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## **A 'Bargaining Chip' or Confirmed Labour Migration Policy?**

*Call for Clarity to End Confusion Regarding the Kuwait Deployment Ban*

"The ban stays permanently. There will be no more recruitment for especially domestic helpers. No more," Duterte told reporters on Sunday in Davao.

"I would like to address to their patriotism: come home. No matter how poor we are, we will survive. The economy is doing good and we are short of our workers," he said.

The announcement made by President Duterte that the temporary ban on Filipinos going to work in Kuwait is now permanent has raised the anxieties of many migrant workers about their livelihoods, families and futures.

It has also focused attention on the Philippines labour market and whether it can realistically *immediately* provide decent employment with a living wage to the thousands of Filipinos that could potentially return - given 11 million Filipinos are in part-time jobs or unemployed. Additionally underemployment and in-work poverty make re-deployment with all the associated stress and expenses more likely.

President Duterte suggests people could be re-deployed to China, however there is no guarantee of any improvement in labour conditions there, especially as they do not have a domestic worker law - unlike Kuwait.

However there is also confusion about whether this is: confirmed government policy or initial reaction or diplomatic bargaining in an attempt to secure the release of those arrested following their involvement in the controversial video 'rescue' of migrant workers in Kuwait or to facilitate the return of undocumented workers or to extract concessions from the Kuwait government for improved Filipino workers labour conditions or related to trade.

There have been contradictory statements regarding the "permanent" deployment ban such as:

Labour Secretary Silvestre Bello said there is no permanent deployment ban of Filipino workers to Kuwait, following the announcement of President Rodrigo Duterte for such. *"The President never mentioned that the deployment ban has become permanent. That is not true. He never said that. What the President said is that the Philippines and Kuwait are good friends and are allies and he does not want the presence of our OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) there to cause an irritant in that relationship,"* Bello said in an interview with CNN Philippines Sunday.

As the Labor official added he will be meeting with Kuwaiti officials on May 7 to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Foreign Affairs officials and Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

Perhaps then the situation for workers will become clearer?

Until then the migrant workers struggle has just become harder faced with the uncertainty about what to do in the short-term (and future) and living with the tension in Kuwait.

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