

# Church workers warn Filipinos against illegal work

MANILA, Philippines – Church workers in the Philippines have been training people ministering to Filipinos who could be illegally recruited to work in Iraq.

Father Edwin Corros, executive director of the Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant People, told the Asian church news agency UCA News Aug. 13 that the manuals commission workers distributed at a July session in the San Fernando Archdiocese contained guidelines for identifying agencies involved in illegal recruitment so workers would not fall victim to them.

Father Corros told UCA News that dioceses with migrant-worker departments have been given the same materials over the past three years to help them inform migrant workers and their families about the “pains and gains” of migration.

However, workers continue to fall prey to illegal recruiters, he said.

Only about 10 of the 1,200 registered recruitment agencies in the Philippines are operating legitimately, he said, adding that the rest are exploitative and many are “doing illegal activities.” He spoke of agencies charging excess placement fees to Filipino workers who are willing to work “even in Iraq.”

The San Fernando Archdiocese covers Pampanga, the home province of truck driver Angelo de la Cruz, who was kidnapped and held by militants in Iraq for two weeks in 2004.

After de la Cruz’s kidnapping, the Department of Foreign Affairs banned the deployment of Filipino workers to Iraq. Abductors freed the worker only after the Philippine government withdrew all members of a team it sent on a mission with the U.S.-led coalition that has occupied Iraq since invading it in 2003.

Edmund Ruga, the bishops’ migrants commission coordinator for Luzon, recalled conversations with migrants and their families.

“They would rather risk their lives in Iraq because their families are suffering from hunger” in the Philippines, Ruga told UCA News Aug. 9.

A Feb. 24-27 survey report from Social Weather Stations, a private research group, estimated that 3.4 million Filipino families, or about one of every five families in the country, “endure hunger.”

Recently, the Philippine and U.S. governments investigated the smuggling of

migrant workers into Iraq for the construction of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Reportedly, the Filipinos did not know they would work in Iraq but thought they would be working in Dubai hotels.