

# The Trafficking of Filipino Women in Japan: Intervention Efforts

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## Abstract

Non-government organizations play a vital role in the fight against human trafficking. Their work with victims of trafficking and with other concerned networks and organizations has resulted in greater public awareness of the issue. NGOs are also active in consciousness-building, information dissemination, education and training, providing data and information, providing direct services to victims, as well as lobbying for the passage of laws. Likewise, NGOs are critical allies and partners of government in the fight against this modern day form of slavery.

This paper provides a descriptive discussion and analysis of trafficking of Filipino women outside the Philippine borders while focusing on the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) and how its programs and services have made a difference in the lives of its members.

## Introduction

International sex trafficking remains the third largest source of profit for organized crime after narcotics and weapons. Human trafficking for prostitution is a gender-specific crime. Most victims are female and the overwhelming majority of the perpetrators are

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male. The 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report of the US State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons found that "a significant number of the 71,084 Philippine women who entered Japan as overseas performing artists in 2004 are believed to have been women trafficked into the sex trade."

This paper looks into the issue of trafficking as an international crime, some efforts being done to combat it, as well as the role non-government organizations play in the campaign. While trafficking also occurs in the domestic scene, the focus of this paper will be on trafficking that transpires outside the boundaries of the Philippines. In particular, it will look at the trafficking of Filipino women who work or worked in Japan as "overseas performing artists."

There are a handful of NGOs that provide direct services to trafficked victims in the Philippines. This paper delves on the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN), whose work is focused on Filipino migrant women and returnees from Japan, and on issues surrounding their Japanese-Filipino children. It will look into how this particular NGO has responded to the issue of trafficking of women and how its work has made an impact on the lives of victims and their families.

As a methodology, the author utilized secondary materials such as books, periodicals and journals. Reports from various agencies and papers presented in conferences and meetings were also used.

Vital inputs to the study was provided by staff members of the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN), who were interviewed. A few women members of DAWN were also interviewed to add to what the staff of DAWN have said and to substantiate the findings of the materials utilized in this paper. Research conducted by the organization were also looked into.

### **Framework of the Paper**

When looking at the issue of trafficking of Filipino women abroad, it would help a lot to have a perspective on the historical development of the migration process and the role of Filipino women. The country's labor policy, particularly its overseas labor migration policy, would partially explain why people leave the country to work abroad. The economic situation of the Philippines,



as well as laws and measures to protect Filipinos overseas would also have to be looked into. These factors would help in having a better understanding of why women become victims of trafficking. Similarly, they can serve as guides and inputs in crafting measures and interventions for both women victims and would-be victims of trafficking.

### **Feminization of Migration**

In 1975, women comprised only 12%, or some 2,275, of workers who left for abroad. In 1987, this figure increased to 47.2%, climbed to 69% in 2002, and up to a high of 75% in 2004 (POEA, 2004). POEA statistics from 1997 to 2001 indicate a consistent increase in the deployment of women, outnumbering the men three to one in 2001.

An ADB study in 2003 indicated that there were more females than male OFWs within the 15-34 age groups. The same study shows that domestic unemployment rates within the same age groups were higher for women. Female OFWs tend to be younger than male OFWs. 64% of female OFWs are between 15-34 years of age. The five percent growth in the number of OFWs in 2001 was, in fact, fueled largely by the surge of female employment overseas.

The POEA Annual report of 2004 says that the number of newly hired service workers such as domestic workers, household workers, caretakers, waiters, and bartenders, expanded with 90% of those hired being females. There was also an increase in the demand for professional and technical workers. The proportion of service and professional/technical workers still continue to comprise the greater bulk of the total deployment of newly hired OFWs. "It must be noted that workers belonging to these categories were women migrant workers, a significant portion of whom were medical workers (nurse and health care assistants), teachers and performing artists," notes the report.

### **Trafficking in the Philippines**

Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 defines trafficking in persons as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders

by means of threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation which includes at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs." As used in the Act, trafficking in persons also include "the recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation."

Trafficking in the Philippines does not only take place within the context of international labor migration, but also for the purpose of marriage, the local sex industry, and for commercial adoption or sexual exploitation of women and children.

One major daily reported that in the Philippines, "at least 50 women and children everyday fall victim to human traffickers" (Romero, 2005). Young women are recruited from the provinces with promises of high paying jobs in cities here and abroad, but most end up in bars in the provinces, supposedly as training to help them cope when they become entertainers abroad. These young women are even forced to have sex with patrons.

According to one NGO based in the Philippines, there were 400,000 women in prostitution in 1998. This figure excludes the unregistered ones, the seasonal prostitutes, overseas entertainers and victims of external trafficking ("RP has 400,000 prostitutes," 2005). A quarter of them are children. Out of roughly 200,000 street children, some 60,000 sell their bodies. Moreover, up to 600,000 women and children are trafficked through the Internet in at least 50,000 websites (Gabriela, n.d.).

Victims of sex trafficking are usually poor and uneducated women and children who go abroad because they cannot make a living or achieve job security in the Philippines. While some women go abroad to work or marry, others work as "entertainers," a euphemism for prostitutes.

Within the context of international migration, trafficking has flourished through the internet, through mail-order bride services, illegal recruitment, and the deployment of overseas performing artists (OPAs), to name a few.



## Deployment of Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs)

Filipino entertainers abroad are called overseas performing artists (OPAs) by the Philippine government. This classification includes composers, musicians and singers, choreographers and dancers, actors and stage directors, and circus performers. The 2004 POEA data indicate that 71,480 OPAs left the country to work abroad. Of this figure, 70,619 or 98% left for Japan; the rest were deployed in other countries.

As women and migrants, Filipina OPAs in Japan—and also in Korea, since there is now an increasing number of Filipino women entertainers working in establishments that cater to American military personnel in that country—are much vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. As workers in the entertainment industry, they are exposed to the risks of harassment and of being trafficked. They also face the danger of acquiring HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases. Filipina entertainers in Japan are also subjected to numerous work violations such as long hours of club work, no day-off or leave even when ill, no health insurance or regular medical check-up, and erratic payment of salary. The contract signed by OPAs say they should receive a salary of about US\$2,000 or Y200,000 a month, but most of them receive only about US\$300 to US\$700 a month (Y30,000 to Y70,000). Their passports and other documents are also confiscated by the club owner/promoter upon arrival in Japan. They get paid at the airport prior to their flight back to Manila after a six-month contract. Many are also forced to go out with customers on *dohan* and are transferred from one club to another, intensifying the risk of sexual harassment.

The various tales of abuse and maltreatment abroad as told by entertainers themselves should be a cause for alarm for a sending country like the Philippines. Cultural presentations, which were usually shown in the 70s and mid 80s by “real Filipino artists” in Japan gradually changed as time passed.

## TRAFFICKING OF FILIPINO WOMEN IN JAPAN

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) calculates that Japan's sex industry hosts about 150,000 foreign workers today, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) Japan reports that Philippines, Columbia and Thailand are the top source countries,

although the number of women from Russia, Korea and China has gone up. Furthermore, the 2005 US report cited that a significant number of the 71,084 Filipino women who entered Japan as entertainers in 2004 ended up in sex trade trafficking.

Several researches conducted by NGOs and scholars have also documented the experiences of Filipino women entertainers in Japan and attest to their persistent trafficking (DAWN, 1997, 2001, 2003; CATW, 2001; Ballescas, 1991; IOM, 2001; ILO, 2004).

### **Work Situation of OPAs in Japan**

Prior to their departure, OPAs sign a contract based on the model contract designed by the POEA with their prospective employer or the Japanese promotions agency. The contract specifies the duration and effectivity of the contract, place of performance, compensation, authorized deductions, hours of work, overtime and rest day, food and accommodation, life and medical insurance, repatriation of remains, transportation, termination of contract, settlement of disputes, and non-alteration of contract.

In actuality, however, the terms and conditions of the contract signed by the OPA are not followed. An OPA is not paid monthly. She gets to collect her salary only upon completion of her contract, which is usually after six months. This is the usual practice among Japanese employers supposedly to make the OPA toe the line.

Upon arriving in Japan, the OPA is met at the airport by the club owner and/or promoter and her passport is confiscated. Such a practice is being done to make sure that the women do not escape. Deprived of their documents, the women are forced into physical confinement.

The skills training the women received prior to their departure become useless. In Japan, their performance is not gauged on how good they sing and dance but on how many customers they manage to lure into the club every night. Since the women sit down with customers and pour their drinks, they are forced to deal with drunk customers aside from getting drunk themselves.

POEA Memorandum Circular No. 2, Series of 1997 states that OPAs are not allowed "to engage in *dohan* or other similar practice, do lewd shows, or perform other indecent acts and do menial



jobs, such as waitressing, janitorial and other non-contract related work."

To engage in *dohan* in Japanese parlance means to accompany or to go out with somebody. The *dohan* system in nightclub jargon means a scenario whereby the hostesses or hosts meet their customers and have dinner, or go out for a drink before her business hours, and then go to the club together.

As a club regulation, *dohan* requires a woman entertainer to meet a certain quota or minimum number of private dates a month ranging from once a week to everyday.

Although the practice varies from club to club, *dohan* is the usual way by which women are able to lure more customers to become club regulars. This means more income for the club because a customer pays around 12,000 yen (about US\$100) for every date. Of this, only 20 to 30 percent goes to the talent or the woman. Women, however, can receive extra payment if they agree to render sex work.

In a study conducted by the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) on Gender Security and Human Rights (2001) a number of women interviewed said that they practice *dohan* mainly for monetary compensation and the gifts they get from their customers. The practice, according to those interviewed, enables them to collect items they can send or bring home as presents for their families and friends when they return to the Philippines.

The need to send money back home has lured women entertainers to engage in *dohan*, a practice which puts them in risky situations such as exposure to possible sex trade and prostitution. There are customers who mistake the women's consent to go out on *dohan* as agreement to have sex.

Despite several measures put in place by the government, the practice of *dohan* persists as more women compete for limited customers and a substantial income they would otherwise not earn home.

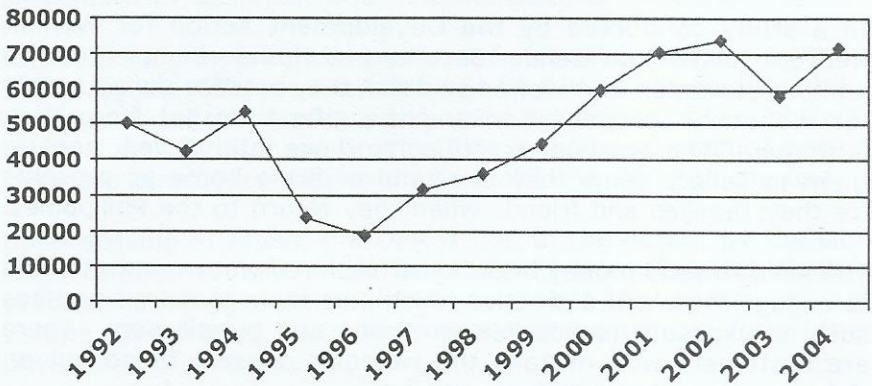
Other violations of employment contract signed by the women include having ghost venues or non-existing performance venues, and the practice of flying booking. Deploying artists to a venue other than the one stipulated in the contract is called "flying booking" and is not allowed.

Trafficking of women and children in Japan has almost always been associated with the entertainment/sex industry which is heavily controlled by syndicates like the Yakuza. Given the nature of their job, the environment and the culture of the entertainment world, Filipina entertainers face risks of sexual harassment and verbal and physical abuse from both their employers and customers.

### INTERVENTIONS FOR TRAFFICKED FILIPINO WOMEN

The period from 1990 to 2004 saw a huge increase in the number of Filipino women who were deployed abroad as OPAs. Although the figure declined in 1996 with the implementation of stricter rules after the celebrated case of Maricris Sioson in 1991 and the Flor Contemplacion case in 1995, 1997 saw an increase in the number of OPA deployment that reached a high of about 74,000 in 2003 and about 71,000 in 2004.

Figure 1: Deployment of OPAS, 1992-2004



Source: POEA

It has long been accepted that women constitute the more vulnerable sector among OFWs. Women entertainers, particularly those who work in Japan due to the nature of their work, are more vulnerable to exploitation, health risks, and problematic work conditions. The deployment of OPAs to Japan has also brought to focus the increase in the number of Japanese-Filipino children (JFC).



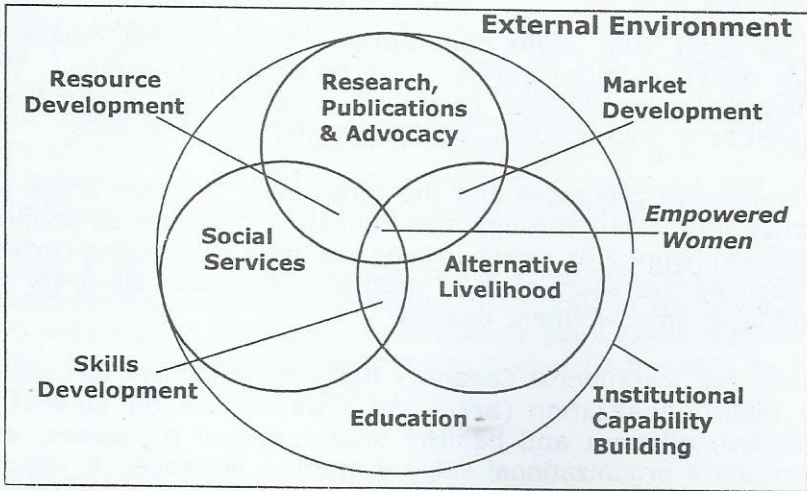
Such a scenario brought about the birth of the Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) to address the concerns of a growing number of distressed Filipino migrant women in Japan, as well as the growing number of Japanese-Filipino children abandoned by their Japanese fathers.

DAWN is one of the leading NGOs in the Philippines working on the issue of women and migration. Founded in February 1996, it focuses on assisting returning distressed migrant women from Japan and their Japanese-Filipino children (JFC), and provides a holistic approach in assisting these clients.

### Framework of Programs

The conceptual framework of DAWN's programs may be graphically presented as follows:

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of DAWN's Program Packages



At the core of DAWN's programs lies its resolve to women empowerment. Keenly aware of prevailing realities that could either facilitate or hinder the process, DAWN chooses to focus its resources on a three-pronged program: Social Services; Alternative Livelihood; and Research, Publications and Advocacy. An education component undergirds all three. A fifth component, institutional capability building, pervades in all program areas. This is meant

to ensure the long-term sustainability of DAWN's total life and work.

Program synergy is ensured through three (3) integrating processes (intersecting areas in the diagram). **Resource development** is a common concern between the Research, Publications and Advocacy; and Social Services components. This includes the expansion of the resource base for social services. This translates into wider client reach, more specialized service to clients, and access by clients to a wider range of necessary and needed social services.

Research, Publications and Advocacy is likewise integrated with the Alternative Livelihood component through **market development**. This covers, among others, identification and securing of buyers of clients' products (present and potential) or expansion of market share of present products, development of new products for potential markets, matching skills or qualifications of women clients with employment opportunities, and negotiating employment.

On the other hand, **skills development** serves as the integration point between Social Services and Alternative Livelihood. This includes human relations, community building, decision making, as well as entrepreneurial, production and technical skills.

All the above processes and the three main program areas are further integrated through the Education program component (shown in figure 2 as circumscribing the three intersecting circles). It ensures the soundness of program processes vis-à-vis the underlying empowerment agenda.

Finally, the Institutional Capability Building component focuses on the institutionalization (becoming a way of life for DAWN) of effective, efficient and healthy organizational processes, and appropriate organizational value systems. Moreover, it secures the organization-based resources for the long-term sustainability of DAWN's life and work.

### **Social Services Program**

The Social Services program serves as the point of entry in reaching out to these distressed women migrants and their JFCs. Foremost among DAWN's direct services is the case management and para-



legal assistance to women and JFC members. Among the cases DAWN assists are those concerning work contract violations, abuses and harassment in the work place, abandonment by Japanese husbands and other marital concerns, JFC's right to paternal recognition and support, as well as the citizenship of the JFCs. DAWN also provides women and children with health care, educational assistance, counseling, airport/travel assistance, access to Manila-based DAWN Center for women returnees and their JFCs, lessons on Japanese culture and language, workshops and other get-together activities to further support their various social, mental, health, and emotional needs, among others.

### **Research and Advocacy Program**

Aside from direct services to women and children, DAWN also asserts its role in the society through extensive information campaign, advocacy programs and partnership building. Among the effective means it utilizes both in the Philippines and in Japan are: print and broadcast media, its quarterly newsletter (SINAG), research, conferences, fora and study tours for local and foreign visitors interested on migrant issues, DAWN web site, and lobby work in the Upper and Lower Houses for the passage of bills beneficial to women and migrants, among others. DAWN-PMRW also lobbied before the Japanese government to intensify and strengthen its efforts to combat trafficking in persons. DAWN is in constant touch with various Philippine, Japanese and other international agencies that are involved in anti-trafficking.

DAWN is also an active member of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW-AP) and the OFW Journalism Consortium. In 2005, DAWN's Executive Director was invited by Vital Voices Global Partnership to be a member of its global advisory council.

### **Alternative Livelihood Program**

To date, DAWN has assisted 106 women in skills training in various training centers. It also conducts in-house training at DAWN's Sikap-Buhay (SIKHAY). Apart from acquiring the skills, women are likewise trained to become efficient and responsible in handling tasks relevant to the program to further prepare them in managing their own projects in the future. As a result, some of them have

already found work outside the program or have put up their own businesses.

From the 106 women trained, there are at present ten active Sikhay members who now produce quality items made of batik and other indigenous materials, tie-dyed shirts, as well as hand-woven items, which are marketed and sold in various local bazaars and in other countries (especially in Japan) through the support of DAWN's networks. This alternative source of income helps members provide for the needs of their families.

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

### Awareness-Raising, Consciousness-Building, Information Dissemination

NGOs have brought into mainstream consciousness the issue of trafficking in persons. They work not only towards the recognition that such a problem exists, but to raise people's awareness and consciousness that human trafficking is a crime.

DAWN tries to reach out to as many as possible to inform people of the issue and educate them of the risks and their rights. It also works through media and regularly comes out with a newsletter (Sinag) to report on the activities of the organization and the latest news in relation to women and migration.

Researches had also been conducted and their results published as a compilation of stories of women members who came home distressed after working in Japan as OPAs but survived their ordeal and have since moved on with the help of their families and DAWN. The data and information provided by these researches are helpful in crafting the necessary interventions for women facing similar situation.

### Direct Services to Victims

As mentioned earlier, DAWN provides a variety of services to victims of trafficking, including social and psychosocial interventions such as counseling, legal and paralegal assistance, shelter, and reintegration projects for women and their families.



## Lobbying

DAWN is active in lobbying for the passage of laws or changes in policies that will benefit women migrants. Together with CATW-AP, the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), and other women-oriented NGOs, DAWN lobbied for the passage of the anti-trafficking law. After eight years, their efforts paid off and Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking Law was finally passed in May 2003. DAWN and the PMRW were also active in lobbying for the passage of the Absentee Voting and Dual Citizenship laws. Both laws were also passed in 2003.

DAWN is also one of the NGOs that actively participate in the Consultative Council for OFWs composed of government agencies and NGOs involved in migration. It also attends congressional hearings on issues related to women and migration.

## Critical Ally and Partner of Government

The primary responsibility of protecting its own people lies with the government. But more and more, NGOs have provided direct and necessary services which the state does not provide.

At times, the relationship between government and NGOs may be conflicting. While NGOs collaborate with governments to reach their objectives, they also criticize some state policies. Being autonomous, NGOs state their own views and opinions as well as their experience in dealing with the issue. And though NGOs differ with government in terms of policy, strategy, and ideology, they nonetheless share a common goal—the end of trafficking.

There is a need for partnership between government, NGOs and other institutions to strengthen law enforcement and for the proper implementation of laws and policies. Only by collaborating at various levels—policy, legislation, and direct service provision on a holistic level—can a comprehensive solution to this nefarious human rights violation be achieved.

## Cooperation, collaboration in the local, regional and international arena

Cooperation and collaboration among NGOs and other agencies within the local, regional and international arena are necessary to fight trafficking in persons.

Last year, with Japan's new immigration policy restricting the entry of entertainers, DAWN and other Philippine NGOs such as CATW-AP, Batis Center for Women, the Center for Migrant Advocacy, the CBCP-ECMI, Kanlungan Center Foundation, Philippine Migrants Rights Watch, the Scalabrini Migration Center, the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women, and WomenLead came up with a unity statement supporting the new rule. While recognizing the loss of jobs and monetary rewards, the impact and consequences of the deployment of entertainers to Japan were given more weight.

At the regional and international levels, DAWN takes part in conferences and discussions, sharing its experiences and best practices as well as measures and solutions to the problem of human trafficking.

### **IMPACT OF DAWN'S WORK**

Ten years ago, DAWN embarked on a mission to help distressed Filipino women migrants. Ten years after, its work has gained notice and recognition by individuals and other groups. Aside from women and children whom DAWN has assisted in various ways, the people and organizations DAWN has worked with have also voiced out their appreciation of the kind of work DAWN does.

During the celebration of its 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in February 2006, friends, partners and networks expressed their recognition of DAWN's advocacies and achievements in the past ten years.

Below are some of the remarks given by individuals and groups on the work that DAWN has done. They attest that indeed DAWN has made its mark and that its programs and services have made a difference in the lives of people.

International Labor Organization (ILO) Deputy Director Keiko Niimi (2006) cited DAWN for including the ILO in its work "to chip away the human rights abuses against women."

Bruce Reed (2006), regional representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) lauded DAWN for being a consistent advocate of best practices and a partner in numerous migration initiatives.



Ambassador John Miller (2006), Director of the US State Department's Office to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons cited the need to form a strong coalition of diverse players ranging from non-governmental organizations to first responders, including police officers and social workers who will aid victims to eradicate human trafficking successfully. "Since trafficking in persons is a global problem, it requires the close cooperation between governments and citizens around the world," said Miller. "The United States and the American people look forward to the day when all people may be free from all forms of human servitude and exploitation."

Ambassador Tony Hely of the Australian Embassy cited DAWN's work in "fighting for international and national improvements in policies and practices" and has also been "actively helping to shape better lives for women and children through their livelihood and skills development projects" (Hely, n.d.).

Commissioner Wilhelm D. Soriano (2006) of the Commission on Human Rights cited the partnership of DAWN and the CHR in the promotion and protection of human rights, particularly migrants' rights, and expressed hope for many more years of continuous partnership.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. (2006) congratulated DAWN on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and cited the vital role DAWN played in the passage of RA 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking Act of 2003.

US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (n.d.) sent her compliments and wished DAWN success in all its efforts. She said that DAWN's programs "shine the bright light of public attention on these transgressions of fundamental human rights."

Secretary Alberto G. Romulo (n.d.) of the Department of Foreign Affairs commended DAWN for "its tireless and selfless dedication in assisting and promoting the welfare of Filipino women migrants and returnees from Japan, as well as Japanese-Filipino children" and expressed hope for a continuing partnership with the DFA "in the protection of our migrant workers, especially those in Japan."

Consul General Eiichi Oshima (n.d.) of the Embassy of Japan commended "the strong advocacy efforts which DAWN has exerted over the years to combat trafficking in persons." He expressed hope that DAWN will "continue its active cooperation with the Philippine government and the Japanese government and

international organizations to help effectively address trafficking in persons."

Ambassador Annika Markovic (n.d.) of the Swedish Embassy in Manila cited the partnership between DAWN and the Swedish Embassy in Manila. "Together we have explored different ways and means to promote and protect the welfare of Filipino migrants and their families." Having seen for herself the work of DAWN, she said she was "impressed with the work that DAWN has done in promoting the rights of the Filipino women migrants to Japan and their Japanese-Filipino children."

The Philippine Migrants Rights Watch noted that DAWN "has been and will always be in the front line of advocacy and concrete action to provide an effective response" to the challenges brought about by globalization and the neo-liberal economy.

Commission on Filipinos Overseas Executive Director Jose Z. Molano, Jr., Rep. Edcel Lagman, and Rep. Roseller Barinaga congratulated DAWN on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. DAWN's partners, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific; Sr. Mary John Mananzan, Prioress of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters and a member of DAWN's Advisory Council; the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA); and Japanese organizations such as the All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers' Union (Jichiro), Peace Boat, and DAWN-Japan, likewise lauded its efforts in promoting the rights and welfare of Filipino women migrants.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

The well-being of its citizenry is the responsibility of government, whether they are within the country or abroad. At times though, government is unable to respond to the many and various needs of the people. And this is where other institutions such as non-government organizations come in.

The emergence of DAWN as a non-government organization in the Philippines came at a time when there was an increasing number of distressed Filipino women entertainers in Japan. With the increasing number of women entertainers in Japan, there was also a marked increase in the number of cases of distressed Filipino women migrants. DAWN filled the need for organizations that will address the issues and concerns of Filipino women entertainers.



Some former Filipino entertainers in Japan go to the Japanese Embassy, especially when seeking assistance in locating their Japanese spouses or partners, and in seeking paternal recognition or financial support for their children. The Japanese Embassy treats such cases as personal ones and as such are beyond the scope of their duties and functions. They refer such cases to NGOs like DAWN, Batis, and Maligaya House.

Gender plays a significant role in finding jobs for migrant men and women, especially for the low skilled. But the types of jobs that have demand for women migrant workers often reflect traditional female roles and sex stereotypes. Demand is mainly increasing for nurses, cleaning services in hotels and restaurants, sex work, and domestic work. These jobs are often vulnerable to contract violations regarding pay and working conditions.

Women migrants often face discrimination because of their status as women and as migrants. Among others, they receive wages lower than their male counterparts. Women, particularly forced migrants, are also prone to physical and sexual abuse during travel and at their destination.

Most of the women who approached DAWN once worked in Japan as entertainers. In the course of their work, they experienced abuse and violation of rights. Some women would not admit to this. But ask them about their work condition and the terms stipulated in their contracts and they will start complaining. Based on the experience of DAWN, many women who left the country to work abroad were not prepared. Many who left to work as overseas performing artists in Japan did not know the kind of work they will have. Many did not even read the terms of the contracts they signed. It is sad that women, in their desperation to find work and to alleviate their economic status, succumb to abuses. A lot of women choose not to complain about the many violations committed against them for fear of losing their jobs. They surrender their fate to demeaning circumstances abroad rather than give up their financial gain, which, ironically, also benefits the Philippine economy. Sadder still is the fact that there are not enough laws and means to protect Filipino women when they leave for work overseas.

In fairness, the Philippine government has instituted policies and passed laws specifically for migrants such as the Migrant Workers Act of 1995 and the Anti-Trafficking Act of 2003. Unfortunately, laws are only effective if and when they are properly implemented.

We should also consider the fact that the laws of the Philippines may not be applicable to the country where our OFWs are working. In many instances, the Philippines does not have bilateral labor agreements with receiving countries.

NGOs provide assistance to people and to the government in the delivery of services. There is a diversity of NGOs operating in the Philippines, working towards a number of advocacies and offering various services. DAWN's field is on women and migration, particularly on the issue of distressed Filipino women migrants in Japan. Its work has made dents and impact not only on the lives of the people it has helped, but also on other organizations. Its work can be cited in terms of best practices that could be shared with others and duplicated in many areas.

NGOs are vital in the fight against trafficking in persons. But they can only do so much. They operate on very limited and tight budget. NGOs like DAWN need the support, assistance, and long-term commitment of funding partners, government, and other private institutions.

Trafficking in persons is not an issue for governments or NGOs alone. No country or region in the world is exempt from the scourge of trafficking. All of us are stakeholders in this issue. Thus, there is need for all of us to be concerned and act in unity. As trafficking syndicates are organized, so must governments, civil societies, and NGOs. There is need for united and concerted efforts to fight trafficking in persons.

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