



Filipino Seafarers in Global Maritime Affairs: Issues and Interventions in Philippine Diplomatic Relations

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ABSTRACT

There is little research addressing the role of Filipino seafarers in the foreign relations of the Philippines. Most of completed studies focus on socio-economic issues. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap by using historical methods to identify issues confronting Filipino seafarers and the interventions made by the government of the Philippines.

The Philippines is the world's leading supplier of highly skilled seafarers. This has placed the country in a highly respected position in the global maritime affairs. The government of the Philippines itself has set out to protect all Filipinos working overseas, whether based on land or sea. Issues of concern to Filipino seafarers have at times landed on the negotiating table when the Philippines has discussed bilateral economic agreements with its counterparts elsewhere in the world. Piracy off the coast of Africa has posed a serious threat to the sustainability of global maritime transport, particularly in terms of the risks to which seafarers are exposed. Lacking military capability, the government of the Philippines has used diplomacy to ensure the safety and security of Filipino seafarers navigating the oceans and driving the country's economy.

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1. Introduction.

The Philippines is composed of 7,107 islands scattered in 300,000 square kilometers of land and sea. The vast coastline becomes conducive for the development of maritime industry and profession. Philippine history speaks of Filipinos' long seafaring tradition [1] [2] [3] [4].

After Martial Law declaration in 1972, the government went into an organized deployment of Filipino workers. Poverty that resulted from political instability was the reason for many Filipinos to seek fortune in foreign soils. In turn, the remittance gave the economy the much needed revenue [2].

The same context applied to Filipino seafarers. Amante (n.d.) [5] of Cardiff University reported that the entry of Filipino seafarers in the global labor market was due to the stark realities in Philippine economy which included (1) huge foreign debt; (2) perennial trade deficits; (3) widespread poverty;

(4) relatively low national income per person; and (5) high unemployment.

1.1. Philippine Foreign Policy.

Republic Act 7175 mandates the DFA to implement the pillars of the country's foreign policy. One of these pillars calls for the protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare of Filipinos overseas as they are "recognized for their critical role in the country's economic and social stability" [6].

The sheer magnitude of Filipino diaspora prompts us to pursue and enhance bilateral agreements, regional arrangements and international standards affecting migrant workers [7].

Magallona of the University of the Philippines analyzed the important role of OFWs in Philippine Foreign Policy. He recounted that, "the global presence of Filipino workers has objectively become a major factor in foreign relations, which calls for a redefining of policy priorities. It calls for new perspectives on the complexity of international migration processes involving a tremendous outflow of skills and talents from developing countries into developed economies; the implications of this on

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Table 1: Number of Deployed OFW by Type of Hiring: 2008 - 2010[9]

Year	Deployed Overseas Filipino Workers by Type of Hiring		Total	% of Sea – based Workers
	Land – based	Sea – based		
2008	974,399	261,614	1,236,013	21.17
2009	1,092,162	330,424	1,422,586	23.23
2010	1,123,676	347,150	1,470,826	23.60

Source: Authors.

human rights and the breakdown of traditional diplomatic protection; and required changes in the WTO policy framework for the protection of migrants...[T]he magnitude of the Filipino migrant worker population — over seven million— makes it imperative that our diplomatic missions and consulates be more vigilant” [8].

1.2. The “Sailing Ambassadors”.

World shipping, which transports 90 percent of goods in global trade, employs about 1.2 million seafarers [8].

Statistics from the POEA shows that in 2008, out of the 1,236,013 Filipinos who went abroad as OFW, 261,614 of them were seafarers (21.17%). By 2009, the deployment increased by more than 2%. Out of the 1,422,586, 330, 424 were seafarers. In the following year (2010), an increase in the percentage was also observed. Of the 1, 470, 826 OFWs, 347,150 were seafarers.

The MARINA noted that Filipino seafarers comprised more than 33% of the world’s total maritime labor requirements [10]. Filipinos work in ships with multinational crews, but mostly with many fellow Filipinos aboard. In fact, there were even instances when full Filipino crews were common in the Asian routes [5].

Statistics on OFW remittances kept by the BSP is very telling of the significant contribution of seafarers in the national coffers.

In 2003 and 2004, the remittance of Filipino seafarers comprised to about 17.13 percent of the total remittances amounting to 1,298,223 and 1,464,930, respectively. Over the course of the eight-year period, seafarers’ remittance soared. However, the proportion of the seafarers’ contribution in relation to the land-based overseas workers dipped to almost 2 percent over the years of 2005, 2006 and 2007. The contribution picked up again by 2008 as it recorded 3, 034,553 or 18.47%. It grew steadily over 2009 and 2010 with 3,400,412 and 3,806,108, respectively.

Bautista noted that seafaring industry is one of the major components of overseas employment for Filipinos. She also took notice of the multiplier effects of seafarers’ remittances. Among others, it is the: 1) establishment of small family businesses; 2) quality education for children and dependent of Filipino seafarers; 3) ready money for hospitalization of children and other dependents; and 4) new houses with comfort of new technologies [10].

Table 2: Filipino Seafarers’ Remittances, 2003 - 2010[11]

Year	Remittance (<i>in thousand US\$</i>)		Total	% of Sea – based Workers
	Land – based	Sea – based		
2003	6,280,235	1,298,223	7,578,458	17.13
2004	7,085,441	1,464,930	8,550,371	17.13
2005	9,019,647	1,669,358	10,689,005	15.62
2006	10,812,018	1,949,290	12,761,308	15.28
2007	12,213,565	2,236,363	14,449,928	15.48
2008	13,392,301	3,034,553	16,426,854	18.47
2009	13,947,640	3,400,412	17,348,052	19.60
2010	14, 956, 881	3,806,108	18, 762, 989	20.29

Source: Authors.

2. Philippine Participation in Global Maritime Affairs.

2.1. IMO Membership.

The IMO was established in 1948. The IMO is the first and only international body devoted exclusively to maritime matters [12]. The Philippines became a member on November 9, 1964 [13].

The East Asian Subregional Presence Office is located in Manila. The Philippine - based office covers 15 countries including Brunei Darussalam, North Korea, Lao, Mongolia, Singapore, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, Japan, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, and Viet Nam.

The Philippines also enjoys high regard from members of the organization. Since 1997, the country has been re-elected to the International Maritime Organization Council under Category “C” where 20 governments representing all major geographical areas of the world have special interests in maritime transport and navigation [14].

The latest election of the Philippines to the council, Ambassador Enrique Manalo, Philippine Permanent Representative to IMO affirms “the high regard the 170-member UN organization has on the country. Manalo said that the move “recognizes our status as the primary provider of seafarers to the global maritime fleet and our active contribution in the areas concerning the human element and maritime security, specifically in combating piracy” [15].

2.2. 2010 Diplomatic Conference on STCW Convention.

The Philippines is a force in the international maritime affairs. On June 21 – 25, 2010, the Philippines hosted the Diplomatic Conference to review the STCW Convention at the PICC [16].

The five-day meeting gathered some 600 delegates and representatives from member maritime nations and organizations. It is said to be “the first ever major IMO event held outside of London.” The Philippine sent Vice President Noli De Castro to speak before the event [17].

Efthimios Mitropoulos, IMO Secretary-General underscored the crucial role of the Philippines in the international maritime industry. It was during this conference that the Philippines is recognized for its contribution “to shipping and the international seaborne trade, and to pay our due tribute to the Filipino seafarers, past and present... they are the unsung heroes of an unsung industry” [18].

The conference was meant “to upgrade seafarers’ training and protect their health by guaranteeing them with adequate rest periods” [19].

The IMO Diplomatic Conference in Manila agreed on amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention). The amendments are officially referred to as the “Manila Amendments.”

Some of the major changes contained include the following:

1. Revised requirement on hours of work and rest and new requirements for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, as well as updated standards relating to medical fitness standards for seafarers;
2. Improved measures to prevent fraudulent practices associated with certificates of competency and strengthen the evaluation process;
3. New certification requirements for able seafarers;
4. New training and certification requirements for electro-technical officers;
5. Updating of competence requirements for personnel serving on board all types of tankers, including new requirements for personnel serving on liquefied gas tankers [20].

3. Seafarers in Philippine Diplomacy.

3.1. Seafarers in Philippine - Japan Relations.

The Japan - Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) is one single most important bilateral agreement between the Philippines and Japan in recent years. Although it has not specifically included labor exchange and human resource development as one among its scope, it has also provided for training and education of Filipino seafarers on board Japanese ships. Indeed, it is the effect of Filipino seafarers’ most important role in Japanese shipping industry. According to Amante, about 72 percent of the seafarers on board Japanese ships are Filipinos. This arrangement, he claims, “...provide[s] an excellent example of how the labor dimension could actually work for the mutual benefit of both Japan and the Philippines” [18].

In 2006, there were 24,727 Filipino seafarers in Japanese ships – the rest are from India, China, Indonesia and other nationalities. The Japanese ship-owners expect a shortage of seafarer officers, and 8,000 new Filipinos are needed. There are rich issues for fruitful negotiations, on how the Philippines could meet Japan’s demand for seafarers. Quality training must be strictly enforced to match global standards, given that most Philippine maritime education and training institutions need to improve learning equipment and curriculum.

Amante (2007) relates that “Japan’s merchant shipping fleet consists of about 2,000 ships, and the number did not change in the past decade... Philippine seafarers are 72 percent of the total 34,268 crew in 1,659 vessels... Japanese shipping would therefore require 25,000 additional crew members. They expect the Philippines to supply about 80 percent of this crew requirement” [18].

In 2006, a whopping 38 percent share of the total OFW earnings from Japan was recorded, coming from a 5.2 percent

share four years before. On the other hand, “remittances from seafarers deployed in Japanese ships increased by 585 percent (almost six times), during the same period.”

Japan’s shipping industry provides enormous assistance in the area of seafarer training.

In addition, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) gave technical and financial assistance to upgrade Philippine maritime education and training institutions.

3.2. Seafarers in Philippines - EU Relations.

In June 2002, the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs of the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs and the Philippine Seafarers’ Assistance Programme (PSAP) organized the “International Conference on The Filipino Seafarer in the 21st Century: Issues and Interests Aboard and Ashore.” The conference was held in Rotterdam, The Netherlands on June 20, 21, 22, 2002 [19].

The Philippine delegation was composed of OUMWA Undersecretary Merlin Magallona, Representatives Roseller Bari-naga, Ernie Clarete, and Jose Apolinario Lozada. Other officials of the DFA included Clemencio Monesa, Philippine Ambassador to Brussels and the European Union, together with Consul Eduardo Menez and Labour Attache George Eduvala of the Philippine Embassy in the Hague, Atty. Gilberto Asuque, Minister at the Philippine Embassy in London and the then representative of the Philippines to the IMO, and Director Corazon Rodolfo of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, Philippine Consuls-General Henk Meijboom (Rotterdam) and Eppo Horlings (Amsterdam).

The Dutch Government institutions were represented by Dr. Ger Nieuwpoort and Mr. Geert Besier of the Dutch Ministry of Transport and Mr. Peter Dankers of the Rotterdam Social Welfare Department.

The SIRC at Cardiff University was represented by Dr. Tony Lane, SIRC Director; Dr. Erol Kahveci; senior researcher; and Dr. Maragtas Amante, research fellow.

Key institutions and international organizations were represented by the following: Dani Appave, ILO; Stephen Cotton and Ruud Touwen, ITF; Simon Bennett, ISF; Rev. Berend van Dijken, on behalf of the church missions and the ICSW Presidium; Dr. Joseph Abesamis, IMHA. Solidarity was expressed by the president of the Dutch Seafarers Federation, Ed Sarton. Arend Boer, managing director of the Maritime Hotel in Rotterdam was also there.

Likewise in the church contingent were: Rev. Jorgedy Bago, Chaplain at the Antwerp International Seafarers Center and Rev. Roy Paul of the Mersey Mission to Seamen in the UK, and Rev. Dolf Leatomu, Rotterdam port Chaplain.

Assistant director Erling Isaksen of the Norwegian Government Seamen’s Service gave an informative presentation. Dr. Olaf Jansen and Dr. Fabienne Knudsen were present on behalf of the Maritime Medicine Institute in Denmark. The Netherlands’ Shipbuilding Industry Association was represented by PSAP’s close friend, Pieter ‘t Hart.

Representation from Philippine NGOs was led by Ms. El-lene Sana of Kakammpi, Ms. Rosario Canete of Unlad Kabayan,

and Ms. Lourdes Ceniza of the Seafarers' Families Caregivers Association. Also there was Joe Valencia of Kasapi Seafarers Assistance Programme based in Athens, Greece. Other representatives from non-governmental groups included Carlo Butalid (Pasali Seafarers Cooperative), Corrie Llamas (United Filipino Seafarers), Manuel Singson (Concerned Seamen of the Philippines). The African Seafarers Assistance Network was represented by Fred Mensah and Simon Dossa.

The conference resulted to the Rotterdam Declaration which outlined the conclusions and recommendations of the conference on the three themes: 1) international labor market for Filipino seafarers, 2) governance, 3) and rights and well-being.

Another salient issues in the Philippine – EU Relations is the recognition of Filipino seafarers' STCW certificates. This move translates to employment opportunities on-board EU – flagged vessels.

In March 2006, the European Union Council conducted an inspection to check on the Philippines' "possible non – compliance" to the STCW Convention. On February 27, 2009, the result of this inspection reflected a possible non – compliance particularly in the aspects of quality standards system, monitoring of maritime education and training institutions. The result was communicated to the Philippine government by Fotis Karamitsos, Director for Maritime Transport of the European Union [20].

The EU agency requested the Philippine government to provide by May 15, 2009 its response and to substantiate any corrective measures undertaken by the latter to address the deficiencies in the STCW's implementation. By May 22, 2009, the Philippine government had submitted its response. European Council Head of Delegation to the Philippines Alistair McDonald informed the government that DG – *TREN (presently known as Directorate – General for Mobility and Transport (DM- MOVE))* requested for a follow – up inspection by the European Maritime Safety Agency to be slated between February 1 – 20, 2010 [20].

By April 2010, the European Maritime Safety Agency conducted an audit of Philippine maritime schools and "reported its findings on gross deficiencies" [21].

By May 5, 2011, EMSA told the Foreign Affairs Department of the country's non – compliance with the International Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers (STCW). It threatened the country of withdrawing its recognition on STCW certificates of Filipino seafarers unless corrective measures were implemented by August 30, 2011 [22].

Any negative directive from the EMSA would be a severe blow against vessels employing Filipino seafarers. Through the EMSA, the European Union can block EU – flagged ships employing over 240,000 Filipino seafarers to enter and dock in EU territorial waters. In the end, this would translate to loss of employment opportunities to Filipino seafarers [21]. As of 2009, DOLE records revealed that almost a quarter of the total seafarer deployment was listed under EU member-state's flag of registry [23].

With the threat, the Philippine Labor department submitted its report of compliance to the Directorate- General for Mo-

bility and Transport (DM- MOVE) of the European Commission through the Philippine Embassy in Belgium. Philippine Ambassador to Belgium Enrique Manalo submitted the report to DM – MOVE Deputy Zoltan Kazatsay four days before the deadline would expire.

Among the compliance forwarded by the Philippine government was the closure of long – established yet poorly compliant maritime school [20].

In September 2010, industry observers applauded President Aquino's attempt to visit Belgium to personally lobby for a favorable response from the EMSA. But to the dismay of some, the trip was cancelled two days before [24]. According to some observers, the supposed visit would help "reload" the Philippine relations and engagement with the European Union and the Belgian government through the issues embodied by Filipino seafarers [20].

3.3. Seafarers in Philippines - Norway Relations.

The maritime sector is one of the most important aspects of RP-Norway bilateral relations, dating back to the 1900's. Today, Norwegian ship owners employ approximately 35,000 Filipino seafarers in shipyards or on board Norwegian owned or controlled vessels, a testimonial to the trust and confidence Norwegian shipowners have placed over the years for Filipino seafarers. Despite the global economic crisis that ravaged the shipping industry in 2008 and 2009, this area of employment has not slackened. Filipino seafarers benefit as well from the education and training provided by sophisticated Norwegian maritime training schools in the Philippines. Norwegian ship owners have been building and repairing vessels in Philippine shipyards. Many companies engaged in the maritime sector have put up offices in the Philippines [25].

The relationship between the Philippines and Norway is also seen in the latter's efforts to pamper Filipino maritime industry leaders. On October 14, 2011, King Harald V of Norway, through his Ambassador, presented Royal Norwegian Order of Merit to Dr. Mary Lou L. Arcelo of John B. Lacson Foundation Maritime University. The award was given in recognition of her "successful endeavors toward fruitful and mutually beneficial maritime cooperation." [26].

According to Ambassador Knut Solem, the relationship between the Philippines and Norway "have been strengthened with the common tradition of seafaring" through the efforts of Arcelo and for to creating "one of the world's leading maritime educational institutions that have produced competent seafarers serving on board Norwegian ships sailing worldwide" [27].

This event had made it in the Norwegian Embassy's official website in the Philippines that carried the praises of the Ambassador to the works of Arcelo in "developing maritime relations between Norway and the Philippines" [28].

3.4. Forging of Relations through Recognition of Filipino Seafarers.

The Philippines is actively promoting the welfare of Filipino seafarers through signing of memoranda of agreement with other countries on recognition of certificate of competency.

The country has existing bilateral agreements with at least 45 countries on the recognition of Filipino seafarers' certificates pursuant to Regulation I/10 of the STCW Convention. These agreements alone would make up the economic ties of the Philippines with the following countries situated in several continents around the globe. There are at least fifty countries [29].

In Africa, the country has a standing agreement on the recognition of Filipino seafarers' certificate of competency with Egypt, South Africa, Eritrea, and Liberia. In Europe, with Portugal, Switzerland, Poland, Ukraine, Belgium, Georgia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Netherlands, Hellenic Republic (Greece), Sweden, Malta, Norway, and Italy. In Australasia and Pacific, with Qatar, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei, Japan, Iran, Malaysia, Cyprus, Australia, Marshall Islands, and Vanuatu. In South America, Panama, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, Commonwealth of Dominica, Belize, Barbados, Isle of Man, Antigua and Barbuda, and the Bahamas [24].

These bilateral agreements are "essential to the continued employment of Filipino seafarers in the international maritime industry" [30].

3.5. *Diplomacy and Seafarers' Labor Rights.*

In April 2010, Greek principals abandoned 12 Filipino seafarers in Spain. According to report, MV Nafto Cement XVI, Greek-owned ship was apprehended by port authorities when it docked at the Port of Valencia in Spain because of unpaid claims from various creditors. The 12 Filipino seamen employed by the ship claimed that they were not paid their on-board salaries and overtime pay for eight months, including allotments to their families. They were also stranded in Valencia, Spain for about four months before they were repatriated back to the country [31]. As remedy, the Philippine government filed a complaint with the International Labor Organization. This incident is very telling of government's desire to use diplomatic channels to reach out to erring principal. Labor Secretary Baldoz said: "We would like the international maritime community to know that we will not allow this kind of maltreatment among Filipino seafarers" [30].

4. Piracy and the Philippine Government Interventions.

No other part in the world today where piracy is more rampant in any recorded history than in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. And because Filipino seafarers comprised more than a quarter of world's maritime workers, they are the most exposed to these violent and unlawful acts.

4.1. *Philippine Diplomatic Missions in the Forefront of African Piracy.*

Diplomacy is the only tool that can be used by the Philippine government to protect Filipino seafarers who pass by the pirate-infested waters of Africa.

The Philippine missions are located in Cairo, Nairobi, Tripoli, Abuja, and Pretoria. Of these missions, Nairobi handles cases

of hostages of Somali pirates while Abuja handles cases of piracy in West Africa [32].

Apart from Kenya, the embassy in Nairobi oversees Philippine bilateral relations with Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasha), Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia [33].

According to government estimates, at least one in every five Filipino seafarers passed through the pirates-infested Gulf of Aden and Somali coast [10].

The Philippine government's interventions to minimize the exposure of Filipino seafarers to piracy attacks could be summed up in the following: 1) making arrangements with ship principals and manning agencies for vessels to travel along a safety corridor, 2) in case of being hijacked and kidnapped, coordinate with the same principals and agencies for the early and safe release of the Filipino seafarers, and 3) adopt best management practices as a deterrence to piracy attacks [34].

These policies are shown in Philippine government's attitude toward the handling of the following piracy incident involving Filipino seafarers.

All the embassies located in Africa and Europe would already know what to do in case a ship with Filipino crew were hijacked and kidnapped. This is coordinate with the principals and agencies for the early and safe release of the Filipino seafarers. This is shown in the incidents involving MT Mattheos when the DFA has instructed the embassy in Abuja, Nigeria to make the representation with the Nigerian government [34].

In the MV Pacific Express incident, crew members lost their passports and seamen's books when pirates burned them. The embassy in Nairobi, Kenya was ordered to provide consular assistance to these seafarers. In incident was reported in Philippine embassies in Manama, Bahrain and Athens, Greece [35].

The same intervention was adapted by the Philippine government in the hijacking incident involving MV EMS River on December 27, 2010. Gaudencio Collado, the Philippine Foreign Liaison Officer to the Combined Maritime Command based in Bahrain, has coordinated with the naval authorities to resolve the case [36].

On May 11, 2011, a Filipino seafarer named Christopher Cortez Ceprado was found dead on a Marshall Island-flagged ship four days after it was attacked by pirates at a port in West Africa's Benin. Ceprado was among the fifteen Filipino crewmembers of chemical tanker MT Sea King. Reports claimed that heavily armed pirates on May 7 boarded while docked in Cotonou, Benin. The pirates looted the vessel and even the personal effects of the crew were taken.

DFA has also coordinated with the Benin government through the embassy in Abuja, Nigeria for the investigation of his death. No other crew members were reported hurt [37].

4.2. *Efforts to Protect Seafarers Against Piracy.*

In 2009, the government initially thought of implementing "deployment ban on Filipino sailors on ships passing through the Gulf of Aden" [38]. However, it did not push through with the move considering its "reaching effects in the global maritime trade and in the domestic economy" [10]. Global industry

leaders had also made an appeal to Philippine authorities to reconsider its policy saying that “[i]f the Philippines were to suspend the sending of, or limit the travel of, seafarers to the pirate area, that would definitely disrupt world shipping” [38].

Government responses were stipulated on the following: 1) reliance on the issuance of various flag state advisories, 2) Inter-Agency consultations, 3) Creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships by the Office of the President, and 4) Donation of US\$ 20,000 to the UN Trust Fund to support Somali security in the fight against piracy.

It did not deploy any Philippine naval ship to escort ships in pirate-infested waters but deployed a naval officer.

4.3. Combined Maritime Forces in Manama, Bahrain.

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) is a multi-national naval partnership of 25 countries based in Manama, Bahrain [39]. Among its purpose is to help secure shipping lanes in the Middle East against piracy [40].

In 2010, the government deployed Navy Commander Gaudencio Collado as the country’s liaison officer. The country is not a member of CMF so the country has limited access on planning and programming. The access is only on the number of sailors being pirated [41].

In January 2011, CMF Chief of Staff Captain Chris S. Chambers visited the country to discuss the CMF’s security operations and command, the operations of the Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 and its counter-piracy campaign plan. The meeting was attended by representatives from shipping companies, seafarers and manning agencies, concerned government agencies, other stakeholders in the maritime industry [42].

4.4. Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia.

The Filipino seafarers are in the mind of Philippine diplomats when it decided to participate in the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). The Group on was created on January 14, 2009 pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851.

The Contact Group held its first meeting in January 2009 and identified six tasks for itself: 1) improving operational and information support to counter-piracy operations, 2) establishing a counter-piracy coordination mechanism, 3) strengthening judicial frameworks for arrest, prosecution and detention of pirates, 4) strengthening commercial shipping self-awareness and other capabilities, 5) pursuing improved diplomatic and public information efforts, and 6) tracking financial flows related to piracy.

In support of these goals, four working groups make recommendations at periodic meetings of the Contact Group secretariat on relevant military/operational, judicial, diplomatic, and public information aspects of regional and international anti-piracy efforts. The goals of these efforts are to improve operational coordination, information sharing, and the effectiveness of legal enforcement activities among all international actors combating piracy in the region.

The membership of the CGPCS has grown to approximately 60 member governments and seven regional organizations. CGPCS meetings in 2010 provided updates on the efforts of working groups and made a number of suggestions and appeals. It includes the following: 1) calling for further donations to counter-piracy trust funds that support regional capacity building; 2) requesting additional maritime patrol aircraft, oil tankers, helicopter-capable ships and military Vessel Protection Detachments and boarding teams; and 3) identifying the need for more robust global efforts to track and freeze proceeds and support funds associated with piracy.

These requests dovetail with the findings of the September 2010 GAO report referenced above, which called on the U.S. government to improve interagency coordination and program monitoring to improve performance in these areas. Some of the international community’s efforts to address CGPCS suggestions are discussed in this report. The Contact Group’s most recent meeting was held in March 2011 in New York. Earlier that month, the United States convened an ad hoc meeting to develop a strategy and action plan to address the financial aspects of piracy [43].

This voluntary, ad hoc international forum brings together countries, organizations, and industry groups with an interest in combating piracy. Participating states seek to coordinate political, military, and other efforts to bring an end to piracy off the coast of Somalia and to ensure that pirates are brought to justice. The Group meets three times a year at the United Nations, while its four Working Groups meet regularly around the world to develop and implement national counter-piracy policies and programs.

Nearly 70 countries and several international organizations participate in the Contact Group, including the African Union, the Arab League, the European Union, the International Maritime Organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and various departments and agencies of the United Nations [44].

It should be noted that the Philippines did not send any warship to comprise the naval arsenals guarding the safety of ships cruising near the Horn of Africa. Instead, the country had “made a modest contribution to the Trust Fund of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia.” [13].

4.5. ILO Convention 185.

ILO C185 of the International Labor Organization came into existence in 2003. It took notice of “seafarers need [for] special protection” [45]. There had calls for the ratification of the said convention [46].

In an effort to protect the seafarers, President Benigno S. Aquino III has ratified the International Labor Organization Convention 185 or the Seafarers’ Identity Document (SID). This convention required ILO member – countries to issue new SIDs that conforms to the requirements specified in ILO SID – 0002, the standard which puts in place a comprehensive security system that enables the first global implementation of biometric identification technology on mandatory basis, thus enabling positive identification of the seafarer that holds the document [47].

Under ILO C185, the new SID carries a fingerprint – based biometric template, aside from the normal physical features for

a modern machine – readable identity document. This new SID must conform to an international standard enabling the biometric templates on a SID issued by one country to be correctly read by devices used in other country.

According to Labor Secretary Rosalinda D. Baldoz, the ratification ensures Filipino seafarers security and continued employment.

The foreign policy of the country aims to protect its economic rights and more importantly the socio – economic welfare of all Filipino working overseas whether land – based or sea – based. The government has to do this to safeguard the “goose that lays the golden egg” for the Philippine economy through the billions of dollars in remittance.

Conclusion

The Philippines is the world's leading supplier of highly skilled seafarers. This translates to Filipino seafarers comprising almost half of the total OFW remittance and its undeniable contribution to the socio – economic development of the country. This has also placed the country to a position of high respect in the International Maritime Organization.

The plight of Filipino seafarers has at times landed in the negotiating tables when the Philippines discussed bilateral economic agreements with its counterparts anywhere in the world, particularly with countries comprising the European Union and neighboring country of Japan. Piracy off the coast of Africa has posed a serious threat to the sustainability of global maritime transport, particularly in terms of the risks to which seafarers are exposed. Lacking military capability, the government of the Philippines has used diplomacy to ensure the safety and security of Filipino seafarers navigating the oceans and driving the country's economy.

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