

Filipinos not among top US illegal entrants

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

Filipinos were not among the top nationalities arrested for trying to cross the United States border illegally, the latest report by the US Office of Immigration Statistics said.

In its June 2009 report, the agency said that apprehensions made by the Border Patrol declined in 2008 at 723,840 persons from the 2007 figure of 876,803 persons. In 2005, apprehension reached its peak of 1,189,000.

The decrease in apprehension can be attributed to the financial crisis in the US and enhanced border enforcement efforts, according to the report.

There are close to three million Filipinos in the US, including 156,000 who are undocumented, according to 2007 figures.

Mexicans topped the nationality arrested in 2008 with 661,773 persons (91 percent), followed by Honduras (19,351), Guatemala (16,395), El Salvador (12,684), Cuba (3,351), Ecuador (1,579), Nicaragua (1,467), Brazil (977), China (836), Dominican Republic (819), Canada (610), and other nationalities (3,998).

Persons apprehended are subject to deportation from the US for violating the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Most apprehensions, occurring near US borders shortly after an illegal entry, are made by the Border Patrol of US Customs and Border Protection.

Apprehensions beyond US borders, involving foreign nationals illegally present in the United States who may have entered without inspection or entered legally but lost their legal status, are handled primarily by Immigration and Customs Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security. ■

Filipina immigrant worker overcomes employer's diplomatic immunity claim

NEW YORK—The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) announced that a former United Nations (UN) ambassador from the Philippines is not protected by diplomatic immunity in a Filipina worker's civil lawsuit against him. A Manhattan federal judge yesterday denied the motion to dismiss of the former ambassador and his wife, stating that former diplomats are subject to only residual immunity once they have left their diplomatic posts.

"This is an exciting victory for Marichu Baoanan, and for other domestic workers who have been exploited and mistreated by diplomats. Ms. Baoanan will finally have the opportunity to have her case against the Bajas heard in court," said Ivy Suriyopas, AALDEF staff attorney. She added: "At last, nannies, cooks, housekeepers, and other workers will be able to seek a remedy for their claims."

AALDEF filed a complaint in Manhattan federal court in June 2008 on behalf of Marichu Suarez Baoanan against former UN ambassador Lauro Baja, Jr., his wife Norma Baja (an owner of Labaire International Travel), the Bajas' adult daughter, Maria Elizabeth Facundo, and Labaire for violating vari-

ous federal laws, including statutes against human trafficking. Ms. Baoanan, a citizen of the Philippines, described how she paid \$5,000 to the Bajas and Labaire International Travel, in return for transportation, a visa, a work permit, and job placement services in the US. Ms. Baoanan arrived in New York in early 2006, believing that she would receive assistance to find employment as a nurse. Instead, the defendants alleged a substantial debt against Ms. Baoanan and subjected her for three months to involuntary servitude, forced labor, peonage, debt bondage, and slavery as a domestic worker in their home on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Marichu Baoanan said: "I hope that other workers will have the strength to expose their situations so that diplomat abuses won't be repeated in the future. If employers are not taught a lesson, they'll continue to mistreat their workers." She continued, "I also want to thank all the people that continue to support me. If I was doing this alone, I would not be able to get as far as I have now. I am only able to have the conviction to do what I'm doing because I know that I have the support of the community." ■

Philippines drops in US trafficking ranking

by VERONICA UY
Inquirer.net

After three years in Tier 2 of the United States' trafficking ranking, the Philippines dropped a notch lower to Tier 2 Watch List, indicating that the number of victims of severe forms of trafficking in the country has either increased significantly or is significantly increasing.

The report, made by the US Department of State to the US Senate Tuesday, June 16, classified

those on this level to have also failed to fight the transnational crime through the country's justice system—from investigation, prosecution, and conviction, as well as through increased assistance to victims and decreasing evidence of complicity by government officials.

Thirty-nine other countries are on this list, which is a notch higher than the lowest ranking of

Tier 3. Countries in this category could face sanctions such as the withholding of non-humanitarian, non-trade related US aid.

State Secretary Hillary Clinton said the report "sheds light on the faces of modern-day slavery" and called on all governments to "build consensus and leverage resources to eliminate all forms of human trafficking."

According to the report, the Philippines is a source, transit, and destination for people traf-

ficked for commercial sex exploitation and forced labor.

"A significant number of Filipino men and women who migrate abroad for work are subjected to conditions of involuntary servitude in Bahrain, Brunei, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Japan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Palau, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates," the report said. ■

Human Rights NGO Calls Attention to Underreported Cases of Human Right Violations by non-state Actors in RP

WHEN government forces commit human rights violations, victims can either go to the courts, cry out loud through the media and file complaints before the United Nations. But when non-state armed groups (NSAGs) torture or execute ordinary people, or even their own comrades, they are usually considered mere statistics of an insurgency war, according to a group called Peace Advocates for Truth and Healing (PATH).

Four officers of PATH are in the United States to brief Philippine consulate officials, the Filipino-American communities and media on the plight of the victims of communist and Islamic rebels in the Philippines. PATH is composed of surviving victims of the bloody communist purges in the Philippines during the 1980s and early 90s.

"Victims of atrocities by NSAGs have nowhere to go to get justice," said Robert Francis Garcia, author of the book "To Suffer Thy Comrade," which chronicles his own experiences of torture and near-death in the hands of his former comrades in the communist rebel movement in the Philippines, who suspected him to be a government agent. PATH

claims more than 3,000 people have been brutally tortured and murdered during the purges.

"It is usually very easy to denounce government for human rights violations committed by soldiers and the police," said Garcia. "In fact, the extreme Left has a ready mechanism for that through the group called Karapatan. But Karapatan, by design, only denounces violations committed by the state, and never those committed by the communist rebels," he added.

Earl Parreno, also a writer and former rebel political officer, said the abductions, torture and killings of ordinary people by rebel groups have remained unabated, and the survivors and the victims' families have nowhere to go for relief and justice.

He cited the recent killing of Evelyn Pitao, sister of New People's Army commander Leoncio Pitao, and her husband Roberto Dadula. Pitao was executed for being a suspected military agent. "They (the NPA) are hunting down peasant leaders in the Bondoc Peninsula and Masbate who are advocating for agrarian reform, and have been recruiting

children as combatants," he said.

"Government is cold and usually unresponsive to such cases, which are considered mere criminal acts. Probably for government, it is a good thing that rebels are murdering their own kind," he added.

"We denounce extrajudicial executions and torture committed by the military and police, and that we subscribe to the view that government holds primary responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights. But violations of NSAGs should also be visible in the radar screen of human rights advocates, governments and the international community," PATH said in a statement.

The group said Philippine laws, and even the UN tenets on human rights, are not sufficiently addressing the atrocities by NSAGs as violative to human rights.

Aside from New York, PATH leaders have so far visited San Francisco and Chicago. They are on their way to Washington to participate in the observance of the Torture Survivors Month (June), and to bring their case before US lawmakers and government officials. ■

RP out of 3rd world status...

PAGE 2 ◀

GK was launched in the Philippines.

"We are also here in the summit to honor the outstanding GK partners starting with the GK village builders of North America, who have made heroic sacrifices to grow the GK movement and to attract more patriots and partners to our cause of nation building," Meloto said. "You were among the first communities who responded to our call and we would like to thank all of you," he added.

Changing lives

"The past seven months have been the most fulfilling I have ever experienced," said Jonah de Lumen, who left a lucrative job as a global brand manager at Unilever in New York to pursue a full-time GK work. "I did global work with Unilever and I thought that was big but doing small things that make big impact on people's lives is really amazing," she added.

For now, De Lumen has to contend with what she considers as her primary challenge: dealing with the bureaucracy in the government. "I am still getting used to it," she said, "There are gems in the rubble and there are people who are really out there to help."

"The calling became very strong probably a year ago through a conversation. I really felt very blessed that I wanted to give back to the country especially when I know that there's a lot of people who do not have enough," De Lumen added.

Earlier this year, GK and the Department of Agriculture launched Bayan Anihan, which is GK's food sufficiency program. De Lumen is helping in this project, through its food sufficiency program.

"The whole idea is to empower communities by teaching the families to farm. We give them the seeds and we teach them how to farm and they reap what they sow. The primary purpose is food on the table. Whatever surplus, they can sell," she explained.

GK is on the process of perfecting the model, which they intend to replicate on a nation-wide scale. They have launched 115 farms in the past three months, with 25 metric tons of vegetables harvested and over 17,000 individuals fed.

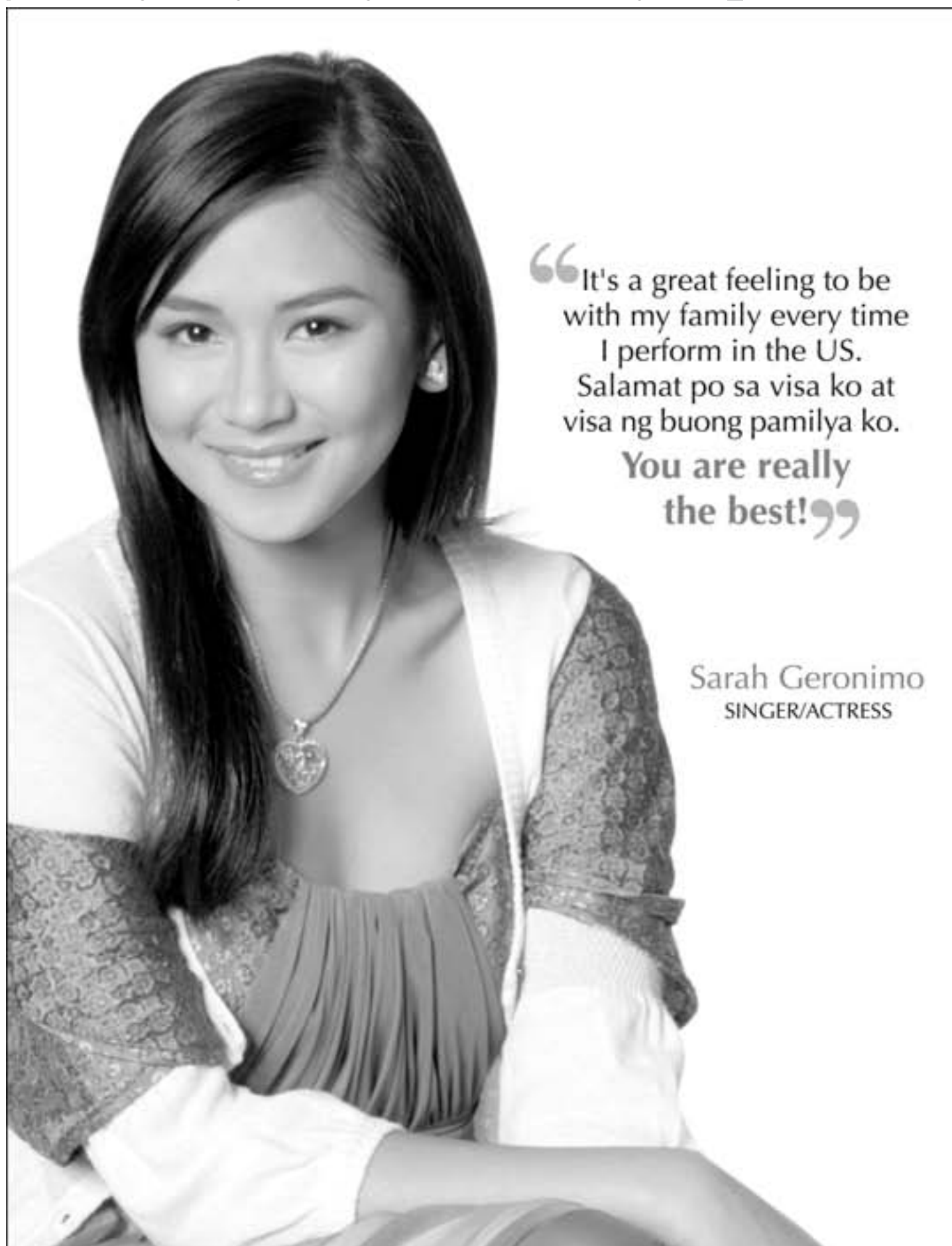
Like the other GK projects, Bayan Anihan is also a multi-sectoral endeavor involving the government, local government units, youth, non-government organizations and the academe.

A lot of things have been achieved since GK's official founding in 2003. Over 900 communities all over the Philippines and in other developing countries, such as Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and East Timor have welcomed Gawad Kalinga with open arms.

GK groups based outside of the Philippines were also established in recent years. GK Hope Initiative Limited (GK HI) was incorporated in February 2009 and registered as an International Charity Organization in the Singapore Economic Development Board to give Gawad Kalinga an official presence in Singapore.

GK HI is composed of volunteers who work to promote GK and its vision in the Lion City. Singapore volunteers have participated in a number of builds and immersions in the Philippines. They have also been involved in charity work for orphans in East Timor and for the elderly and handicapped in Singapore.

Delegates from Singapore led by GK HI director Su-Chzeng Ong and active supporter Antonio del Rosario, president of Coca Cola Singapore and Malaysia officially announced that the country will be hosting the 2010 GK Global Summit next June. ■



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