

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 227

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
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Introduced by Representative Eric D. Singson

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration has said that 1.6 million Filipinos were deployed abroad, and that total remittances has reached \$26.92 billion (P1.20 trillion). Overall we were third in the world at receiving remittances, behind India and China, based on statistics from the World Bank.

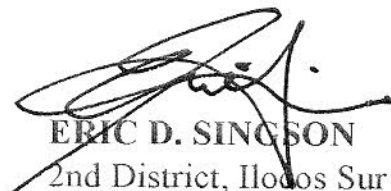
The Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) has been referred to as modern-day heroes. They have contributed much to improve the living conditions not only their families but also contributed greatly to the nation's economy. Their remittances make up nearly ten percent of the Philippine gross domestic product. That is the very reason why they are considered one of the pillars of the new Philippine economy.

Article XIII Section 3 of the Constitution states that "[t]he State shall afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and unorganized, and promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities for all." In keeping with this declaration, the State has created the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) assisted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Labor and Employment. But despite the presence of these institutions, OFWs still feel neglected and unsupported by the government.

Considering the importance of Overseas Filipino Workers and their contribution to the Philippine economy, it is but appropriate that a separate Department be created. President Rodrigo Duterte has indicated that such department should provide immediate, prompt, and effective response to OFWs problems both local and abroad. He said that there should be a Department of Overseas Filipino Workers. In addition, I also propose

that there should be an official OFW bank, possible the Landbank, which shall address the OFWs financial needs.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought



ERIC D. SINGSON
2nd District, Ilocos Sur

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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS
(DOFW), DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, APPROPRIATING
FUNDS THEREFORE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* This Act shall be known as the "Department of Overseas Filipino Workers Act."

SECTION 2. *Declaration Of Policies.*

- A. To ensure the protection of the rights of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), promotion of their welfare, safety, and support;
- B. To ensure a policy of the government of orderly flow of OFW movements under favorable condition;
- C. To ensure that the government reaches out and cooperates with other states where there are OFWs;
- D. To ensure the provision of information and communication services to countries without such adequate services or provision of the same in times of calamities or emergencies;
- E. To develop a database for OFWs to ensure assistance in times of distress;

F. To establish a strong and effective regulatory system that will ensure only fit Filipinos are allowed to work outside of the country;

G. To promote the human capital development of OFWs to enable them to better compete in other countries;

H. To extend deployment and repatriation assistance and support to OFWs; and

I. To promote the reintegration of returning OFWs.

SECTION 3. *Creation Of A Department Of Overseas Filipino Workers.* There is hereby created a Department of Overseas Filipino Workers (DOFW), hereinafter referred to as the Department, which shall, among others, recommend and implement the government's policies, plans, and programs for the promotion of protection, safety, development, support, deployment and repatriation of OFWs.

SECTION 4. *Mandate.* The Department shall be the primary policy, planning, coordinating, implementing, regulating and administrative entity of the executive branch of the Government that protects and provides assistance to OFWs who are holders of Philippine passports.

SECTION 5. *Powers And Functions Of The Department.* The Department shall have the following powers and responsibilities which shall be exercised by its offices:

A. Formulate and recommend national policies and guidelines and conduct in-depth studies on all policy areas and options that will ensure protection of OFW and address perennial issues OFWs face abroad, in consultation with the relevant stake holders;

B. Assess, review, harmonize and coordinate all OFW-related local policies and procedures and international agreements to ensure overall consistency and implementation of the national policies;

C. Promote, advance and implement general and specific government objectives regarding OFW activities, programs, welfare and interests;

D. Build a strong and harmonious partnership with foreign countries and the private sectors to formulate strategies and implement the same;

E. Represent and negotiate for Philippine interest on matters pertaining to OFW affairs in international bodies;

F. Develop, implement and improve coordination with other countries with OFW presence and monitor foreign developments to ensure the most reasonable

working conditions for the OFWs and create a proactive approach in providing assistance to them especially in times of war and civil unrest, whether potential or apparent;

G. Promote knowledge, information and resource sharing, and develop a database to assist OFW anywhere in the world;

H. Coordinate and support the generation and build up of resources or funds for use of OFWs;

I. Conduct symposia, consultations and seminars on effective OFW related programs and plans;

J. Assist and provide technical expertise in the troubleshooting of OFWs in distress and tap the services of personnel, foreign and local, with expertise on the formulation of strategies and plans concerning OFW activities if needed;

K. Promote, develop and monitor the continuing education, training and qualification, availability and deployment of OFWs and coordinate with concerned agencies in the training of OFWs to improve their competitiveness globally;

L. Coordinate with concerned government agencies in the training and support of Filipinos who have worked abroad and are returning to the country;

M. Regulate and guide the business activities relative to the deployment of Filipino workers and other related activities;

N. Promulgate rules and regulations for the implementation of its guidelines and policies and related laws;

O. Administer, accept, hold and utilize property, both personal and real, subject to constraints by existing laws, for the purpose of assisting of expediting the work of the Department, and

P. To perform such other functions as maybe needed to achieve its goals and objectives to the fullest and as may be provided by this Act.

SECTION 6. *Composition.* The Department shall be headed by a Secretary.

The Department proper shall be composed of the Office of the Secretary, the Offices of Undersecretaries, and Assistant Secretaries and Regional and Assistant Regional Directors.

SECTION 7. *Secretary of Overseas Filipino Workers.* The Secretary shall be appointed by the President of the Republic of the Philippines with confirmation of the Commission on Appointments.

The Secretary shall have the following functions:

- A. Provide executive direction and supervision over the entire operations of the Department and its attached agencies;
- B. Establish policies and standards for the effective, efficient and economical operation of the Department, in accordance with the programs of the government;
- C. Review and approve request for financial and manpower resources of all operating offices of the Department;
- D. Designate and appoint officers and employees of the Department, excluding the Undersecretaries and Assistant Secretaries, in accordance with the Civil Service laws, rules and regulations;
- E. Coordinate with other government agencies and public and private interest groups, including non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations on Department policies and initiatives;
- F. Undertake consultations with other members of the Cabinet and officers of the government relating to OFW concerns;
- G. Advise the President on the promulgation of executive and administrative orders and regulatory and legislative proposals on matters pertaining to OFW development;
- H. Advise the President of the activities, programs, plans and all information necessary or relevant to OFWs;
- I. Coordinate all policies and programs relating to OFW affairs;
- J. Formulate such rules and regulations and exercise such other powers as may be required to implement the objectives of this Act; and
- K. Perform such other tasks as may be provided by law or assigned by the president from time to time.

SECTION 8. *Undersecretaries.* The Secretary shall be assisted by three (3) Undersecretaries who shall be appointed by the President upon recommendation of the

Secretary: Provided, That one (1) of the undersecretaries shall be a career officer coming from ranks of existing government labor agencies. The undersecretaries shall aid the Secretary in the performance of his/her operational duties, and shall perform such other functions as may be directed by the Secretary.

SECTION 9. *Assistant Secretaries.* The Secretary shall be assisted by three (3) assistant secretaries who shall be career officers appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the Secretary.

SECTION 10. *Qualifications.* No person shall be appointed Secretary, Undersecretary or Assistant Secretary of the Department unless he is a citizen and resident of the Philippines of good moral character and of proven integrity.

SECTION 11. *Regional Offices.* The Department shall be authorized to establish, operate, and maintain Regional Office in each of the administrative regions of the country as the need arises. The regional office shall be headed by a Regional Director, who may be assisted by one (1) Assistant Regional Director. The regional offices shall have, within their respective administrative regions, the following functions:

- A. Implement laws, policies, plans, programs, projects, rules and regulations of the Department;
- B. Provide technical expertise and know-how and information to provide OFW-50 centered and efficient services;
- C. Coordinate with regional offices of other departments, offices, and agencies and Local government units for the consolidation and integration of OFW programs; and
- D. Platform such other functions as may be provided by law or assigned by the Secretary.

SECTION 12. *Transfer Of Bureaus, Offices And Agencies.*

The following bureaus, offices and agencies are hereby transferred from their respective departments (as shown in parenthesis) to the Department of Overseas Filipino Workers:

- A. Office for the Overseas Filipino Workers Affairs (Department of Foreign Affairs);
- B. Office of the Legal Assistant for Migrant Worker's Affairs (Department of Foreign Affairs);
- C. Commission on Filipino Overseas (Office of the President); and

D. All Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (Department of Labor and Employment).

SECTION 13. *Attached Agencies.*

The following agencies are hereby attached to the Department for policy and program coordination, and shall continue and function in accordance with the charters, laws or orders creating them, in so far as they are not inconsistent with this Act:

A. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA); and

B. Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). The laws and rules on government reorganization as provided for in Republic Act No. 6656, otherwise known as the Reorganization Law, shall govern the reorganization process of the Department.

SECTION 14. *Sectoral and Industry Task Forces.* -The Department may create sectoral and industry task forces, technical working groups, advisory bodies or committees for the furtherance of its objectives. Additional private sector representatives, such as from the OFWs, academe and private industries directly involved in deployment of OFWs, as well as other National Government Agencies (NGAs), LGUs, and GOCCs, that may be appointed to these working groups.

SECTION 15. *Structure and Staffing Pattern.* - The Department shall determine its organization structure and create new divisions or units as it may deem necessary, and shall appoint officers and employees of the Department in accordance with the Civil Service law, rules, and regulations.

SECTION 16. *Separation from Service.* - Employees separated from the service as a result of this reorganization shall, within ninety (90) days therefrom, receive the retirement benefits to which they may be entitled under existing laws, rules, and regulations.

SECTION 17. *Special Assistance Revolving Fund.* A Special Assistance Revolving Fund for OFWs in distress, both documented and undocumented, in the amount of One Billion Pesos (P 1,000,000,000.00) is hereby created. The fund shall be utilized for the following purposes:

A. Repatriation;

B. Medical expenses, hospitalization and purchase of medicine in the form of vouchers for six (6) months from arrival;

C. Migration fees for overstaying Filipinos;

D. Legal assistance including litigation expenses, legal fees, payment of translation fees, attendance in court hearings;

E. Payment of blood money, when necessary; and

F. Basic necessities of OFWs caught in emergencies or are detained. Provided, That thirty percent (30%) of the total fund shall be allotted to support a livelihood training program or re-training of returning OFWs in new skills and literacy.

SECTION 18. *Appropriation.* The appropriation allotted for the Office for the Overseas Filipino workers Affairs, Office of the Legal Assistant for Migrant Worker's Affairs, Commission on Filipino Overseas, and all Philippine Overseas Labor Offices Shall be transferred to the Department of Overseas Filipino Workers. Provided, That the amount needed for the initial implementation of the this Act shall be taken from the current fiscal year's appropriation of the transferred agencies to the Department of Overseas Filipino Workers. Thereafter, the amount needed for the operation and maintenance of the Department shall be included in the General Appropriations Act: Provided, That for the next fiscal year, following the approval of this Act, the appropriation for the Department shall not be lower than five billion pesos. Provided further, That 1 billion pesos (1,000,000,000.00) of the same appropriation shall be allotted for the Special Assistance Revolving Fund as stated in Section 17 hereof.

SECTION 19. *Separability Clause.* - If any part or provision of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the other parts or provisions hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SECTION 20. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, orders, rules or regulations which are inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are hereby amended or repealed accordingly.

SECTION 21. *Effectivity.* -This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Ruiz', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.