

PHILIPPINE SCHOOLS OVERSEAS AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE CONTINUING FILIPINO MIGRATION

**Lecture by Jose Molano Jr. before the
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Migration and Overseas Filipinos

The aggregate of three categories of people who originated from the Philippines who live or work in another country or territory, namely:

- (1) permanent migrants or legal permanent residents whose continued stay does not depend on employment;
- (2) temporary migrants whose stay overseas is employment related, and who expect to return home after their employment; and
- (3) irregular migrants or those not properly documented, or without residence or work permits, or who are overstaying in a foreign country.

Migration and Overseas Filipinos

Migration from the Philippines to other places has been the result of “push” and “pull” factors at work. The growth of the country’s population to more than 92 million today and the inability of the system to match this growth so people could have a sufficient share of the country’s wealth, are seen as the biggest push factors contributing to out migration.

Migration and Overseas Filipinos

Pull factors include the demand for the skills of our people, higher real wages overseas and perceptions of a better future abroad. Also, the declining or aging populations in some industrial countries is expected to increase the demand for our workers because sooner or later, these countries will need to stabilize their shrinking labor force, increase the ratio of workers to dependents and bring in new worker contributions to boost their pension systems.

Migration and Overseas Filipinos

This migration, as you may know, has been taking with it a very significant number of young Filipinos in the diaspora, considering that more than 30% of emigrants who left the country in the last thirty years were 19 years old and younger. Unless drastic changes occur that will alter the effects of push and pull factors, this demographic movement of Filipinos is likely to continue far into the future.

Facing the Challenge – CFO Role

First, functions such as assistance to nationals, worker protection, employment promotion, migrant welfare, repatriation of nationals, reintegration of migrants and others, had already been mandated to other government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Labor, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration.

Facing the Challenge – CFO Role

Second, while CFO had the mandate to “serve as a forum for preserving and enhancing the social, economic and cultural ties of Filipinos overseas with the motherland”, it had no existing programs for overseas Filipinos along this mandate other than those for permanent residents abroad.

Facing the Challenge – CFO Role

Third, we recognized that some Philippine schools overseas were already in operation prior to 1994 though difficult issues had been arising, and no clear basis existed for handling them except for requirements of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports.

The Foreign Service Act of 1991 was also seen to diminish the role of the DFA in cultural matters with the abolition of the erstwhile Office of Cultural Affairs, and with senior officials of the Department holding conflicting views about involvement in the schools.

Facing the Challenge – CFO Role

We in CFO therefore saw potentials for developing something in connection with the schools, partly because of the apparent hiatus in policy and programs, and because of the possible linkage with our existing programs and activities to promote teaching of the Filipino language and Philippine studies in other parts of the world.

School Issues and the Inter-Agency Effort

However, we at CFO were careful to maintain the position that unless we had a service to provide, or unless there was in fact a value added by our involvement, there would be no real justification for us to step in.

IAC Role Defined

Based on extensive consultations about the beginnings, requirements and dynamics of existing community schools overseas, we arrived at the view that this sector could not possibly be the concern of a single department or agency alone.

Setting Directions - the Manual as a Framework

The IAC immediately recognized the need to issue a manual of regulations for the schools because its non-existence was a hindrance to giving well-founded advice to those who sought it, and because there was need for guidance in the development of a sector where the number of schools and their students were notably increasing.

Setting Directions - the Manual as a Framework

While the manual prescribed the regulations from the Philippine side, it emphasized that the schools also needed to comply with pertinent regulations of the host country.

Although the IAC Manual of Policies and Regulations was very clear on many issues, it was never meant to take the place of a school manual of procedures which we encouraged the schools to individually prepare, to regulate their own day-to-day operations. The IAC manual also recognized that most schools would have their own individual charters and by-laws or internal rules to suit their respective corporate objectives and local environment.

Setting Directions - the Manual as a Framework

Matters that lie beyond the IAC or the Manual of Policies and Regulations, which can only be dealt with effectively by the school community through better compliance with their own by-laws and internal procedures. Interestingly, the conflicts took place in Category I and Category II schools.

Developing a Cultural Component in PSOs

To “develop a prominent Filipiniana section containing among others, authoritative references and materials on Philippine history, government, geography, anthropology, literature and the arts”, and “materials about Filipino historical figures and recognized achievers as well as Filipiniana materials in the form of film, audio tapes, disks, photographs, musical scores, illustrations and originals or reproductions of exemplary Philippine art”.

Developing a Cultural Component in PSOs

The provision was introduced because we recognized that in addition to the capacity of an educational institution to contribute to a consciousness about nationhood among young Filipinos in a foreign land, we also saw from the dynamics that the schools were a locus of community activity overseas, and that the development of a Filipiniana collection should remind them about contributing to our country's finest traditions.

Moving Forward

Because the CFO was keen to see a strong cultural dimension, the National Commission on Culture and the Arts was invited to co-sponsor the event. Among other contributions, the NCCA provided each participating school with a good package of books and materials as a contribution to the development of a Filipiniana collection in their library.

Moving Forward

The Third Conference was held in Bahrain again because by 2004, the Philippine School Bahrain had completed construction of its modern school building and facilities, and we wanted everyone to see what the community in Bahrain had been able to achieve.

Philippine schools overseas were made less dependent on the embassy or consulate which had many other responsibilities, and became more closely linked to the community that it served.

Moving Forward

Schools were kept abreast of current educational policies and educational objectives. School personnel were shown the best practices in classroom instruction, as well as in improving school management and facilities. Summer in-service training was extended to teaching staff of the PSOs, courtesy of some schools and colleges in Manila. Graduates of Philippine schools overseas were given more than a fair chance to enter college in the Philippines through advance on-site entrance exams given by some Philippine universities. The networking encouraged among the schools also fostered inter-school competitions in sports, math and science, and also led to forming the Association of Principals for Philippine Schools Overseas.

Moving Forward

On the whole, we were seeing the steady development of the schools in all categories as community educational institutions.

The Bigger Picture – Opportunities for PSO Excellence

While the secondary school graduates of Philippine schools overseas were readily admitted to college in the Philippines, it was not the case when entering college abroad, whether in the host country or in other countries. As far as academic requirements in other countries were concerned, admission to tertiary institutions was restricted only to those students who completed 12 years of basic education. This was a dilemma for PSOs as well as their students who faced a kind of dead end situation with their options narrowed to returning to the Philippines for college. However, the CFO took a forward view and considered this as another area with potential for possible innovation.

Into the Future

First, a new law, RA 10066 was passed in 2009 providing for the protection and conservation of the national cultural heritage, among others, and which also envisages a role for Philippine schools overseas in hosting programs of a new cultural agency, the Centro Rizal. This should be a most welcome development because of a role that was envisaged in 2000, although I do not know how far the schools have gone in developing their respective Filipiniana resources. With a new mandate under RA 10066, more could surely be achieved to fulfill this role in synergy with Centro Rizal.

Into the Future

Second, the Department of Education is now taking the bold step of moving alongside the developed world to have better qualifications for secondary school graduates by shifting to a twelve year basic education track. Surely, the DepEd's view of the educational needs of our people and requirements of the times is a very well studied one, and I can only say that this shift is probably going to be the most profound change for the better in Philippine education in our lifetime.

Into the Future

But the point I would like to make is that, aside from the merits of the twelve year curriculum, the realities of international migration have been there for Philippine schools overseas to find reason to move ahead to adapt to change. With no other option now but to shift to the twelve year cycle, I urge the PSOs to again lead in education for our overseas youth, by taking steps to adjust to the new cycle, immediately. I believe there is enough time to prepare for an eleventh grade to start in school year 2013-2014, with the consent of the Department of Education.

Into the Future

First, with more than 40 Philippine schools in ten different countries, and a student population of more than 30,000 today, I believe there is need for the IAC to develop a workable system for timely inspection and monitoring visits. Other than the fact that a number of schools have been due for inspection, I know that there has been no better way of knowing about the individual schools and their respective communities more intimately than visits from here.

Into the Future

Second, should there be serious obstacles to a system for timely physical inspection visits, it should be possible to develop a means of conducting virtual inspection visits with the available technology today, in order to get our work done, and keep close to the more than 40 schools that need to be in the loop.

Into the Future

Third, because the IAC as a body does not have a presence overseas, and only routinely depends on DFA and DOLE officials on the ground for functions related to the schools, those being assigned to Posts where Philippine schools operate could benefit from CFO pre-departure orientation and briefing about the schools in their destination. Like the specialized briefing by other agencies conducted through the Foreign Service Institute, this practice will help ensure that those taking up their assignments abroad, proceed with useful knowledge about the Philippine schools in their respective areas.

Into the Future

Fourth - and this is also related to government's preparedness to fulfill obligations under inspections and visits - it is high time, after service to our overseas communities by PSOs starting thirty years ago, that Congress appropriates funds to cover the costs of supervising and helping to develop this sector. Considering the work of several government agencies that has been going on since 1994, nothing has ever been said about providing for expenditures in connection with work on PSOs in the annual General Appropriations Act. Work has been made possible through the resourcefulness of members of the IAC and the schools on their own.

Into the Future

Our Philippine schools overseas have developed to become an inseparable part of this larger transnational community that is rooted in the home country, and must be viewed continually in the larger context of the current discourse on migration and development. I believe it is only in this light that the relevance and the future of PSOs in the life of this transnational community could be best understood and fully realized.