

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

First Regular Session

House Bill No. **737**

Introduced by REP. JUDY J. SYJUCO

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution unequivocally affirms labor as a primary social economic force and mandates the State to protect the rights of workers and promote their welfare (Sec. 18, Art. II). It is further provided that "The State shall afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and unorganized, and promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities for all".

The Filipino migrant worker deserves utmost protection and assistance in their place of work---in a foreign land with its own set of laws and policies. Dubbed as the "bagong bayani", the Filipino migrant workers continued to play an important role in Philippine economy for at least two reasons. First, the deployment of Filipinos to work in various countries of destinations eases the pressure on the domestic labor market, brought about by high labor force growth. Second and more significantly, the foreign exchange being remitted into the Philippine economy by OFWs through the years have continued to be an important factor in sustaining the economic growth of the country.

From 1995 to 1998, the total deployment of OFWs has been increasing at an annual average of two percent, or a yearly average of 704,381 workers. The tally of deployment on the top five work destinations in the second quarter of 1999 of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) showed Saudi Arabia still on top with 111,378 Filipino workers received and the United Arab Emirates with 20,176.

Most of our land-based OFWs still go to the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia as the major destination since 1995. As of December 2001, there are 897,000 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia while 128,604 Filipino workers are deployed in the United Arab Emirates who ranks No. 4 in the top five work destinations.

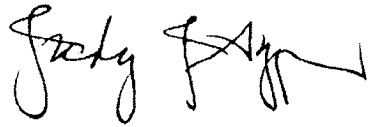
We have witnessed in various reports that our migrant workers in the Middle East countries are often caught in crisis and incriminating situation. According to Migrante International, a former Protestant Cavite choirboy, Wilfredo C. Bautista, 35 years old, and three other OFWs may be beheaded in Taif, Saudi Arabia any day from now. In a factsheet provided to Migrante International by the Southern Luzon Jurisdictional Convention of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (SLJC-UCCP), Bautista, along with fellow OFWs Sergio Aldana,

Antonio Alvesa and Miguel Fernandez were imprisoned to death by the Taif Grand Court for allegedly killing Jaime de la Cruz, a fellow OFW.

As documented by Migrante International, at present, there are 44 OFWs in various Saudi jails facing the possibility of beheading unless the Philippine government intervenes.

This proposed measure seeks to provide remedy to the plight of our migrant workers by establishing a Legal Attache Office in every Middle East country particularly in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Hence, in view of the foregoing, immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judy J. Syjuko', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JUDY J. SYJUCO

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AN ACT

ESTABLISHING A LEGAL ATTACHE OFFICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8042 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "MIGRANT WORKERS AND OVERSEAS FILIPINOS ACT OF 1995" AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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

SECTION 1. Declaration of Policy – It is the policy of the State to afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and unorganized, and promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities for all. Towards this end, the State shall provide appropriate and adequate legal services to Filipino migrant workers.

SECTION 2. A new section is hereby inserted under Title V of Republic Act No. 8042 otherwise known as the "Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995" to be read as follows:

V. THE LEGAL ASSISTANT FOR MIGRANT WORKERS AFFAIRS

Section 25. OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ATTACHE – A LEGAL ATTACHE OFFICE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED IN EVERY COUNTRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST TO PROVIDE FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS IN NEED OF LEGAL AID AND/OR IN CRISIS OR DIFFICULT SITUATION.

Section 26. Legal Assistance Fund. - XXX

SECTION 3. Appropriation. The amount needed to carry out the provisions of this Act is hereby authorized to be appropriated in the General Appropriations Act of the year following its enactment into law and thereafter.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in two (2) national newspapers of general circulation. The publication shall not be later than seven (7) days after approval hereof.

Approved,