

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 26, 2015



Filipino Workers Network

FILIPINO-CANADIAN WORKERS URGE GOVERNMENT TO FIX EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AND LABOUR LAW

Weaknesses in the *Employment Standards Act* and *Labour Law* came under criticism this week by Filipino-Canadian workers at the Changing Workplaces Review.

Represented by Ben Corpuz and Josh Cuasay, a delegation of the Filipino Workers Network gave a deputation to the advisors of the review panel held in Mississauga. Corpuz, who co-chairs the Filipino Workers Network in Toronto, drew attention to the high labour participation rate amongst Filipino-Canadians – 75%. Yet more than half of those workers are employed in precarious or vulnerable jobs, in which the worker is at the whim of the employer and lacks the rights under the *Employment Standards Act* that would normally cover Ontario workers.

“Proactive enforcement of the ESA is crucial,” suggests Corpuz. “The current system is flawed, because the government expects workers to raise labour violations, which means they risk being punished by the employer by being fired. Even if they are allowed to stay in their jobs, there will be a certain tension between them and the employer.”

Educating workers about their rights was also proposed by Corpuz in his report, with emphasis on the availability of multilingual options.

“Most newcomer workers do not understand their rights under the *Employment Standards Act*,” Corpuz noted. “The contract they sign, if there is one, is often not followed; their EI and CPP are not paid. They do not receive a paystub. At the end of the year, these workers are required to file taxes, and they end up paying their employers’ share of the EI and the CPP – because they weren’t aware of their rights.”

Josh Cuasay, a former live-in caregiver and hotel room attendant, shared her personal story. Like many other Filipino immigrants to who find work in non-unionized hotels, Cuasay’s story included horrific employment practices.

“Under the previous owner at the hotel where I work, we were treated so badly. We were not given any vacation pay or holidays. There was no sick leave. There were no benefits,” recounts

Cuasay. "Some of us were forced to clean the owner's or the manager's houses. Others were forced to clean other buildings that belonged to the owner. Those who were injured at work were simply thrown aside. We had no rights at all."

Cuasay also described how one of her co-workers, who had formerly been employed by a unionized hotel, had attempted to give her a phone number to reach the union. The employer at that hotel discovered this, however, and Cuasay's co-worker was promptly fired.

"This is what happens all the time," Cuasay lamented, "but no one seems able to do anything about it."

The story of Cuasay highlights the need for reforms of the *Labour Relations Act* to protect workers who try to unionize.

One success story, observed Corpuz, can be found in the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board. "The WSIB successfully became an enforcement regime that made both the independent contractors and the client-owner accountable for health and safety practices in the workplace." Corpuz recommends that the same model can be applied to the ESA.

Of Canada's estimated 700,000 Filipino residents, approximately 40% live and work in the Greater Toronto Area. It is crucial that the ESA and Labour Law be updated to protect these workers, who are disproportionately disadvantaged by the lack of worker protections in Ontario.



Left to right: Ben Corpuz, co-chair of Filipino Workers Network; Josh Cuasay, a Filipino hotel worker

For inquiries, contact:

Angela Zhu, Communications, Toronto & York Region Labour Council
647.232.7427 | communications@labourcouncil.ca

Toronto & York Region Labour Council,
15 Gervais Dr., Suite 407, Don Mills, ON M3C 1Y8
labourcouncil.ca