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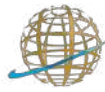
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*Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers:
Bridging the Gaps between
Standards and Capacity*

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Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers: Bridging the Gaps between Standards and Capacity

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23 June 2023—In 2021, the Philippines was reported as the top source of seafarers in the world (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2021). This is not surprising since the country is deploying more than 400,000 Filipino seafarers overseas, on average, from 2016 to 2021 (Maritime Industry Authority, 2023).

However, even with these numbers, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) flagged the country for not aligning with international maritime safety standards, which had already been identified and raised since 2006, thereby putting thousands of seafarers' jobs at risk. EMSA stated that the Philippine marine education did not comply with the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW) guidelines for Seafarers, which made them issue a warning of not recognizing the certifications from the country if the gaps remain unresolved (Santos, 2022).

As per the report of the Maritime Executive (2023), the Philippine government responded to the said issue through a personal meeting of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. with European Union (EU) officials, affirming the commitment of the Philippines to EU regulations and standards by promising an improvement of the country's maritime education and training. Marcos also discussed the country's commitment with European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen during the EU-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in December 2022. Part of the resolution is establishing an advisory board of experts and sector representatives to address the maritime issues affecting the country and Filipino seafarers.

After the negotiations with the Philippine government, the EC, last March 2023, through its website, announced its decision to continue recognizing the certificates for seafarers in the Philippines. The EC also commits to providing technical support for the country's maritime capacity building.

With the given issues, the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers was expedited in Congress. The bill was approved by the House of Representatives (House Bill No. 07325) in the final reading on 06 March 2023 and is pending for the second reading in the Senate (Senate Bill No. 2221) as of 22 May 2023.

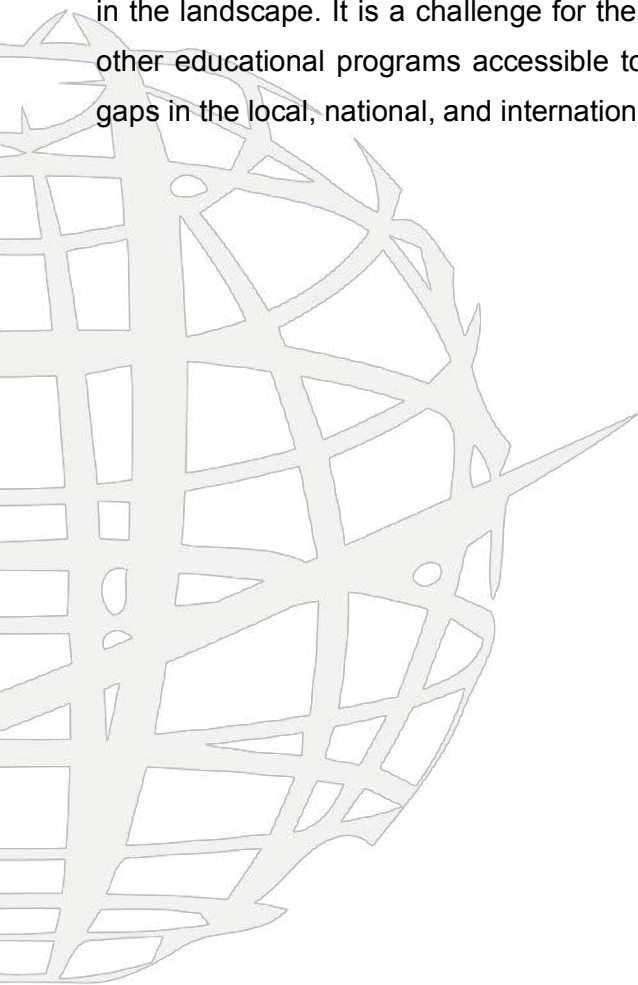
The proposed magna carta specifies the rights, mechanisms, and programs that shall ensure the welfare of Filipino seafarers, including the reintegration program, grievance system, and social welfare benefits.

To comply with international standards and conventions such as the STCW, by governing bodies that include the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the proposed bill also highlights maritime education, training, and certification as a right and requirement that shall be accessible to all Filipino seafarers. The proposal also mentions the government agencies that shall administer the implementation and monitoring of the maritime capacity-building programs and activities in the country, including the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

On the other hand, the latest Senate bill expanded the details of the magna carta. It included chapters focusing on the welfare of domestic seafarers and the role and responsibilities of manning agencies. It also removed the provision regarding escrow which shall hold any monetary award in cases of disputes until the legal processes are settled. The said provision was criticized for unfairness to seafarers by labor unions, including Amor Seaman, a group of seafarers (Baclig, 2023).

Gender and Development (GAD) became more extensively stitched in the Senate bill with more provisions in most areas of the magna carta, such as the need to have non-discriminatory training, accommodations catering to women, and a gender-responsive curriculum. It also expanded the roles of government agencies like the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) that shall conduct migration research, extend assistance to seafarers' families, and initiate GAD initiatives. The National Maritime Polytechnic (NMP) is also included in the agencies with a role in skills enhancement, maritime research, and policymaking.

The emphasis of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers on capacity building is a good sign that the future of the maritime industry would keep up with the global standards and changes in the landscape. It is a challenge for the government to make the necessary training and other educational programs accessible to Filipino seafarers. These efforts will bridge the gaps in the local, national, and international maritime scene.



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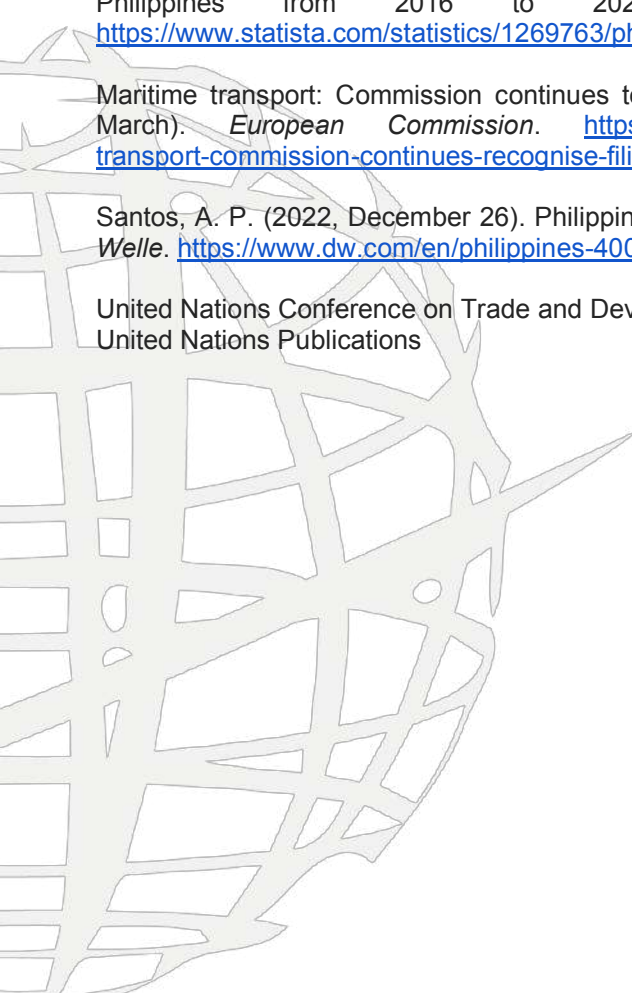
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