



MIGRANTE INTERNATIONAL

"We dream of a society that will never be torn apart just for the need to survive!"

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State of Filipino Migrants Under Duterte

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On July 26 this year, President Rodrigo Duterte will deliver his last State of the Nation Address or SONA. He will deliver the speech less than one year before the end of his term in June 30, 2022. It is important to take stock of what he has done for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the Filipino people during his term.

Because of his bold promises to OFWs and the Filipino people, Duterte's term started with hopes for "genuine change" in the country. Now, nearing the end of his term, it is clear that we OFWs and the Filipino people are only worse off than before his presidency, and that he is responsible for this situation.

Duterte's regime has been a long, dark night for Filipinos, marked by his government's abandonment of OFWs and the Filipino people in times of great need, brutal repression of all voices independent and critical of his government, state exaction and corruption, and betrayal of the national interest.

DECEPTION FROM THE BEGINNING

Even when he was still campaigning for president in 2016, Duterte was already targeting migrant Filipinos around the world for deception and for generally using us to further deceive the Filipino people.

As presidentiable, Duterte showered OFWs with so many sweet words and promises. In a speech before the Filipino community in Japan in 2016, for example, he said "Ito ang pangako ko. Sana naman sa Diyos at sa inyo, ang pagtatrabaho n'yo sa labas hanggang diyan na lang. Next generation sa Pilipinas na."

Political observers in fact say that one of the main reasons that Duterte won the elections was the bold promises he made to various, even conflicting, sectors of society. To woo the country's workers, for example, he promised an end to contractualization -- even as he

assured big capitalists of huge returns on their investments. He even said that he would end illegal drugs, criminality and corruption within three months upon becoming president.

During his presidential campaign, Duterte crafted a narrative that targets OFWs and which he has continued to promote even during his presidency. He paints the scenario of drug addicts and pushers targeting children of OFWs in their communities, because the latter have the money to buy drugs. He even exaggerated the level of drug use and criminality in the Philippines to justify his call for peace and order. This message resonated with OFWs, many of whom are familiar with peace and order in migrant-receiving countries.

The phenomenon of “tanim-bala” in the country’s main airport shortly before the 2016 elections showed the brazen lawlessness which Duterte portrayed as having engulfed the country. It also pushed many OFWs to fall for Duterte’s narrative about wanton criminality and the need to end it. Some observers now believe that it was Duterte’s people in the military and government who carried out the scheme in the first place -- with the precise objective of bolstering his campaign. No wonder that it immediately stopped when he became president.

Many OFWs were won over by Duterte’s promises, and his campaign machinery took advantage of this. OFWs were depicted as spontaneously forming organizations supporting his candidacy -- when we know now that the core of these were funded by his cash-rich campaign. These groups were depicted as creating numerous Facebook Pages to show their support for the Davao City mayor -- when we know now that these were funded by his social media-heavy campaign. OFWs were depicted as powerful breadwinners who were mobilizing their families to support and vote for Duterte, even delivering 3 million votes to him.

Duterte was successful in promoting his deceptive narratives because of another factor for his strong campaign and eventual victory -- enormous campaign funds provided by a solid base of support consisting of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Marcoses, other oligarchs and China. It was with the help of these odious friends of his that Duterte was able to take advantage of Facebook and social media for his campaign. He was able to create troll farms and even manipulate Facebook algorithm in his favor. He was able to bombard OFWs with fake news, not only during his presidential campaign but during his entire presidency.

Even as OFW voter turnout in 2016 is touted as the highest in a decade, only 31.65 per cent of OFWs registered for the Overseas Absentee Voting or OAV cast their ballots. Out of this, a whopping 72.42 per cent voted for Duterte -- an actual but more importantly a symbolic victory for him. This is a victory which he secured through massive deception of OFWs and the Filipino people, using his promises and lies. Less than one year before his term ends, we can confidently say that many even among those who supported his candidacy are now critical of his government. In fact, many are already calling for an end to his presidency.

2016 AND 2017

In 2016, migrant Filipinos led by Migrante International pushed for the realization of Duterte’s positive promises to OFWs and the Filipino people. We called for the reduction, if not

elimination, of the various forms of state exaction on OFWs. We called for the junking of the Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC) and other mandatory fees for departing migrant workers.

In the face of rising tensions between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran and the subsequent oil crisis that badly affected the Middle East, hundreds, if not thousands, of OFWs were retrenched from work. OFWs led by Migrante International called on the Duterte government to repatriate retrenched and distressed OFWs in KSA and the entire Middle East. We also called on the government to push for the payment of wages and other money claims to OFWs. The government, for its part, provided short-term and band-aid solutions. It failed to provide a comprehensive reintegration program for returning OFWs.

To add insult to injury, the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Foreign Affairs publicly competed against each other in trying to claim leadership for the government's humanitarian mission to the KSA during the crises. Their competition created so much noise even as the said mission was too little and too late in comparison to the problems faced by OFWs.

In September 2016, Duterte held a dialogue with Indonesian president Joko Widodo or Jokowi. We OFWs called on him to seek the freedom of Mary Jane Veloso, the OFW who is in jail in Indonesia over drug trafficking charges and whose execution was stayed in May 2015, and other OFWs in Indonesian jails. To the surprise of many, Jokowi afterwards revealed that Duterte gave his go signal to the execution. After some denials, which were disproved by the Indonesian government, Duterte admitted that he thought it would be improper for him to ask for Mary Jane's freedom given his "war on drugs" in the Philippines -- a clear betrayal of the victory won by OFWs and the Filipino people who fought Mary Jane's execution.

Contrary to Duterte's electoral promise, and as if immediately dashing all hopes that the situation of the country's workers will be improved, DOLE released DOLE Order No. 174. Containing superficial changes in the country's policies on contractualization, such as contractuels' so-called "regularization" in employment agencies, the order basically continued the legalization of contractual employment. It further authorized the attacks on the basic rights of workers to a living wage, benefits, regular employment, forming unions and holding strikes.

Consistent with this policy of offering cheap and repressed labor to employers, the Duterte government declared the intensified implementation of the government's Labor Export Policy (LEP) as part of its 10-point economic agenda. The declaration, which intensifies, previous governments' efforts of earning dollar remittances from OFWs' work, clearly runs counter to Duterte's promise of laying the foundation for OFWs' return to the Philippines to work.

In 2017, US president Donald Trump stepped up his statements and policies against migrants, especially Muslims, in the US -- thereby signaling the intensifying attacks by anti-migrant parties, movements and leaders that are on the rise the world over. In response, Duterte said he will not lift a finger to help Filipinos in the US who were facing deportation and other anti-migrant measures of the Trump government. It was us OFWs, led by Migrante International, who had to call for fighting racism and xenophobia, rights violations and fascism in migrant

receiving countries. Aside from arming Filipino migrants with education about our rights, we also sought solidarity with labor, left and other groups in various countries.

Duterte campaigned for and approved another measure that has increased the economic burdens of OFWs, our families and the Filipino people -- the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion or TRAIN Law. The law increased the taxes of ordinary Filipinos so the government can gather funds for paying the country's foreign debt, which was set to increase because of Duterte's centerpiece economic program -- the infrastructure "Build, Build, Build" program. Instead of paving the way for OFWs' return to the Philippines, Duterte approved another policy that will make it even more necessary for Filipinos to work abroad -- so as to meet their families' growing financial needs.

Saying that the DOLE will not be able to handle all OFW concerns, Duterte pushed for the creation of a government department devoted to OFWs. This government agency, he claims, will systematize and strengthen government efforts to protect OFWs abroad. The proposal may sound good at first but is in fact bad for OFWs, our families and the Filipino people. It is premised on the continuation of the government's Labor Export Policy, not its end as Duterte promised during the elections. It seeks to make mere cosmetic changes in handling the rights violations suffered by OFWs, which are inherent to the LEP. It will most likely end up as a way to intensify the LEP's implementation than a measure to protect OFWs.

2018 AND 2019

In 2018, the effects of the Duterte government's continuation of previous governments' economic policies were further highlighted by reports in the Philippines about job losses, increased unemployment and reduction in the value of the daily minimum wage in comparison to a living wage. At the same time, reports about the sad plight of OFWs in different countries poured in, including the employment of Filipinas as domestic workers and other kinds of service sector workers in the Middle East. Migrante International reiterated the call for the Duterte government to create decent jobs at home, so Filipinos will not have to leave the country to find work abroad.

Even as the Duterte government worsened the conditions that force Filipinos to leave the country and find work abroad, it continued to collect heavy and excessive fees on OFWs, such as the following: the PhP 200 (USD 3.74) POEA processing fee, PhP 1,200 (USD 22.43) passport fee, PhP 1,250 (USD 23.37) OWWA membership fee, PhP 2,400 (USD 44.87) PAG-IBIG membership fee, PhP 2,400 (USD 44.87) PhilHealth fee, and PhP 8,600 (USD 160.78) fee for 76 needed signatures. All in all, OFWs pay PhP 16,050 (USD 297) to the government before they are able to leave the country. This amount excludes the transportation, printing and other costs that they pay for in the process of seeking to go abroad. The Duterte government also imposed mandatory SSS coverage on OFWs and a 3,000 per cent increase in SSS exactions from OFWs -- the highest in history.

In December 2018, the Duterte government signed the Global Compact on Migration, which is based on the false notion that labor migration can bring about a country's development and what is needed is to simply ensure that migrants' rights are protected. Experts and

migration activists have repeatedly pointed out that labor migration has not brought about genuine development for the Philippines and many migrant labor-exporting countries. They also criticize the GCM for being non-binding for the countries that sign it, making its inclusion of migrant rights discourse a mere cosmetic change.

In 2019, cases of abuse of OFWs continued to mount. Constanca Dayag, a 47-year old domestic worker who started working in Kuwait in 2016, was tortured and killed by her employer. Her family in the Philippines complained of the government's slow response and refusal to provide information. At the same time, various cases emerged that highlighted the toll that labor migration, as a form of modern-day slavery, takes on the mental health of migrants. This is compounded by the lack of free healthcare services, especially with regard to mental health.

Labor trafficking that targets Filipinos also worsened. In the US, 70 Filipino teachers were among 300 victims of a case of human trafficking that was publicized. Their case drew no concrete action from the Philippine embassy and consulates. In the Philippines, there has also been a proliferation of Japanese language schools victimizing students who pay up to USD 5,000 for placement, but end up as manual laborers in Japan.

Poor working and living conditions push OFWs to fight back, but when they do, they are subjected to various attacks -- from being jailed to getting killed. According to a report of the Department of Foreign Affairs, there were 73 OFWs in death row in 2017, there were 48 Filipinos in death row in Malaysia alone, while up to 4,000 Filipinos are languishing in jails across the world.

In December, armed clashes between KSA and Yemeni forces reached deeper into KSA territory especially in the border regions of Asir, Jizan, Najran where more than 40,000 Filipinos live and work. Stranded and distressed OFWs flocked to the Philippine Embassy in Beirut for mass repatriation. Not only did the issue expose the slow action of the Duterte government in repatriating distressed OFWs, it again highlighted the danger of overseas work especially in conflict-affected regions of the world.

While Duterte's government was promoting the narrative of drug pushers preying on the sons and daughters of OFWs and targeting OFWs' hard-earned money, OFWs' sons and daughters and relatives are being victimized by the so-called "war on drugs." An example is Bryan Conje, son of an OFW in Saudi Arabia. Bryan, a resident of Navotas City, went missing on July 2 and was declared dead three days after in what the police claim was an "armed encounter." The police claim that it found illegal drugs in his possession, and accused him of being the main suspect in a robbery incident -- contrary to facts and in violation of due process.

The Duterte government violently repressed workers who were fighting for the realization of the president's electoral promise of ending labor contractualization. In October, Duterte himself made a public statement ordering the shooting of striking farm workers. This triggered the intensified repression of workers' strikes and protests across the country. Instead of addressing the problems in Filipinos' working conditions, Duterte chose to suppress those who dare speak out against these. Workers' basic problems remain unaddressed and are being compounded by state repression -- yet another reason why Filipinos have been

leaving the country in record numbers to find work abroad.

The Duterte government also imposed more state exactions on prospective OFWs before their deployment. Among these are the three-month worth of SSS premium and one-year worth of PhilHealth premium, which were collected on the basis of the newly-enacted Universal Healthcare Act or RA 11223. The law, together with RA 11199 or the Social Security Act of 2018, mandates that reserve funds raised by the SSS and PhilHealth will be used by the government as investments in projects signed with the private sector. At the same time, activists in the health and other sectors say that Universal Healthcare as it is carried out by the Philippine government in fact violates people's right to healthcare, as it still means preserving the privatized and profit-driven healthcare system.

PhilHealth exactions were being raised even as a corruption case in PhilHealth was exposed by the government's Commission on Audit, and earned widespread ire. The case revolves around a huge PHP 154 billion involving ghost patients, overpayments, and fake deliveries since 2013. Despite OFWs' call for the prosecution of those responsible, the Duterte government has failed to hold anyone accountable for the missing amount.

2020 AND 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic devastated the world in 2020 and triggered the worst global recession after the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many economists clarify, however, that even before the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic, the global economy was already in a downturn. There was no recovery from the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009, and the Covid-19 pandemic only hastened the global economic crash.

As workers in the lowest rungs in the workplace and as second-class citizens in another country, OFWs and migrant workers in general were hard hit by the pandemic and the economic crisis. As of December 31, 2020, there were 12,876 Covid-19 cases among Filipinos abroad -- 911 deaths, 3,578 undergoing treatment, and 8,387 recovered or discharged. This has increased to 20,943 Covid-19 cases among Filipinos abroad as of July 12, 2021 -- 1,245 deaths, 7,344 undergoing treatment, and 12,354 recovered or discharged. Most of these cases, including 67.15 per cent of the deaths, are in the Middle East, where there is a large concentration of OFWs and where OFWs' living quarters are mostly cramped.

Many OFWs and migrant workers in general were excluded from the financial assistance programs in migrant-receiving countries. Because of the origins of the Coronavirus and of their standing at work and society, many OFWs and migrant workers faced discrimination, even racism.

Many migrant workers, OFWs included, were either laid off from work or had their workload and wages reduced. Many were subjected to "no work, no pay" schemes. When everyone was asked to stay home during the early phases of the pandemic, many OFWs had to rely on their meager savings and experienced hunger. In July 2020, more than 551,000 OFWs have been displaced from work. More than 20,000 seafarers were out of work, caused by the end of ship operations. Tens of thousands were stranded aboard their ships and demanded

repatriation. Some, including Raul Calopez and Stanley Jungco, died without receiving medical attention.

At the same time, many OFWs found themselves at the frontlines in fighting the pandemic. The health services of the UK, US, Canada and other countries are staffed by many Filipinos. Many OFWs also continued essential work in many farms and factories. Their health and lives were put at risk, and at first did not have the personal protective equipment or PPE necessary for them to work safely.

Despite the bad situation of OFWs, their families in the Philippines were barred from receiving the meager financial assistance released by the government and from the DSWD's Social Amelioration Program on the grounds that they are "better off." Some OFWs and their beneficiaries did not receive benefits from the OWWA because they were not active members when they became sick, met an accident or died. This, despite the fact that they have been long-standing before the pandemic, and only failed to renew their membership because of the pandemic. Some OFWs were not able to access their insurance benefits, which were received by the agencies employing them.

The Philippines is a top migrant labor-exporting country, but its embassies and consulates were closed in the early days of the pandemic, unable to provide support to distressed OFWs and OFWs in general. Many -- such as in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Thailand, and Australia -- either reduced their office hours or completely closed, even as government offices in these countries continued operations with their regular office hours. In Hongkong, home to hundreds of thousands of Filipina domestic workers, OFWs in quarantine facilities receive food from fellow Filipinos, as Philippine government offices like OWWA and POLO stand idly by.

Philippine government offices abroad are merely continuing their poor record in providing services to OFWs even before the pandemic -- Duterte's sweet words about OFWs notwithstanding. In the Middle East, they are closed during weekends -- Friday and Saturday in these Islamic countries -- when these are the days that OFWs are free to go to their offices and make transactions. In Canada, they do not have any program for distressed OFWs, and the Filipino community has to step in to provide support. They are also responsible for the slow processing of passports, which are essential to all OFWs. In the US, they are available only through appointments, no walk-ins are allowed, and getting an appointment is difficult. They are even slow in responding to emails. They also use inconsistent policies on dual citizenship applications and voter's registration.

The Duterte government failed to provide immediate repatriation to hundreds of thousands of OFWs stranded in migrant-receiving countries. OFWs had to wait for more than three months before they are repatriated. The government brags about its repatriation efforts even as an overwhelming majority of OFWs who were repatriated paid for their own tickets to go home.

It offered USD 200 in cash aid through its DOLE-AKAP -- which was too meager compared to OFWs' needs, demanded too many documents, and was released late to the few who were deemed eligible. It also excluded many sectors of the OFW population: OFWs in jail,

trafficking victims, undocumented Halaw's in Sabah, Au Pairs in Europe and J1 visa holders in the US. It excluded countries like Thailand, which has a significant OFW population, many of whom were laid off from work when the country's tourism industry was badly affected. Only 250,000 or 2 per cent of the total 12 million OFWs will receive the financial assistance. Under BAYANIHAN 1, only 338,900 OFWs received one time financial assistance out of 683,369 who submitted applications for DOLE-AKAP. For many OFWs in the Middle East, the amount can only help in paying one month of rent. The pandemic and the lack of government support to rely upon affected OFWs' mental health badly, with many becoming depressed and some committing suicide.

Many among OFWs who were able to return to the Philippines found themselves stranded in Metro Manila. Many were dumped -- "like garbage," as one OFW put it -- in the National Capital Region's airport terminals. As many were unceremoniously retrenched from work, many were penniless. They were not provided with food, were made to sit close to heaps of junk airport equipment, or were forced to sleep along roads, pathways and under bridges close to the main airport. The government then adopted quarantine procedures that were inept. In stark contrast to the Duterte government's sweet promises for OFWs, many found themselves packed like sardines in overcrowded shelters, sleeping on floors, and lacking food and water.

It was only when we OFWs led by Migrante International complained loudly about these quarantine facilities that the government was forced to partner with hotels to provide us with proper quarantine areas. OFWs' quarantine stay was extended unnecessarily, however, because there were no prompt PCR tests upon arrival and results were released late. The Duterte government then made noises about funds for OFWs' quarantine running out and about the necessity of shortening quarantine stay, without carrying out prompt PCR tests.

OFWs who were able to return home faced joblessness and hunger, together with their families. The number of the unemployed in the Philippines reached historically new heights, according to independent think-tank Ibon Foundation. Returned OFWs are victims of the government's snail-paced vaccination program. The government's efforts for re-skilling OFWs have been rendered useless, as it refused to take decisive action to create jobs in the country. It even pushed through with the implementation of the Rice Liberalization Law, which meant death for the country's agriculture sector -- as well as high prices of the Filipinos' staple food.

And what was the Duterte government busying itself with during this time in the OFW front? One is raising state exactions on OFWs. (1) It implemented the mandatory PhilHealth membership and premium increase. The latter amounts to P20,400 in the first year and will increase in the following years. Those who will not be able to pay this will be forced to pay penalties with compounded interests. (2) It implemented the mandatory SSS membership and premium increase, and will compel OFWs to pay for the 50 per cent employers' contribution. (3) It retained other state exactions: (a) USD 140 mandatory insurance per contract, (b) OWWA-membership that is dependent on contract, and (c) the OEC which not only comes with a price but is also being used to impose other fees on OFWs.

Another is repression of migrant rights defenders. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) extended its campaign of repression outside the

country. It pushed for the appointment of military attaches in Philippine embassies in countries with a significant OFW population. It held seminars that red-tagged Migrante International and other progressive organizations fighting for the rights of migrants and the Filipino people and critical of the Duterte government. Its actions intensified after Duterte signed the Anti-Terror Law in December 2020.

- ◆ In Abu Dhabi in the UAE, the first defense attache office in the Gulf Cooperation Council states was created in February 2021.
- ◆ In Hong Kong, the NTF-ELCAC used a local group of Duterte supporters to red-tag leaders of progressive organizations who were opposing the mandatory PhilHealth premium increase. They also tried to disrupt activities expressing opposition to the increase.
- ◆ In Taiwan, the Labor Attache himself went to the house of a Filipina domestic worker to harass and intimidate her after posting a video critical of the Duterte regime's handling of the pandemic.
- ◆ The PNP created its outposts in the US, which ask the public to report "criminal activities" or any concerns.
- ◆ In Australia, the NTF-ELCAC spokesperson Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr. himself, together with Duterte supporters in the country, attempted to sabotage forums critical of the Duterte regime's policies.
- ◆ In New Zealand, leaders of unions and Migrante Aotearoa were red-tagged by individuals connected with the Philippine government.
- ◆ In Canada, there is increased surveillance by the Philippine consulate on activities of progressive and opposition groups.
- ◆ In Toronto and Vancouver, consulate officials are taking videos and photos of protestors in front of their offices.
- ◆ Progressive Filipino organizations and leaders in the US were red-tagged by government-sponsored Facebook Pages and webinars.

OFWs have become victims of the Duterte government's militaristic and inept response to the pandemic -- which is responsible for the Philippines' bad rankings in global surveys of Covid-19 performance. Yes, the pandemic hit the world like a typhoon, but it hit the Philippines like a super typhoon because of the Duterte government's ineptitude and militaristic mindset. It is clear that Duterte has prioritized the defense of his presidency over defending Filipinos against Covid-19. His government borrowed a lot of money, but this did not go to services for OFWs and ordinary Filipinos. If Duterte really cares about OFWs, he should have improved his government's response to the pandemic. As the Philippines is a top migrant labor-exporting country, Filipino migrant workers will surely suffer if the government's response to the pandemic is inept -- and OFWs have been suffering.

OUSTING DUTERTE, FILIPINO MIGRANTS STRUGGLE

Contrary to Duterte's promise, there has been no "genuine change" in the situation of OFWs and our families since he became president. We are worse off now than when he assumed office and he did more harm than good to us. All he gave us were sweet words and promises, and little changes such as the extension of passport effectivity from five to ten years, and

nothing more.

His government's response to the emergencies and problems faced by Filipino migrants was often too little and too late. It increased the financial burden borne by OFWs by hiking various state exactions. It did little to uphold OFWs' rights in the workplace and receiving countries. It intensified the implementation of the government's Labor Export Policy. It made worse the social and economic conditions in the Philippines -- landlessness, joblessness, lack of affordable government services -- that force Filipinos to leave the country in order to find work abroad. It used the funds it gathered from OFWs to advance the interests of big foreign and local capitalists, big landlords and bureaucrats, top military and police officials and his political clique.

These crimes against OFWs, Filipino migrants and our families are part of his crimes against the Filipino people as a whole: extrajudicial killings and human rights violations against the poor and against members and leaders of progressive organizations; various attacks against the opposition, the media, the Catholic church and other voices independent and critical of the government; high levels of corruption; involvement in drug and criminal syndicates; selling off the country's territories to China; puppetry to the US and acting as a client to China; rehabilitation of the Marcoses, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the most corrupt and fascist factions of the political elite; inept and bungling response to the Covid-19 pandemic; among others.

In sum, Duterte abandoned OFWs and Filipinos to fend for our own during the Covid-19 pandemic and other times of great need. He waged a brutal campaign of fascist repression of all voices that are independent and critical of his government. He intensified state exaction from OFWs and ordinary Filipinos even as he presided over record-levels of corruption in government. He betrayed the national interest in relation to the country's territories being claimed by China, and other issues.

Throughout this time, we OFWs and our families did not remain silent. We demanded swift and adequate government response to the emergencies and problems faced by Filipino migrants. We opposed increases in state exactions, and called for their junking. We fought for our rights in our workplaces and in receiving countries. We exposed the numerous problems inherent in the Labor Export Policy and called for its junking. We opposed policies that will worsen the socio-economic conditions in the Philippines and we fought for genuine social change. We fought the use of OFW funds for the interests of the few. We united with the Filipino people in opposing Duterte's numerous anti-OFW and anti-people policies.

Concretely, we have demanded the following:

- ◆ Scrapping of the mandatory membership and premium hike in PhilHealth. Implementation of free and genuine healthcare system. End to, and reversal of, privatization of the country's healthcare system. Abolition of PhilHealth. Use of people's money for free health services, not corruption.
- ◆ Junking of the SSS premium hike. Ensuring employers' unpaid SSS contributions are collected. Implementation of free and genuine social security system.

- ◆ A stop to illegal collections. Refunding of fees illegally collected from OFWs. An end to illegal recruitment.
- ◆ For seafarers, the enactment of the Magna Carta of Seafarers, which contains provisions on security of tenure, free medical services and recognition of fishers in ocean going vessels. Repatriation of stranded seafarers. The provision of government services and an end to state exaction.
- ◆ Ayuda or financial assistance for OFWs: (a) PhP 10,000 for each OFW family inside and outside the Philippines. (b) USD 200 for each OFW who was retrenched from work and whose salary was reduced because of the pandemic -- in addition to the DOLE-AKAP assistance. (c) PhP 20,000 livelihood assistance for each OFW repatriated because of the pandemic. (d) PhP 30,000 for going home, quarantine, swab test and other health needs of each repatriated displaced OFW. (e) Creation of decent temporary shelters for OFWs outside the country who lost their job and accommodation because of the pandemic.
- ◆ Expansion of the DOLE-AKAP in terms of amount and coverage.
- ◆ Junking of the Labor Export Policy. The creation of decent jobs in the Philippines -- which by definition will provide living wages, job security, and the right to form unions and hold strikes.
- ◆ An end to the Duterte government's policy of deploying military attaches to foreign posts. What should be deployed to other countries are welfare officers, social workers and medical personnel's for OFWs who are in need and in distress.
- ◆ Scrapping of the draconian Anti-Terror Law, and the abolition and de-funding of the NTF-ELCAC.

Even as we face economic difficulties of our own, we OFWs have repeatedly helped fellow Filipinos in need -- victimized by various calamities and the pandemic and by the Duterte government. We have gathered and sent donations to victims of the strongest typhoons that hit the country, and the eruption of volcanoes in recent years. When Covid-19 devastated the world, we gathered and provided food and other forms of assistance to fellow Filipinos in need: OFWs in the Middle East launched Kabayan Bayanihan, Filipino migrants in Canada launched Kapit Bisig, and OFWs across Asia-Pacific launched Damayan.

We waged a formidable struggle against the mandatory increase in PhilHealth premium contributions in 2020, other state exactions imposed on OFWs, and the Duterte government's red-tagging and repression of migrant rights defenders. We held various activities to express solidarity with the campaigns of the marginalized sectors in the Philippines. We sought to expand and strengthen our organizations in the process of fighting for the rights and interests of OFWs and the Filipino people.

As we face Duterte's last SONA, we take stock of his crimes against Filipino migrants, OFWs, our families, and the Filipino people. We are worse off now than when his term began. Because of his anti-OFW and anti-people policies, as well as our resistance to these policies, Duterte has become weak politically -- hated by many OFWs and Filipinos. We have struggled against Duterte's policies and have become stronger and more resolute in our unity in opposing him. Because of his grave crimes, Duterte should be removed from office and be made accountable. The long, dark night of Duterte's reign in the country must end. Through our continuous struggle, we are making that possible. ###

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