

# Philippine mission's mandate is to protect interest, welfare of fellow citizens: Embassy source

## Official responds to rumors on Kuwait warning against 'sheltering' runaway maids

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Philippine Embassy responded to a news article published last week warning it against 'sheltering' runaway workers inside the embassy building, reminding the Philippines that sheltering absconding workers is against Kuwaiti law. "This was a mere proposal subject to further studies," said an embassy official who agreed to be interviewed on the condition of anonymity since the newly-designated ambassador to Kuwait Noordin Pendosan Lomondot is yet to arrive after taking the oath of office at Malacanang Palace before President Rodrigo Duterte over the weekend.

"I don't think it will be implemented soon. It was a proposal on the part of the Kuwaiti government and not from the Philippine side. I heard about it some time ago, even before the meeting last week. We told them it has to be studied first," said the embassy official. "Remember that we are only allowed to bring 50 runaway housemaids to the Kuwaiti government shelter. What I know is that Secretary Silvestre Bello III requested to increase the number from 50 to 100. This was mentioned during meetings with Kuwaiti officials, which they agreed, but our runaway housemaid numbers have always been at 300 or higher, so where are we going to take the 200 plus more maids in case they invoke this Kuwaiti law? Maybe if they increase the shelters, perhaps we will 'study' the matter, but then again we also have to ensure the safety of our citizens if their lives are being threatened by their

employers," the embassy source told Kuwait Times. "Our mission's mandate from our government in Manila is to protect the interests and welfare of our fellow citizens working overseas wherever they are in the world, and this includes Kuwait: this mandate has never been replaced or changed till now," the source added.

**Only 50 maids allowed in govt shelter**

There have been several cases of employers going to the Philippine Embassy to take back domestic workers who have fled and sought sanctuary there. In one instance, a former welfare officer at the embassy was involved in a physical altercation with a Kuwaiti employer who tried to physically remove his housemaid from the embassy and take her back to his home.

"It's a dangerous precedent if we shut the shelter and allow the government of Kuwait to take custody of our

runaway workers. The Kuwaiti government should instead help the Philippine embassy expedite the resolution of runaway housemaid cases so they can easily be reunited with their families. They are human beings too. While we don't blame the entire problem on employers as they are mostly arising from the housemaids, they are poor and disadvantaged - have mercy on them," a community leader said.

The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) opened a shelter for absconding domestic workers in 2014. It is designed to house more than 500 runaway housemaids of various nationalities, but the location is somewhere in the heart of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, and it is not easy for runaway helpers to find. Many of them escape with friends who are also Filipino, and they mostly go to the embassy as a safe haven.

The question of the embassy shelter was reportedly mentioned in the minutes of meetings signed during the recent visit of Philippine Secretary of the Department of Labor and Employment during the Joint Committee Meeting, in which they stressed on the need to do away with the so-called 'shelter center' inside the embassy headquarters, saying all complaints will be handled to ensure protection of the workers and necessary legal measures will be taken.

In the minutes of meeting, they also included a new provision related to the obligations of the second party (the employer), where the domestic worker is allowed to own a phone and use it outside working hours, allowing

Filipinos to keep their passports, giving them one day off a week and enough sleeping hours. At the same meeting, they also agreed to prevent the employer from assigning the domestic worker to work outside Kuwait without their consent.

The Philippines had imposed a total ban of its workers to Kuwait on Jan 15 - which was partially lifted on Feb 5 - after an autopsy by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) in the Philippines revealed that Jeanelyn Villavende, 26, was allegedly raped and beaten to death. The autopsy also revealed that Villavende had suffered from past physical abuse before her death in December. DOLE had earlier said that Villavende had sought the help of her recruitment agency for repatriation, but help was forthcoming.

The Kuwaiti authorities have detained Villavende's employers. The Philippine authorities condemned Villavende's death, describing it was a "clear violation" of the agreement signed by Kuwait and the Philippines in 2018. The 2018 agreement - which came at the end of a diplomatic crisis over the gruesome murder of Filipino worker Joanna Demafelis - sought to uphold the protection of the rights and welfare of Filipino workers in Kuwait.

A total of 250,000 Filipinos are currently working in various sectors in Kuwait, of which 65 percent are engaged in the domestic labor sector. At least five to 10 Filipinas run away to the embassy shelter daily, as per the Kuwait Times source at the Philippine Embassy.



**KUWAIT:** (From left) Asma Al-Kanan, University Librarian at AUK, Eman Al-Awadhi, Group Communications Director at KIPCO and Reem Al-Ali, project manager at AUK

## AUK Library, KIPCO launch 'Oral History' project

**KUWAIT:** The Library of the American University of Kuwait (AUK) launched the Oral History and Documentation Project (OHDP), in collaboration with KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding). The project, an initiative by AUK's Center for Gulf Studies led by its former Director Dr Farah Al-Nakib, made public its first set of life history interviews with pioneers in Kuwait to mark the launch of the project.

The project was established to actively conduct oral histories on a wide range of topics and themes in order to document the experiences of generations of Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. The launching of the OHDP website marks the culmination of a four-year collaboration between AUK and KIPCO, which has supported the project since the early stages of planning. The aim of the project is to develop a substantial archive of recorded interviews that will serve as a valuable

resource to researchers, students and the general public. Asma Al-Kanan, University Librarian at AUK said: "It is not uncommon for libraries to nurture such projects. Libraries have always been places where content is created, shared and preserved for generations to come. We are very proud to launch the Oral History Project in Kuwait and make it available to the public through the latest technology of audio recording and archiving. All of this would not have been possible without the strong support of KIPCO and the university administration, as well as the dedication of the project team led by our project manager, Reem Al-Ali."

Eman Al-Awadhi, Group Communications Director at KIPCO said: "KIPCO is delighted to be supporting this important AUK initiative, the Oral History and Documentation Project. As we all work together to realize the vision of the future of Kuwait, we must look to lessons learnt from the past. Here rests the importance of preserving the voices, memories and experiences of the many men and women who have made significant contributions to shape this nation."

The OHDP is currently focused on recording the life histories of those born before the 1960s. The recorded interviews explore the memories of individuals who experienced the drastic shift in Kuwait's society with the advent of oil, as well as their experiences of major historical events such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

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## Boubyan Bank sponsors Kuwait Maker Faire 2020

**KUWAIT:** Boubyan Bank has recently announced its platinum sponsorship of the world makers expo, Kuwait Maker Faire 2020, due to be organized for the fourth year in a row by Kuwait Investment Company (KIC) under the auspices of His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref, during the period from 11 to 15 February 2020.

In this regard, Waleed Al-Saqabi, Manager - Corporate Communications Division at the bank stated: "Out of the bank's keenness on supporting youth-targeting projects and activities, Boubyan Bank is taking part in this event for the first time ever since its launch three years ago."

He added: "The exhibition comes in line with Boubyan Bank's plans that target the youth, while focusing on technical aspects since Boubyan Bank is known as the most prominent bank in the field of digital banking services and products, where it has confirmed its leadership over recent years."

Kuwait Maker Faire aims at supporting and strengthening the Kuwaiti industry as much as possible, as it embraces innovative projects of citizens, especially those of young people, and works on highlighting them in front of specialists, investors, companies, and institutions from both the public and private sectors as well as before the public. A large number of those projects already receive care, support, and entry to industrial or commercial fields.

### Active partner

Moreover, Saqabi added: "Boubyan Bank was motivated to become an active partner in the Maker Faire by the splendid success it has achieved over the past three years, which resulted in the emergence of a large number of important projects with added value to the society in general, and to the local economy and industry in particular, especially since the exhibition is garnering international attention, as it is organized in more than 80 countries worldwide."

"With this in mind, Boubyan Bank has decided to sponsor and take part in this major event, which aligns with aspirations towards the implementation of the New Kuwait Vision 2035 in light of the bank's social development strategy focusing on supporting Kuwaiti youth projects," Saqabi added.

Saqabi thanked the Faire organizers for organizing it under the auspices of His Highness the Amir, which confirms the extent of support and care the state provides to creative Kuwaiti youth. He also thanked KIC for embracing such a major event that presents a group of Kuwaiti and Arab youth talented in various fields for the first time in the region.

**In my view**

**What did we prepare for coronavirus?**

By Fatima Nasser Al-Azmi

**KUWAIT:** The categorization of crises around the world differs according to their nature or type, and there is no doubt that the world is currently facing a health crisis with the spread of the new 2019/2020 Wuhan coronavirus, which started in the middle of Dec 2019 in this city located in the middle of China, and it was given the name CoV2019.

The patient suffers from severe pulmonary infection that may lead to death, while scientists are still developing a vaccine against this highly contagious virus. Deaths will exceed 1,000, while the number of cases is approaching 40,000. Many countries around the world have evacuated their citizens from China and others banned travel to China as the disease is spreading at a fast pace.

We are facing a true health crisis, so was real and fast preparation made for it? What did GCC countries, in particular, do in the form of precautionary and preventive measures towards it? There are many Chinese communities working in them and businessmen who are linked to many fields there, in addition to vast commercial exchanges by commercial ships and others.

Not only that, there are cultural and scientific exchanges too. Countries of the GCC have students on scholarships in China, and have a large number of Chinese workers, in addition to official delegations to China. Some cases of this killer virus have appeared in some GCC countries, so are we informed on a daily basis? Were there daily information messages to describe this virus and means of prevention from it in all types of media?

The holy month of Ramadan is near, during which we visit the Grand Mosque for umrah. Also, the hajj season is approaching, with millions of Muslims around the world converging to perform pilgrimage. Was this taken into consideration? This global health crisis will not disappear within days or weeks, as deaths are on the increase and infections continue every day. We are facing a real health crisis, and if one case enters Kuwait (Allah forbids), fear and panic will spread among people, apart from the many frightening rumors.

I hope that effective precautionary measures are taken at both the official and popular levels in GCC countries to face this condition by those concerned, be it in the health sectors or others. All new developments of this killer virus should be discussed, and all material and human facilities should face it and exert more efforts to prevent it from reaching the GCC countries, while taking strict measures at the borders and activating the role of health information in all GCC health ministries.