

## Apostleship of the Sea- Manila

### AQUARTER OF A MILLION FILIPINO SEAFARERS WANT TO BE COUNTED, VALUED AND HEARD IN THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS –ABSENTEE VOTING IS THEIR RIGHT

More than 200,000 Filipino seafarers are at sea at any given time, all around the world. They are hailed as the “heroes of the sea” because they inject more than One (1) billion dollars a year into the economy of the Philippines (or 12% of the total contribution by the OFWs). To recognize their contribution and honor their role in this country and throughout the world, the former President Fidel Ramos instituted by Presidential Decree a one-day a year as the National Seafarers’ Day (last Sunday of September).

The Maritime and Labor Sectors of our Government and Industry have extensively labor lately to insure the continuation of the Filipino seafarers dominance in the world.

The Apostleship of the Sea and all NGOs concerned in the proper legal protection and the welfare of our Filipino seafarers are astounded by the lip-service and double-standard of our politicians when it comes to protect and facilitate their constitutional rights as citizens to vote.

There are embassies and consulates all over the world. These should have been empowered long time ago by proper legislation to receive their ballots as absentee voters. In fact, the seafarers hardly approach them even in case of need thus indicating that relations with their nationals abroad must improve and become trustworthy.

There are about 400 Manning agents in the Philippines who supposedly should not only deploy seafarers but ensure proper coordination between them, their families and their country. Sad to say, these manning agents have less pride for their nationals than for their foreign principals.

There is the Constitution of the Philippines that enshrines their rights to vote. But those wielding the power in government have more concern for those whose vote they can swindle than to protect the very foundation of a democratic government –through electoral voting.

We, the Apostleship of the Sea and concerned NGOs, believe that:

- the exercise of the right to vote must not be discriminatory nor selective;
- it is unconstitutional that it should have been denied to seafarers in service all this long;
- Embassies and consulates must deserve the trust of their citizens and be at their service;
- A proper machinery can be put in place to preserve the sanctity and confidentiality of the votes;

-If the present political people in government will not act now for the passing of the Absentee voting bill, they show their true color: their interest in power more than the democratic rights of their constituents.

The present members of the government must not fear the abuses of the absentee voting nor be apprehensive of the ways to safeguard the sanctity of the ballots. These motives to delay the passage of the bill are only a cover-up of some malpractices initiated not by the citizens but by their people in government. We feel assured that the exercise of voting by the OFWs, land and sea-based, will serve well our country and our government.

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