

PRESS RELEASE

PHILIPPINE EMBASSIES IN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS TRANSFER 68 OFWs IN SYRIA TO THE CARITAS SHELTER IN LEBANON



PHOTOS:

FIRST ROW LEFT – Assistant Labor Attaché Irma Valiente (leftmost), with MWOFRFC Houseparent Gina Murillo (rightmost) shows Ambassador Leah M. Basinang-Ruiz (center) the beds which the repatriates will use during their stay at the CLMC shelter; **FIRST ROW RIGHT** – Vice Consul Dennis John Briones (rightmost) and CLMC Social Worker Jeanne d'Arc Hobeika (second from left) briefs Ambassador Ruiz on what transpired at the Masha'a border for this particular cross-border operation; **SECOND ROW LEFT** - ATN Officer Dexter Macaraeg leads the repatriates to the shelter; **SECOND ROW RIGHT** – Ambassador Ruiz welcomes the 68 repatriates at the shelter; **THIRD ROW** – Ambassador Ruiz poses with (L-R) Assistant Labor Attaché Valiente, Mr. Ricardo Ruiz, spouse of Ambassador Ruiz, CLMC social worker Ms. Hobeika, Vice Consul Briones, Information Officer Mr. Edwin Batallones, and MWOFRFC Houseparent Murillo, prior to the unloading of the buses containing the 68 repatriates upon their arrival at the CLMC shelter.

2 September 2013 – In view of critical developments in Syria following the recent alleged chemical attacks in that war torn country, the Philippine Embassy in Damascus brought to the Masha'a border last 30 August 2013 a total of sixty-eight (68) OFWs sheltered at the Embassy who were granted exit visas by the Syrian Government and turned them over to the Philippine Embassy in Lebanon where they can stay at the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre (CLMC) while awaiting their flights home to the Philippines.

Both Embassies are exerting all efforts, under the leadership of DFA Undersecretary Rafael E. Seguis, who arrived in Damascus last 28 August 2013, to transfer to Lebanon the rest of the OFWs who are sheltered at the Philippine Embassy in Damascus. Upon orders of DFA Secretary Alberto del Rosario, Undersecretary Rafael E. Seguis is currently in Syria to facilitate the immediate repatriation of the remaining OFWs in Syria and their return to their loved ones in the Philippines.

The Philippine Embassy in Beirut fielded a Border Team, composed of Vice Consul Dennis John Briones and ATN officer Dexter Macaraeg, who was accompanied and assisted by Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC) personnel, to receive this batch of 68 OFWs from the officers and staff of the Philippine Embassy in Damascus and facilitate their entry into Lebanon through the Masna'a border.

Upon arrival of the three buses containing the 68 repatriates at the CLMC shelter in Lebanon at around 8:30 P.M., they were turned over to the Beirut PE Shelter Team lead by POLO Assistant Labor Attaché Irma Valiente, who was assisted by Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Resource Center (MWOFRFC) Houseparent Gina Murillo as well as by Damascus PE local-hire Alma Balili, who traveled with the repatriates from Damascus.

Ambassador Ruiz and her spouse, Mr. Ricardo Ruiz, were on hand at the Caritas shelter to welcome the 68 OFWs upon arrival. In her brief remarks to the repatriates, Ambassador Ruiz emphasized that the Philippine government's primary and immediate aim is to put them out of harm's way and assured them that the Philippine Embassy in Beirut would be exerting all efforts to speedily repatriate them from Lebanon to the Philippines.

Ambassador Ruiz also informed the group that the shelter where they are being temporarily housed belongs to the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre, which contains all the facilities to ensure that their brief stay would be homey and comfortable. She also committed to convey their appreciation to the Caritas officials, Eng. Kamal Sioufi, President of the CLMC Board Committee, and Ms. Najla Chahda, CLMC Director, who readily made the shelter available for the use of the Filipino repatriates free of charge in line with the CLMC's commitment to assist the Embassy in the implementation of its contingency plan.

Select personnel of the Philippine Embassy in Beirut have been assigned to stay in and manage the shelter 24/7 on a rotating basis until all of the OFWs have left Lebanon. Also staying at the Caritas shelter 24/7 and assisting the Beirut PE Shelter Team is one staff from Damascus PE, as well as one Caritas personnel.

This is the 29th cross-border operation undertaken by the Philippine Embassies in Beirut and Damascus since it started on 12 December 2012. **END**