

CHR urges gov't: Ensure justice mechanism for repatriated OFWs



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MANILA, Philippines – The Commission on Human Rights on Wednesday called for a more structured and human rights-based system on the repatriation of overseas Filipino workers in the wake of an uptick in cases of wage theft.

In a statement issued Wednesday afternoon, the commission said that lack of support from sending and receiving countries was linked to the increasing wage theft cases.

"Commission on Human Rights (CHR) would like to draw attention to the fact that the lack of support from the sending and receiving countries has led to an increase in the number of cases on wage theft," the commission's statement read.

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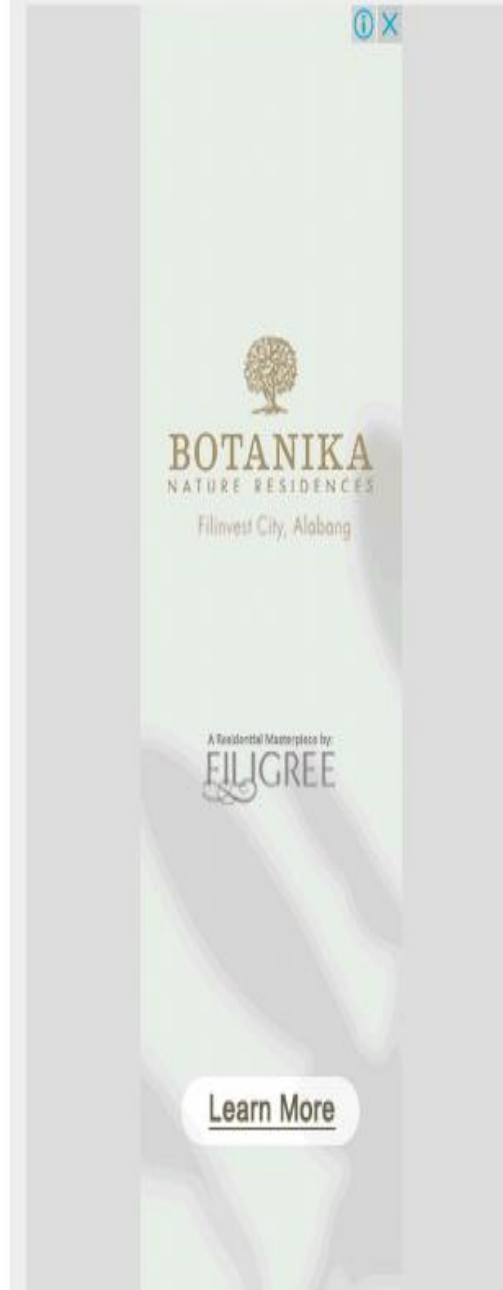


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"Thus, we urge the government to take the necessary steps to address the concerns faced by repatriated OFWs, particularly improper compensation, non-payment of wages, and job loss," it also said.

The commission called for funds, whose contributions could be ensured by the government, private contributions, business, and philanthropic foundations, to be set up at the national level.



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Such funds, the commission said, could "be later recouped from employers and businesses who were involved in wage-theft" to would ensure OFWs are paid their dues and have their cases resolved promptly.

In particular, CHR called for justice reforms such as:

- expedited labor courts
- waving court fees
- putting in place wage protection systems
- operating worker hotlines in different languages
- ramping up documentation in cooperation with missions
- facilitating power of attorney procedures
- allowing for remote testimony post repatriation
- providing legal aid
- encouraging workers to come forward to register their labor grievances

Families of OFWs in distress are among the target beneficiaries of the government's social amelioration program, though the Department of Social Welfare and Development is nowhere near complete with its second tranche, even as the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act is already well expired.

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By mid-July, less than 20% of the DSWD's 17-million targeted families had received their aid.

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Earlier on in the pandemic, videos circulated on social media of Filipinos displaced by the coronavirus in the Middle East going through trash bins to find food and appealing to authorities to bring them home.

"The need for more robust mechanisms to expedite payment of wages and other entitlements owed must be recognized and addressed. This is a matter of great importance to migrants, to the family members and communities who depend on their remittances, and to the resilience of the economies in their countries of origin," CHR said.

"We are in solidarity with the appeal of the Migrant Forum in Asia, together with other migrants' rights movements, on the urgency of ensuring a justice mechanism for repatriated Filipino migrant workers," Commissioner Gwendolyn LI. Pimentel-Gana, focal commissioner on migrants' rights said. — **Franco Luna**

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