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SPEECH BY
PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
AT THE CEREMONIAL SIGNING OF THE MAGNA CARTA OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS

[Delivered at the Ceremonial Hall, Malacañan Palace in Manila | 23 September 2024]

Maraming salamat sa ating Kalihim ng Department of Labor and Employment, Secretary Benny Laguesma.

Nandito rin ang ating Senate President, Senate President Chiz Escudero and many of the members of the Senate, all of whom have worked very hard --- actually the entire legislature have worked very hard for this bill that we have just now signed into law; the House Speaker is also here with us, House Speaker Martin Romualdez; Transport Secretary Jaime Bautista; Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Cacdac and the other members of the Cabinet who are here with us; the Presidential Legislative Advisor Mark Llandro Mendoza; my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Today, we gather for this Ceremonial Signing of the Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers—an act that transcends what we have seen today, just mere ink and paper. It’s way beyond that.

It is not just a tribute to our seafarers’ sacrifices --- not just now but over the many, many, many decades when they established themselves as the first overseas Filipino workers, before the term OFW had even been coined. It is a tribute to their sacrifices but a ca --- not only a tribute to their sacrifices but a call to weave together a future that they can be proud of—one where their voices are heard, their rights are upheld, [and] their families feel the support of a nation that understands the weight of their duty.

More than helping economic --- just economic growth --- helping drive just economic growth, our seafarers are the heartbeat of countless Filipino families.

They are, in many ways, the heroes of the modern world—linking bridges between nations, connecting markets, [and] carrying the Filipino spirit in every corner of the globe.

But behind every voyage lies a reality that we, as a nation, have too often overlooked.

Long way away from their homes and their families, the weight of isolation, of unpredictable conditions, countless threats to their safety and their security – especially this past year, with what is happening around the world, especially in the Red Sea.

Cargo ships and tankers traveling along that route have been attacked with missiles and with gun boats. Last month, it happened once again with a Greek oil tanker.

And these are not just occupational hazards; they are actual human experiences.

So, today's signing of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers is our collective acknowledgment of these sacrifices.

It is our way of telling our seafarers, "We see you, we hear you, and we are here to support you." *[applause]*

This would not have been possible without the dedication of our legislators in bolstering seafarers' rights, addressing their challenges, [and] empowering their dreams. For this, we thank you all. *[applause]*

This Administration also extends its gratitude to all stakeholders who shared their insights to make this law even more comprehensive.

Our different perspectives helped us produce this Magna Carta that encompasses our shared goal: to make Filipino seafarers, the industry, and the country prosper both in domestic and international waters.

At its core, this new law aims to uphold the fundamental rights of our overseas seafarers: their right to fair wages, safe working conditions, and skills and competency development, amongst others.

But let us not lose sight of what these rights mean.

Fair wages are not just about numbers on a paycheck; they are about the dignity of being compensated fairly for one's hard work and dedication.

Safe working conditions are not just about compliance; they are about ensuring that every overseas seafarer who sets sail will come home safely.

Skills development is not just a provision in the law; it is about upgrading their qualifications to promote career growth, it is about providing them tools, training, and support to become more competitive both here and abroad.

When we speak of protection, we speak of shielding our seafarers not only from the perils of the sea, but from exploitation and discrimination that have too often been tolerated.

Specifically, the Magna Carta will strengthen our legal framework to ensure that Filipino seafarers receive adequate training, secure contracts, just wages, and fair benefits.

This will seamlessly align with the Standards for Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping or STCW, as well as the accepted global maritime labor laws.

By creating a more robust certification process, we ensure that our seafarers are not just compliant but exceptional and equipped to meet the demands of an evolving maritime industry.

Clear protocols for grievances and disputes are also enforced to help resolve issues and concerns of our seafarers.

This Magna Carta will also strengthen the role of our maritime institutions and stakeholders by setting the standards for the quality of accommodation, food, medical care, and other services that are provided for seafarers.

To protect our seafarers from unfair labor practices, we are also setting up mechanisms so that a Filipino seafarer is not just any other worker but a valued professional whose rights are protected by our laws.

By prohibiting the imposition of recruitment, placement, visa or other related fees, we hope to alleviate some of the financial struggles that our seafarers even --- that they have to go through even before they board a vessel to set sail in international waters.

This law also confronts the emerging challenges of modern seafaring, including digitalization and automation.

As technology reshapes the maritime landscape, the Magna Carta ensures that our seafarers are equipped with skills to navigate the future of the industry.

It commits to lifelong learning and skills development, recognizing that the seafarer must not just adapt but prosper in a rapidly changing and evolving world.

To every seafarer, this is for you.

You are the embodiment *[applause]*... Seafarers are the embodiment of the *Bagong* Filipino spirit—resilient, hopeful, and always moving forward.

So, as you navigate the unpredictable waters of your journey, remember that your country stands with you, proudly cheering you on, and working tirelessly to ensure that every voyage you take is safer, fairer, and more dignified.

This is our pledge: to sail with you, every step of the way, until you find your way home safely back to the *Bagong Pilipinas*. *[applause]*

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay ang ating mga seafarers! Maraming salamat at magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat. [applause]

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