

KAPIT BISIIG

September 2001, Vol.2, No.2

Towards Equality:

ACHIEVING COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS FOR FILIPINO NURSES



“Being a live-in caregiver is a waste of our skills because we are highly skilled professionals. Some even worked in Saudi Arabia as Registered Nurses, but when we arrive here, we cannot practice our profession. We are used as cheap labour. That really is a human rights violation!”

Canada deceitfully portrays itself as a champion of human rights, but instead of recognizing the rights of Third World people, Canada uses them as a source of highly skilled, but cheap labour. Under the Live-in Caregiver Program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Filipino nurses are

subjected to discriminatory treatment, forced into modern-day slavery, and rendered even more vulnerable to class, race, and gender abuse by unjust immigration and accreditation policies. Their struggle to practice their profession is part of the broader struggle for their comprehensive human rights and equality rights as women, workers, and overseas Filipinos in Canada.

While human rights and equality rights are often narrowed to the civil and political rights of individuals, it is impossible to genuinely attain these rights without also attaining economic, social, and cultural rights. The “universality” of human rights is an empty slogan given the conditions of exploitation and oppression endured by Filipino nurses doing domestic work.

According to the 1948 United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” For eight million Filipinos—forced to go abroad to survive—there is no security or liberty to live in their country of choice. Their forced migration is pushed by the Labour Export Policy of the government of the Philippines, which turns its people into commodities for export on the world market.

Canada is one of the host countries benefiting from the cheap labour of Filipino workers, especially through the Live-in Caregiver Program. Despite the UN’s commitment that everyone has the right to “just and favourable remuneration ensuring himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity,” Filipino nurses under the LCP are often forced to work 24-hours a day with little compensation. Despite achieving professional status in the Philippines, they are relegated to household work under exploitative and precarious conditions. “As a live-in caregiver for an elderly couple, I not only do domestic work, but I also do nursing duties. I administer insulin and dispense other medications. I change the urine bags two times a day, and I am on call through the night. I really work 24-hours a

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Provincial government launches nursing strategy: **FILIPINO COMMUNITY ANGERED**

On August 15, 2001, the provincial government announced a Nursing Strategy. Yet, the announcement came as a surprise to many members of the Filipino community and BC public who were expecting the government to recognize non-practicing Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses who are present in BC. “There is no doubt in our community that many of our nurses are present in BC. Why aren’t they being valued and utilized to solve the nursing shortage?” questions Lynn Farrales, a practicing MD and the chair of the Philippine Women Centre.

According to Leah Diana, a Registered Nurse and

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volunteer with the Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG), “The Nursing Strategy is certainly not a break-through for foreign-educated nurses. FNSG, as a stakeholder in the government’s Nursing Access Committee, was not consulted. Our experiences, research, and recommendations were not utilized.”

The \$21.31 million Nursing Strategy includes forgivable student loans; an increase in training spaces for new RNs, LPNs, and care aides; and overseas recruitment of specialty nurses. “This strategy is an outrage,” states Rachel Rosen, an advocate with the Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG). “The provincial government announced it will spend almost half a million on overseas recruitment, yet it is doing nothing to address the barriers to Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses. It is a clear example of systemic racism, particularly as they will recruit in Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.”

As part of the Nursing Strategy, the government is offering bursaries (grants that do not need to be paid back) for refresher courses. “While it is helpful to have grants for foreign-educated nurses who are going to do refreshers, it misses the main point,” explains Joyce Lovitos, a member of the FNSG. “Most of us do not need refresher courses since we have practiced within the past 5 years.”

The Nursing Strategy also includes an English as a Second Language training component designed for foreign-educated nurses that the Registered Nurses Association of BC (RNABC) identifies as needing support in meeting the English requirements. For the over 350 Filipino nurses FNSG has contact, ESL training does not address the fundamental problems with the English requirements. The required English tests are costly (between Cdn\$208 and US\$410) and irrelevant. Filipino nurses are educated in English and have worked in English in the Philippines, other countries, and in Canada. “From our perspective, the ESL training is going to be just one more step in an already lengthy process,” explains Diana. “Our members are fluent in English. They even passed the mandatory English interview prior to coming to Canada. The English tests required of RNABC are only based on the racist assumption that people of colour can’t speak English.”

“This strategy is a real insult to our community when our nurses have years of nursing experience in OR, ICU, and labour and delivery—speciality areas the province is going to do overseas recruitment for,” Farrales continues. “Members of our community, who were recognized by reciprocity agreements in the 1960s and 1970s, have worked successfully in the Canadian health care system ever since. Why can’t they do the same now instead of spending millions on a Nursing Strategy that doesn’t even address the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP)—the major barrier to Filipino nurses practicing their profession?”

Because no occupational points are given to nurses in the Immigration Act, many Filipino nurses are forced to come through the Live-in Caregiver Program and work as 24-hour domestic and home support workers. “Even though I’m qualified to work under an Interim Permit, I’m still denied the right to practice. Canada Immigration threatens that if I break my LCP contract, I will be denied landed status and deported,” explains one FNSG member. FNSG raised this issue during a meeting with the Minister of Health Planning and the Minister of Community, Aboriginal, and Women’s Services. They hesitated to remove Filipino nurses from the LCP because of concerns over the health of private families employing caregivers.

“Our community and the FNSG will continue to struggle against our marginalization, for the rights of our nurses to practice their profession, and for the scrapping of the racist and anti-woman LCP,” asserts Diana.

FNSG Leadership Workshop:

BUILDING UNITY AMONG OUR MEMBERS

(On August 17 and 18, FNSG held two leadership training workshops that were attended by 20 members of FNSG and SIKLAB (an overseas Filipino workers organization). Gloria attended the Aug. 18 workshop.)

By Gloria

When I came to the FNSG Leadership Training Workshop, I was hoping to learn about the experiences of other Filipino nurses and update my skills and knowledge.

The workshop started with introductory remarks, given by Sheila. Each one of us introduced ourselves by means of body language, as demonstrated by Ana. Those who had not used their hips for months, years, or centuries to swing and sway, used them a lot that morning. I can say that it was really good exercise for us to have that kind of introduction.

We shared our own experiences patterned to guideline questions: How many years have you worked in the Philippines? Do you have any other overseas work experience? How did you come to Canada and when did you arrive? What is your job in Canada?

Some of the experiences of the attendees were as follows: nurse back home who came to Canada to work under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP); domestic helper who has been away for five years from nursing and needs a nursing refresher course as required by the Registered Nurses Association of BC; and a landed immigrant who is qualified to work but still cannot get a nurse-related job and finds the experience frustrating.

We enjoyed our sharing and time went quickly until 2pm. I found it really inspiring to hear how the others were persevering in the face of such challenges. Our stories were very similar, with so many of us having to leave the Philippines for the survival of our children and our families.

Then, we had our lunch together. The foods were excellent typical Filipino dishes. Each and everyone enjoyed the meal.

To warm up all the members, Ana taught us a song about one Filipina who stayed in the USA. She sang a song about a bird with matching actions in an American accent. It was really funny.

We continued the second part of the workshop, where I learned the most. If I hadn't attended the workshop, I wouldn't know about the history of the Filipino community in Canada, Filipino nurses, and the history of our migration.

When I heard the experiences of all the members, I consider my case to be the worst after all the mess that has happened to me and my family here in Canada. I am not a landed immigrant, my husband cannot work because he is a visitor, and Immigration can deport us any time.



FNSG member receives a certificate after participating in the FNSG Leadership Workshop graduation ceremony.

Our only wish was to be together as one whole family. The things that have happened to us are not really fair because we were both working before and earning enough income to support our children, and now we are both jobless. We already spent all of our savings. The only way we can stay here is if RNABC will grant my request to waive my English fluency requirement.

I'm glad to be one of the members of the FNSG and am grateful I attended the Leadership Workshop. I got motivation to carry on, met new friends, and boosted my self-esteem. I felt that it was a good release to be able to share my experiences in such detail. I really could feel everyone's genuine desire to help and support each other and the newly arrived nurses through our similar experiences.

On Sunday, August 19, 2001, at the Kalayaan Centre, we celebrated the graduation day of all the members who attended the workshop. We were all wearing our nursing uniforms and a nursing cap like Florence Nightingale to dignify the real nurse.

Thank you!

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FNSG members speak:

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Q: I came under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). My friends said I can't open a file at RNABC since I'm still under the LCP. Is this true?

You can open a file at Registered Nurses Association of BC (RNABC) from outside Canada anytime or within Canada while under the LCP. FNSG members suggest that you open your file as soon as possible because the whole accreditation process can be very long. You can complete the entire accreditation process while under LCP.

Once RNABC authorizes it, you can take the nursing exam, regardless of your immigration status. But even if you have finished the accreditation process (including the RN exam) while under the LCP, Immigration still bars you from practicing as a nurse. They claim that if you break the LCP contract, you will be denied landed immigrant status and will have to leave Canada.

FNSG continues to call on the federal government to scrap the anti-woman and racist LCP. FNSG demands the granting of occupational points to nurses so that they can come to Canada as independent immigrants and demands the release of nurses from the LCP when they receive accreditation from the RNABC.



FNSG members look at surgical dressings during one of FNSG's bi-weekly review classes.

Q. I'm a graduate nurse in the Philippines. Can I pursue my nursing career here in Canada?

According to the RNABC, if you have not completed the nursing exam in the Philippines and did not obtain registration as a nurse in the Philippines, you cannot become accredited as an RN in BC unless you redo your nursing education or take certain courses, as assessed by the RNABC. FNSG recommends that, if possible, you go back to the Philippines to take the nursing exam and obtain nursing registration with the PRC. Then you can start the accreditation process with RNABC. This is cheaper and quicker than redoing your education.

Q. Do I have to take the TOEFL, TSE, and IELTS to fulfill my English requirement?

The RNABC requires that you write either (1) the TOEFL and TSE or (2) the IELTS. You do not have to do all three.

The TOEFL tests your written English fluency. It costs US\$125. You need to score 213 on the computer based test or 550 on the paper based test. The TSE tests your spoken English fluency. It costs US\$110. You need to score 50.

The IELTS tests your English writing, reading, listening, speaking abilities. All are combined into one test. It costs Cdn\$208.65. RNABC requires an overall band score of 6.5 and a spoken band of 7.

If you do not achieve these required scores, you may waive your results. To waive, you must submit a letter explaining your reasons for waiving (FNSG has a sample letter) and two references who will complete appraiser forms. One reference must be an employer. The other can be anyone other than an employer or relative whose first language is English.

RNABC has a policy that with adequate references, they will waive your TOEFL if you scored 540/207. They will waive your TSE if you scored 45. But you must have at least passed either the TOEFL or TSE. If you waive your English, this means that you have completed your English requirement. RNABC does not have a policy for waiving the IELTS. If the IELTS is not waived, you have to retake it. You must wait 3 months before rewriting the IELTS.

FNSG offers English Support Classes to prepare for the English test. Also, FNSG continues to assert to the RNABC that English testing is expensive and irrelevant and



FNSG members during one of FNSG's bi-weekly review classes focusing on labour and delivery.

that Filipino nurses should not have to take the exams as they have been educated and practiced in English.

Q. Do I have to take a refresher course if my last nursing practice was in 1998?

The Registered Nurses Association of BC does not make you take a refresher course if you have worked as a nurse for at least 1125 hours in the past five years (i.e. since October 1996). Also, if you graduated in the last five years, you do not have to take the refresher course (even if you have not worked for 1125 hours).

Q: I received an assessment letter from RNABC. They're asking me to take the refresher course. Which schools are recognized by RNABC? Where are they located? How long is the course and how much it will cost me?

The RNABC recognizes four different refresher courses. RNABC will provide the exact details of which refresher courses you will need to take. There are different bursaries and loans that you can avail of.

The Open Learning Agency offers a refresher course that can be taken anywhere in the province. It is 22-36 weeks long. The first part is self-directed study and the last six weeks is a practicum. It costs \$1,382. There is no wait list, and it takes about 3 weeks to register and a few more weeks to get your books. You must complete an English requirement before taking the second section of the Refresher Program.

Kwantlen College offers a Graduate Nurse with English as an Additional Language (GNEAL) course. It costs \$1,432. It takes 17 months part-time or 9 months full-time. There is a long waiting list for Kwantlen, but they will not add you to the list until you have met their admission requirements. The entrance requirements are a letter from RNABC stating that you are ready to write the nurses exam, a completed application for Kwantlen, and a score of 535/202 on your TOEFL and 45 on your TSE. They also accept the IELTS (instead of the TOEFL / TSE). You will need a 5.5 overall band score, with a reading band of 6 and a speaking band of 6.

Malaspina University College offers a refresher course in Nanaimo, BC. It takes two to five months. John Collins Consulting is a private institution. They charge \$11,000 for their refresher course.

There are grants and student loans available to help you cover the costs of the refresher courses. FNSG has application forms.

If you are not a landed immigrant (i.e. you are still on an open visa or you are on a visitor's visa), then you will have to pay triple the amount of regular tuition fees.

MEMBERS COMMENTS:

“I took the TOEFL exam and received a score of 213. My TSE score was 45. FNSG gave me information so that I could waive my TSE.... They wrote me a letter of support ... After few weeks. I received a letter from RNABC and they waived my English... I'm working as a Graduate Nurse under an Interim Permit now and preparing for my nursing exam here in Canada.”

“ I've been here in Canada for almost 2 years. But I didn't know how to go about the step-by-step process in becoming a nurse... I found the flyers of FNSG at one of the Filipino stores and contacted them. They gave me lots of information regarding processing the application and also informed me of their work as a community-based organization...”

OPEN LETTER TO THE BC NURSES' UNION

Dear Ms. McPherson (President of the BC Nurses' Union),

I am writing to you on behalf of the Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG), which represents over 300 Filipino nurses in BC who are being denied the right to practice their profession and help alleviate the nursing shortage.

We take extreme offense to your recent public statements regarding potential government support for foreign-trained nurses. For example, your August 10 statement to the Vancouver Sun ("We have thousands of nurses waiting to get into nursing programs in BC and every time they bring in fast-tracking, they back off training in BC.") is both virulently anti-immigrant and short-sighted in terms of building union and worker solidarity.

In a globalized economy such as we have now, it is no more than self-interested protectionism to speak about moral issues regarding immigration. Third World workers are being forced to leave their countries on a daily basis because of grinding poverty and unemployment created by free market globalization through bodies such as the International Monetary Fund / World Bank. Speaking about "voluntary immigration" misses the point about the reasons hundreds and thousands of workers, including nurses, are forced to leave the Philippines and other Third World countries every day. It denies the concrete reality they face upon arriving here in Canada, irregardless of what immigration program they entered under. While Filipino nurses face extreme de-skilling and modern-day slavery under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), even those who came to Canada as independent immigrants face major barriers to practicing their profession. We have members with 15-20 years of nursing experience in the Philippines and other countries internationally in both supervisory and teaching positions. They have worked in areas of OR, ICU, and labour and delivery – desperately needed in British Columbia – yet they are denied the right to practice here.

By refusing to support migrant and immigrant workers who are being exploited in British Columbia because of their temporary status and systemic racism, BCNU will only hurt its own membership. The recent reaction to the BCNU job actions illustrates the need for genuine solidarity from BCNU for Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses here in BC who are being denied the right to practice as nurses. As we warned BCNU prior to your job action, the presence of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses was used by the government and the Health Employer's Association to deny BCNU workers' demands.

Instead of being recognized and accredited, Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses are being used in the scheme to privatize health care. They are forced to endure modern-day slavery while working for private families under the Live-in Caregiver Program and are under-employed by private health care companies as home support workers and care aides. They are being paid one third of the wages they would make as nurses, yet are being used for their nursing skills and expertise. Their exploitation is a part of the increasing push to privatize health care and will only further the union-busting tactics of the government, employers, and international institutions.

Instead of using the argument that Third World workers threaten the education and working conditions of First World workers, which serves globalization's proponents so well, we call on BCNU to critically evaluate its policies and public statements. The FNSG calls on you to support our calls for the valuing and utilization of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses. Instead of funding political parties at their fundraising dinners, BCNU has a role to play in concretely supporting FNSG and other grassroots organizations leading the struggle against privatization and free market globalization.

In solidarity, *Rachel Rosen*
Advocate with the Filipino Nurses Support Group



Gathering of Filipino Nurses ready to work but trapped in Live-in Caregiver Program

Yadni's story:

OUR STORIES

My name is Yadni, I'm from a small town in the Philippines, the eldest of four children. My parents were both public school teachers and farm owners.

My brother finished with an aircraft mechanic degree and my two sisters and I graduated with nursing degrees. My sisters are currently working as nurses in the United States. I was also supposed to work in the US, but when the United Nations' reported that Canada is the best country to live, I chose Canada as my destination. I looked forward to greener pastures and a better life because our home country is overwhelmed with corruption and lacks opportunities for a better life.

Philippine newspapers are bombarded with advertisements recruiting caregivers into Canada. Ads like "If you're a NURSE, TEACHER, or MIDWIFE, you are qualified to come to Canada!" are an everyday reality. Live-in Caregiver training schools lure Filipinos into enrolling. These tuition fees range from \$500 to over \$1,000 CDN. These training centres only teach you how to use a washing machine, how to cook Canadian or Chinese food, how to drive etc. Since I couldn't enter Canada as a nurse because I had zero points, I came under the Live-in Caregiver Program.

After a few months in Canada, I went to RNABC to begin my accreditation. Since I believed I am fluent in English, I requested to waive my English requirements. But unfortunately RNABC replied that my English was merely HOUSEHOLD English! I believe they made unfair assumptions and judgements because of my Filipino background! They completely ignored my years of nursing education and experience! English language is even our mode of instruction from elementary school through to nursing school. As a caregiver, taking English exams is far too expensive for me, I have to spend more than \$400 US. But I'm only receiving \$715 Canadian a month. I feel very discriminated and marginalized.

Even more angering is knowing that Canada has a nationwide shortage of nurses while thousands of Filipino nurses in Canada are working as domestic workers, like me. We are trapped under the Live-in Caregiver Program.

RNABC dares to publicly comment that nursing education in the Philippines is not at par with the Canadian education. Again, I believe they are making ignorant presumptions. They are talking out of ignorance. They are talking from their own biases because they only see the

color of our skin. Historically, Filipino nurses have worked as nurses for the past 30 years all over the world!

The FNSG, of which I am a part, has helped in voicing out our resistance against racism and our marginalization. My participation in rallies, the media interviews, and other FNSG programs has empowered me to forward our legitimate demands. I hope others will also participate to assert our voices, be united in struggling for our rights and welfare, and our genuine equality!

FNSG launches "A Stalled Development"



FNSG launches its three-year participatory action research project: [Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada: A Stalled Development](#). The press conference was attended by 9 media representatives and 22 community supporters.

Achieving Human Rights, continued from page 1

day! At first I thought earning \$1200 a month is sufficient, but as I calculate it, I earn no more than \$2.50 an hour. I'm a virtual slave!" exclaims Yvette, a member of FNSG. Canada's lack of commitment to the human rights of Filipino nurses is exposed in its refusal to ratify the UN Convention for the Rights and Welfare of Migrant Workers and their Families.

To forward the struggle for the equality and human rights of Filipino nurses doing domestic work, FNSG is calling for a national meeting of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses and advocates to coincide with International Human Rights day. The meeting will be an opportunity to learn from the successes and experiences of FNSG and build strategies for coordinated action. "Advancing the rights and welfare of Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada" will be held in Vancouver, BC, from December 7-9, 2001.

CONGRATULATIONS!

FNSG members who have passed the Canadian Nurses Association Test in June and August 2001:

Christy Arguelles, Maria Teresa Batoon, Arlene Casilla, Maribeth Cuenca, Jonathan Dingle, Agnes Laforteza, Perlita Maganis, Myra Ona, Fatima Sera

qualify for / have received an Interim Permit:

Charina Caprio, Genevieve Coloma, Cielo Ebio, Joey Estaris, Narcelita Ison, Maricon Labrador, Jenny Macalalad, Marilyn Padoan, Nanette Suarez, Agnes Velasco

starting / enrolled in a nursing refresher course:

Joy Calica, Josie Caprio, Alberto Ellema, Judith Esguerra, Nyllette Illustre, Cedy Lagria, Evelyn Mustafa, Beverly Simon, Terisita Vossberg

Filipino Nurses Support Group:

Review Classes: Canadian Nurses Association Test (CNAT)

Classes are every other Sunday, by donation.
Call Leah or Ana at (604) 255-6870 for information.

SIKLAB

*an overseas
Filipino workers'
organization*

215.1103

- Attend free workshops
 - Review application for Landed Status
 - Employment Standards Branch & WCB issues
 - Fill out your family class sponsorship application
 - Help on Immigration & EI questions
 - Referrals
- MEET OTHER FILIPINOS!**

HELP SUPPORT FNSG!

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____
I would like to become a member _____
(enclose \$10 for one year membership fee)
Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone number: _____

Upcoming events:

**Wednesday,
October 3 &
November 7**

**Tinig ng Masa:
*the people's views on
Philippine news***

monthly community radio program,
every first Wednesday of the month,
6-7pm
Vancouver Co-op Radio, 102.7 fm
for info call Ethel at 604.215.1103

**Friday,
October 5 -
Sunday,
October 7**

**North American
Consultation for Women of
Philippine Ancestry:**

Seattle, Washington
for more information call Monica at
604.215-1103
pwc@attcanada.ca

**Saturday,
October 20 -
October 21**

**Leadership Training:
*Bridging the Gap***

organized by the Filipino-Canadian
Youth Alliance
for more information call Monica at
604.215.1103

**Sunday,
October 14,
October 28**

**Review Classes:
*Canadian Nurses
Association Test (CNAT)***

organized by FNSG
2-5 pm at the Kalayaan Centre
for information call Sheila or Leah at
604.255.6870

**Sunday,
October 14,
October 28**

English Support Classes

organized by FNSG
6-7 pm at the Kalayaan Centre
for information call Sheila or Leah at
604.255.6870

**Saturday,
October 20**

**SIKLAB Anniversary:
Launching of campaign to
remove the \$975 head tax**

organized by SIKLAB
2-5 pm at the Kalayaan Centre
for information call Dinah at
604.255.1103

**Friday,
December 7
- Sunday,
December 9**

**National Consultation:
*Achieving Human Rights
for Filipino Nurses***

organized by FNSG for Filipino
nurses and advocates
for information call 604.255.6870