

### **Leap of Faith. Filipino Domestic Workers in Lebanon**



*Overseas Filipino Workers are successfully repatriated to the Philippines from war-torn Lebanon.*

In the midst of continuous bombings in Lebanon, Miramar Flores, a young 25-year-old domestic helper from Bacolod City, begged her employer to bring her to the Philippine Embassy so that she could fly home. Her employer's response: Miramar had no right to contact the Philippine Post.

"That's when it started," she recalled.

"She hit my head on the toilet. I planned, woke up at 3 A.M. and started packing my things. I jumped from the kitchen window and landed on the foam I had thrown down. When I tried to get up, I felt like I was going to die".

The young Filipina forced herself to stand up despite the crushing pain. "I thought if I didn't get up, my employer would beat me up instead".

Liz Plimaco, another Filipina domestic worker trapped in Lebanon, made a similar leap of faith out of despair.

"We were scared of the war. We couldn't sleep anymore because of the explosions. Every day they would tell me 'Tomorrow...tomorrow you'll go home' until I got fed up. So I

escaped and jumped. I don't remember how high it was," shared Liz.

Jezebel Guillermo, 31, was not allowed by her employers to seek refuge at the Embassy. Detained inside her employer's house, her best option was to jump.

"I fell from the first floor; I didn't even realize I was injured. We ran for two hours non-stop. And then I saw the wound on my leg. I'm just grateful I didn't die from the fall."

Miramar, Liz and Jezebel are only a few of the 20 Filipina domestic workers who made the life-changing decision of choosing to leap from a window rather than remain hostage in the home of their employers in war-torn Lebanon.

In July 2006, Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon engaged in a 33-day war. More than 30,000 Filipino migrant workers, most of them domestic helpers, were caught in the crossfire.

In August, the Philippine Government ordered the immediate evacuation of all Filipinos in Lebanon. The Philippine Embassy in Beirut raised the Alert Level to 4, making evacuation mandatory for all Filipino nationals in the whole of Lebanon.

With the hope of repatriation, Jonalyn Malibago, 26, spoke to her female employer.

"When I heard the news that all Filipinos were allowed to go home because of this war, I thought this was my chance. So I grabbed this opportunity but when I asked my Madame to let me go home, she would not let me leave."

Jonalyn, desperate to go home, threatened to kill herself. "I told them, 'Whether you like it or not I'm leaving. If you don't take me to the Embassy, I'm going to kill myself. I'll jump from the window,'" she recounted, "Even inside the car, they were still beating me up. When we were near the Philippine Embassy, they dumped me in the garbage."

Upon reaching the Philippine Embassy Evacuation Center, a Catholic School-turned-evacuation facility, Filipino migrant workers were registered and given temporary shelter. The Center was managed by diplomats from the Philippines to ensure the orderly repatriation of Filipino workers affected by the crisis in Lebanon. Volunteers assisting during the mass evacuation were also Filipino domestic helpers. Migrant workers waited for their assigned buses to transport them to Damascus where they took a direct flight back to the Philippines

"I'm grateful I'm still alive," reflected Miramar, "If you don't die from jumping, you'll die from nervousness!" she said with a laugh.