

News Release  
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## **DOLE's AssistWELL extends help to Filipino healthcare workers repatriated from Kuwait**

Assist WELL, the Department of Labor and Employment's one-stop help center for repatriated overseas Filipino workers has opened its doors and services to the 21 Filipino workers who left their job in a health care company in Kuwait due to an unresolved labor dispute.

Labor and Employment Secretary Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz said the health workers were repatriated last February 9 with the help of the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) in Kuwait.

Labour Attache Cesar Chavez Jr reported that the group worked as nurses, nurse assistants and caregivers at Kuwait Invest Medical Services Company (KINVCO) and asked to be repatriated to the Philippines after conciliation-mediation meetings arranged by the POLO with the company management and the complainants failed.

The workers alleged their employer violated the employment contract they signed in the Philippines. They accused KINVCO of contract substitution including underpayment of salary, non-payment of overtime pay, rest day pay and holiday pay; no sick leave; no food or food allowance; illegal salary deduction; and unclear personnel policy.

They said the company in Kuwait did not pay them the right salary as specified in their contract. The nurses in the group were supposed to receive 250 Kuwaiti Dinar but were only given 135 to 150 KD, and often with unexplained deductions. They also complained of excessive placement fees collected from them by JVR Placement Company, Inc., and Reliable Recruitment Corporation, their recruitment agencies in the Philippines.

The Secretary said the workers were assisted by personnel of Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) upon arrival at the airport and were registered by the AssistWELL Processing Center at the OWWA main office.

POEA lawyers initially informed the group of their legal rights and the legal remedies available to them and offered them assistance in preparing their individual sworn statements when they file money claims at the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) and administrative and recruitment violation cases against their recruiter and employer at the POEA.

They were given stress debriefing and orientation on *Balik-Pinas, Balik Hanapbuhay* component of the Center. Eight (8) of them stayed at the OWWA Hostel. Those who opted to be with their families in Metro Manila area were given transportation assistance.

The Center also conducted job matching for those who wanted to be reemployed, either locally or overseas. The repatriated workers chose to try their luck in local companies using the job search function of Bureau of Local Employment's Phil-JobNet and the job order database of the POEA.

Two (2) of them asked to be referred for both local and overseas jobs, 1 for local employment only and 9 for overseas jobs only and 1 opted not to be referred yet. The workers who still wanted to work overseas, selected vacancies in the nearby Asian countries like Taiwan and Singapore. The nurses who signified interest in working in Japan and Germany were given information on application and qualification requirements.

'Assist WELL', which stands for 'Welfare, Employment, Legal, and Livelihood' is a reintegration assistance/services program formed by Secretary Baldoz in 2014 through Department Order 139-14 to address the needs of repatriated migrant workers.

Baldoz said the program holistically looks into the OFWs' reintegration needs after their repatriation, especially due to emergency or crisis situations. She also assured that that the government stands ready at all times to assist all the OFWs, especially during emergencies.

The strengthened convergence of DOLE agencies delivering the Assist WELL program is mandated by Administrative Order No. 21 series of 2016 issued by Secretary Baldoz early in January this year. /END