

SPEECH of PHILIPPINE LABOR SECRETARY ARTURO D. BRION  
IOM – LINKAGES WITH BUSINESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
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1. Good afternoon to all IOM officials and the representatives of member and observer states now with us.
2. Allow me first to thank the IOM for giving me the opportunity to speak on the present topic and for giving my country another “exciting” migration year. I will speak about this year in my country statement later on in this conference. For now, I will dwell on our current topic – linkages with business and civil society – from the point of view of the government in a labor sending country.
3. The Philippines cannot be where it is now in migration without the support of partners who had significantly helped it along the way.
4. The primary credit of course goes to our institutional partners such as the IOM and the ILO. Less prominent because they are not often mentioned, but equally important, are our partners from business and civil society.
5. To put the linkages under discussion in context, let me start by mentioning the thrusts of Philippine migration policy; in two words, these are – REGULATION and PROTECTION. We regulate to protect all our stakeholders – the Philippines as sending state – our temporary migrants – and the receiving state, with particular emphasis on the migrant.
6. Business and civil society are currently active participants in carrying out the regulatory and protective thrusts of our policies. They will have greater roles beginning this coming year as we activate on Valentine’s Day our enhanced REINTEGRATION CENTER – our response to calls and the need for better linkages between migration and development.

7. As temporary overseas migration has developed in the Philippines, the location of job markets and the recruitment of workers have essentially been private-sector led activities. Recruitment agencies are largely businesses that the Phil Overseas Employment Administration regulates. Thus, business has a very large presence under our system. A unique character of this system is that the regulated sector is present through their chosen representatives at the highest policymaking level, i.e., at the POEA Governing Board. Likewise present are the unions and a distinct component of civil society – the women sector. It was perhaps this composition that helped us successfully put in place a new and higher minimum wage for our domestic helpers, essentially doubling the rates for this vulnerable sector of our overseas workforce.
8. Other than the POEA Governing Board, we have established a Consultative Council for Overseas Filipino Workers whose membership covers the full spectrum of businesses and civil society groups and institutions with significant stakes in migration. The members of this Council, collectively and individually, have given us the chance to feel the pulse, so to speak, of our migration community. They feed us the information that has driven the direction of our migration policies.
9. Basic in our system is the network of channels we have developed for the dissemination of pre-employment information on migration. We consider this important under the view that temporary contract migration is not a career path solely strewn with rose petals. Migration has social costs that the migrant must understand, appreciate and fully prepare for as he leaves for his or her foreign work. Thus, information on this aspect – particularly those that the local government units, the Church, the academe and NGOs provide the would-be migrants - are critical even before an application for overseas work is filed.
10. Our pre-employment information campaign is rounded off and made more concrete by country-specific PRE-DEPARTURE

ORIENTATION SEMINARS that the recruitment agencies and accredited NGOs handle together with government.

11. Onsite overseas, our partnerships are with relevant church groups, NGOs and Filipino associations providing protection and welfare services for our workers. This is initiated and coordinated through the efforts of our embassies and consulates and our network of labor attaches now found in 33 countries worldwide.

12. Outside of direct recruitment, businesses have largely assumed roles complementary to their particular business interests. Current linkages are not many but we foresee that they will grow under our enhanced reintegration initiatives.

Among the more significant ones currently in place is the tie up with one of our major banks in the issuance of overseas employment identification cards geared towards easing up the sending of remittances to the Philippines.

Our anti-illegal recruitment campaign is undertaken too with the active participation of our two major telephone companies – the Philippine Long Distance and Telephone Company and the Globe Telecom.

13. Under our coming reintegration program, enhancements will come under three main components. The first - - personal reintegration - will assist the returning individual worker in securing new jobs or livelihood activities under conditions that will maximize for our country the knowledge and experience the migrant gained abroad. This will be undertaken not only by government but particularly by NGOs; government assistance to both NGO and the migrant will be through facilitation of training delivery and access to funds.

14. Under our community reintegration – the second reintegration component - we hope to facilitate the linkages between our migrants and their local communities in the Philippines for whatever purposes they may find these linkages useful.

A working example of this is our CGMA Project under which OFWs raise money overseas for the construction of classrooms in their chosen localities in the Philippines. Another civil society group, the Fil-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, undertakes the actual construction at significantly reduced cost while a bank manages the funds while we monitor the flow of the project. We have constructed 463 classrooms so far under this program which we hope to further enhance qualitatively and quantitatively.

15. The thrust under our economic reintegration – the third component - is to help the migrant save and manage his funds through our intervention in remittances and the investment assistance we shall deliver in partnership with banks and other financial institutions. We hope, through our intervention, to lower the cost of remittances by encouraging the use of the formal banking channels. We hope too to encourage savings and thus leave the migrant financially independent when he returns to the country.
16. These, in brief, are the more significant Philippine experiences and the broad outlines of our partnership plans with business and civil society. These enhanced linkages are new landmarks in the evolution of the handling of migration in our country and will further develop, hopefully, with IOM help.