

Local

Special Report

What do Filipinos say?!

By Jeri Al-Jeri

People were both shocked and confused by the ban on Filipinos working in Kuwait. Some found it justifiable, while others found it unfortunate. People in Kuwait took it upon themselves to express their thoughts and feelings freely and without hesitation. However, Filipinos felt their voices are heard only on the Internet and only among themselves. This is not because there is government suppression or that the Kuwaiti people want them to remain silent - it is due to a lack of media efforts to listen to them.

Kuwait is tiny in size, but has a vast demographic diversity. Even certain tribal members and religious minorities such as Christian Kuwaitis do not have that much of a platform to express themselves, so how can a certain nationality be expected to be listened to, when they are a minority within a majority of foreigners from all around the world, who have their own different ideologies and cultures. Therefore, I found it necessary in this time of adversity to collect their voices in a special article.

I had a great opportunity to conduct face-to-face interviews with multiple overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in their host country Kuwait, which secures the right for everyone to speak their mind. Being a democratic Kuwaiti, I asked three questions to everyone I met:

1. Are you happy in Kuwait?
2. What are your thoughts on the ban?
3. What do you want changed in Kuwait?

The first speaker is a housemaid named Christy. She had a very diplomatic answer with a lot of love and wisdom for all.

1. "Yes, I am happy in Kuwait working in my employer's house."
2. "I think it's not a problem for me - not all employers are difficult or manipulative. But I am not against the ban."
3. "We have to apologize to each other."

Marichu is a housemaid who works in a house occupied only by an old woman who is in need of constant medical care. Marichu gave what all of us want - a straightforward and clear-cut response:

1. "Yes of course, I am happy working here for the past seven years."
2. "Yes, I think I agree with my president, but only for housemaids. Because it is not good for them in some houses."
3. "I hope all employers are open-minded."

Jammy, a young worker, had this to say about the matter:

1. "Yeah, for now I am happy because of my work, and for experiencing a different culture here in Kuwait."
2. "Yes, we know our president is doing good for us OFWs."
3. "To better the general treatment of OFWs, Egyptians and the rest of the foreigners."

During the brief interview with Jammy, her friend and colleague Samtha fully supported Jammy's comments:

1. "Yeah, I'm happy in Kuwait."
2. "It's good what the president is doing for us."
3. "Same as what my friend said."

Other workers chimed in, including Samantha Reyes:

1. "Yes sir, I am happy."
2. "I'm scared, because we need to work here. We do have jobs in the Philippines, but not at the same salaries."

For the last question, her answer was similar:

3. "I am scared, because I need the money for my father."
- Lastly, Virginia, who is a housemaid, said:
1. "Yes, I am happy, and in this house my work is good and my employer is good."

Unfortunately, her lack of knowledge of English did not make her feel very comfortable in sharing her responses, because she felt that her ideas won't be fully understood as she desired them to be. Language barriers are very common in Kuwait.

Note: The answers were edited for clarity to ensure what the respondents meant was not misunderstood. (The raw and unedited versions are available on Kuwait Times' website.)

After listing to their voices, and after researching this matter in Arabic, I can say as a Kuwaiti that my personal conclusion is it seems the actual reason for this problem is a misunderstanding and lack of proper communication. This is expected to happen all over the world, as the humorous saying goes: "In every farm there is a spoiled potato."

Kuwait does not deserve a total ban of Filipino workers. Kuwait is hospitable, and the law does protect foreigners from acts of violence and extortion. Kuwaitis did not turn antagonistic towards the Philippines after a number of murders and kidnappings of their fellow citizens. There was an understanding to not generalize acts of criminality with the entire populace. The Filipino people obviously have the same level of awareness, as seen by their responses. We all hope that the issue of the lack of rewarding jobs in their homeland is taken care of. There is also room for improvement in Kuwaitis' treatment of others. All in all, what we need is more understanding towards one another, and fewer barriers.



Diplomat touts govt interest in capability revamp

LONDON: Kuwait's successive governments have been paying much heed to the building and developing of Kuwaiti human capabilities, a Kuwaiti diplomat boasted yesterday. "The State of Kuwait has long encouraged and spurred education in all its stages," Kuwaiti Ambassador in London Khaled Al-Duwaisan said in a keynote speech during a congress of the National Union of Kuwait Students -

UK and Ireland. The Kuwaiti government has established several schools, institutes and colleges nationwide in an effort to push forward the educational process in the country, he emphasized. Furthermore, hundreds of Kuwaiti students are dispatched to foreign countries, including the UK, he said, adding that 5,500 students have been taught abroad over the past five years.

The Kuwaiti ambassador went on to say that his country pins much hope on young people who would live up to responsibility by means of arming themselves with learning and knowledge. Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth and Sports Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan and Kuwait Airways CEO Ebrahim Al-Khuzam and representatives of governmental bodies were present at the congress. —KUNA

News in brief

Kuwait 85th in Corruption Index

KUWAIT: Kuwait ranked 85th out of 161 countries in the Corruption Perception Index 2017 released recently by Transparency International. Kuwait finished with a score of 39 points, down from 41 in 2016 and the lowest mark it recorded in six years. Its final score was good enough to rank Kuwait in eighth place among Arab countries behind the United Arab Emirates (21st worldwide), Qatar (29th), Saudi Arabia (57th), Jordan (48th), Oman (68th), Tunisia (74th) and Morocco (81st).

Traffic violations not dropped

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) on Friday denied a post circulated on some social networking sites on the dropping of traffic violations against citizens and residents on the occasion of the country's national days. The post regarding this matter has a fake slogan of the ministry and is untrue and incorrect, the ministry's public relations and security media department said in a press statement. It affirmed that the ministry's official bodies would take legal measures against those who posted the fake slogan and information. The ministry appealed to different media outlets to make sure news sources they cite were credible, the statement noted. —KUNA

Kuwaiti surgeon leads oncology programs

WASHINGTON: A Kuwaiti chief surgeon at Georgetown University Hospital was promoted as regional chief of Surgical Oncology and vice chair for Research, being the first Arab ever to occupy such a leading post at the hospital. Dr Waddah Al-Rafaie is recognized for creating numerous collaborative opportunities for advancing in the profession, such as founding the MedStar Georgetown Surgical Outcomes Research Center and starting the MedStar Surgery Resident Research Program. Among his many accomplishments, Dr Rafaie augmented the gastric, soft tissue sarcoma and melanoma cancer lines at the hospital, where in partnership with international services at the hospital, he also plays a "significant role in growing this important service line." In a joint statement, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Joy Drass and Regional Chair Thomas Watson noted that Dr Rafaie's "track record of clinical research leadership make him the ideal individual to serve in these two important capacities within the integrated surgery department." In his new role, Dr Rafaie will have the responsibility for "directing the regional surgical oncology program, as well as research activities of surgical services in the Washington area. — KUNA

Kuwaiti child dead in crane's fall

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: An 8-year-old Kuwaiti girl died after a crane fell on a chalet in Abdaly where her family were spending the weekend. Three other family members were injured and taken to Jahra Hospital. Meanwhile, a fireman suffered a fractured hand during the rescue operation. A case was filed for investigations.



KUWAIT: A picture taken from the scene showing a heavily damaged chalet after a crane fell on it in Abdaly, killing a child and injuring three other family members.

Injuries in house fire
Firemen from the Farwaniya and Sabhan fire stations tackled a blaze that hit an Arab-style house of three floors. Thirty persons were evacuated from the building before firemen battled the fire which started in the ground floor and spread upwards. Firemen faced difficulties due to furniture and wood that were randomly stored in the ground floor, while some cooking gas cylinders that were kept in the hallways exploded. Three persons suffered burns, while another suffered smoke inhalation, and they were all taken to hospital.

Smuggling foiled
Customs officers at Kuwait International Airport foiled a passenger's attempt to smuggle 3.7 kg of Marijuana. The Asian man placed the illicit substances in a box, but officers were able to discover them. The suspect and substances were sent to concerned authorities.

Kuwait exerts efforts for UN resolution on Syria

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti diplomats have acted diligently and continuously throughout the night for passing a United Nations Security Council's resolution to address the humanitarian situation in Syria, the Deputy Foreign Minister said yesterday.

In a statement answering a question about the State of Kuwait efforts regarding the draft UNSC resolution on the humanitarian situation in Syria, Khaled Al-Jarallah said the Kuwaiti diplomatic efforts pursued till dawn for trying to reach a consensus at the Security Council to enforce a full-scale cease-fire for 30 days for enabling relief teams deliver humani-

tarian aid and evacuate the injured. In line with instructions by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, "we held contacts till the dawn hours with our permanent delegate at the United Nations in New York in coordination with our friends in the Kingdom of Sweden who share us adoption of the draft resolution on the humanitarian situation in Syria."

Jarallah indicated that the humanitarian situation became direr in light of the events in Eastern Ghouta where hundreds of people were killed and wounded in continuing bombardment. There have been tremendous and continuing efforts between the State of Kuwait delegation, the Kingdom of Sweden with the permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, particularly the friends in Federal Russia, Jarallah said. "Throughout these consultations we had at times approached consensus and at other times did not," he said. "However, we maintained our resolve to reach such concord thus the consultations resulted in delaying voting till Saturday noon in the last bid to reach the aspired accord." — KUNA

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