

MHC head named as UN rep for migration, human rights

Written by Administrator
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ARNEDO VALERA

Filipino-American lawyer Arnedo S. Valera has recently been appointed United Nations Representative for Migration and Human Rights by the Foundation for the Support of the U.N. (FSUN) in New York.

In this capacity, the Washington, D.C.-based attorney, who is one of the executive directors of Migrant Heritage Commission (MHC), will actively participate in international meetings, conferences and panel discussions that tackle human rights and migration issues.

Valera, along with Janet Salazar of FSUN, met with Philippine Permanent Representative to the U.N. Ambassador Libran Cabactulan in New York to discuss ways on how to best secure and protect Filipino migrants in America.

“Forging a genuine partnership is a big challenge on the issue on human rights and migration,” Valera said.

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“But we have to find creative ways for partnerships between governments, NGOs and the civil society to understand fully well the nature of migration and why human and labor trafficking is a serious global problem.”

For her part, Salazar emphasized the importance of immigrants both to their home countries and the countries where they work.

“Thus, governments must find ways that they are protected and given due recognition,” she said.

The Philippines ranks second in the watch list on human and labor trafficking worldwide for the past two years.

In response to this, the MHC has recently lobbied for Philippine Senate to pass a law protecting the rights of migrant workers in a Magna Carta for Migrant Workers.

Valera also asked Cabactulan to call for the audit of the billion pesos designated as reserve and assistance funds for overseas Filipino workers and migrants which have remained unaccounted for by the previous administration.

“These funds, if used properly, can help immigrants in dire situations,” Valera said.

Cabactulan expressed openness to forging partnerships with the NGOs and the civil society as a whole and said that he will make the necessary recommendations to government on human rights and migration issues.

Valera attended the 24th General Assembly of CoNGO — Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations — in Consultative Relationship with the U.N. on Jan. 17-19 at the UN headquarters, where a broad range of issues covering gender equality, education, governance and racial equality, were tackled.

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MHC is headed by three executive directors, Valera, Grace Valera-Jaramillo and Jesse A. Gatchalian, all recipients of the Twenty Outstanding Filipinos in America/Abroad (TOFA) Award.

It is a service-oriented organization that provides legal, financial, health and language access programs to migrants in the D.C. area.

Last month, the three participated in the panel discussions of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) at the U.N.

MHC's programs which covers legal assistance, medical and health program, cultural development, education and literacy, social welfare, and communications, publications and research are geared toward addressing the increasing concerns of immigrants in the U.S.

Founded on Dec. 30, 2005, MHC is supported by various partner organizations, numerous committed volunteers and designated envoys for unity and service nominated from among the leaders and key members of the immigrant community.

Born in Quezon City and raised in Pasig City, Valera earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Santo Tomas, where he was a consistent dean's scholar, and his law degree from Ateneo De Manila University, where he was a dean's lister and co-captain of the senior debating team.

He was the main counsel for farmers who died in the infamous Mendiola Massacre before accepting an academic scholarship at Columbia University in New York under the auspices of Ford Foundation and Asia Foundation.

In 1990, he completed his master's degree in international affairs with international law and human rights as his field of specialization.

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He continued to deliver lectures on the human rights conditions in the Philippine in several universities, including Harvard Law School and Columbia University School of International Affairs.

While waiting for his New York Bar Examinations result, he interned at a small law firm in Falls Church, Virginia.

In 1993, after passing the New York Bar, he organized and immediately started his private law practice with immigration, bankruptcy and discrimination as the areas of specialization.

He is married to Elizabeth Evangelista Babiera of Davao and they have two sons: Alexander Philip Valera and Joshua Rafael Valera.