



FEDERATION OF FREE WORKERS

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STATEMENT ON FORCED LABOUR¹

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this Launching of the Global Report, appropriately entitled *“A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*

The Report Launching can be as important as a Global Campaign that should follow to educate people on the indecency and indignity of any form of forced labour, both in their traditional as well as newer forms.

That the Philippine Senate newly ratified the Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour indicates confidence by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines that our law and practice are mostly compliant with the Convention.

Even then, both traditional and newer forms of forced labour still exist in our country.

In the days when martial law reigned, some of our members who have been detained were forced to labour by the military authorities, to clean their vehicles and their offices.

Even until now, one observes that certain police officers use detainees to help construct their homes and offices.

For ages, some child and adult domestic workers have been forced into domestic work in order to pay for their indebtedness and the indebtedness of their parents.

Even if unsanctioned, the use of prisoners to labor in certain export-oriented farms continue to be practiced, unless exposed in public by the media.

These traditional forms of forced labour are more easily understood by the public at large and are therefore more readily condemned.

Not so, the newer forms.

The absence of freedom of choice in employment, for example, which results in stunting the personal growth of all who work can result in the indecency of work or in lessening the dignity of the human being; likewise, that being's potential to develop into a person.

¹ Message of Mr. Ramon J. Jabar, National President of the Federation of Free Workers (FFW-BTU-WCL), to the Launching of the Report on Forced Labour, organized by the the ILO Manila-SRO, on July 5, 2005. Delivered by Jose Cayobit, FFW National Treasurer

Hazardous and unsafe work can equally be aligned with forced hard labor by prisoners of crimes and conscience; these having the same effect in the end. Poverty forces workers to accept degrading work.

Yet there are more: such as groups of workers forcibly detained by their employers to work and live inside company compounds, not only to ensure their productivity but also to prevent them from being unionized. This is not theory; the practice, in fact, has been exposed to the public by vigilant media. Workers hostages by management during strikes, whether voluntarily or involuntary, in order to maintain production schedules are not much better.

Studies done by our own Philippine Social Institute on children working in the mining pits of Diwalwal show aspects of forced labor, but more insidious ones, in that they destroy the physical, intellectual and moral growth of children.

Many overseas performing artists sent to Japan, until lately when recruitment and placement have been abated by the laws on anti-trafficking, are forced by poverty, and by their own parents, to work as guest relations officers, under humanly degrading working conditions just so they can pay-off the debts of their families, and uplift them from degrading conditions in their life of poverty.

There is then the link of forced labor and poverty: that even ordinary workers in the course of earning their living are forced to labor in hand-to-mouth existence, for love of living, and to tide their families over the next meal.

Poverty among workers has been convincingly shown as emanating from underemployment in sub-profitable firms producing lower value-added products. It is in the same firms where forced labour, in both its traditional and newer forms, continue unabated.

Both traditional and its newer forms, forced labour, therefore, is anathema to Decent Work. Conversely, it is Decent Work that will finally abolish forced labour.

It is why the Federation of Free Workers has been closely working with the social partners and the ILO to sustain and expand the Decent Work Programme for the Philippines, now on its second cycle of implementation.

For indeed, when people are finally given the “opportunity to work productively under conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” the act of forced labour is automatically abolished.