



NATION

CHR asks gov't to protect inadequately paid repatriated OFWs amid pandemic

Justice mechanism for deprived workers should be in place, commission says

By: **Gabriel Pabico Lulu** - Reporter / @GabrielLaluINQ INQUIRER.net / 07:11 PM July 22, 2020

MANILA, Philippines — The government should set-up a justice mechanism for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who were not compensated properly before they were repatriated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) said on Wednesday.

According to CHR, they support the call by Migrant Forum in Asia, which noted that a high volume of migrant workers have fallen victim to “wage theft”, or when workers were not properly paid for their work as the health crisis ensued.

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“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,” CHR Commissioner Gwendolyn Pimentel-Gana, who handles the commission’s migrants’ rights affairs, said in a statement.

CHR mentioned three ways for the government to help OFWs affected by <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1310494/chr-asks-govt-to-protect-inadequately-paid-repatriated-ofws-amid-pandemic>

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a compensation fund, reforming existing justice systems to help workers cope with legal expenses, and the creation of opportunities for the repatriated workers.

The compensation fund, the commission said, would be paid in advance by the government and sourced from employers and businesses allegedly involved in the wage-theft scheme.

“Funds must be set up at the national level, and contributions to them could be ensured by the government, private contributions, business, and philanthropic foundations,” CHR said.

“Funds advanced by the government could be later recouped from employers and businesses who were involved in wage-theft. This approach would ensure that migrant workers are paid their dues without delay and that their cases are resolved swiftly,” they added.

At the start of July, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said that **72,000 Filipino workers have been repatriated** after the sectors they have been working for abroad closed down due to the lockdowns in other countries brought about by the health crisis.

Just before that, President Rodrigo Duterte’s report mentioned that around **48,000 OFWs would also be repatriated**, warning that the repatriates could reach over 100,000 in the coming months.

Also in early July, Bello admitted that the **jobs of 400,000 OFWs** were affected by the COVID-19 crisis, while adding that around **one million workers may lose their jobs** due to the pandemic.

CHR said that the government must act fast on the issue, as it is very important for the OFWs and their families.

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“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,” CHR said.

“For our part, CHR will continue to engage with government and civil society in finding durable solutions and redress for human rights grievances that beset OFWs and members of their families especially in this time of the pandemic,” it added.

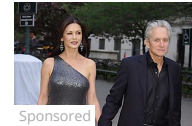
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