



# PHILIPPINES

## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REVIEW FORUM – GENERAL DEBATE

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### PHILIPPINE STATEMENT

by

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We hold this Forum in a pandemic that's taken millions of lives, many of migrants. For political purposes, migrants do not count with governments and publics.

Many countries' health facilities are staffed by migrants; but they were among the last to get access to COVID cures and care. This, despite migrants stepping up to be front liners, doing jobs locals were too scared or not competent to take.

It was like entering a firefight unarmed, against an unseen enemy; sans weapons and Kevlar, to save the wounded that existing medication could not treat. Or to just pick up the dead. Many times, it was to be by the victims, holding their hand as they gasped their last breath.

Migrants lost jobs and shelters. We mounted a mass repatriation on a scale unprecedented, taking home 2 million migrants safe and sound. With 10 million Filipinos out there, it was a categorical imperative. Yet we started by facilitating the swift expatriation of stranded foreign nationals that no foreign government asked us to do. This validated our hard fight for the Global Compact for Migration.

Resistance was strong; we were lucky to have the determined guidance of our Mexican and Swiss facilitator—the last in the teeth of his own country's opposition. Resistance continues. When not overt, then in blocking moves to dissemble disdain for the subject.

We incorporated the GCM in our Development Plan. We enacted a law creating a Department of Migrant Workers to combine all government programs on labor migration. Separately all of them worked efficiently and in synchrony to get the job done right and fast. But every department concerned willingly carved out a big part its function for the sake of unity of command. Mine is the first and only country to make domestic law, the 23 Objectives of the GCM.

We embarked on a landmark campaign to reform Kafala—the sponsor-ship system that snarls labor mobility, resulting in migrant workers treated like slaves. Our country partners in the Middle East led by Bahrain and UAE responded positively

Migrants' remittances make up 9.6 percent of GDP. But that is not the reason for anchoring our response on the 5Rs: an unceasing cycle of Relief, Repatriation, Reintegration, Recovery, and Return.

For all practical purposes, I happily ceased being the Secretary of Foreign Affairs with year-round perks—to be what I proudly called myself: Secretary of Repatriation and Expatriation; I consoled my co-workers. While we missed the travel we did and still are doing what none before us did: the work that cried out to be done.

We prioritized migrants for vaccination and vaccination certificates; we established a “green lane” to enable crew change with lesser risk of COVID spreading. We will do more.

But as GCM says, migration is a shared responsibility of the global community. So, work with us and with our partners— IOM, UN Migration Network, civil society.

Yet none of this is anything out of the ordinary. Migration is in the DNA of being human. We will always wander abroad out of want or for the challenge. Why we are not all crowded where humanity started; but find ourselves Out of Africa spread out on the rest of the planet.

So, fight on for GCM and what it stands for: decency as the only way to treat human beings; foremost the stranger in our midst. It was argued in UN debates: the GCM cannot be compelling law. We replied: the compulsion to act decently is way stronger than law. It is defining of what it is to be a truly, human, being. Thank you.