

Committee Daily Bulletin



17th Congress
First Regular Session

A publication of the Committee Affairs Department

Vol. I No. 81
February 28, 2017

COMMITTEE MEETINGS				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Agriculture and Food	Substitute Bill to HB 626	Rep. Gonzalez	Creating a carabao center in the Municipality of Guinobatan, Province of Albay, amending for the purpose RA 7307, or the law creating the Philippine Carabao Center to propagate and promote the Philippine carabao	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Jose Panganiban Jr. (Party-List, ANAC-IP), approved with amendment the Substitute Bill to HB 626.
	Substitute Bill to HBs 37, 189, 294, 526, 558, 1053, 1197, 1887, 1943, 2133, 2150, 2247, 2251, 2812, 2857, 2880, 2902, 3013, 3119, 3151, 3302, 3505, 3589, 3595, 3853, 4162, 4056, 4170 & 4358	Reps. Yap (A.), Bravo, Suansing (E.), Garbin, Casilao, Antonino, Loyola, Estrella, Santos-Recto, Villafuerte, Pineda, Panganiban, Dalipe, Yu, Tan (A.), Oaminal, Tupas, Geron, Fortuno, Alejano, Villanueva, Primicias-Agabas, Salon, Deputy Speaker Singson, Reps. Unabia, and Pimentel	Strengthening assistance to all farmers, agrarian reform farmers, and members of the indigenous cultural communities by providing free irrigation service fee and all other similar or related fees or charges, amending for the purpose certain provisions of RAs 3601 and 8435, and PDs 552 and 1702, and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved the Substitute Bill to the 29 bills subject to style and amendment.
Economic Affairs	Substitute Bill to HBs 69 & 2510	Reps. Salceda and Cua	Collective Investment Schemes (CIS) Law	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Arthur Yap (3rd District, Bohol), reopened its deliberations on the previously approved substitute bill to give way to additional amendments.</p> <p>The Committee amended the bill's Section 28, paragraph b (Tax on Gains Upon Creation, Redemption, Sale, Barter, Exchange or Other Disposition of CIS Securities) by setting a 45% threshold on the value of the underlying assets listed and traded in the local stock exchange to be exempt from the stock transaction tax.</p>
Economic Affairs jt. w/ Trade and Industry	HB 4106	Rep. Garcia (J. E.)	Further strengthening the powers and functions of the Authority of the Freeport Area of Bataan (AFAB), amending for this purpose RA 9728, also known as the Freeport Area of Bataan (FAB) Act of 2009	<p>The Joint Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (2nd District, Albay), Vice Chair of the Committee on Economic Affairs, and Camiguin Rep. Xavier Jesus Romualdo, Vice Chair of the Committee on Trade and Industry, agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to fine-tune the bill.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by Rep. Romualdo.</p>

Continuation... Economic Affairs jt. w/ Trade and Industry	HB 4462	Rep. Garcia (J. E.)	Converting the Government Arsenal located in Camp Gen. Antonio Luna in Limay, Bataan into a special economic defense zone (SpEDZ), creating and establishing the Special Economic Defense Zone Authority (SpEDZA), appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Joint Committee will deliberate further on HB 4462.</p> <p>The officials of the Department of National Defense (DND) and Rep. Jose Enrique "Joet" Garcia III (2nd District, Bataan), author of HB 4462, were requested by the Joint Committee to initially discuss the proposed law among themselves to address the reservations of the DND.</p>
Good Government and Public Accountability	HR 654	Rep. Gonzales (A.)	Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the sale of <i>Paskuhan</i> Village in Pampanga by the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) to SM Development Corporation (SMDC) reportedly under the former's Asset Privatization Program	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Johnny Ty Pimentel (2nd District, Surigao del Sur), will deliberate further on the issues raised relative to HR 654.</p> <p>Rep. Aurelio "Dong" Gonzales Jr. (3rd District, Pampanga), author of HR 654, explained that his resolution aims to determine whether the sale of the <i>Paskuhan</i> Village located in San Fernando, Pampanga was in order and to explore alternatives to boost Pampanga's local tourism.</p> <p>TIEZA Chief Operations Officer Guiller Asido explained that pursuant to RA 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009, TIEZA is authorized to regulate and supervise tourism enterprise zones (TEZs) established by law, as well as develop, manage, and supervise tourism infrastructure projects in the country. Asido added that TIEZA has the power to sell government properties in the best interest of the country.</p> <p>Rep. Gonzales requested the Register of Deeds of the City of San Fernando, Atty. Lorna Dee, to hold the transfer of the title of the property occupied by <i>Paskuhan</i> Village to the buyer while the Committee is still conducting the inquiry.</p> <p>Early on, Dee informed the Committee that the title has not been transferred to the buyer (SMDC) yet because it still needs to secure a Certificate Authorizing Registration (CAR) from the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), which will certify that the transfer and conveyance of the property was reported and the taxes due have been fully paid.</p> <p>BIR San Fernando Regional Director Jethro Sabariaga disclosed that the buyer has already paid the documentary stamp tax due on the sale, but is seeking exemption from the payment of the capital gains tax.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Gwendolyn Garcia (3rd District, Cebu) manifested that all government officials and private individuals involved, including the members of the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) that facilitated the transaction, be invited in the next meeting to clarify issues themselves instead of the current officers answering for them.</p> <p>TIEZA was directed to submit its position paper on the matter and other pertinent documents with regard to the sale of <i>Paskuhan</i> Village.</p>

Continuation... Good Government and Public Accountability				Likewise, all other resource persons present were requested to submit the documents required by the House Members.
	HR 566	Rep. Zarate	Inquiry into the alleged midnight deals of the Manila Electric Company (MERALCO)-affiliated generation companies and the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) which may be disadvantageous to the public	The Committee assumed jurisdiction over HR 566. BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate, author of HR 566, was requested to submit the list of resource persons who should be invited in the Committee's meeting on the resolution. Rep. Pimentel said that HR 566 will be discussed on March 13 in a joint meeting with the Committee on Energy.
	Privilege Speech 179	Rep. Barbers	On the alleged controversy surrounding the audit of legitimate mining companies	The Committee assumed jurisdiction over the privilege speech delivered last February 6 by Rep. Robert "Ace" Barbers (2 nd District, Surigao del Norte). Rep. Barbers sought the support of the Committee to investigate issues regarding the audit of legitimate mining companies, which became the basis of the decision of Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Gina Lopez to close several mining companies. Rep. Zarate said the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability are scheduled to conduct a joint meeting on the matter on March 8.
Privilege Speech 186	Rep. Bravo (A.)	On the alleged anomalies in the procurement process conducted by the Department of Transportation (DOTr) with regard to the award of the Bicol International Airport Package 2B to JD Legaspi Construction	The Committee assumed jurisdiction over the privilege speech delivered last February 13 by COOP NATCCO Party-List Rep. Anthony Bravo, Ph.D. Rep. Bravo, stressing the importance and urgency of the investigation, requested the Committee to invite the officials of DOTr to answer the issues he raised in his privilege speech. Rep. Gabriel Bordado (3 rd District, Camarines Sur) asked if the Bicol International Airport will be operational by 2019. Rep. Bravo said it is not possible, adding that the earliest the project may be completed is in 2022.	
Human Rights	HB 4574	Rep. Belmonte (J.C.)	Amending RA 10368, or the law providing for the reparation and recognition of victims of human rights violations during the Marcos regime, documentation of said violations, appropriating funds therefor	The Committee, presided by its Vice Chair, AMIN Party-List Rep. Sitti Djalia Turabin-Hataman, approved HB 4574. The bill amends the provisions of RA 10368 to remove the ceilings imposed on the budget for hiring personnel and for operational expenses of the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board (HRVCB) and to reduce the frequency of publication of the official list of eligible claimants. ANAKPAWIS Party-List Rep. Ariel "Ka Ayik" Casilao asked the HRVCB why it has not fulfilled

Continuation... Human Rights				<p>its task of providing reparation to victims of human rights since 2014 when it commenced operation. HRVCB Chair Lina Sarmiento admitted that the agency's lack of personnel hinders its task of processing applications numbering to over 75,000.</p> <p>However, Sarmiento said that the HRVCB will provide cash advances to almost 4,000 eligible claimants by the second quarter of this year based on its meeting with the President.</p> <p>On the question of ACT TEACHERS Party-List Rep. France Castro, Sarmiento said that non-monetary reparations are provided to eligible claimants by the Departments of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Health (DOH), Labor and Employment (DOLE), and Education (DepEd), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).</p> <p>Atty. Eunice Sta. Maria-Manahan of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) conveyed the CHR's support for the bills.</p>
	HBs 79, 491, 576, 1556, 3312, 3468, 3541 & 3895	Reps. Aglipay-Villar, Turabin-Hataman, Panganiban, Villafuerte, Bagao, Tan (S.), Deputy Speaker Garin, and Rep. Escudero	Prohibiting discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, language, disability, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) status, and other status, and providing penalties therefor	<p>The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the eight bills.</p> <p>Chief Superintendent Ericson Velasquez of the Philippine National Police (PNP) expressed support for the bills, but made the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delete the provision granting authority to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) "to investigate and prosecute" as it is not in accordance with its powers and functions enshrined in the Constitution; • Delete the provision granting power to the CHR to order the revocation of license, removal from office or employment, suspension, demotion, fine, censure, or prosecution of a public officer it found to be negligent or at fault but pending any legal action in court, as this is tantamount to the denial of administrative due process; • Delete the provision imposing penalty against government agencies for failure to implement the provisions of the proposed law, which shall be deemed analogous to acts of discrimination, as this is also violative of due process; and • Allow profiling of suspects if it will help law enforcers in pursuing significant leads during criminal investigations or in identifying suspects as described by witnesses. <p>Atty. Krunimar Escudero III of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) promised to submit the CSC's position paper on the bills.</p> <p>Dr. Benny Abante, former House Member and</p>

Continuation... Human Rights				<p>Chair of the Committee on Human Rights during the 13th Congress and currently the chair of the BIBLEMODE, opposed the inclusion of “sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity” within the anti-discrimination’s legal framework. He explained that “far from fostering equality, the proposed law creates a class of citizens protected in a matter that is more advantaged than the general citizenry,” in violation of the equal protection clause of the Constitution. It can give rise to a new form of discrimination by socially isolating certain religious and moral beliefs and principles, he added.</p> <p>Rep. Turabin-Hataman requested all other resource persons present to submit their position papers on the bills.</p>
Local Government	HB 611	Rep. Collantes	Converting the Municipality of Sto. Tomas in the Province of Batangas into a component city to be known as the City of Sto. Tomas	<p>The Committee, presided by Deputy Speaker Ranejo Abu (2nd District, Batangas), approved the Committee Reports on HBs 611, 936, 1016, 2341 and 4678.</p>
	HB 936	Rep. Tiangco	Establishing the City Prosecution Service in the City of Navotas, amending for the purpose Section 55 of RA 9387, otherwise known as the Charter of the City of Navotas	
	HB 1016	Deputy Speaker Abueg	Creating a barangay to be known as Panacan-2 into a regular barangay unit in the Municipality of Narra, Province of Palawan	
	HB 2341	Rep. Ferrer (L.)	Creating the lone legislative district of General Trias, thereby reapportioning certain legislative districts in the Province of Cavite	
	HB 4678	Rep. Acharon	Separating General Santos City from the first legislative district of the Province of South Cotabato to constitute the lone legislative district of General Santos City	
	HBs 248, 260, 276, 298, 390, 467, 502, 503, 598, 619, 653, 784, 828, 1007, 1391, 1492, 1511, 1620, 2019, 2046, 2195, 2196, 2213, 2378, 2454, 2514, 2541, 2629, 2662, 2687, 2707, 2774, 2801, 2802, 2815, 2981, 3021, 3281, 3483, 3622, 3715,	Reps. Bordado, Loyola, Nograles (K.A.), Suansing (H.), Ocampo, Deputy Speaker Abu, Rep. Yap (V.), Minority Leader Suarez, Reps. Paduano, Oaminal, Gullas, Deputy Speaker Andaya, Reps. Zarate, Vargas, Abayon, Alejano, Deputy Speaker Alvarez (M.), Reps. Deloso-Montalla, Montoro, Uy (J.),	Granting additional benefits/incentives to all barangay officials	<p>The Committee, presided by Deputy Speaker Frederick "Erick" Abueg (2nd District, Palawan), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the 50 bills.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate, author of HB 1007.</p> <p>Minority Leader Danilo Suarez (3rd District, Quezon) said that his bill, HB 598, seeks to increase to 41% from 40% the apportioned share of the local government units (LGUs) in the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) based on the collection of the third fiscal year preceeding the current fiscal year.</p> <p>Minority Leader Suarez said that the 1% increase shall accrue to a special account that will be used to fund the retirement of <i>barangay</i> officials, whether elected or appointed, including <i>barangay</i></p>

Continuation... Local Government	3760, 3780, 3902, 3948, 4001, 4264, 4397, 4568 & 4985	Deputy Speaker Macapagal- Arroyo, Reps. Silverio, Yap (A.), Sy- Alvarado, Tambunting, Atienza, Roque (H.), Tan (S.), Cuaresma, Gonzaga, Castelo, Suansing (E.), Espino, Escudero, Ermita-Buhain, Bagatsing, Velasco, Enverga, Rodriguez (M.), and Aglipay- Villar		<p><i>tanods</i>, health workers, day care workers, and members of the <i>Lupon Tagapamayapa</i>.</p> <p>Rep. Winston "Winnie" Castelo (2nd District, Quezon City), author of HBs 2801 and 2802, supports the grant of additional benefits and incentives to barangay officials to promote their welfare.</p> <p>Rep. Gabriel Bordado (3rd District, Camarines Sur), author of HB 248, believes that proper compensation will all the more encourage barangay officials to exercise good governance in their respective localities.</p>
	HBs 43, 125, 337, 618, 654, 766, 829, 1084, 1268, 1339, 1469, 1472, 1669, 1879, 2689, 2770, 2816, 3101, 3111, 3409, 3673, 4277 & 4607	Deputy Speaker Quimbo, Reps. Lobregat, Villarin, Paduano, Oaminal, Aglipay-Villar, Deputy Speaker Andaya, Reps. Lanete, Biazon, Villafructe, Abayon, Revilla, Almonte, Tan (S.), Espino, Suansing (E.), Bag-ao, Unabia, Calixto-Rubiano, Salo, and Leachon	Granting benefits to barangay health workers, amending for the purpose RA 7883, otherwise known as the Barangay Health Workers' Benefits and Incentives Act of 1995	<p>The Committee agreed to create a TWG to consolidate the 23 bills.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by KABAYAN Party-List Rep. Ron Salo.</p> <p>Rep. Salo, author of HB 4277, explained the need to enhance the benefits and incentives of barangay health workers (BHWs), by granting a monthly honoraria, setting a floor or minimum for hazard and subsistence allowances, and other benefits, in addition to other incentives they are currently entitled to under existing laws.</p>
	HBs 620, 984, 1232, 2363, 2801, 3693, 4095 & 4967	Reps. Paduano, Fortun, Umali, Bernos, Castelo, Enverga, and Rodriguez (M.)	Providing additional benefits and incentives to <i>barangay tanods</i>	<p>The Committee agreed to create a TWG to consolidate the eight bills.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by Rep. Zarate.</p>
Overseas Workers Affairs	Substitute Bill to HBs 78, 457, 574, 1356, 4360 & 4525	Reps. Aglipay- Villar, Manalo, Angara-Castillo, Nogralas (K.A.), Villarin, and Mendoza	Instituting the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers	The Committee, chaired by BUHAY Party-List Rep. Mariano Michael Velarde Jr., approved the Committee Report on the substitute bill to the six measures.
	HR 220	Rep. Salceda	Inquiry into the alleged P530 million fraud involving the Embassy of Kuwait and a private company known as Winston Q8 Certification Solutions, Inc., with Kuwait-bound OFWs as victims	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on the issues raised in HRs 220 and 694 in its next meeting.</p> <p>ACTS-OFW Party-List Rep. Aniceto "John" Bertiz III lamented that the right of OFWs bound for Kuwait to undergo medical testing in any medical clinic accredited or operated by the Department of Health (DOH) was curtailed with the imposition of the Winston Q8 medical decking system.</p>
	HR 694	Rep. Bertiz	Inquiry into the conspiracy among Winston Q8, Mawared Services, and medical clinics to extract illegal and exorbitant medical testing and	

Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs			certification fees from among OFWs bound for Kuwait	<p>Winston Q8 Certification Solutions, Inc., which claims to represent the Ministry of Health of Kuwait, accredits the medical clinics where OFWs can only undergo medical tests. Mawared Services, which processes visas for Filipinos bound for Kuwait, only accepts medical certificates issued by the medical clinics accredited by Winston Q8, as supporting documents to visa applications.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Estrellita Suansing (1st District, Nueva. Ecija), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) General Counsel Camilo Correa said that Winston Q8 and Mawared are locally registered companies, incorporated last 2015. Camilo added that based on the articles of incorporation of Winston Q8, the company's primary purpose is general business consulting. He promised to submit to the Committee certified true copies of the companies' documents that were submitted to SEC.</p> <p>Assistant Secretary Agnette Peralta of the Department of Health (DOH) disclosed that both Winston Q8 and Mawared are neither recognized nor accredited by the DOH.</p> <p>The DOH and Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) were directed to conduct their own investigation on this issue and to present their findings to the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee will invite the owners of the eight medical clinics accredited by Winston Q8 in its next meeting. It will also issue a subpoena to compel the officials of Winston Q8 to attend its next meeting.</p>
Social Services	Substitute Bill to HBs 328, 2065, 2324 & 3689	Reps. Romualdo, Villar, Relampagos, and Deputy Speaker Macapagal-Arroyo	Allowing the rectification of simulated birth records and prescribing administrative adoption proceedings	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Sandra Eriguel M.D. (2nd District, La Union), approved the Committee Report on the Substitute Bill to HBs 328, 2065, 2324 and 3689 subject to style and amendment.
	HB 3028	Rep. Zarate	Granting indigent families 50% discount on funeral services and granting free funeral services to extremely poor families nationwide, appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to study further HB 3028.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by the author himself, BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate.</p> <p>Assistant Director Rosalie Dagulo of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Protective Services Bureau recommended that local government units (LGUs) be involved in the crafting of the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of this proposed law in consultation with owners of mortuaries and non-government organizations that extend assistance to the poor and the marginalized.</p> <p>Dagulo also said that the DSWD, through its</p>

<i>Continuation...</i> Social Services				<p>Protective Services Program, offers burial assistance to individuals in crisis situation.</p> <p>Arlington Memorial Chapels President Rafael Jose informed the Committee that a group of funeral homes in Quezon City provides "<i>Murang Pallbing</i>" and "<i>Libreng Libing</i>" package to indigent families upon submission of pertinent documentary requirements.</p> <p>The resource persons present were requested to submit their position papers on the bill for consideration of the TWG.</p>
---	--	--	--	---

AGENCY BRIEFING

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Climate Change (Special Committee)	<p>Briefing by the Climate Change Commission (CCC) on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP 22) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of the Philippine accession to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change 	<p>The Committee, chaired by AKO BICOL Party-List Rep. Christopher Co, listened to the briefing conducted by the Climate Change Commission (CCC).</p> <p>CCC Acting Vice Chair Frances Veronica Victorio reported on the outcome of the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP 22) held in Bab Ighli, Marrakech, Morocco from November 7 to 18, 2016.</p> <p>Victorio said that the Parties engaged in an open and inclusive process to lay a solid foundation to implement the mandates in the Paris Agreement and accelerate action on climate change.</p> <p>Victorio reported the highlights of COP 22, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding of the first Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement; • Expansion of the Paris Agreement Rulebook; • Review of the terms of reference of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage; and • Development of functions and linkages under Climate Finance. <p>According to Victorio, the Philippine delegation to the COP 22 was organized into nine main negotiating groups with a government agency leading each group. The discussion focuses on the following topics: mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, finance, technology transfer and development, capacity building, transparency, implementation and compliance, and agriculture.</p> <p>Victorio emphasized that ratifying the Paris Agreement will strengthen the country's call for strong global climate action, taking into account the "principle of common but differentiated responsibilities."</p> <p>AKO BICOL Party-List Rep. Rodel Batocabe requested the CCC to inform the Members of the Committee of future conferences pertinent to climate change so that they can participate in these activities in the exercise of the Committee's oversight function. He also requested the CCC to submit its programs and projects relative to climate change adaptation and mitigation.</p> <p>Victorio said the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has already transmitted the Instrument of Accession and 28 Certificates of Concurrence (COCs) last January 31, 2017 to the Office of the President for signature. Once signed by the President, Victorio said, these documents will be transmitted to the Senate for its concurrence.</p> <p>The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is a global agreement that</p>

<p>Continuation... Climate Change (Special Committee)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of People's Survival Fund (PSF) 	<p>primarily aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. (Source: UNFCCC website)</p> <p>The Instrument of Accession is a document signifying the Philippines' ratification of the agreement, while the COCs serve as an assurance that the concerned agency understands and approves the agreement and vows to do its share in implementing the country's commitments under the deal.</p> <p>CCC Assistant Secretary Rommel Cuenca reported that, of the 95 PSF project proposals received by the CCC, two projects are already approved costing P119.75 million, while seven projects with an aggregate cost of P962.73 million are still on the pipeline.</p> <p>Cuenca said that the PSF is a special fund in the National Treasury that is earmarked to finance climate change adaptation programs and projects. The PSF has an annual budget of P1 billion.</p> <p>The CCC will again be invited in the next meeting of the Committee to present a more detailed report on the PSF.</p>
<p>Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<p>Update on the situation of stranded overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Saudi Arabia, particularly those affected workers from the Mohammad Al-Mojil Group</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by BUHAY Party-List Rep. Mariano Michael Velarde Jr., will continue its discussion on the situation of stranded OFWs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in its next meeting.</p> <p>Assistant Secretary Grace Princesa of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) reported that Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud already issued a royal decree directing the release of all monetary claims due to the displaced OFWs. She went on to say that the Saudi Ministry of Justice had already appointed lawyers to represent the OFWs in filing their claims, explaining that only lawyers who are Saudi nationals are recognized by the Saudi court system.</p> <p>In 2016, thousands of OFWs in Saudi were retrenched by Saudi-based construction companies which were financially affected by the plummeting oil prices.</p> <p>Assistant Secretary Hope Hervilla of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that the affected OFWs from KSA already received relief assistance, transportation assistance, and other support services from the Department.</p> <p>Atty. Robert Chuan, officer-in-charge of the Legal Staff Division of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), reported that the agency has allocated P500 million for the affected OFWs in Saudi Arabia, through its Relief Assistance Program (RAP). Those who were already repatriated were given P20,000 each. Each family of OFWs who are still in KSA were also given P6,000. Chuan added that OWWA also distributed food and hygiene kits to the stranded OFWs at KSA and covered the post-repatriation service expenses of repatriated OFWs who stayed at the OWWA halfway home.</p> <p>Executive Director Luz Victoria Amponin of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) said that since January of this year, 491 out of the 5,000 profiled OFWs have availed themselves of TESDA's scholarship program. TESDA also offers free competency assessment and certification, and technical-vocational training to interested OFWs or to their family members.</p> <p>Reps. Winston "Winnie" Castelo (2nd District, Quezon City) and Wes Gatchalian (1st District, Valenzuela City) stressed that with what is happening now with the OFWs in Saudi, the immediate passage of the proposed law creating a Department of Overseas Filipino Workers</p>

Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs		<p>(DOFW) becomes imperative.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Lawrence Castillo, caseworker at <i>Migrante</i> International, suggested that the government should also study the critical effects of “Saudization,” or the replacement of foreign workers with Saudi nationals in the private sector, to the Philippine economy as a whole.</p> <p>The Committee suggested that a task force be created headed by DFA, with DOLE, DSWD, OWWA, TESDA, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), and other concerned agencies as members, to look into the current situation of displaced OFWs.</p>
Social Services	Briefing by the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) on its policies and programs for persons with disabilities (PWDs) and legislative agenda for the 17 th Congress	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Sandra Eriguel M.D. (2nd District, La Union), listened to the briefing conducted by the NCDA on its policies and programs for persons with disabilities (PWDs) and legislative agenda for the 17th Congress.</p> <p>Rizalio Sanchez, chief of the Information Education and Communication Division of the NCDA, discussed the mission, vision, and programs and services of the Council.</p> <p>The NCDA is mandated to formulate policies and coordinate the activities of all agencies, whether public or private, concerning disability issues and concerns.</p> <p>Sanchez highlighted the NCDA’s legislative agenda for the 17th Congress, which are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory PhilHealth membership of PWDs; • Amendment to <i>Batas Pambansa Bilang</i> 344 or the Accessibility Law; • Mental health bill; • Filipino sign language; • Early detection and intervention for children with disabilities (CWDs); • Inclusive education; • Alternative communications for PWDs in judicial courts; • Amendment of RA 1179 or the Vocational Rehabilitation Act; and • Strengthening of the NCDA.