is compounded by the fact that government authorities from both sending and receiving countries are helpless in stopping unscrupulous brokers and employers from stopping said entities to force migrants to sign side contracts or agreements.

The letter of appeal includes ensuring the humane treatment and suspension of the penalty on all migrants who surrender and are caught. This letter has now been distributed to APMM networks for endorsement.

Some local groups plan to hold a conference in Taiwan regarding the issue.

ERRATUM

In the August issue of News Digest, it was the **Dabawenyo Overseas Association** who raised the funds for the air ticket of Lazaro Escalona and not the Kapatiran sa Gitnang Silangan (KGS). Apologies to the members and officers of the Dabawenyo.

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Despite the lack of resources and foreseen problems as a result of Philippine government inefficiency, MIGRANTE Sectoral Party in Hong Kong, together with other major Filipino alliances, associations, federations, unions and religious groups, conducted continuous public voter's education and disseminated information on the mechanics and process of registration especially during Sundays and holidays.

They used creative means of informing its compatriots (public fora and meetings, cultural presentations, discussion groups and radio announcements) about the importance of participating in the national elections in May 2004 as one of the form and arena in promoting and upholding the rights and welfare of Filipinos abroad.

Filipino organizations had to spend their own funds in order to reproduce and disseminate education materials, primers, posters and flyers. In Hong Kong, MSP chapter members volunteered in the Philippine Consulate as checkers in order to assist registrants in the filing of their registration forms.

In Hong Kong alone, the commitment shown by MSP members as well as its allies and friends resulted in the formation of 55 MSP Chapters with more than 1000 individual membership all over the territory.

Conclusion

Generally, despite the low turn out, the first registration for OAV can be seen in a positive light. Despite the various limitations imposed by government inadequacy, the participation of numerous organized migrants in the process made it a rewarding experience especially for the progressive movement of Filipinos abroad.

The just concluded registration was just one of the main components of this whole electoral exercise. What is important now is to transform the results of the registration into campaign for Filipinos abroad to vote for progressive candidates, not to let traditional politicians (*trapos*) win any seat, be vigilant in protecting the votes of migrants, and ensure concrete gains for migrants in the whole electoral process.

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