Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 885

Introduced by
BAYAN MUNA Representatives FERDINAND R. GAITE ZARATE,
CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE and EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT,
ACT TEACHERS Party-List Representative FRANC E. L. CASTRO,
GABRIELA Women’s Party Representative ARLENE D. BROSAS
and KABATAAN Party-List Representative SARAH JANE I. ELAGO

RESOLUTION
URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THROUGH THE COMMITTEE
ON OVERSEAS WORKERS AFFAIRS AND THE DEFEAT COVID-19 AD HOC
COMMITTEE, TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON
THE SURGE OF COVID-19 INFECTION AMONG REPATRIATED DISPLACED
OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS AND REPORTED RISKY AND DIMAL
SITUATION IN QUARANTINE FACILITIES, AND RECOMMEND URGENT
MEASURES TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT OFWs

WHEREAS, on May 13, 2020, there were 171 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) staying at
government-run quarantine centers who tested positive for COVID-19. Based on available
reports, 20,569 OFWs under quarantine have been swabbed but are still awaiting test results.\(^1\)
Meanwhile, 23,480 OFWs remain quarantined in Metro Manila and in nearby Batangas as of May
7, 2020, according to Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infections
Diseases (IATF);

WHEREAS, on April 14, 2020, the Department of Labor and Employment estimated 70,000-
100,000 OFWs have been displaced due to the impact of COVID-19 and are bound to be
repatriated to the Philippines. Among the estimated number of homebound OFWs, around 85,000
have already been repatriated as of May 7, 2020 according to the Overseas Workers Welfare
Administration (OWWA)\(^2\). Of this number, 45,000 were seafarers and 40,000 were land-based
overseas workers\(^3\). More than 45,000 more Filipinos are expected to return home over the next
two months\(^4\);

WHEREAS, in response to the announced mass repatriation of OFWs, the IATF through DOLE
and DOH issued several guidelines and resolutions to facilitate repatriated OFWs including
directing OWWA to provide temporary shelters for homebound overseas workers\(^5\). Said
guidelines mandated the 14-day quarantine, rapid antibody testing, RT-PCR testing, standard

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\(^2\) https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/05/07/2012325/40000-displaced-ofws-coming-home
\(^3\) https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/05/07/2012325/40000-displaced-ofws-coming-home
\(^4\) https://www.asianjournal.com/world/over-71700-overseas-filipino-workers-expected-to-be-displaced-by-
pandemie/
health policies in accommodation including one-person-per-room policy, and social distancing
measures among others;

WHEREAS, upon arrival at the accommodations provided by OWWA, several OFWs took to
social media to complain over ‘filthy and unhygienic’ conditions at their quarantine hotel.
Bedsheets and pillowcases have not been properly washed, dirty rugs, cockroaches inside the hotel
room, and garbage on top of air condition units were just some of the many complaints aired by
repatriated OFWs. In response to issues on the quality of OWWA shelters and the growing
demand for quarantine facilities, the NTF converted several establishments into We Heal As One
Centers that served as temporary health facilities meant to accommodate the influx of repatriated
OFWs needing isolation within and outside Metro Manila;

WHEREAS, despite additional capacity to house repatriated OFWs, migrants continue to report
substandard facilities, violations of the one-person-per-room policy, lack of social distancing
measures, and delayed testing. Dismal health monitoring systems, and no ample medical and
mental health services were provided contrary to previously issued IATF, DOLE and DOH
guidelines. Stranded OFWs decry the lack of transport services supposedly provided by DOTr
leaving hundreds marooned in quarantine facilities with some staying for extended periods for
more than one month. In addition, OFWs also reported the lack of free testing despite clear
accountability of manning agencies to shoulder testing costs. Even in cases wherein agencies fail
to comply, the government bears the responsibility to administer free COVID-19 testing among
OFW repatriates;

WHEREAS, the health, safety and well-being of repatriated OFWs must be ensured and
protected the moment they enter mandatory isolation until they are safely sent back to their
respective hometowns including efforts to ensure one standard protocol across different LGUs to
allow OFWs who have completed the 14-day quarantine to return home safely and undergo
necessary protocols at home to prevent possible community transmission;

WHEREAS, consulations with migrants held by Migrante International through the
#StrandedPH initiative show an urgent need to investigate the current situation of stranded
OFWs in quarantine facilities. Migrants report overcrowding and massive delays in the release of
test results making it difficult, if not impossible to ascertain whether infection was contracted from
their exposure in quarantine centers or from abroad. Thus, it is imperative to investigate whether
the infections were contracted in host countries or in crowded quarantine facilities;

WHEREAS, mass testing among repatriated OFWs must be prioritized by the IATF including
the need to fastrack the release of test results to prevent possible outbreaks within quarantine
centers. This comes as an urgent concern especially after OWWA released five repatriates to
Western Visayas who turned out to be COVID-19 positive. Without addressing the backlogs on
test results, congested quarantine areas can lead to higher risks of contagion;

WHEREAS, the systematic neglect of the government on the welfare of migrants make them
highly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. Even prior to the pandemic, migrants are mostly
overworked and underpaid largely working in inhumane conditions and away from their families.
Inadequate salaries and benefits on top of exorbitant PhilHealth dues, the lack of concrete
measures to ensure their rights while staying in their host countries have severely compromised
their physical and mental well-being. Case in point is Algen Manos Cadungog, a 42-year old female

9 #StrandedPH: Stranded sa Panahon ng COVID-19 is an online group initiated and led by stranded OFWs in
an effort to organize themselves and call on the government to address their urgent needs and demands.
10 https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/03/owwa-under-fire-after-5-repatriated-ofws-in-w-visayas-test-positive-for-
covid-19/
OFW from Kuwait who, suffering from depression, hanged herself to death on April 27, 2020, at
a hotel in Pasay City where she underwent quarantine;\footnote{https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/04/27/owwa-to-provide-free-counseling-to-repatriated-ofws/}

WHEREAS, defeating COVID-19 necessitates the government to immediately address and arrest
the surge of infection among OFW quarantine centers. It is crucial to save the lives of OFWs –
Filipino workers whom we have long hailed as our heroes, but at the same time are bereft of the
proper compensation and care they truly deserve. Much more than calling them “heroes,” the
government must ensure and provide concrete steps and programs to truly protect and support
OFWs while providing for their immediate needs;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the
Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs and the Defeat COVID-19 Ad Hoc Committee, conduct
an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the surge of COVID-19 infections among repatriated overseas
Filipino workers, and reported risky and dismal situation in quarantine facilities, and recommend
urgent measures to protect and support displaced OFWs.

Adopted,

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Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. EUPHIMA C. CULLAMAT
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REP. FRANCIS L. CASTRO
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REP. SARAHJANE I. ELAGO
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