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Paper No. 5
Asian Media Information and Communication Center (AMICC): Regional Consultation on Media and Labor Migration. August 21-23, 2000
Richmonde Hotel, Pasig.

Welcome Remarks: Dr. Rudolf Traub-Merz

- Hon. Laguesma, Secretary of Labor & Employment,
- Dr. Goonasekera, Deputy Secretary-General of the Asian Media Information & Communication Center (AMICC),
- Mr. Regalado, Administrator of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration,
- Delegates & Participants to this Conference
- Ladies & Gentlemen

I am very pleased to welcome you all on behalf of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), to this regional conference on “Media and Labor Migration”, organised by the Asian Media Information & Communication Centre (AMICC) and supported by my organisation.

I think, it is a matter of courtesy to the host country of this conference, that I begin my short welcome address with a Filipino salutation: MABUHAY! Magandang Umaga. Good morning everyone.

Before I say a few words on the topic of this conference, allow me to share with you a few insights about FES.

FES is a non-stock, non-profit educational foundation, established in 1925 in the legacy of Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany, and at the same time, the chairperson of the Social Democratic Party.
The purpose of FES is to organize activities, which are aiming at strengthening democracy in the understanding of a social democracy.

We maintain a worldwide network of branch offices in some 75 countries, where we cooperate with development institutions and organizations in the fields of civic and labor education, political decentralization, media development, promotion of small enterprises, and environment.

Historically, FES has strong roots in the German labor movement. Today, participatory rights within industrial relations, the development of trade unionism, and protection of workers are still prominent issues in our work. We feel, therefore, very honored to be part of this consultation on labor migration and media.

Considering the power of media in information and in policy-making, this conference can contribute in ensuring that the movement of workers across countries shall be governed by international standards, which should be anchored on the commitments of national governments and institutions.

Let me browse through a few data and images, related to labor migration.

- In Germany, foreign workers, the so-called Gastarbeiter, heavily contributed to the German economic miracle after the 2nd World War. Today, under a high unemployment rate, my country faces the rise of right-wing nationalism. An increasing number of young people are turning in campaigns of hatred against foreigners.

At the same time, Germany is faced with a declining population, a process, which threatens the very set-up of our welfare state, especially the pension scheme. This very demographic problem can only be overcome by inviting more foreigners, to work and live in Germany.
- In the Philippines, remittance of Overseas Filipino Workers is estimated to reach $6-billion a year, fuelling a consumption-led economy. In another view on this feature, we can stay, that the Philippine society is exporting unemployment, thus doing away with the need for stronger national employment policy.

- The sex sector in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines—with its cross-border migration—is estimated by ILO to account for anywhere from 2 to 14 percent of GDP.

There are thousands of statistics and images - good and bad ones - that we could consider. The greatest issue, at the end, always pinpoints to workers' protection.

As we try to grapple labor migration in this conference, the inevitable question will be: - what can be the role of media, in ensuring protection of labor migrants?

Let me share my initial thoughts on this.

Firstly, we have to expect a broader and deeper coverage and discussion on the plight of migrant labor - internationally and within each country. This serves to widen awareness of the issues and mobilize public opinion.

Secondly, the media has to disseminate information on the international labor standards, specially on the ILO Convention 143, as well as to report on best practices and models of legal framework in the various sending and receiving countries.

This can have direct impact on legislators and policy-makers, and civil society groups can pursue them as their agendas.
Thirdly, the media has to take a strong role in the system of checks and balances to institutions. One of the key problems in labor migration is illegal movement. This often leads to exploitation and abuse.

Thus, the media has to put pressure on governments to perform its duty in curbing these illegal acts.

Lastly, the media has an important role in strengthening the value of human rights among the citizenry. Many abuses occur in domestic settings, and these are the most difficult to check.

I am sure, such ideas and many more, will be discussed in detail during the course of your 3-day consultation. We must remember, that at this stage of our civilization, one important thing remains sacred - and that is human rights.

These rights must extend to those people, which are now called “The workers without frontiers”. The media occupies a special role in upholding and promoting them.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I congratulate AMICC for initiating this conference and for the excellent preparations. Many thanks to the resource persons and participants for giving your time to participate and to share your experiences and ideas.

I thank you for you attention. And in Pilipino, Maraming Salamat.