



Filipino Nurses Support Group *report*

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Introducing FNSG

In 1996, a group of Filipino women who were connected with the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. and SIKLAB (a migrant workers organisation) began to come together as registered nurses from the Philippines, but who worked in Canada as low-income domestic workers under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). They hoped to gain a deeper understanding of their situation as Filipino women in Canada, particularly the specific situation and status of the growing numbers of Filipino nurses doing domestic work.

Through initial sharings of their experiences and identifying the common issues each faced, they realized that to effectively tackle these issues, they must empower and strengthen themselves through their own self-organization and collective effort. From this desire to build a community that reflects our vision of a just and fair society, the Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG) was organized.

Our Context

The Filipino community in Canada numbers over 240,000 people who are concentrated in major urban centres of Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. The Philippines consistently ranks in the top five source countries for immigrants to Canada. Among the most highly-educated of all immigrant groups in Canada, the incomes of Filipinos are lower than that of other immigrant groups and those born in Canada. Filipino women are highly segregated in domestic work and childcare, while for men, in cleaning and janitorial services.

Filipino nurses in Canada are part of the mass migration of over 7 million Filipinos in search for a 'better life' abroad. For several generations now, the failure of the Philippines to achieve genuine economic development has kept the large majority of the Filipino people mired in poverty. The lack of opportunity for a decent livelihood forces Filipinos to seek employment abroad



at record-breaking numbers. The Philippine government, through the Labour Export Policy (LEP), exports its own people as a primary source of foreign earnings, making the Philippines the world's largest migrant nation.

Commodified by the Philippine government, and recruited by Canada at a low cost, the extreme marginalization of Filipino nurses in Canadian society is one product of globalization as it operates today. Driven by imperialism's endless pursuit for profit, and its subsequent need for cheaper labour, nurses from the Philippines have been forced to come here as domestic workers under the federal government's Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), even though Canada is in dire need of nurses. The Canadian government grants zero occupational points to the nursing profession for independent immigrant applications.

Nurses from the Philippines, therefore, come to Canada in droves, no longer recognized as registered nurses and landed immigrants like those who came before them in the 1960s to early 70s. They now toil as

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Our Objectives

In its commitment to resist the extreme marginalization of migrant Filipino nurses in Canada, FNSG set its objectives as follows

- To deepen our understanding of the situation of Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada by studying Philippine history, the roots of our migration from the Philippines, and the present global economic crisis
- to arouse, organize, and mobilize Filipino nurses to fight for our legitimate rights and welfare, including:
- to outreach to other Filipino nurses doing domestic work
- to lobby for recognition of our nursing education and training in the Philippines
- to build alliances with progressive trade unions and other organizations supportive of our struggle
- to unite with other overseas migrant workers and with other groups who share the same aspirations as we have for the promotion of a just and humane society.

modern-day slaves – temporary workers in a foreign land, receiving slave wages under a work contract to live-in their employer's home and restricted to do only household and caregiving work. It is this live-in requirement that makes these women vulnerable to several forms of abuse and exploitation. The LCP even restricts them from taking academic upgrading courses. Their education

and training are wasted, as they become de-skilled and legislated into poverty and debt by the Canadian government. Many members of FNSG have persevered to become qualified and registered to practice nursing in B.C., but are held back by institutional barriers wrought with systemic racism from returning to the practice of their profession.

The nurses' basic struggle as a segregated community of cheap labour in Canada is directly linked to the global context of imperialist globalization and the privatization of health care, since their presence in Canada cheapens the nursing profession by driving down the wages of Canadian nurses and health workers. Once completing their temporary work contract and becoming landed immigrants, many become home support workers, nursing aides, or continue to do domestic work for rock bottom wages. A pool of highly-skilled, yet low-paid health workers has been created by the Canadian government's LCP.

The position of the Canadian government in maintaining the LCP and denying nurses occupational points is outrageous in the midst of an acknowledged nationwide nursing shortage, increasing concern over the deterioration of health care due to privatization, and unrest among nurses over working conditions.

Our History

FNSG is an organization of migrant and immigrant Filipino nurses

interested in upholding their rights and welfare in Canada and forwarding the Filipino people's struggle for national freedom and democracy.

FNSG took root in 1996 from the initiatives of members of the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. (PWC) to critically examine and address the growing phenomenon of Filipino women (many of whom are nurses) who are segregated to do domestic work for the young, sick, and elderly in Canada – not as registered nurses, but as cheap and highly-skilled caregivers or “nannies”. Ongoing studies, meetings, and workshops were held, aimed at gaining a better understanding of the issues and needs of this particular sector in our Filipino community.

Building from PWC's research on the economic violence against Filipino migrant/immigrant women, the systematic de-skilling and marginalization of Filipino nurses was the focus of PWC's research project, “*Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada: A stalled development*”, also funded by Status of Women Canada from 1998-1999. Out of this research project sparked the need and commitment to strengthen FNSG and reach out to more and more Filipino nurses working as modern-day slaves in Canada.

Since its establishment in 1996, its membership continues to grow.

Our Future

Looking back to the rich experiences and lessons gained over the past few years, FNSG looks forward to both continue and intensify its work to educate, organize, and mobilize Filipino nurses.

The Filipino Nurses' Support Group (FNSG), a grassroots organization of Filipino nurses, has gained great momentum in leading and advancing the struggle of Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada. Since 1996, FNSG has been educating, organizing, and mobilizing Filipino nurses to militantly fight for their empowerment, equality, and genuine development. Their leadership and strides forward are clear.

Community organizing

- outreached to Filipino nurses doing domestic, caregiving, and home support work in B.C., FNSG presently has contact with almost 200 Filipino nurses in B.C.
- finalized a research project, "*Filipino Nurses doing Domestic Work in Canada: A Stalled Development*" (funded by Status of Women Canada). This project, which included interviews with over 25 women and men, documents and analyses the situation of Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Vancouver. It also includes recommendations for policy change.
- established a program to provide education and support for members, including review classes to prepare for the nursing exam; educational studies on human rights and the history of Filipino migration to Canada; skills training on leadership and organizing; a written module outlining the logistics of accreditation, refresher courses, and how to access funding from various government programs to support the accreditation efforts of our members, peer counselling
- raised public awareness of our key issues and concerns through all forms of media, locally, nationally, internationally; community forums, and rallies
- 3 FNSG delegates participated in the historic Filipino-Canadian National Consultative Forum in August 2000, where we united on our history, struggle, and resistance as Filipinos in Canada. We asserted the struggle of Filipino nurses and called for national support.

Provincially

- advocated for the right of Filipino nurses to practice in B.C. by exposing and opposing discriminatory, marginalizing programs and policies set up by BCNU and RNABC
- led and participated in multi-sectoral rallies like "No to Privatization of Healthcare" rally and May Day Rally

- gained support from trade unions such as British Columbia Nurses Union (BCNU) and Health Employees Association of BC (HEABC). BCNU informed us they will be writing a letter to Hon. Elinor Caplan, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, urging her to make necessary changes. BCNU will also ask the board of the Canadian Federation of Nurses' Unions to send similar letters to the Minister. BCNU and HEABC will also send a joint letter to BC's Ministers of Health and Advanced Education, Skills, Training and Technology
- had a meeting with Jenny Kwan (B.C. Minister of Women's Equality) and Joan Smallwood (B.C. Minister of Labour) in September 1999 to present the issue of Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada
- asserted the struggle of Filipino nurses and other foreign-trained nurses seeking to practice nursing in BC at a stakeholders meeting sponsored by Multiculturalism BC in October, 1999.
- at the BCNU annual general meeting in June 2000, FNSG and concerned nurses proposed that the general membership of BCNU recognize the presence of Filipino nurses doing domestic work and to stand in solidarity with them in their fight to practice
- met with Colin Hansen, MLA, Vancouver-Quilchena in June 2000, and gained his support for our campaign. He has written letters to the Registered Nurses Association of BC (RNABC) and HEABC to raise our issues
- 15 FNSG members and supporters attended the roundtable discussion called by Premier Ujjal Dosanjh in August 2000. Hon. Jenny Kwan (Minister of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers) and Hon. Sue Hammell (Minister of Multiculturalism) were present. Also present were representatives from the Ministries of Labour, Health, and Women's Equality. FNSG members who attended: Liza Ahyeng, Marlyn Padoan, Joyce Lovitos, Be Tan, Karen Versario, Cecilia Sayo, Sheila Farrales, Leah Diana

Federally

- collected signatures for a petition to the B.C. Minister of Health, Alan Rock (federal Minister of Health), and Elinor Caplan (federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)
- met with Hon. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State of Multiculturalism and Status of Women Canada and discussed how she can support the struggle of Filipino nurses doing domestic work. FNSG members who attended: Be Tan, Liza Ahyeng, Joyce Lovitos, Sheila Farrales, Cecilia Sayo, Leah Diana
- presented our issues to Minister Caplan during her visits to Vancouver and Winnipeg

Internationally

- FNSG became a member organization of Migrante-International, an international alliance of Filipino migrant workers' organizations in December 1999
- an FNSG member recently came back from a 2-month exposure trip to the Philippines to integrate and learn from the everyday lives and struggles of the Filipino people. She also spent time with the health sector there, and learned how doctors, nurses, and other health workers are taking part in the people's movement towards social change in the Philippines.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Tonette Penebro, Alona Chua,
 Brian Serato, Christine Galeon, Ellen
 Pasadas, Fe Marie Binuhe, Geraldine
 Sagayap, JunJun Escobar, Karen
 Versario, Leah Diana, Liza Ahyeng,
 Rudy Verar, Sharon Andaya, Virgie
 Ancheta, Maritess Asprer,
 Ampe Santiago, Allan

FNSG members who have passed the Canadian nursing board exam since October 1999!

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 14, 21, 29 ***Philippine Women Centre's Film Study Series***

@ Kalayaan Centre
451 Powell St.
Vancouver
6:00 pm
For more info call Ali 215.1103

November 17 ***Club for a Cause Fundraising event of Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance***

@ Purple Onion
15 Water St, Gastown
Tixs \$6
Entrance 10:00 pm
Call Ethel for more info, 215.1103

November 18 & 19 ***Our Heroes, Our Heritage, Our Struggle***

2-day gathering for Fil-Cdn youth
Nov. 18 @7pm, book launching, cultural presentations, art display at the Kalayaan Centre
Nov. 19 @ 11am-4:30pm, workshops & panel discussions at Douglas College
Call Charlene at 215-1103

November 26 ***SIKLAB 5th Anniversary***

2-5pm @ Kalayaan Centre
Call Ana @ 215-1103 for info

December 2 ***Philippine Women Centre's 11th Annual Fundraising Dance***

St Patrick Church Hall
116 E 12th & Main Street
7:00 pm, Tix \$10, raffle prizes
Call Jane at 215-1103 for info

Filipino Nurses Support Group

Review Classes

Canadian Nursing Board Exam review classes every other Sunday

By donation for all Filipino nurses doing domestic work in Canada.

For more info call Sheila, Leah, or Virgie at 215.1103

