
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

December 2012 - January 2013

Strengthening the Rights of Filipino Domestic Workers

By Fe
Kagahastian



Domestic workers should enjoy the same basic rights—such as standard pay, leave days, welfare benefits, among others—as the rest of the workers in the labor force, said Ms. Ana Liza U. Valencia, National Project Coordinator of the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Decent Work for Domestic Workers Project in the Philippines.

“Now, more than ever, the unjust working conditions of domestic workers (both local- and overseas-based) are under close scrutiny by lawmakers and the current Philippine administration,” said Ms. Valencia, expressing optimism when asked if she thought the proposed Domestic Workers Act of 2012—also known as the Kasambahay Bill—protecting Filipino domestic workers, will be enacted into law.

Ms. Valencia was the guest speaker at the November 19 meeting of the Manila Women's Forum, hosted by MWF member Carol Davies, in her work premises at the DöhleHaus Building on Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue.

Ms. Valencia's scheduled talk was intended to inform MWF members, a network of Filipino and expatriate women, who are mostly employers of domestic workers, of the work being done by ILO to uphold the rights of domestic helpers at the global and country levels.

A few days after her talk, the
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November meeting, left to right:
Rebecca Ma, Ana Liza U. Valencia
(speaker), MWF Chair Lisa
Lumbao, Cecilia Leung.

January MWF Meeting ■ **When:** Monday, 2013 January 21, 6:30 p.m. ■ **What:** Did the new year sneak up on you before you had a chance to make any New Year's resolutions, reflect on the past year, or figure out plans or goals for 2013? Shana Montesol Johnson, certified executive/career coach and longtime MWF member, will lead us through an interactive mini-workshop to take stock of 2012, get clear on what we'd like in the new year, and get ready to take action to make 2013 a great year. ■ **Where:** The home of Kitty Arambulo, 1433 Calumpang Dasmariñas Village, Makati. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. ■ **February Meeting:** Monday, 2013 February 18.

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leadership of the Philippine bicameral lawmaking body announced their decision to approve a consolidated version of the Kasambahay Bill. Shortly thereafter, both the Philippine Congress and Senate ratified the bill, respectively, leaving one last step toward enactment into law—submission to President Benigno Aquino III for signature.

One of the highlights of the bill is the standardization of domestic workers' monthly minimum wages. Under the bill, according to newspaper reports, the monthly salary set for domestic workers based in the National Capital Region is P2,500, while househelpers working in chartered cities and first-class municipalities should receive P2,000. And for those based in other municipalities, P1,500 is the established monthly wage.

In discussions with her MWF audience, Ms. Valencia, while optimistic about the legislative process

Domestic worker refers to any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship but shall exclude any person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis. — Domestic Workers Act of 2012

around the Domestic Workers Act of 2012, also emphasized the neglected plight of domestic workers, who until now, had been left out of labor codes and laws.

“The labor code of the Philippines had been so outdated that until recently, if you pay your domestic helper P800 per month, you wouldn't be violating any law,” said Ms. Valencia.

Such developments in the Philippines is an example of the kind of outcome that ILO envisioned when it adopted the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), the first binding instrument that provides mechanisms to protect the rights of domestic workers around the world as members of the labor force.

For the last few decades, regional and international trends have converged to create a greater demand for domestic care services, according to Ms. Valencia. For example, more and more women are joining the labor force, forcing them to outsource household chores and childcare. Aging populations in certain parts of the world are requiring home health care assistance.

Yet, deficits in domestic work remained—undervalued, poorly regulated. This, despite the culture-driven employment of housemaids; and the Philippines being one of the top exporters of domestic workers throughout the world.

The topic drew great interest from MWF members, who employ domestic workers, particularly the welfare aspect of their employment. One common question was how to determine the

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- 1.9 million workers employed in private households (children not included in the survey);
 - Domestic work is an important source of paid employment for women—84.5% are female
 - 32.1% of domestic workers belong to the 15-24 age bracket
- Domestic Workers Act of 2012
-

employer's responsibilities to domestic helpers who get pregnant.

Ms. Valencia encouraged MWF members to seriously consider signing a contract with their employees covering such circumstances and social security benefits. One option suggested was to enrol the employee in Philhealth, which provides pre-natal care and other maternity needs. The common practice, she said, is to provide pregnant employees a two-month maternity leave.

Other than the leave and benefits provisions in the Kasambahay Bill, Ms. Valencia also highlighted the importance of giving domestic workers a daily rest period of eight (8) hours per day, and 24 consecutive hours of rest for every week.

Ms. Valencia encouraged the MWF group to be advocates and champions for domestic workers' rights, beginning with their own employees. ■

Millions of domestic workers worldwide lack social protection

Millions of domestic workers around the world are not protected under general labour laws and are highly vulnerable to exploitation, says a United Nations report released January 9, 2013.

“Domestic workers are frequently expected to work longer hours than other workers and in many countries do not have the same rights to weekly rest that are enjoyed by other workers,” said the Deputy Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), Sandra Polaski.

“Combined with the lack of rights,

the extreme dependency on an employer and the isolated and unprotected nature of domestic work can render them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse,” she added.

According to the ILO report *Domestic Workers Across the World*, more than 52 million people worldwide are employed as domestic workers. While a substantial number are men working as gardeners, drivers or butlers, 80 per cent of them are women.

Of the 52 million domestic workers, only 10 per cent are covered by labour laws to the same extent as other workers, and more than one quarter are completely excluded from national labour legislation.

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“Long working hours, night working and patterns of shift work that involve

an irregular distribution of working hours are among the factors that have the greatest negative effects on workers' health,” said an ILO domestic work specialist, Amelita King-Dejardin. “They carry especially important risks for women during and after pregnancy and for young workers.”

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Domestic Workers Across the World follows the adoption in June 2011 of a new ILO Convention and Recommendation on domestic work which sets a standard for equal treatment between domestic and general workers in relation to working hours, rest periods and annual leave.

The Convention will come into force in September this year. So far, it has been ratified only by Mauritius, Uruguay, and the Philippines. ■

Rehabilitating Abused Girls with Love and Compassion

By Irene Donahue

Inside the festively decorated home of Pilar Martinez-Miranda in Dasmariñas Village, the Manila Women's Forum held its monthly meeting on Monday, December 3, 2012. Kicking-off the evening was a holiday performance of the Virlanie Foundation Children's Choir. As one audience member described the performance, "Their voices filled the air like bells." The singing was a perfect accompaniment to the holiday season. (For more information about Virlanie Foundation and its Children's Choir, see the next page.)

The evening's featured speaker was Mercy Cabrillas, Director of Tahanan Santa Luisa (TSL), a Welcome Center and Shelter for Abused and Exploited Girls. Established in 1996, TSL provides healing and teaching programs and cares for girls who have been sexually and physically abused, abandoned, exploited and neglected. TSL focuses on girls from the street aged 11-15 years old upon admission. In her discussion, Mercy explained that at the Center the girls receive home-life, educational, socio-cultural, and livelihood assistance.

With a mission to respond to the specific and urgent needs of abused children, TSL's programs help these children begin the healing process in order for them to rebuild their lives to achieve a normal and productive future. Included within the TSL mission is also to "proactively conduct advocacy and training on child rights among leaders of grassroots communities particularly those where families of the street girls live, in order to promote the protection of children's rights and prevention of all types of abuse."

In order to fulfill the mission of TSL, Mercy explained the goals include the development and management of healing, education and recovery and



December meeting, left to right: Lisa Lumbao, Tahanan Santa Lucia Director Mercy Cabrillas (speaker), Kathryn Nelson, and Raeanna Cranbourne.

care programs for 23 girls. "These girls have been abused, abandoned, exploited and neglected and live on the streets. Our wish is to facilitate their mainstreaming back to their families or relatives when feasible, or refer them to a long-term residential care center to prepare for independent living." Mercy brought to light the tragedy and trauma of these young girls, yet expressed how TSL provides hope for their futures.

To assist in the transition, the staff at TSL provides home life services, including fulfilling medical, dental, spiritual and counseling needs for the girls. Non-formal and values

educational services are dispensed and the girls obtain access to sports and other recreational and cultural activities. In addition, the girls are taught livelihood skills that may be used in obtaining employment and producing income. The girls are given an opportunity to boost their self-esteem, to know their self-worth and to become independent, responsible, productive and respected members of society.

Kathryn Nelson, an MWF member, has been a volunteer with TSL since she arrived in Manila in 2003 and remains deeply committed to its

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(Rehabilitating . . . from page 3) mission and vision. “Tahanan in Tagalog translates to home,” she explained prior to Mercy’s presentation. “In addition to fulfilling its mission of providing the basics of food, shelter, and clothing, TSL offers a sense of home during their transitional recovery.”

She added, “The on-site staff and counselors attempt to recreate a sense of normalcy and daily routine; the girls attend school, have family meals, participate in outdoor recreation and

other structured activities.” Kathryn’s commitment extends to assisting in cultural activities, having arranged for an artist to visit with the girls and contributing during birthdays and holidays.

Of particular concern for Kathryn and other supporters of TSL is the location of the home site. The property in Quezon City is for sale in a classic case of NIMBY – “not in my backyard!” While no decision has been made as to where TSL ultimately will be located, the immediate needs of this

Welcome Center are great and remain during this holiday season and throughout the year.

Donations of food, clothing, school supplies, financial contributions and volunteer time are always needed. For more information on Tahanan Santa Luisa, please visit www.tahanahstaluisa.org or contact Mercy Carillas, Center Director at tahananstaluisainc@gmail.com. TSL is an accredited nongovernmental organization (NGO) and is affiliated with Child Hope Asia. ■

Virlanie Foundation and its Children’s Choir

At the December meeting, the MWF members were treated to Christmas songs by the Virlanie Foundation Children’s Choir. Their voices filled the air and put everyone in the holiday spirit.

The Virlanie Children’s Choir is part of Virlanie Foundation, an organization started in 1992 by a French social worker, Dominique Lemay, and his Filipino friends with the goal of “giving back the smile to street children.” Virlanie is a registered non-profit and NGO and is one of the largest private, non-secular, child-caring institutions in Metro Manila. With the help of over 200 volunteers, it cares for nearly 1,300 children each year in residential homes and outreach programs. Over the past two

decades, Virlanie has assisted over 14,700 children off the streets and into a path of responsible adulthood.

The Virlanie Children’s Choir began in 2004 as a result of the children singing at a benefit for Princess Caroline of Hanover. Their performance exceeded expectations and the Virlanie Foundation Children’s Choir was born. The Virlanie Choir is available to perform for private functions during the holidays and throughout the year. If you would like information on the availability of the Virlanie Choir for an event, please contact choir@virlanie.org. For more information on the Virlanie Foundation and on ways to support their work, please visit www.virlanie.org.

Manila Women’s Forum

Manila Women’s Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair; **Julia Holz**, Treasurer and Membership; **Baulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter; **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator; **Evelyn Mendiola**, Membership; **Shari Virjee Tañada**, Message Board; **Caroline Wright**, Message Board; **Camille Dalmacio**, Message Board.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution of P50 is collected from non-members at each monthly meeting. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

MWF Newsletter

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