European Union Delegation to the Philippines commemorates Human Rights Month by honoring Filipino migrant workers

In the context of the Human Rights Month, the EU Delegation on 13 December arranged a special screening of the film 'Sunday Beauty Queen' to honour Filipino migrant workers. The film, screened at the Alliance Francaise de Manille, follows the lives of five Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, who have left families back home in order to support them.

Mattias Lentz, Chargé d'affaires, a.i., of the EU Delegation said in his welcoming remarks that "for many OFWs, working overseas is not easy. Work conditions can be difficult and immigrants might not
enjoy the same rights as back home. Women migrants, especially those employed in low-paying jobs, largely bear the brunt of abuse and exploitation. This is something that the EU is very much concerned about."

"We believe that the vulnerability of migrants can be addressed through the strengthening of inter-governmental and inter-regional cooperation, where civil society organisations and other non-state institutions play important roles."

Among those who attended the screening were Undersecretary Lou y Arriola, Office of Migrant Workers, Department of Foreign Affairs, the film's director Baby Ruth Villamara, Commissioner Gwen Gana from the Commission on Human Rights, Carmelita Nuqui, President of Philippine Migrants Watch and popular actress Juana Change who has a role in the film. In attendance were also advocates for migrants' rights and members of the diplomatic corps.

Since 2005, the EU has funded 17 projects worth Php 1 billion to address human trafficking, illegal recruitment and strengthening of migration systems and institutions. A recent initiative is the newly-launched regional programme called "Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region, which aims to make labor migration safe and fair especially for all women migrants in Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, Undersecretary y Arriola credited the EU for its fair treatment of migrant workers and also stressed that the Philippines' policy to maximize all avenues and forums where the rights, interests and welfare of Overseas Foreign Workers (OFW) could be advanced.

Film director Baby Ruth Villarama said that "like the champions that we are in our work and our families, we hope we can continue to champion the hidden heroes in our migrant work force and find inspiration through their stories. As we commemorate the value of human rights this month, we can only hope that by uplifting the voiceless in our society, we can uphold human dignity, and ultimately celebrate equality - not just exclusively on Sunday but everyday 24/7".

It is estimated that there are 10 million Filipinos living abroad. The remittances they send back every year to their families in the Philippines constitute a substantial part of the GDP of the Philippines.

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