

Republic of the Philippines  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Quezon City, Metro Manila

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS  
First Regular Session  
House Resolution No. 807



---

Introduced by Representative Ron P. Salo

---

**RESOLUTION**  
**DIRECTING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE CURRENT DIRE SITUATION OF FILIPINOS IN SABAH**

**WHEREAS**, the situation of Filipino migrants in Sabah – both documented and undocumented, is a cause of grave concern, with thousands languishing in overcrowded jails and deportation facilities under subhuman conditions, and are continually exposed to threats of abuse and police brutality;

**WHEREAS**, the situation of Filipinos in Sabah is a long-standing humanitarian crisis of ominous proportions. While there is difficulty in accurately assessing the number of Filipinos in Sabah, government estimates of Filipinos in Sabah were pegged at 800,000, while NGO estimates were pegged at 1.4 million, according to 2013 reports (Yahoo News Philippines, April 1, 2013);

**WHEREAS**, in recent years, the Malaysian government has instituted crackdown on illegal immigrants, which were reportedly accompanied by police brutality and severe human rights violations;

**WHEREAS**, in 2002, a crackdown against immigrants caused physical, emotional, and psychological suffering to Filipinos. This was described by Gabriela representative Luzviminda Ilagan in a speech to the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees in 2008: ***“Tens of thousands of Filipinos, half of them women and children, were caught and cramped in appalling detention cells. They were detained for weeks before they are deported back to their countries of origin. Sabah newspapers confirmed the Malaysian authorities’ cruelties – beatings and manhandling of men, children and even pregnant women. Dozens of women had been raped by police or jail guards; one of them a 13-year-old girl. Just like in the previous crackdowns, countless people, especially children, fell physically, emotionally and psychologically ill, and at least 12 babies and children died while in detention due to dehydration, starvation and disease”*** (Ilagan, 2008).

**WHEREAS**, in February 2013, the Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo, claiming to be under the leadership of Jamalul Kiram III, an heir and claimant to the Sultanate of Sulu, arrived in Sabah to assert the Philippines' territorial claim. This sparked a military stand-off with Malaysian forces which resulted in the death of 52 Filipinos and eight Malaysian policemen and the evacuation of over 6,000 Filipinos from Sabah. Undocumented Filipino migrants were reportedly subjected to physical abuse and harassment by the Malaysian police force (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 17 March 2013);

**WHEREAS**, in January 2014, reports of abuses against Filipinos in Sabah, again circulated. Documented and undocumented migrants were allegedly rounded up, thrown in processing centers and jails, and forced to admit they were illegal workers. Some of the female migrants were also reportedly raped. Florito Rosales, an architect working in a Malaysian construction company, posted in his Facebook account that he and other Filipinos were jailed, abused, made to sleep on the floor of an overcrowded and pest-infested hall, and treated as criminals, even if he was "fully documented with a working visa". He claimed that Malaysian authorities were targeting Filipinos. He also complained of the inaction of the Philippine embassy in Malaysia over these mistreatments (Inquirer.net, 24 January 2014);

**WHEREAS**, there have been various efforts to address the situation, but fact-finding missions revealed that these actions failed to provide adequate and coordinated assistance for the migrant workers. Overall, it has been observed that the abuses suffered by Filipinos in Sabah were seldom given national attention, and that efforts that have been implemented so far offered only temporary solutions such as providing assistance to deportees, and not permanent solutions to the persisting issue of the Filipino migrants in Sabah. Limited or insufficient state intervention aggravates the abuses that Filipino migrants suffer;

**WHEREAS**, on 10 November 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak agreed on the gradual repatriation of Filipinos in Sabah. The President expressed his full cooperation with the repatriation, and stressed that while the gradual repatriation is proceeding, he intends to provide assistance, in the form of hospitals and schools, for the undocumented Filipinos in Sabah.

**WHEREAS**, on 30 January 2017, Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Judy Taguiwalo stated that more than 7,000 Filipinos in Sabah who have been arrested by Malaysian authorities for their "undocumented migrant" status will be deported beginning February, and stressed that the deportees will be provided with assistance to make sure their immediate economic needs are met;

**WHEREAS**, the recent efforts of the government are encouraging and will offer much-needed relief and support to many of the thousands of Filipinos detained in jails and deportation facilities in Sabah. However, there is a need for a coherent policy and definitive action from the concerned government agencies to halt the continuing abuses against Filipino migrants. While repatriation is on-going, there is a need to fully investigate and squarely address the issues of abuses and human rights violations, and come up with policies and programs including addressing the

issue directly with Malaysia and coming up with bilateral agreements that will tackle the situation once and for all;

**WHEREAS**, while there is an existing territorial issue between the Philippines and Malaysia, the government needs to come up with solutions that treat the security and welfare of the Filipinos as a priority. The protection of the interest of Filipinos should be given a paramount consideration, even separate from other issues involving other aspects of the Philippine relations with Malaysia;

**WHEREAS**, the Philippines is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Protection of All Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families, and, as such, is duty-bound to ensure that every Filipino who wishes to work or is currently working overseas is protected from all forms of human rights violations, regardless of whether or not his or her country of destination and work is a signatory to the same international treaty that binds us. And all the more should the State be on the lookout or on a more heightened alert for such violations in countries, such as Malaysia, that are non-parties to the aforementioned human rights convention.

**WHEREAS**, this inquiry in aid of legislation aims to come up with a coherent policy and legal framework in addressing the situation of Filipino migrants in Sabah, including a clear government policy on Filipino migration to Sabah. This will include defining a much clearer and effective government policy on Filipino migration to Sabah that will render safer the living and working conditions of all Filipino migrants in that area, an assessment of the effectiveness of our legal protection mechanisms for our migrants in distress, and a veritable review of our foreign relations policy with Malaysia insofar as the Sabah issue is concerned.

**WHEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED**, for the House of Representatives, through the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on Overseas Workers, to conduct an investigation on the situation of Filipino migrants in Sabah, and to determine the appropriate measures to improve their situation, address the abuses and human rights violations committed against them, provide clear policies on Filipino migration to Sabah, and provide better security, welfare, legal protection, and better overall conditions to all Filipinos in Sabah.

Adopted,

  
**RON P. SALO**  
KABAYAN Party-list