**Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte threatens Middle East work ban after maid ‘rapes and suicides’**

Kuwait expressed surprise after Duterte said domestic workers were being raped there

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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has threatened to ban hundreds of thousands of Filipinas from working as maids in the Middle East as he said domestic workers were being raped in Kuwait.

Over two million Filipinos, many of them maids, are employed in the region, helping to prop up the Philippine economy with billions of dollars in salary remittances to their families each year.

Last week, Duterte barred Filipinos from seeking work in Kuwait over reports of widespread abuse, exploitation and deaths, although the ban did not affect workers already in the Gulf state.

“One more incident about a woman, a Filipina worker being raped there, committing suicide, I’m going to stop – I’m going to ban” Filipinos working, he said.

“And I’m sorry to all the Filipinos there, they can all go home.”

“Let me be blunt about this because Kuwait has always been an ally. But please do something about it and for the other countries of the Middle East.”

A visibly angry Duterte was speaking soon before boarding a flight for India to attend a regional summit. “Can I ask you now to treat my countrymen as human beings with dignity?” he added.

Duterte said last week that four Filipinas had died in Kuwait over the past few months in apparent suicides.

Kuwait said on Wednesday it was still awaiting details from the Philippines about the cases and expressed surprise about Duterte’s new allegations.

“We have explained our position to the Filipino officials towards the cases mentioned,” by the president and asked them for details, said deputy foreign minister Khaled al-Jarallah. “But we have not received any details about any case,” he added.

Jarallah said Filipino workers were still welcome in Kuwait, and that the rights of foreign workers were guaranteed in the emirate.

“We explain to countries that have workers in Kuwait that their labourers are highly valued and are welcome … and we affirm that their presence and work are governed by the law,” he told reporters.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said separately that Duterte had reacted to a recent report on abuses in Kuwait.

“Statistics don’t lie and there is grave concern about the abuses in Kuwait,” he said.

There were more than 200,000 Filipinos in Kuwait and a “large” number were stranded in that country, were paid less than they were promised or were abused, Cayetano said.

Accounts of Filipinos being subjected to abuse, overwork, rape or dying in suspicious circumstances in the region have long circulated.