

**STATEMENT OF H.E. PRESIDENT FIDEL V. RAMOS  
ON THE THIRD PARTY PANEL OF EXPERTS (TPPE)  
19 JULY 1995**

**THIRD-PARTY PANEL OF EXPERTS ANNOUNCES ITS FINDINGS**

The Third Party Panel of Experts (TPPE) appointed by the Philippine and Singapore Governments to resolve the differences of opinion between their own pathologists on what had caused the death of Ms. Delia Maga in the Flor Contemplacion Case announced its findings on 14 July in Washington D.C.

The Panel -- made up of three eminent American pathologists in Washington, D.C. -- concluded that Ms. Delia Maga died from "strangulation by ligature" and that the stains and other blemishes on her remains were caused after -- rather than before -- her death.

In its finding, the Third Party Panel concurred with the original autopsy report of the Singapore experts -- key portions of which pathologists from our National Bureau of Investigation had questioned.

The Philippine Government -- in keeping with its agreement with the Government of Singapore -- accepts the finding of the Third Party Panel as final and has started to take steps to normalize its relations with Singapore.

**LET US NOW PUT THIS SAD EPISODE BEHIND US**

The legal process leading to Ms. Flor Contemplacion's conviction and execution for the murder of Ms. Maga and Nicholas Huang took four years, including appeals to Singapore's highest court.

On January 18, 1995 and March 11, 1995, I appealed to my Singaporean counterpart, His Excellency President Ong Teng Cheong, for clemency or stay of the execution of Flor Contemplacion. I asked that her execution be suspended in order to pave the way for a review by the Singaporean court of the decision based on newly revealed information. While my appeal was seriously considered, it was not granted by the Singapore authorities.

At the height of public feeling in our country over the hanging in Singapore last March 17th of Ms. Flor Contemplacion for the murder of Ms. Maga and the minor Nicholas Huang, I recalled our Ambassador to Singapore and promised our people that if proof is found of Ms. Contemplacion's innocence, I would cut off diplomatic relations entirely -- even though Singapore is one of our major trading partners and a fellow-member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

I also stated that "... if on the other hand, the facts bear out another verdict, I say that we must also have the grace to acknowledge before the world that our outrage has been misplaced."

In this spirit, let us leave this unfortunate and sad affair behind us -- consoling ourselves with the thought that the Maga-Contemplacion case had served to focus national attention on the difficult conditions of many of our overseas workers, prompting our Government to take firm, positive actions to remedy the same, in collaboration with countries around the world that host Filipino workers.

#### **IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF OUR OVERSEAS CONTRACT WORKERS**

As part of my efforts to improve the situation of our OCWs, I have created an Oversight Action Group (OAG) by virtue of Administrative Order No. 205 dated 13 July 1995 -- headed by

the Executive Secretary -- to coordinate all Government policies and programs relating to the deployment, protection, conditions of work, skills upgrading, social reintegration, entrepreneurial training, and post-employment opportunities of our overseas workers.

The OAG will translate into policies, programs and projects -- to the fullest extent possible -- the valid and doable recommendations of the Gancayco Commission which I had created to look both into the Maga-Contemplacion case and into the wider concerns of our overseas workers. The creation of the OAG signals the fact that I have not approved all the recommendations of the Gancayco Commission -- but only those that are aligned with well-established Government policies on people empowerment, social justice, economic growth and poverty alleviation.

I have also ordered procedural reforms in the various services that Government renders to Filipinos overseas -- so that officials can respond effectively and compassionately to the problems of Filipino nationals overseas.

#### **PASSAGE OF THE MIGRANT WORKERS AND OVERSEAS FILIPINOS ACT**

Congress has cooperated wholeheartedly with me and the Executive Branch in these efforts on behalf of our OCWs. The outgoing Ninth Congress expeditiously passed, upon my certification, the "Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995" (R.A. 8042) which protects the rights and enhances the welfare not only of our workers overseas but of their families. In addition, the Senate ratified the United Nations Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers -- an international agreement which defines the rights of migrant workers and their families, and the responsibilities toward them of their host countries.

#### **THE GANCAYCO COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT**

The Gancayco Commission's Final Report recommends several policies, programs and actions to improve the lot of our migrant workers. I have issued various orders and directives to the concerned departments and agencies to carry out those measures which I consider valid and beneficial in the national interest. These are all designed generally to prevent the exploitation and abuse of our OCWs; and to punish those who do so.

I have asked the Secretary of Health and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Administrator to study the feasibility of establishing a hospital for migrant workers; and the Executive Secretary and the Secretary of Labor and Employment to review a proposal to amend the charter of the OWWA to make it an independent corporation similar to the Social Security System (SSS).

Other actions are still to be reviewed, coordinated and integrated under the OAG.

#### **PHASING OUT CERTAIN CLASSES OF UNSKILLED OCWs**

Responding to the Gancayco Commission's proposal to phase out certain classes of unskilled OCWs, I have directed the Secretary of Labor and Employment "to explore the possibility of promulgating a policy of selective deployment of Filipino domestic helpers and entertainers in various countries." This is not a phase-out within five years as mistakenly perceived.

Selective deployment as a policy will give us the flexibility to deal with serious issues related to domestic helpers and entertainers working in many countries and diverse cultures, while we rationalize the criteria for their deployment abroad without compromising their safety, honor, and dignity, and their opportunities for gainful, legal employment.

Finally -- as recommended by the Gancayco Commission -- I shall request the Supreme Court to consider designating special salas to try expeditiously cases involving Filipino migrant

workers. This will complement the legal aid mechanisms we are already providing our workers and nationals in foreign jurisdictions.

In all these efforts, our urgent need is to develop a strategy on poverty alleviation and at-home job generation, employment and livelihood opportunities which Government can pursue, and which, in fact, is now being put in place. The lasting answer to our problems in overseas employment lies in economic growth, social reform and broad-based development on a sustainable basis here at home.

This we hope the public will support. And we must move on!