



NEWS RELEASE

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Arroyo administration leads the way in protecting women workers

Labor Secretary Arturo D. Brion said one hallmark of the present administration is taking the lead in providing protection to women workers overseas.

“Even as we are criticized for the policy reforms we introduced for our household services workers, some labor sending countries are now moving to protect their own domestic helpers,” Brion said.

Brion cited the case of India which has followed suit in setting the minimum monthly salary of women immigrants to US\$400, and increasing the age restriction at 30 years old. The new India policy takes effect September 1, 2007.

The POEA Governing Board approved last year a series of resolutions defining policy reforms that seek to improve the lot of household workers. The new policies which took effect December 16, 2006, include upgrading of skills of the workers, orientation course on country-specific culture and language, protective mechanisms at the job sites, obliging employers to shoulder the cost of deploying the domestic helper, increasing the age limit to 23 years old, and increasing the minimum salary to a level commensurate to their acquired competencies.

In following our initiative, Brion said the Indian government may have recognized that the competition now in the deployment of workers is the protection of women.

But India even went further. Aside from the new age and wage policy, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs require that the employment contract should be between the worker and the employer directly and not with the recruiting agent. The contract should also include a pre-paid mobile facility to be provided by the employer to every household service worker.

Under the new Indian policy, every foreign employer directly recruiting an Indian woman emigrant must deposit a security of US \$ 2500 in the form of bank guarantee with the Indian Mission.

There are also reports that Indonesia is requiring its domestic helpers to undergo a three-month training course prior to taking up employment abroad.

Brion added that the decrease in the number of household workers deployed should be viewed positively as the policy reform is generating good results despite the decline.

Brion said more Filipino workers are now eyeing jobs that offer higher salary and more friendly working environment.

From January to July this year, Brion said there was an increase in the number of new hires deployed to some countries like Canada, Cyprus, Italy, New Caledonia and New Zealand. The rise in number was attributed to the increasing demand for skilled workers in the labor-short industries of these developed economies and continuous demand for caregivers and household workers by the countries that provide better terms and conditions of employment.

The decrease in the deployment of household workers, particularly in the Middle East was compensated by the increase of deployed skilled workers and professionals, Brion said.

Baldoz said the percentage share of professional and technical workers group went up by 2 percentage points from 12.4% in first half of 2006 to 14.4% for the same period in 2007. This group of high end skills consisting of professional, technical and highly skilled workers accounted for 73 % of the total new hires, while low- end skills only constituted 27 %.

Brion said large workers' groups and industry associations have also thrown its support for the policy reforms.

Rene Cristobal, president of Association for Professionalism in Overseas Employment, Inc. (ASPROE) said his group is not at all saddened by the decrease in the number of domestic helpers deployed.

"We view this positively. It means we are moving towards high skilled and professional jobs which should be the case," Cristobal said.

From day one, ASPROE has fully supported the DOLE policy reforms for household service workers. ASPROE is an advocate of "no placement fee policy".

Leonardo de Ocampo, the private recruitment industry representative to the POEA Governing Board said that while the new regulation on household service workers were initially met by objection by the private sector, the result of the policy reform has been very encouraging.

"It is true that there has been a decrease in the deployment of this most vulnerable OFW category but this decrease has been compensated by the increase in the deployment of the more skilled categories," de Ocampo said.

POEA Board Member Wilhelmina Gabor said non-government organizations were consulted and majority of them supported the policy reforms.

“My sector has fully supported the policy reforms on household workers because of the many reported abuses that have been committed against our women workers. The NGOs I consulted were glad government has come up with the new regulation to curb abuses. As I watched the news lately about domestic helpers being abused, I told myself the POEA Governing Board was right in insisting the reforms particularly age, training, no placement fee, and rigid testing”, Gabor said.

The Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) has previously hailed the decrease of DH deployment as a positive trend.

TUCP spokesperson Alex Aguilar said Filipino domestic helpers engaged by foreign employers who are willing to pay \$400 to \$700 monthly, or even more should generally enjoy improved treatment and are more likely than not to be treated as extended families.

Brion said some members of the recruitment industry should now realize that there are other jobs out there for our countrymen other than doing household chores.

“Our partners in the recruitment industry need to be more selective of the jobs being offered to our OFWs, and be more concerned with the welfare of the workers”, Brion said.

Despite the decrease in the deployment of HSWs, Brion remains optimistic that the annual target of 1 million OFW would be reached.
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