

Background to consultation

In the midst of the worst nursing shortage Canada has ever experienced, thousands of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses here in Canada are being denied the right to practice as nurses. Instead, they are trapped in the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and face systemic barriers to accreditation.

The presence of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses in Canada must be understood as part of the overall migration of Third World people from conditions of poverty, unemployment, and chronic political and economic crisis in their homelands. In the present era of globalization, the migration of Third World



people generally, and Filipinos particularly, has expanded exponentially as people are forced to migrate to survive. They are commodified as highly skilled, but cheap, labour on the global market. There are currently over eight million Filipino migrant workers in 186 countries worldwide.

Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses are part of the massive out-migration of Third World people. In 1989, 65% of

new nursing graduates in the Philippines emigrated abroad. These Filipinos—forced abroad and commodified by their country’s Labour Export Policy—and other Third World people are denied their right to “life, liberty and security of person” guaranteed by the 1948 United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Canada is one of the host countries benefiting from the cheap labour of Filipino and other Third World workers, especially through the LCP. The Filipino Nurses Support Group, a pioneering advocacy group, already has contact with almost 300 non-practising Filipino nurses in British Columbia. Once in Canada, Filipino nurses and other nurses of colour 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.

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 and other foreign-trained nurses under the LCP are often forced to work 24-hours a day with little compensation. Even though they achieved professional status in their home countries, they are relegated to household work under exploitative and precarious conditions and forcibly de-skilled.



Canada has not always had such restrictive policies: in the 1960s and 1970s, Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses were able to practice their profession in Canada under reciprocity agreements. Over 15% of nurses working in BC are foreign-trained. The immigration and accreditation policies of today are created as part of the scheme to privatize health care, as Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses are de-skilled and relegated to caring for private families under the LCP and for-profit home support companies.

The struggle of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses to practice their profession is part of the broader struggle against the privatization of health and for their comprehensive human rights and equality rights as women, people of colour, and overseas workers in Canada. To forward the struggle for the equality and human rights of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses, FNSG hosted a national consultation “Advancing the rights and welfare of non-practising Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses” to coincide with International Human Rights Day. The consultation was co-sponsored by Grassroots Women, Immigrant Worker’s Centre-Montreal, Philippine

Women Centre of Ontario, and South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy.

The objectives of the consultation were to:

- 1) Share experiences, challenges, and barriers to non-practising Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses in Canada.
- 2) Develop our analysis of these experiences in the context of human and equality rights.
- 3) Develop a program of action for advocacy work at a national level that will advance the human rights and equality rights of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses.

Over 50 people attended the historic consultation representing the Philippines and the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. They represented women’s groups, unions, immigrant / migrant organizations, and nurses organizations.

The consultation proceedings contain speeches from the panel presentations, workshop discussions, and a statement of unity and plan of action.

These conference proceedings are available for \$5 from the Filipino Nurses Support Group. Send a cheque or money order with your name and address to: FNSG, 451 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6A 1G7.