

This story came about when a lady named, Dr. Carmelita C. Ballesteros, a teaching fellow at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore sent a mass email and I was one of the recipients. She's a colleague in another publication that also publishes my column. And this is what she wrote . . .

Dear Family and Friends,

□

A group of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to which I belong has just launched a blog site.□ Please help spread the word among your family and friends who might be interested in OFW matters.□ The URL is <http://barangay-ofw.blogspot.com>.□ I hope you'll soon visit and leave a comment.□

□

Many blessings.

Signed (Carmel)

Lighting a Candle in the Dark for OFWs - MabuhayRadio

Written by Jesse Jose

Friday, 04 July 2008 04:23 - Last Updated Friday, 04 July 2008 04:38

I got curious, so visited the site, then I emailed her:

Hello Carmel,

□

I visited the site and read all your posts.□ Got a couple of questions: What happened at Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) when you left for Singapore that day?□ What did they do to you?□ And what did those people say to “DEMEAN” you and other OFWs who were leaving for overseas?□ Why did those airport officials harass you?□ Why would they do that? □□□□

□

Take care,

Signed (Jesse)

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If readers of Jesse Jose and the MabuhayRadio.com want to help, too, in lighting the candle for OFWs, please log on at: <http://barangay-ofw.blogspot.com> ... post your comments and be heard around the Internet world.

Camel answered:

Dear Jesse,

□

Thanks very much for visiting Barangay OFW. □ I wanted to forward to you my original email to former Chief Justice (CJ) Artemio V. Panganiban on June 6, 2008, but I must have deleted it.

□

Anyway, I've attached four columns by the CJ. □ They answer your questions and explain the beginnings of Barangay OFW.

□

The Immigration and POEA personnel detailed at the NAIA seem to have a THRIVING

INDUSTRY at harassing and/or coercing OFWs.

□

My brother was going to Oman last February 21st as a tourist and had a return ticket. Our sister whose family is in Oman has sponsored his visit.

□

But the immigration people refused to let him through. Forewarned about my experience, he called my son for help. A lawyer-cousin of my daughter-in-law works at the Bureau of Immigration. He called one of the CROCS (buwayas) at NAIA and told them, "Ibalato ninyo sa akin iyang tong iyan. Pinsan ko iyan."

□

My brother who had left the queue was sought out from the crowd and was escorted through the gates. It was 30 minutes before his flight.

□

What's the thriving industry? From what I hear and read in emails, the Immigration/POEA personnel at the airport ask for a boarding fee of Philippine pesos 10,000 Philippine pesos or 200 U.S. dollars. OFWs going to places like Nigeria where there's a Philippine travel ban are milking cows.

□

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The catch is they tell you to rebook your flight, but it means losing your job. So you pay up. So if I had been prepared for the scenario, I would have offered to pay or called for a VIP to help me.

□

Being treated as if I were dirt was unspeakable to me then. I really felt as if I were a bug. (From hindsight, it was nothing compared to what others have endured.) I did call on Someone. I composed myself in a corner and prayed. Then I fell in line again toward a counter staffed by a kind-looking elderly man. With no questions asked, he stamped my passport and boarding pass, "Departed."

□

When was the last time you went home to the Philippines? It's a BATTLEFIELD. And yet it's home.

□

Let's keep the faith,

Signed (Carmel)

I answered:

Hello Carmel,

□

I read those four columns of the CJ. Really, what's new? Got another question: Now that the CJ had pointed out and exposed the anomalies at the Immigration/POEA at NAIA through his columns and President Arroyo and the Secretary of Labor were already made aware of those problems, do those problems still exist? If they do, then nothing has changed. It's still a country as corrupt as ever.

□

When I joined the U.S. Navy in 1960 and left the Philippines, big time corruption already flourished! When I came back for a visit 20 years later, it was still corrupt! Ten years later when I went back for another visit, it was still corrupt! It's now 2008, it's still corrupt! Only much worst from what I hear and read.

□

Everybody in the government are THIEVES, from the Arroyos to the small time politicians. Poverty and hunger pervade all over the land. I can only weep, Carmel, for our Motherland and for all those Filipinos who are still back there, yearning to leave the Motherland behind so as to seek better lives for their families and themselves. It's so sad.

□

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Take care,

Signed (Jesse)

Carmel answered:

Dear Jesse,

□

Maraming salamat. You've invested time and heart in reading the files I attached. I understand how you feel about corruption and Filipinos dreaming of leaving the Philippines for a better place.

□

I'd like to ask you for an immense favor. Won't you please write about our Barangay OFW, our grassroots movement? I've attached a column of mine which shows why I feel committed to "Reforming the Present, Creating the Future." I can never move a huge boulder with my frail hands. Neither can you. But we can use a lever. If we do, we can move the boulder of corruption and hopelessness. Won't you help us light a candle in the dark?

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□

Most sincerely,

Signed (Carmel)

I hope that in quoting verbatim my email exchanges with Carmel, I have somehow contributed in “lighting that candle in the dark.” If readers of this column want to help, too, in lighting the candle for OFWs, please log on at: <http://barangay-ofw.blogspot.com> ... post your comment and be heard. JJ

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