Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 1095

Introduced by
TUCP Party-List Representative RAYMOND DEMOCRITO C. MENDOZA,
1-PACMAN Party-List Representative ENRICO A. PINEDA,
BAYAN MUNA Representatives FERDINAND R. GAITE,
CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE and EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT,
ACT TEACHERS Party-List Representative FRANC E L. CASTRO,
GABRIELA Women's Party Representative ARLENE D. BRO SAS
and KABATAAN Party-List Representative SARAH J ANE I. EL AGO

RESOLUTION
URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSEAS WORKERS AFFAIRS AND THE COMMITTEE ON LABOR TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE WORSENING SITUATION OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND RECOMMEND URGENT MEASURES TO ADDRESS THEIR CONCERNS

WHEREAS, there is an estimated 1.2 million registered OFWs working in the Middle East in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Israel and Bahrain. Even prior to the pandemic, majority of these OFWs work in desitute conditions and suffer from various forms of abuse and exploitation from their employers. These working conditions only worsened when the pandemic-induced lockdowns and economic restrictions caused massive job displacement and increasing cases of employer abuses;

WHEREAS, it has been four months since the COVID-19 pandemic and business closures began in various countries in the Middle East. Many of our OFWs have lost their jobs and sources of income for daily subsistence. The cash assistance program offered by the State only targets 250,000 beneficiaries which pales in comparison to almost a million OFWs bound to lose their jobs according to estimates from no less than DOLE Secretary Silvestre Bello III himself. Even for OFWs who qualify for the program, the Php10,000.00 or $200.00 AKAP one-time dole out can only cover one month's worth of rent;

WHEREAS, remittances from OFWs working in the Middle East reached a record total of $5.9 billion or 18 per cent of total remittances in 2019. Despite the pandemic-induced massive layoffs and non-payment of salaries, OFW remittances from the Middle East had reached $1.4 billion from January to March 2020 – an amount which has been largely instrumental in supporting their families at home amid the lockdown as well as funding government coffers in the fight against COVID-19;

WHEREAS, as of July 20, 2020, there were 9,136 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Filipinos abroad across 67 countries. Of this figure 5,360 have recovered and have been

discharged, 3,132 are undergoing treatment while 644 have died according to official data from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)²;

WHEREAS, out of these figures, around 72% or 6,605 cases are OFWs located in 27 countries across the Middle East and Africa³. The number of COVID-19 casualties among OFWs in the Middle East has seen more than a hundred additional deaths from last month as the death toll currently stands at 374;

WHEREAS, out of the 167,626 stranded OFWs reported by the DFA as of June 26, only 50,577 or a third of figure are expected to be repatriated by the end of July. At this rate, OFWs would have stayed for half a year or more before they are repatriated not to mention possible underreporting and inconsistencies in data regarding affected OFWs. Our OFWs are in grave despair – without a viable source of income, they are left with no money to spare to pay for rent, food, medicine and other basic needs for themselves and their families in the Philippines. Their desperation has become palpable as more of our so-called ‘modern day heroes’ have resorted to scavenging for food just to eke out a subsistence while others are forced to sell their own blood for money;

WHEREAS, this alarming trend is further exacerbated by the deplorable condition of OFWs in quarantine centers and shelters abroad as well as several cases of employer abuse such as contract substitution, unpaid salaries, wage cuts, non-issuance of exit visas, and other forms of violence. Case in point is OFW Bernadette Erlano, working as a cleaner along with 300 other Filipino women under the Jawa Human Resources in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia who, since March 1 have not received salaries and were merely provided with meager allowances⁴;

WHEREAS, several OFWs have lamented the lack of support from the Philippine government citing the inefficiency of Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLO) on responding to their urgent needs. OFWs have repeatedly pleaded POLO officials for help hoping they can be assisted by the Philippine government in demanding for their salaries to be justly paid and assisting their flights back home;

WHEREAS, the Philippine government’s systematic neglect of the welfare and betterment of migrants makes them highly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 infection. Even prior to the pandemic, OFWs in the Middle East have been grossly abused and mistreated by their employers without receiving ample assistance from the national government or from POLO officials. Inadequate salaries and benefits on top of exorbitant government exactions and the lack of concrete programs to ensure their rights in host countries have severely compromised their physical and mental well-being;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs and the Committee on Labor, to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the worsening situation of overseas Filipino workers in the Middle East and recommend urgent measures to address their concerns.

Adopted,
REP. RAYMOND DEMOCRITO C. MENDOZA
TUCP Partylist

REP. ENRICO A. PINEDA
I-PACMAN Partylist

REP. FERDINAND R. GAITE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT
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REP. FRANCE L. CASTRO
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REP. ARLENÉ D. BROSAS
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REP. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO
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