

Filipino Ties

An official publication of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas distributed worldwide

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US NCSBN oks Manila as NCLEX testing site



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo inaugurated the newly constructed Pearson Professional Center in Makati City where Filipino nurses aspiring to work in the United States could now take NCLEX. Also present in the event are (L-R) NCSBN Assoc. Exec. Dir. Casey Marks, CFO Chairman Dr. Dante Ang, Pearson VUE President Robert Whelan, and Pearson VUE VP Anthony Zara.

The US National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) is now being held in Manila. After the approval of the US National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), the first batch of examinees took the exam last August 23 at the Pearson VUE offices in Trident Tower, Makati City. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was on hand to open the occasion and to wish the examinees good luck.

Unknown to many people, the declaration of Manila as an NCLEX site was the culmination of almost two years of efforts exerted by Dr. Dante A. Ang, chairman of the Commission on

Filipinos Overseas (CFO) and head of Presidential Task Force on NCLEX (PTF-NCLEX). On February 8, Dr. Ang flew to Chicago, where the NCSBN holds its headquarters, to sign the formal agreement.

At a press conference held at the CFO on Feb. 12, Dr. Ang explained that the NCSBN board of directors had unanimously approved Manila as NCLEX site. "NCSBN acceded to our request, convinced of our sincerity to protect the integrity of the examination," the chairman said. "The board took into account that no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had personally given the assurance."

The Chicago-based organization was about to hold the test in Manila but then information surfaced about leaks of answers in the local Nursing Licensure Examination, which the Philippine Regulation Commission conducted in June last year. "As a result of that unfortunate incident," Dr. Ang explained, "NCSBN abruptly terminated the negotiation with appropriate government agencies

See PTF-NCLEX, page 11

400 Fil-Am groups attend Bayanihan sa Amerika

Seeking to strengthen linkage between Filipino Americans and the Philippines, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), in partnership with Philippine consular offices, conducted the historic *Bayanihan sa Amerika* series of conferences in four key cities in the United States – Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago in October 2007. Themed "Community centers and associations in the United States: strengthening ties with the Filipino motherland," the conference gathered more than 400 Filipino community organizations spread throughout the United States to share their views on community-building among Filipino Americans and how their organizations can better respond to the needs and interests of the community.

The beginnings of the Bayanihan sa Amerika conference sprang from joint efforts by Philippine foreign service Posts in the United States and the CFO in profiling the make-up of the Filipino community. In 2005, the Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco published a Filipino



The organizers and sponsors of the Bayanihan conference in Los Angeles: (L-R) Mr. Adrian Peran of PCG LA, Mr. Noel Calleja of CFO, Mr. Lito Villanueva of SMART Inc., Congen Mary Jo Aragon, Ms. Hazel Custodio of SMART Inc., CFO Deputy Exec. Dir. Jennifer O. Gonzales, Ms. Cherry Joy Veniles of CFO, Ms. Rowena Sierra of PCG LA, and Mr. Geminiano Arre of FCC of Hawaii

community resource directory broken down into community centers, umbrella organizations, university-based groups and chambers of commerce in an attempt to map out support networks for Filipino immigrants. In

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New procedure for Filipino emigrants' attendance in CFO pre-departure seminars

Filipino emigrants attending the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) and Peer Counseling at the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) may make a reservation by telephone or through the Internet at least five working days before the scheduled date. The new procedure has been in force since July 1, 2007.

For telephone reservations, emigrants may call (02) 563-1965 or (02) 561-8321 local 103, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. For on-line reservation, emigrants may access the CFO website, www.cfo.gov.ph and submit a completed reservation application. For inquiries, call 562-3848 or 561-8321 locals 104, 105, 201 to 203.

Israelis pay tribute to Filipino caregivers

TEL AVIV - Bait Bkfar (Home in a Village), a prominent retirement home in Israel, paid tribute to 13 Filipino caregivers in a one-hour cultural program showcasing the Philippines in Givat Shaphira, Israel.

Officers of the retirement home showered the caregivers with praises, citing their love for and devotion to their employers and the elderly and the sick. Bait Bkfar's Cultural Director Ronit Aussenberg gave the audience a historical glimpse of Filipino culture and tradition.

The owner of the retirement home, Shalom Blustein, donated 10,000 shekels (\$2,300) for the proposed Philippine Monument in Rishon Lezion.

The program included a video presentation on the Philippines and rendition of the Filipino national anthem and other Filipino songs by the caregivers themselves, with Hebrew translation. The caregivers also performed Philippine dances to the delight of the guests.

Filipino costumes, products and textiles were shown on exhibit by the Embassy to complement the festive atmosphere. Pictures depicting Philippines-Israel relations attracted the crowd. Tourism brochures ran out early, as 400 Israelis who attended the fair snapped them up.

Source: DFA

Johns Hopkins offers course on mail-order brides

NEW JERSEY - The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore is offering a course on Filipino mail-order brides, which would help explain the stereotyping of Filipino women.



The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland

The course *Mail-Order Brides: Understanding the Philippines in Southeast Asian Context* started running in the spring of 2007, under the Department of Anthropology. It is cross-listed with studies on Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and Political Science. British Professor Fenella Cannell, who is teaching the course, spent 15 years in the Philippines. In those years, she did extensive fieldwork in Bicol. She has written scholarly books about Southeast Asia. She is a lecturer on social anthropology at the London School of Economics and

Fil-Am siblings join Kennedy, Clinton as 'Outstanding Young Americans'

Two Filipino-American brother and sister were recently named among the 2006 Ten Outstanding Young Americans (TOYA) by the United States Junior Chamber (Jaycees).

US Air Force LtCol. Leslie Claravall and younger brother Lester Claravall of the Oklahoma Department of Labor are believed to be the first recipients of the awards who are full-blooded Filipinos. The siblings, born in the US to Filipino immigrants, received the awards in ceremonies held at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Claravalls thus joined an elite circle of past TOYA awardees that include former Presidents John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Bill Clinton, as well as Dr. Henry Kissinger, internationally acclaimed conductor Leonard Bernstein, Howard Hughes, Orson Wells, Elvis Presley, and Nelson Rockefeller, among others.

It was the first time in the TOYA awards history that siblings made the nation's ten best in the same calendar year. The closest were the Kennedy brothers – John F., Bobby, and Teddy – who won in different calendar years.

Leslie, a nursing professional, commands the US Air Force's largest overseas medical operations squadron in the Western Pacific. Headquartered at Yokota Air Base in Japan, the squadron takes care of the 374th Airlift Wing's 11,000 personnel. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

On the other hand, Lester was born in Warren, Pennsylvania, and graduated from the University of Oklahoma. He currently heads Oklahoma's Child Labor Unit, where he directs the operation of the state's educational outreach and enforcement activities. He has authored several books and is a frequent speaker at conferences, youth groups meetings, and school functions. His advocacy is the protection of the nation's young workers. Leslie and Lester were born to Dr. Leonardo Claravall of Isabela and the late Gloria Gaerlan of La Union. The couple migrated to the US in the early 60's.

The TOYA program is one of the oldest and most prestigious recognition programs in America.

Source: Philippine News

Political Science. Ms. Cannel, through this course, introduces the Philippines and examine the different aspects of its culture and history to interested students.

The mail-order bride phenomenon is a component of immigration that has prompted studies by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In 1999, the INS issued a report on more than 200 international matchmaking organizations in the US, which have brought together 4,000 to 6,000 couples in marriage. Most of the women come from the Philippines and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Parenthetically, the INS report puts in context the 1995 murder of a pregnant Filipino woman, who was shot outside a Seattle courtroom by her husband. He was seeking an annulment after only ten days of marriage and a refund of \$10,000, which he said he spent for bringing his wife to the country.

Source: Philippine News

Filipino scientist receives Harvard Foundation honors



Prof. Baldomero M. Olivera

Harvard University students, administrators, and professors gathered to honor Baldomero M. Olivera, Scientists of Year 2007 of Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations, at a reception in Pforzheimer House in mid-March of 2007.

Olivera, a professor of bio-chemistry and neuroscience at the University of Utah, was born and raised in the Philippines, where he finished his undergraduate studies. After completing doctoral work at the California Institute of Technology and post-doctoral work at Stanford University, Olivera began doing research on the deadly cone snails that live in Southeast Asia.

His research, which now includes many more type of cone snails, has led to a better understanding of the nervous system and the development of new commercial drugs, including a potent painkiller administered to patients who do not respond to morphine.

Dr. S. Allen Counter, director of the foundation and associate professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School, said Olivera's work has a potential "to explain some behaviors...[and] help us treat and cure many diseases."

Marlowe A. Rillera, class of 2009 and co-president of the Harvard Philippine Forum, said the award signifies that "Filipinos are getting out there and making a difference in the world."

Source: *Harvard Crimson*

13 Fil-Am doctors and nurses rewarded in LA

The Los Angeles city government honored 13 Filipino-American doctors and nurses for their exemplary work as health care professionals and role models.

Consul General Mary Jo A. Bernardo-Aragon reported that the awardees were given certificates of commendation during the council's meeting on December 14, 2007 by LA council president Eric Garcetti and council member Richard Alarcon. The awardees were doctors Francisco P. Quismorio Jr., Robinson Villaverde Baron, Rolando Mercader, Noli Soza, Arnel Joaquin, Erwinn Sistoza, Mariedel Leviste-Mosqueda, Edgar Bañez, and Delia Cabansag, as well as nurses Mila Velasquez, Lydia Roblow-Jimenez, Violeta Unabia, and Josie Jones.

Filipino Americans were acknowledged as an integral part of the health care workforce in the city who continue to meet the demands of an expanding healthcare system with their demonstrated skill, work ethic and passion.

Source: *PDI*

Filipina gets Voices of Courage Award

Ms. Noraida Abdullah-Karim, a Filipino social worker, was named one of six recipients of the Voices of Courage Award given by the Commission for Refugee Women and Children. She received the award at a luncheon at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York City on May 10, 2007.

A Maguindanaoan, Ms. Abdullah-Karim is the officer-in-charge of Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and coordinator of the Food Assistance Project, both in Mindanao. She played a leading role in the Literacy, Livelihood, and Food Sufficiency Project for women and young men, a project that CFSI field-tested for the World Bank. The project is now being implemented in conflict-affected communities in Maguindanao in partnership with the World Food Programme.

The Voices of Courage Award is given each year to people and organizations from around the world that have shown commitment and leadership to promote the well-being of displaced women and children. Established in 1989, the Commission is affiliated with the International Rescue Committee.



Noraida Adang Abdullah Karim (left) shares lessons with a colleague in Cotabato.

Source: *Philippine News*

Filipina nanny cited for heroism

NEW YORK - A Filipino nanny who saved her wealthy employers' four children and their two friends from the fire that gutted their house in Stowe, Vermont, received a check for \$25,000 as a reward.

Hazel Reposo, 30, a native of Negros, received the monetary reward from Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Wood, who said they would forever be grateful to her for her heroism and quick thinking. It was found out that when told by one of the children that the fire was coming out of the garage of the 4,500 square-foot luxury home, which was made entirely of wood, the nanny immediately ordered the children out. After securing the children, she called 911 and her employers.

The Woods say that the reward is intended for the education of Ethan, the son the nanny left behind in the Philippines in 2003 to work overseas. Consul General Cecilia Rebong sent the information to the Department of Foreign Affairs after learning of the heroic deed when Reposo came to the consulate to acquire a new Philippine passport to replace the old one she had lost in the fire.

Source: *DFA*

CFO program special

GMA honors 48 Presidential awardees



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo conferred the Presidential Awards on 48 Filipino individuals and organizations on December 7, 2006, at a gala dinner at the Rizal Hall, Malacanang Palace.

The awardees were selected from 158 nominees in 20 countries through 30 Philippine Embassies and Consulates. Of the 48 awardees, 30 are individuals while 18 are organizations. The awardees came from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Germany, Israel, Japan, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States of America.

The Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas is held every two years to recognize individuals and organizations who contribute to Philippine development and progress, or promote the interests of overseas Filipino communities. The awards are also given to Filipinos overseas who have distinguished themselves in their profession and have brought honors to the Filipino people.

The awards have so far been given to 283 Filipinos and private organizations overseas since its establishment.

The Presidential Awards for 2008 was launched in December 2007. The CFO distributed primers containing the guidelines for the awards system, including the nomination and endorsement forms, to all Philippine embassies and consulates. These may also be downloaded at the CFO's website, www.cfo.gov.ph. The awards secretariat at the CFO will be receiving nominations, and all related documents on or before 30 May 2008.

Bayanihan sa Amerika...

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the same year, CFO devised a survey instrument to: 1) gain a composite profile of organizations listed in the organizations in terms of membership, coverage and services provided; 2) surface issues and problems encountered by the organizations in program implementation and delivery; 3) provide an avenue for organizations to self-assess the impact of their programs; and 4) develop an agenda for a conference that is relevant to the needs of community service organizations.

A draft working concept and agenda for the Bayanihan sa Amerika conference was discussed during the 2006 annual Consuls General meeting in Honolulu where the Posts and CFO finally agreed to hold the first ever conference of community centers and associations in the United States in 2007.

Los Angeles. The first leg of the Bayanihan sa Amerika conference was held in Los Angeles on 7 October 2007 at the New Otani Hotel. Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon formally opened the session on programs of the Philippine government, starting with programs and services extended by the Philippine Consulate General in Los Angeles.



Community leaders and participants during the conference in Los Angeles

Her presentation was followed by tourism thrusts, and business and investment opportunities for overseas Filipinos as discussed by Tourism Director Mary Ann Cuevas and Trade Attaché Archimedes Gomez of the Philippine International Trade Center, respectively.

Opening the second session of the Bayanihan sa Amerika Los Angeles leg is a discussion and overview of Filipino community centers in the US framed in the experience of the Filipino Community Center in Hawaii,

discussed by its Executive Director, Geminiano Arre, Jr. The session further expounded on the important role of Filipino community centers in instilling the value of Filipino heritage among 2nd generation Filipino emigrants, as well as goal setting and future prospects of Filipino cultural visibility programs. These themes were expounded by the presentations of Ms. Linda Nietes of the Philippine Expressions Bookshop and Ms. Jilly Canizares of the Association for the Advancement of Fil-Am Arts and Culture. Concluding the second session was a discussion on effective fundraising strategies and financial planning for Filipino community centers from the experience of the Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA), shared by Mr. Joel Jacinto.

Assistance to the Philippines was the theme of the third session which was opened by CFO Executive Director Jennifer Gonzales, focusing on CFO's *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* (LINKAPIL) program, a conduit for material and financial assistance from overseas Filipinos to the Philippine countryside. Mr. Ric Munda of ANCOP-Gawad Kalinga followed Ms. Gonzales' presentation, focusing on enhancing the transformative value of development assistance to the Philippines. Closing the third session was a discussion on patriotic bonds by Congressman Hermilando Mandanas. Con. Gen. Aragon and Ms. Gonzales keynoted the evening celebration.

Workshop discussions on addressing organizational concerns and enhancing Filipino political and cultural visibility were facilitated by Ms. Susan Dilkes of Filipino American Services Group, Inc. and Ms. Rozita Lee of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations. CFO Director Regina Galias facilitated the presentation of workshop outputs.

San Francisco. Following the initial run of the conference, San Francisco hosted the second leg of the conference on 13 October 2007 at the Philippine Center. The San Francisco leg retained the original prescribed format of the conference opening the first plenary session with a situationer of Filipino community centers discussed by Mr. Bert Caoili of the Filipino Community Center in Seattle, and a discussion of consulate and CFO programs by Acting Head of Post Consul Antonio Morales and CFO Executive Director Jennifer

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CFO program special

CFO holds *Lakbay-Aral* 2007



The Lakbay-Aral participants headed by Ms. Noreen Martin (third from left) of the Napa Valley College in California, at the National Museum, Manila.

Fourteen participants from the United States joined the 2007 *Lakbay-Aral* Program held 10-24 July 2007. Through the two-week cultural immersion program of the CFO, they learned more about the Philippines, through visits to various places in Manila, Quezon Province, Cebu City, Bohol, and Palawan.

The first several days were spent visiting the National Museum and touring Intramuros with Mr. Carlos Celdran, who discussed the history of the Philippines. The participants also visited the University of Santo Tomas - College of Nursing, where they were welcomed by nursing students and were shown around the campus. They also gave gifts to the children and elders at the Jose Rodriguez Memorial Hospital (formerly Tala Leprosarium). For their first out-of-town trip, they spent a day at the Villa Escudero in Quezon, where they had the opportunity to witness various regional dances of the Philippines. The visit to the villa was more exciting to most participants who had their first *karitela* ride.

The next three days were spent in Cebu City. The group was welcomed by Governor Gwendolyn Garcia. The Provincial Government of Cebu also hosted a dinner and cultural show. Among the places visited in the city were the Plantation Bay, Magellan's Cross, Basilica Minor del Santo Niño, Taoist Temple, and the Alegre Guitars.

Next in their itinerary was the province of Bohol. Here, they got to visit the Blood Compact Site, Baclayon Church, Tarsier Sanctuary, and the Hanging Bridge. They spent some time counting the 1,268 perfectly cone-shaped hills, famously known as the Chocolate Hills. They also enjoyed a feast while being serenaded on a boat cruising along the Loboc River.

From the Visayas, they proceeded to Palawan. They indulged in island hopping in Honda Bay, and snorkeling and fish feeding in one of its islands. They also went to see the rock formations in the underground river, and spent time on the beach in Sabang. The participants also dropped by the Vietnamese Village and had a taste of authentic Vietnamese recipes at Vietville Restaurant.

Oh, yes, the fun would never be complete without shopping. They spent endless hours shopping at Greenhills, Robinson's Place in Manila, and the SM Mall of Asia. They also did the same in the provinces haggling for souvenirs, handicrafts, pearls, and anything that catches their attention. At the closing ceremony, the participants tried the *tinikling* which awed everyone at the program. One of the participants also made his own music using the *kubing*, an indigenous musical instrument. They shared their insights about the things they have learned from the two-week program, and how the experience made them more appreciative of the Philippines and its people.

Lakbay-Aral, a Filipino term literally translated as "travel-study", is a program started by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in 1983 to provide young Filipinos overseas with an opportunity to learn more about their roots and heritage by experiencing life in the Philippines.

The CFO invites all Filipino youth overseas to come and visit the Philippines through its *Lakbay-Aral* Program. For more inquiries about the *Lakbay-Aral* Program, please contact the Program Coordinator at telephone numbers (632) 561-8321 local 605 or 561-8327, fax number (632) 561-8332, or e-mail at info@cfo.gov.ph.



CFO renews ties with Filipinos in Australia

Invited by the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) participated in the 5th Global Filipino Networking Convention (GFNC) held on 6-8 September 2007 in Sydney, Australia. CFO Chairman Dante A. Ang was represented by Executive Director Jennifer O. Gonzales. She was accompanied by Ms. Ivy Miravalles of the CFO's Migrant Integration and Education Division.

Executive Director Gonzales' presentation, "Assisting the Global Filipino through CFO Programs and Services", received overwhelming pledges of support from participants of the convention. Individuals and Filipino organizations in Australia expressed willingness to provide scholarship grants, sponsor livelihood and construction of water well projects in needy communities in the Philippines.



Ms. Ivy Miravalles of CFO (fourth from left) with members of the Filipino Australian Society of the Hunter Valley, Inc., headed by Ms. Rebecca McDonald (third from right)

After the GFNC, Ms. Miravalles undertook a cultural immersion program by visiting families of Filipino-Australian immigrants based in Hunter Valley, in coordination with the Filipino-Australian

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FILIPINO TIES

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Living the American dream

I arrived here in November 2004 through my husband Greg, who works as a psychologist in one of the school districts in Wenatche, WA. We live in the downtown area which presented many opportunities for me. I took all the chances when I received my employment card and my conditional green card. I started work at a children's center and took on another job at a nearby retirement house as a certified nursing assistant. I took up English classes to improve my English proficiency and was later on accelerated for Adult Basic Education.

As a nursing graduate from the Philippines, I sought advice on how to become a registered nurse (RN) in Washington. They asked me to take major nursing subjects here that are not included in our curriculum back home. I postponed motherhood because I want to be stable first before a baby arrives. I am currently juggling a lot of roles: wife, student, worker and financial supporter for my family in the Philippines. It is pretty hard to tackle all of these but with patience, determination, perseverance and a good supportive husband, I am doing well so far. I am doing all of these because I do not want to be a burden to my husband. I work very hard so I can have my own money and have the freedom to do whatever I want to do.

In 1994, I almost couldn't graduate because money was so hard to come by. In fact, I had an outstanding balance at the school and was unable to get my transcript of records. I remember how frustrated I was as I could not take the nursing board exams without money and without my TOR. Eventually, my husband helped me pay off the balance and was given my TOR ten years after graduating.

I am thankful that today all of my dreams are taking shape and I hope my story would be an inspiration to others.

E.B Hall
Washington, USA

Separate lives

I am thankful my dream of living and working in the USA has come true and I am blessed that I am cared for by my relatives here. At the same time, I am extremely sad because my husband and my three children are not here with me.

My children were given a visa but I could not take them with me because there is nobody to take care of them while I work. My husband was denied a visa because he told the truth: that as a young impressionable college student he tried drugs. It didn't matter that he never touched them again. His truthful answer had caused him his visa.

Now, we face the harsh reality of separation. And while I intend to honor my contractual obligations, each day I am faced with the painful reality that I am thousands of miles away from my loved ones.

Name withheld
upon request
New Jersey, USA

Useful tips for Filipinos migrating to Canada

For new immigrants, there are so many things Canada has to offer. Canada has invested millions of dollars to help new immigrants. They always ask us why we speak good English and are surprised to find out that we learned it since kindergarten. Here are some tips for new immigrants:

- *I strongly suggest for new immigrants to contact the nearest city or town hall because they have job counselors who can help find a job for you, make your resume, and use their computer for free. They even have a day care center where you can leave your child while you are attending classes. Contact the New Canadians Center for Excellence, Inc.*
- *Coming from a country like the Philippines, they required us to get a TB skin test. It's for free at the Health Office. You have to be a resident of Canada for at least 3 months to qualify for the Health Insurance. Benefits may vary from province to province.*
- *Open a savings or checking account at any bank and just present your Landed Immigrant Form. They do not require an initial deposit. Just sign in.*
- *Secure a certification from the Philippine Land Transportation Office nearest your place certifying the number of years you have been driving so that the waiting time of one year is waived. Just present your Philippine driver's license when applying for a driver's license.*
- *Elementary and High School are free. Bring school credentials and immunization records of the children.*
- *No matter what, be persistent, hardworking, patient and most of all trust in the Lord. He will never let you down.*

Elsie Calumpang
Windsor, Canada



Quotes from the Quill

"As you ponder the great questions before you, look at Hawaii for sources of lessons in political empowerment." – former Hawaii Governor Benjamin Cayetano referring to the political success of Filipino Americans in Hawaii during the 7th NAFAA Empowerment conference in September 2006.

Bayanihan sa Amerika...

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Gonzales, respectively. Congressman Hermilando Mandanas also delivered a keynote speech.

An exhaustive session on Filipino tourism, culture and heritage followed suit, with National Historical Institute (NHI) Chairman Ambeth Ocampo discussing ways to bridge the generation and cultural gap between 2nd generation Filipino emigrants and their parents. Ms. Mellie Lopez of the Philippine Folklife Museum addressed the goals and future prospects of cultural visibility programs while Tourism Director Rene delos Santos introduced ideas on how the Filipino community can help Philippine tourism by promoting Philippine destinations for vacationing friends or acquaintances.

Occurring simultaneously with the culture and heritage session is a breakaway session on assistance to the Philippines with speakers from both government and non-government sectors as part of the panel. Explaining CFO's LINKAPIL program, CFO Director Regina Galias highlighted successful collaboration between CFO and community organizations in channeling development assistance. Bringing Ayala Foundation's expertise to the fore, Mr. Greg Macabenta shared the organization's experience in assisting welfare and development projects in the Philippines with the help of the Filipino community. Congressman Hermilando Mandanas provided a testimony on the impact of these forms of assistance in alleviating poverty especially among the underprivileged in far-flung Philippine provinces.

In the afternoon, two parallel sessions were again held on business and investment opportunities in the Philippines and organizational challenges faced by Filipino associations. The business and investment session was opened by Trade Representative Maria Roseni Alvero, outlining priority business areas or sectors as well as incentives to new investors. Her presentation was followed by testimonials from business people who have succeeded breaking into the US market, namely Mr. Dennis Lacar of Cavera Technology Group, Mr. Henry Sy of Pacific Tropical and Ms. Leannie DiCarlo of XRoads Philippine Sea Salts. Meanwhile, two notable Filipino community leaders tackled organizational challenges facing community centers and associations. Ms. Marily Mondejar of the Filipino Women's Network spoke about evaluating program thrusts of Filipino community centers, while Mr. Freddy Guevara of ANCOP Foundation tackled effective fundraising strategies and financial planning for organizations.

The two workshops on addressing organizational concerns and enhancing political and cultural visibility were facilitated by Director Galias and Ms. Cherry Joy Veniles of the CFO.

Entertainment during breaks and the Bayanihan night were provided by the Fil-Am Veterans Rondalla, Bayanihan Cultural Organization Dance Troupe, Mr. Florante Aguilar and Lori Abucayan.

New York. Integrating the CFO Secretariat's experience in the past two legs of the conferences, the East Coast run of the Bayanihan sa Amerika was distinctively focused on capacity building among Filipino community centers and associations. Held at the Philippine Center in New York on 20 October 2007, Consul General Cecilia Rebong gave a rousing welcome to the participants of the conference, some of whom came all the way from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. CFO Chairman Dante Ang's message was read by Mr. Rino Paez of the CFO.



Executive Director Jennifer O. Gonzales discussing the programs and services of CFO

The conference organizers decided to hold all sessions in plenary, opening with a situationer on Filipino community centers and associations in Northeast US. Project management specialist Vladimir Manuel discussed ways by which community organizations can translate their visions to reality. An apt follow-up on the topic is Ms. Jean Lobell's (co-founder of the Filipino American Human Services, Inc.) talk on effectiveness and sustainability factors of non-profit organizations. Concluding the session on capacity-building is Mr. Rey Padilla's presentation on effective fundraising, financial management and internal controls, highlighting the necessity of maintaining strong internal controls and transparency in the finances of community organizations. The session was chaired and facilitated by Ms. Lolita Compas, past board member of the Philippine Independence Day Council.

Community initiatives on culture and heritage promotion followed the first session, where Ms. Ludy Corrales of the Philippine American Friendship Committee presented suggestions to strengthen Filipino cultural visibility programs. Her presentation was followed by Ms. Cristina Castro's discussion on imparting a cultural legacy through the experience of Iskwelahang Pilipino. NHI Chairman Ambeth Ocampo closed the session through an interactive lecture on the Filipinos' stereotypical concepts of its heroes, stressing the importance of studying Philippine history in determining one's concept of Filipino national identity. The session was jointly chaired by Ms. Johanna Martinez of the Filipino American Human Services, Inc. and Deputy Consul General Melita Sta-Maria Thomeczek.

The fourth plenary session was dedicated to Philippine tourism, business and investment. Trade representative Josephine Romero made a presentation on the prospects of Philippine products in the US as well as investment advice for those who wish to do business in the Philippines. Her presentation was followed by Tourism Director Emma Ruth Yulo's overview of Philippine destinations, tourism developments and available package promotions.

Capping off the conference, CFO Acting Deputy Executive Director Atty. Golda Myra Roma discussed CFO's experience in channeling development assistance from overseas donors to the Philippine countryside, before briefly foraying into policy issues relevant to assistance to the Philippines. The session was chaired by Mr. Edwin Pajares of the CFO. 2006 Presidential awardee and world-renowned pianist Adolovni Acosta provided the entertainment during the Bayanihan night.

Chicago. The last leg of the Bayanihan sa Amerika was held at the Sheraton Gateway Suites in Chicago on 27 October 2007. Consul General Blesila Cabrera welcomed the crowd with some attendees coming from as far as Wisconsin and Michigan. Project management specialist Vladimir Manuel provided a situationer of Filipino community organizations while FilCom Center Hawaii Executive Director Geminiano Arre expounded on the challenges faced by the proponents of the center from fund-raising to operations. Husband-and-wife team Engr. Cornelio and Dr. Evelyn Natividad (of the Philippine American Cultural Foundation and National Federation of Filipino American Associations, respectively) capped off the first plenary discussion by presenting effective fundraising strategies and financial planning as gleaned from their experience in establishing a center and setting up the Jose Rizal monument in Chicago. Facilitating the session and open forum is Vice Consul Roberto Bernardo.



(L-R) Hazel Custodio of SMART Inc., Congen Cecile Rebong, LandBank Manager Cecile Abante, and Atty. Golda Myra Roma launched the Bayanihan card during the New York leg of the conference.

The second plenary session focused on Philippine government programs for overseas Filipinos particularly on tourism and strengthening ties between overseas Filipinos and the motherland. Tourism director Verni Morales explained the tourism department's thrust to promote the Philippines as an ideal vacation destination for tourists coming from North America, while Mr. Rino Paez, reading CFO Chairman Dante Ang's message, enjoined the audience to continue assisting the Philippines in achieving its development goals. Consul Orontes Castro facilitated this session and the open forum. National Commission for Culture and the Arts Commissioner Alfredo Gabot opened the session

See Bayanihan sa Amerika, page 11

Overseas Filipinos assist Reming typhoon victims

Organizations and individuals in the United States responded to the call for help from hundreds of families affected by typhoon *Reming* (international name Durian) in Bicol in mid-December 2006.

The representatives of US-based groups, with the help of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), brought the relief goods to Albay on Dec. 14 and 15.

CFO officials and employees were accompanied by Dr. Dominador Genio, who represented the Filipino Organization in Kona in Hawaii, to the devastated area. Other major donors included the Feed the Hungry, Hawaii International Relief Organization, and the Philippine-American Foundation for Charity. A former *Lakbay Aral* participant, Richard Responde and anonymous local donors transported the goods from Manila to Bicol.



Mount Mayon provides a beautiful backdrop for the devastation wrought by Typhoon Reming.

After braving the devastated roads, weaving through the mass of rubble and 23 hours of travel, the group reached the area and distributed relief goods to 1,200 families in evacuation centers in Daraga and Legazpi City. Most survivors not only lost their homes and properties but also family members to flash floods and mud flows.

The group also went to Sto. Domingo to distribute items to families residing there. In both places, each family received a package consisting of rice, sugar, noodles, canned goods, detergents and candles, among others.

The successful relief operation was implemented in cooperation with the social welfare and development offices of the local governments of Albay, Legazpi City, and Daraga.

Mayor Noel Rosal of Legazpi and Mayor Gerry Jaucian of Daraga, as well as the social welfare officers of each LGU, expressed gratitude for the assistance. Mayor Rosal observed that the adjoining villages were in ruins. He said that it thus became necessary to relocate residents to a ten hectare lot in Taysan.



Typhoon victims young and old alike

The typhoon affected Regions IV and V, but Albay fared worst. According to a report of the National Disasters Coordinating Council, more than 700,000 families were affected. Around 1.3 million individuals were housed in 909 evacuation centers. Some 734 died and 2,360 suffered injuries. A total of 762 people were listed as missing. Damage to agriculture and infrastructure is estimated at P5.4 billion.

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Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino donations surpass P2 billion mark

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas' *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* (LINKAPIL) or Link for Philippine Development Program achieved yet another milestone in 2006, with P2.048B worth of donations received from various Filipino organizations and individual donors overseas.

Established in 1989 to manage the influx of donations for communities affected by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo and the earthquake in Luzon in the early 1990s, LINKAPIL has grown to become a testament to a strong and deep partnership between Filipinos overseas and Filipinos in the home country.

Apart from providing immediate relief assistance to communities affected by natural disasters, LINKAPIL creates livelihood opportunities, rebuilds schools and other damaged infrastructures, grants scholarships, and runs feeding centers for malnourished children. Through the government agencies at the local and national levels, and non-government institutions, it seeks to improve the lives of residents by imparting to them needed skills and knowledge.

In 2006 alone, P158M worth of assistance was distributed to more than 220,000 people in 53 provinces. In St. Bernard, Southern Leyte, which caught the world's attention when one of its villages was completely buried by mud and rocks, 11 classrooms were built and a virgin coconut oil plant was

established. A rehabilitation program was launched and completed in Quezon and Aurora provinces, which likewise suffered from floods and mudslides.

The LINKAPIL also established feeding programs for malnourished children in five municipalities. Some 27,000 books were distributed in 70 public schools, libraries and other learning centers in 34 provinces. Other noteworthy contributions in the past year were the relief operations for about 800 displaced families residing at the foot of Mount Mayon in August, and for 1,200 families in Albay affected by the massive floods and lahar flow in December. This project was sponsored by the Feed the Hungry, Inc. of Washington, DC, and Filipino organizations in Hawaii.

2007 proves to be another significant year, with migrant altruism bringing in almost P103 million. Construction of water system projects in Southern Leyte and Muntinlupa City, and 23 new classrooms in 12 provinces in the country, among other projects, were undertaken as a result.

For those interested in sponsoring development projects in the Philippines, you may get in touch with the CFO's Projects Management Division at telephone numbers (632) 561-8327, 5618321 (local 607 / 608), fax number (632) 561-8332, or through email: info@cfo.gov.ph.

anti-trafficking

CFO designated lead agency of Task Force Against Human Trafficking

To efficiently address the increasing reports and cases of human trafficking of Filipinos within and outside the country, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Executive Order No. 548-A on 9 February 2007 creating the Task Force Against Human Trafficking (TFHT) under the supervision of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO).

The CFO complements the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT), which remains as the primary body in coordinating, monitoring and overseeing the implementation of Republic Act 9208, or the "Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003". Specifically, CFO will be tasked to conduct special operations such as surveillance of persons and entities suspected to be engaged in human trafficking.

The TFHT is directed to:

- Recommend to Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking policies, programs and services to enhance government initiatives against trafficking in persons;
- Conduct surveillance and entrapment operations, in consultation and coordination with the IACAT established under Section 20 of Republic Act 9208, of persons, firms or entities alleged or suspected to be engaged in trafficking and related activities, as defined in RA 9208;
- Cause or direct the immediate apprehension, investigation and speedy prosecution of persons involved in, or of cases involving the trafficking in persons, and monitor progress of such cases;
- Provide adequate legal, psycho-social and other forms of assistance to trafficked persons, subject to rules and regulations as may be implemented;
- Consolidate various sources of data and statistics on trafficking, and establish a comprehensive databank for the effective monitoring, documentation and prosecution of trafficking incidents;
- Conduct a community education and information campaign program against trafficking in persons; and
- Perform such other acts as may be necessary for the effective discharge of its functions and responsibilities.



The Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila International Airport Authority, National Bureau of Investigation, Office of the Prosecutor of the Department of Justice, Philippine National Police, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Bureau of Immigration, and other relevant agencies are directed to

See CFO designated, page 11

Advocacy Seminar-Workshop on anti-human trafficking held in Cebu

An advocacy seminar-workshop on anti-human trafficking for youth leaders in the Visayas region was conducted in the Golden Valley Hotel, Cebu City on 10-11 November 2007. The two-day activity was sponsored by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) in partnership with the Cebu Coalition Against Trafficking of Women and Children for Sexual Exploitation (CATCHWISE) and the Provincial Women's Commission (PWC).



The participants listen intently to a lecture on anti-trafficking by Atty. Golda Myra Roma of CFO.

The seminar-workshop was envisioned to create awareness among Filipino youth about issues and concerns on trafficking in persons and foster youth participation against this illegal activity in the concerned provinces.

Some 46 youths from Antique, Bohol, Cebu, Leyte, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental and Samar participated in the activity. The youth advocates are delegates of different youth organizations, namely; Care for the Youth Organization; Christian Children's Fund; Coalition of Ormoc Women

Advocates; Hayag Youth Organization, Inc.; Justice, Peace, Integrity and Creation, Inc.; Pag-asa Youth Association of the Philippines; Parish Youth Coordinating Council; People's Empowerment and Awareness for the Community and Environment (PEACE); Philippine Karate-Do Federation; Sacred Heart Youth Ministry; *Samahan at Ugnayan ng Manggagawang Pantahanan sa Pilipinas* (SUMAPI); *Sangguniang Kabataan*; Society of Future Educators and Administrators of the University of Cebu; Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc.; Western Samar Development Foundation, Inc. and Youth for Christ.



Youth leaders working on their action plan against human trafficking

On the first day, *RA 9208: Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003*, *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child*, and *Supreme Court Rule on the Examination of Child Witness* were discussed. Atty. Jo-Ann T. Suarez, Atty. Cheryl A. Cabutihan, and Atty. Joan Dymphna G. Saniel from the Children's Legal Bureau (CLB) served as the resource speakers.

A workshop on advocacy work in relation to anti-trafficking facilitated by Mr. Vicente Alan Abadesco from the Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc. was held on the second day. During this activity, the youth participants came up with invaluable action plans that they would implement in their respective communities.

anti-trafficking

CFO provided assistance to trafficking victims from Hong Kong

Six Filipino women were saved from white slavery in Hong Kong with the help of the Philippine Consulate and the police in the former British colony.

On July 26 and 27 last year, 14 Filipino women arrived in Hong Kong.

Angelita David and Jennifer Balibat brought the group from the airport to Wan Chai, a red light district. Here, the two informed them that each had to pay back the syndicate HK\$10,000 for their recruitment fee and that they could raise the amount by giving sexual services to customers.

Outraged by what was asked of them, six of the women, all natives of Nueva Ecija, asked assistance from the Philippine Consulate General, who promptly contacted the police, which then set up a sting operation. The two traffickers were arrested and charged in court.

From the testimony of the six, Hong Kong District Judge Maria D'Almada Remedios found David and Balibat guilty as charged. She sentenced them to three years in prison each.

In the Philippines meanwhile, Dr. Dante Ang, chairman of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), based on the affidavits sent in by the consulate, contacted the victims' relatives and helped them file formal complaints against a certain Loida Viola Villaflor, the alleged brain of the illegal recruitment, who remained in the country, at the Cabanatuan City Prosecutor's Office.

Later, Dr. Ang met with the victims on their return to the Philippines on December 17 and hailed them for their courage. He urged them to pursue the pending cases against the ringleader.

There was a happy sidelight to the unfortunate incident. One of the victims, a nursing graduate was flown back to the Philippines earlier, on December 2, so that she could take the nursing board exam.

The CFO arranged the trip and took care of the young woman's hotel accommodation.

CFO leads drive vs. human trafficking



A CFO officer conducting a symposium at Bagumbong National High School, Caloocan City

The Community Education Program (CEP) initiated by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) is an annual inter-agency community education and information campaign that seeks to assist prospective migrants in making informed decisions on living abroad. Various migrant-serving national agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration lend their support by joining the week-long campaign held in various municipalities and provinces around the country.

The series of activities aim to generate community involvement in migration concerns and raise public awareness on various issues concerning migration, intermarriage and existing government policies and programs directed against illegal recruitment, documentation fraud, and human trafficking, among others. The program reaches out to the public in municipalities, cities and provinces through the conduct of school symposia on migration, public assemblies, radio interviews, and interaction with community members.

As of December, a total of 14 regions, 26 provinces, 25 cities, and 31 municipalities have participated in the CFO's information campaign. Teams were able to visit 60 schools, 19 religious sectors, and 16 non-government organizations, with over 14,000 attendees. Issues on international migration, intermarriage and human trafficking were also discussed with the public

See CFO Nationwide campaign, page 11

CFO conducted study visit in Japan



Misses Lucille Ronda (L) and Janet Ramos (R) of CFO during a courtesy call with Ambassador Domingo Siazon, Jr. in PE Tokyo.

Officers of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) visited Japan from 8-20 December 2007.

The visit centered on the prefectures of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Shizuoka, Aichi and Osaka, the top destinations of Filipino spouses of Japanese nationals. Meetings with the representatives of the Philippine posts, Filipino associations, international non-government organizations and church groups in Japan were held to determine the current conditions of Filipino women married to Japanese nationals. Interviews with Filipino wives through the CFO's Guidance and Counseling Program (GCP) were conducted to identify their issues and concerns and their coping mechanisms as immigrants and "foreign" wives. Among the issues that were raised during the meetings and interviews were the increasing incidences of trafficking of Filipino women in the guise of marriage, domestic violence, overstaying, children abandonment, and statelessness.

The output for this study visit will determine key areas for the improvement in the conduct of CFO's GCP and provision of assistance for Filipino spouses who are in distress. It also hopes to provide relevant inputs for the proposed round table discussion (RTD) on intermarriage which will be held in Japan in July 2008.

The study visit also provided an opportunity for CFO in establishing network with Filipino and Japanese organizations in Japan for possible partnership in carrying out some of its programs and services such as post-arrival orientation program, development assistance to the Philippines through the *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* (LINKAPIL) or Link for Philippine Development, and referrals for assistance-to-nationals and trafficking cases.



CFO officers invited during the Christmas party of Philippine Society in Japan

PTF-NCLEX...

continued from page 1

to hold the test here. Immediately after the scandal broke out, the President placed PRC, which until then was an independent agency, under the direct supervision and control of the Department of Labor and Employment. Concerned about the plight of Filipino nurses, she created PTF-NCLEX to pursue the stalled negotiation.

All foreign trained nurses must pass NCLEX to be able to work in US hospitals and health care institutions. Only then will the US Government issue a visa for such nurses. Some 10,000 Filipino nurses take NCLEX every year but that requires going to another country, with a huge investment in time and money. It is estimated that the nurses spend at least \$1,200 or the equivalent in the local currency for the purpose. Until the successful lobbying by PTF-NCLEX, Filipino nurses must take the examination either in Guam or Saipan, both US Territories. Other NCLEX sites outside the US include South Korea, Hongkong, India, Canada, and Great Britain. The Philippines is the origin of the great majority of foreign nurses working in the US.

Other members of the PTF-NCLEX who formed part of the mission to clinch NCSBN approval were Dr. Carmencita Abaquin, chairman of PRC Board of Nursing; Dr. Leah Samaco Paquiz and Ms. Ruth Padilla, president and governor, respectively, of the Philippine Nurses Association; Mr. Elfren Meneses of the National Bureau of Investigation, Mr. Ariss Santos of DOLE; and Mr. Rino Paez of CFO. Columnist Jarius Bondoc of the *Philippine Star* went with the group to Chicago.

CFO designated...

continued from page 9

support the anti-human trafficking campaign. The CFO Chairman may also call upon the heads of such government agencies for assistance, as may be necessary from time to time.

Since the creation of the task force, CFO has assisted in the repatriation of nine trafficked victims and is currently handling 25 trafficking and other related cases, involving 57 victims or complainants. The CFO has also spearheaded a comprehensive information campaign against trafficking in persons through the publication of posters and handbooks and through the conduct of community education programs in various provinces in the country, especially those with high incidences of emigration.

CFO renews ties...

continued from page 6

Society of the Hunter Valley, Inc. (FASHVI). During her meetings and interviews with Filipino immigrants and spouses/ partners of Australian nationals and their families, Ms. Miravalles inquired about their primary motivation for migrating to Australia, settlement concerns, family life, and their perceptions about raising a family abroad. CFO's presence in the Hunter region also gave chance for the government and non-government organizations to discuss pressing issues on Filipino migration to Australia. It also paved the way for Filipino-Australian senior citizens to have an audience with the Centrelink of the Hunter Region, and clarify issues on their social security benefits in Australia.

As a result of the study visit and participation in the 5th GFNC, the CFO was able to establish linkages for post-arrival services with organizations such as the FASHVI, Ethnic Community Council, Multicultural Christian Fellowship, Filipino-Australian Community Club of Tasmania, Inc., and Filipino Settlement Coordinating Council of South Australia, among others. Part of the CFO's mandate is to promote and ensure the protection and welfare of Filipinos overseas. In view of this, CFO maintains partnerships with Filipino associations overseas that offer community and settlement support to newly-settled migrants in their host countries. To date, the CFO actively coordinates with 10 post-arrival service providers from the US, Canada and Australia through the assistance of the Philippine Embassies and Consulates abroad.

Bayanihan sa Amerika...

continued from page 7

on Filipino culture and heritage emphasizing the importance of passing on cultural and historical traditions to younger generations of overseas Filipinos. His presentation was followed by an assessment of Filipino cultural visibility programs of the community by Mr. Eduardo Navarra of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations as read by Dr. P. Emraida Kiram, who also facilitated the entire session and the open forum.

Trade Representative Glenn Penaranda opened the session on business and investment in the Philippines, with Board of Investment Executive Director Celeste Ilagan, making a presentation on the Philippines' business advantage. Mr. Manny Belbis of Firenze of Chicago gave a testimonial about lessons he learned when doing business in the Philippines. The session was chaired by Engr. Editha Ardiente, past president of the Philippine Engineers and Scientists Organization.

Atty. Roma of the CFO was the lone presenter for the session on assistance to the Philippines, citing best practices by organizations who have conducted sustainable assistance programs in the past and briefly touching on policy issues relevant to overseas donations. Workshops akin to the first and second leg of the conference were held after this session with Dr. P. Emraida Kiram and Engr. Editha Ardiente facilitating the workshop discussions. Filipino folk song group HAPAG, provided the entertainment during the Bayanihan night.

SMART Communications and Land Bank of the Philippines were the major partners of the Bayanihan sa Amerika conferences, presenting their business packages and remittance services to the public apart from giving out raffle prizes to participants of the conference. The Asian Eye Institute and Book Exporters Association of the Philippines, also form part of the sponsors' roster, giving out free surgical eye treatments and Philippine books, respectively.

The Bayanihan sa Amerika series of conferences proved to be a fruitful learning opportunity for the participants to maximize the resources available to their organizations and refocus their programs to better address the needs of their constituencies. Apart from threshing out organizational issues such as funding and program impact, the open fora during the conferences provided an avenue for participants to share the problems they encountered insofar as assistance to the Philippines is concerned.

Several issues with policy implications were brought to the fore such as, value added tax on overseas donations, temporary permit to practice for health professionals on medical missions, lag time in the release of donations from the Bureau of Customs, among others. Many of the participants were also encouraged by the conference and proposed to do a follow-up by way of a leadership conference.

The CFO officers assured the community that representations will be made with the appropriate agencies to address the concerns which were raised in the conference. With the overwhelming response of the participants, the Bayanihan is foreseen to be replicated in other major destination countries of Filipino migrants, such as Canada, Australia, and United Kingdom, among others.

CFO Nationwide campaign...

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through local press briefings and radio and television interviews. Said programs were broadcasted locally reaching approximately 75,000 listeners and viewers in each area.

The campaign kicked off from the Ilocos and Cordillera Administrative Regions, down to Visayas and Southern Mindanao. The CEP culminated with a series of parallel forums at the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and the National Capital Region in December 2007.

Gov't, NGOs mark Overseas Filipinos Month



More than 150 participants from government and non-government organizations as well as other stakeholders concerned with the protection of the well-being of overseas Filipinos gathered on December 18, 2007 for the *2007 Forum on Overseas Filipinos*, in time for the celebration of the Month of Overseas Filipinos and International Migrants Day.



The Month of Overseas Filipinos committee members during a press conference at CFO: (L-R) Sr. Aida Virtudez of AOS, CFO Exec. Dir. Jennifer Gonzales, Ms. Hazel Custodio of SMART Inc., Mr. Mon Isberto of SMART Inc., CFO Chairman Dr. Dante Ang, SMC Director Fr. Fabio Baggio, Ms. Evelyn del Rosario of PMRW, AOS Director Fr. Savino Bernadi, and Ms. Liza Garcia of DAWN

Celebration of the Month of Overseas Filipinos led by the Philippine Migrants Right Watch (PMRW) and Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), the forum provided an opportunity for government organizations to provide a status report on their specific programs, functions and services related to the protection of overseas Filipinos and recommended solutions on how government and civil society can cooperate more closely in securing the welfare of all Filipino migrants. Among the agencies and organizations that presented include the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, Department of Foreign

Affairs, Department of Labor and Employment, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, CFO, PMRW, and Migrant Forum Asia.

The highlight of the forum was the paper "Protecting Migrant Workers: Lessons and Cautions from the Philippines" presented by Dovelyn Agunias Rannveig and Neil Ruiz, policy analyst and fellow, respectively of the Migration Policy Institute and Brookings Institution, both Washington DC based think-tanks.

An exhibit was also featured showcasing the programs of government and non-government agencies involved in the delivery of services to Filipino migrant workers. The celebration concluded with a *Pamaskong Handog Concert* featuring Filipino artists and entertainers such as Tuesday Vargas, Epi Quizon, and the Side A Band. The concert was organized by SMART Communications, the major sponsor of the event.



Vice President Noli "Kabayan" De Castro with CFO Chairman Dr. Dante Ang, responds to questions from participants during the Forum on Overseas Filipinos.

Prior to the celebration, the CFO partnered with the AIM Policy Center in conducting the *Handog ng Overseas Filipinos Forum 2007: The Global Pinoy for National Competitiveness* at the Makati Shangri La Hotel on 13 December 2007. The previous year, the CFO and AIM Policy Center collaborated in hosting a forum titled *Aguinaldo Para sa Bayan-2: Overseas Filipino Resources for Philippine Investment and Development Projects* at the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Philippine Plaza on 18 December 2006.



(Photos L-R) Spectators enjoying the SMART Pamaskong Handog Concert; The Side A Band serenading OFWs and their families during the concert; Policy analysts Ms. Dovelyn Agunias Rannveig and Mr. Neil Ruiz delivering their paper on protecting Filipino migrant workers during the forum; and Participants viewing the exhibit of government and NGOs involved in migrants services

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