

Our Forgotten Shame in the Green Zone

Written by Reggie
Sunday, 13 April 2008 00:16

I'll admit it, I did not remember either. Even though we reported the story last year, so much has happened in Iraq that somehow I, too, had forgotten. The story, like so many others, had been swept under the proverbial rug by the corporate media, and within a day or so the world forgot about the Filipino workers in Iraq.

But a few days ago, I received a personal email from an officer serving in Iraq and housed in the Green Zone, and the story came back to me, full blast. Just a few words in the message reminded me of the forgotten horror that must be added to the countless crimes this administration is committing in Iraq.

This time around, I don't want the story to become lost in the endless melee of death and destruction that defines this useless war. I just want to put it out into the public consciousness once again, so we don't simply forget what is going on. This time around, it has to get some real attention.

The original story involved the First Kuwaiti General Trading and Contracting Company, the firm that was awarded a nearly \$600 million contract to construct the ridiculously ostentatious US Embassy compound in the Green Zone. It also involved the recruitment of thousand of foreign laborers to work on this behemoth that was to be the largest diplomatic mission in the world.

It also focused on Filipinos who were lured by offers of good jobs in Kuwait, and then transported to Iraq against their will to work in Iraq. I will not detail the entire story here because it is available at sites such as the [Migrants News Monitor](#). I will, however, reprint the statements of two former American civilian contractors of a Kuwaiti company who testified before the House Committee on oversight and government reform on allegations of waste, fraud and abuse in the construction project.

According to the testimony of John Owen, "Conditions there were deplorable, beyond what even a working man should tolerate. Foreign workers were packed in trailers tight. There was insufficient equipment and basic needs – stuff like shoes and gloves. If a construction worker needed a new pair of shoes, he was told, 'No, do with what you have' by First Kuwaiti managers. The contract for these workers said they had to work 12 hours a day 7 days a week, with some time off on Friday for prayers."

At the same hearing, Rory J. Malberry testified that he was asked to escort 51 Filipino nationals to the Kuwaiti airport and make sure they got on the same flight that he was taking to Baghdad. "Many of these Filipinos did not speak any English," he told US congressmen. "When we got to the Kuwait airport, I noticed that all of our tickets said we were going to Dubai. I asked why? The Kuwaiti manager told me that because Filipino passports do not allow Filipinos to fly to Iraq, they must be marked as going to Dubai."

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And boy, did that ever make the front pages and the network news! Sure, it did

Of course, the rest is history because the workers are still there and predictably, nothing came of the testimony, and nothing was ever done to investigate the fate of the Filipinos or any other foreign workers who serve at the behest of wealthy contractors in Iraq. And, just as predictably, the story was forgotten and the abuse and deception disappeared into the fog of war.

Until just a few days ago, when I received an email from a US Army Captain who was recently assigned to Green Zone. It began:

Hi. Here I am almost in to the middle of my tour of Operation Endurance Iraqi Freedom

And only a few lines later, here's what the Captain wrote:

I had the opportunity to visit some of the areas where the Filipino people live. These people are here to do our laundry and to clean our bathrooms and showers . They are very hard working people who have to live in very sad conditions.

They have been placed in little trailers that have small beds and they are not allowed to go out of their working places alone. They must be escorted back and forth from their work place to their 'homes' .and they must be at their gate by 10 o'clock. Filipinos have their own place to eat, travel in their own buses and they have no recreation or any other activities other than work and are not permitted to interact with others here.

And as I read the message, I remembered. And then I was ashamed to have forgotten.

I don't know what good it does to remember. Oh, I'll write the required letters and make the usual phone calls to legislators and other useless people to stir the pot a bit and see if anyone cares. But right now I am determined to remember the story and the people and the ugliness of what we have wrought.

And maybe you will remember, too.

Must Read:

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[Escape from Iraq: Filipino Migrant Worker Recounts Nightmare Flight](#)