

Final days to register for...

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Ocean Concerns Rafael Seguis reminded Filipinos abroad that they have until August 31, 2009 to register.

Seguis also announced that posts will be opened during the weekends to accommodate registrants as instructed by DFA Secretary Alberto Romulo.

"*Hiniling din namin ang kooperasyon ng mga foreign employers, sa pamamagitan ng POEA na bigyan ng pagkakataon ang kanilang mga empleyadong Pilipino na makapagrehistro* (We also asked for the cooperation of foreign employers through POEA to allow their Filipino employees to register)," said Seguis.

As of August 26, the number of overseas absentee registrants has reached 200,637. Adding this to the existing OAV voters numbered at 371,304 will bring to a total of 571,941 votes, short of more than 400,000 to the 1 million goal of the secretariat. But the DFA-OAVS is optimistic that this number will increase by next week's deadline.

Still, Blas Ople Policy Center president Susan Ople believes that this number is still a potent force in the coming elections.

"If you multiply 600,000 to four family members of OFWs, that will result in more than 2 million votes, which in a very tight race, can be a crucial number," she said.

Registration difficulties
Seguis stressed that the department has exhausted all the department's efforts to encourage overseas Filipinos to register citing projects like *Akyat Barko* registration for seafarers, among others.

Ellene Sana, executive director of the Center for Migrant Advocacy, said the lack of information campaigns was a major obstacle to increasing the number of registrants. Other factors such as restrictions in field registrations in some countries like Saudi Arabia, lack of volunteers to assist in the registration and limited budget have also affected the turn-out.

But to Ople, one of the biggest factors for the low turnout is the deeply rooted cynicism toward the electoral process not only among Filipinos abroad but also among new voters here.

In an interview with *Inquirer.net*, Ople said, "*Ang isang balakid na humahadlang sa mga*

potential overseas voters *ay yung paniniwala na kahit magre-histro sila at bumoto, wala namang mangyayari* (One of the obstacles that stops potential overseas voters is the belief that even if they register and vote, nothing will happen)."

Ople said this cynicism is a challenge to candidates of national positions, especially for those aspiring for the highest post in the land.

"Presidential candidates

should give a clear and doable OFW agenda. We want the OFWs' voices to be heard and to have an OFW-friendly government in the future," he said.

Also in the briefing was Elections Commissioner Armando Velasco, who announced that an extension to OAV registration can be difficult at this point but would depend on automation plans and requests to be presented to the en banc. (*Inquirer.net*)

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