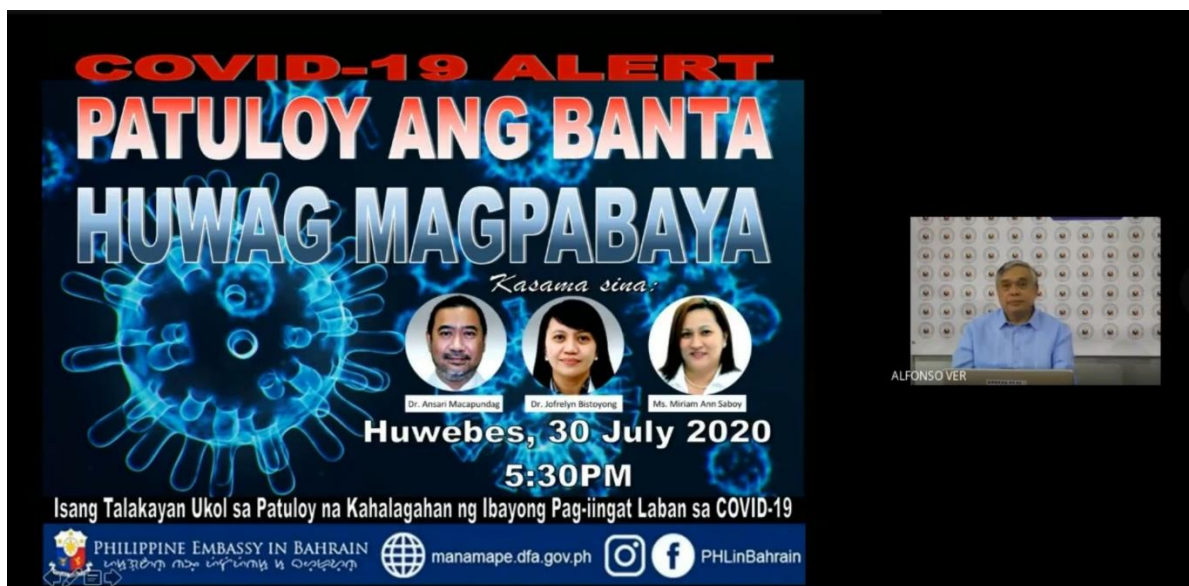


**Philippine Embassy Hosts Online Forum to Encourage Continued Vigilance Against COVID-19**



Screen capture of the poster of the forum with PHL Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, H.E. Alfonso A. Ver, at the start of the forum.

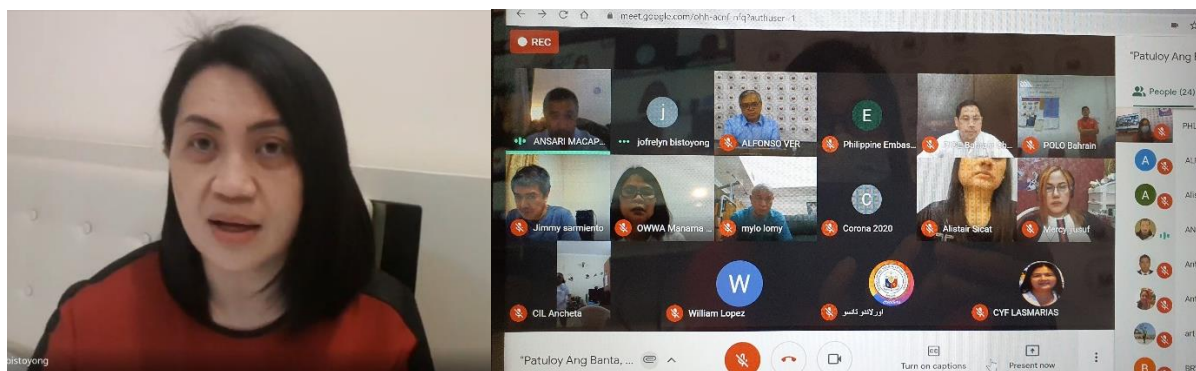
The Philippine Embassy in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain hosted its very first Online Forum entitled *“Patuloy ang Banta, Huwag Magpabaya: Isang Talakayan Ukol sa Patuloy na Kahalagahan ng Ibayong Pag-iingat Laban sa COVID-19”* via Google Meet on 30 July 2020. The online forum was conducted to encourage members of the Filipino Community to continue their vigilance in adhering to health and safety protocols to prevent infection. The resource speakers who shared their expertise on the matter were Dr. Ansari Macapundag, Dr. Jofrelyn Blstoyong, and Ms. Miriam Ann Saboy. Over 20 Filipino Community leaders and presidents of different Filipino Community Organizations participated in the forum.



(Left photo) Ambassador Ver giving his welcome remarks. (Right photo) Dr. Ansari Macapundag discussing the symptoms of COVID-19 and related health protocols.

H.E. Ambassador Alfonso A. Ver welcomed the participants and thanked them for joining the online forum. He explained that the online forum was organized to share updates, best practices and lessons on COVID-19 to Embassy personnel and the Filipino community, including preventive measures being implemented by the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Embassy, and the effects of the pandemic on mental health, so that we can better protect ourselves and reduce the risks associated with COVID-19. He also thanked members of the Filipino community who supported the Embassy's "Bayanihan Para kay Kabayan Program" and those who by themselves provided support to kababayans during this pandemic.

Dr Ansari Macapundag, an Emergency Room Physician from the Bahrain Specialist Hospital, warned that the threat of COVID-19 still remains, and reminded everyone not to be complacent. He shared the recent statistics of COVID-19 infection in the Philippines and in the Kingdom of Bahrain, information on the incubation period of the virus, symptoms of infection, risk factors and supportive treatments.



(Left photo) Dr. Jofrelyn Bistoyong discussing COVID-19 in children. (Right photo) A screenshot of the speakers and participants during the forum.

Dr. Jofrelyn Bistoyong, a Specialist Pediatrician from the Bahrain Specialist Hospital, provided information regarding COVID-19 in children, including mortality rate, symptoms of COVID-19 in children and supportive treatments for children with COVID-19. Dr. Bistoyong also reminded everyone not to put facemasks and face shields on kids 2 years and below.

Three (3) *kabayans* shared their experiences regarding their bouts with COVID-19, starting from how they found out that they were infected by the virus, the symptoms they experienced, the treatment they received, as well as, the assistance they received from the Embassy and OWWA. They all underscored the importance of taking proper precautions to reduce the risk of becoming infected.

During the open forum, Dr. Macapundag and Dr. Bistoyong responded to queries posed by the participants, ranging from the possibility of transmission of the virus by asymptomatic cases, the use of antibiotics in prevention and treatment of COVID-19, concerns regarding the possibility of reinfection, health and safety protocols being implemented by airline companies and the Bahrain International Airport, as well as, the Philippine Government's programs, projects and initiatives for OFWs diagnosed with COVID-19. Both doctors underscored that antibiotics will not prevent or treat COVID-19 since antibiotics are used only for bacterial infections and not sickness caused by a virus, such as COVID19. They also reiterated the importance of observing

frequent hand washing, use of face masks and social distancing as asymptomatic cases are also infectious.

Ms. Miriam Ann Saboy, a Registered Psychologist and Psychometrician, for her part, discussed the common effects of COVID 19 on mental health which are anxiety, stress and worry. Through a video presentation shared with all registered participants, she also shared ways to take care of one's self, particularly their mental health, during this pandemic.

Representatives from the Embassy and its attached agencies also gave brief discussions on the Embassy's efforts to assist Filipinos affected by the pandemic. Atty. Vicente Cabe, Labor Attaché, shared the latest on POLO's implementation of the Department of Labor and Employment's Financial Assistance for Displaced Workers or DOLE-AKAP.

Ms. Redina Manlapaz, Welfare Officer, shared that OWWA was able to distribute 3,608 food packs to OFWs who were either terminated or are receiving reduced salary due to the pandemic, in cooperation with the Embassy, and FilCom leaders, including Mr. Rod Paje, Ms. Annette Avila, Ms. Miriam Guese, Ms. Rosalie Nochefranca, and Mr. Jimmy Sarmiento. She further shared that OWWA is giving 200 USD or 75 BHD to OFWs who were infected by COVID19. Per OWWA records, a total of 62 OFWs have so far benefitted from the program, while 27 are still on process.

Consul Bryan Jess Baguio explained that the Embassy created a COVID Database to keep track of the condition of OFWs, to effectively respond to their needs and to develop policy recommendations and encouraged members of the community to continue reporting to the Embassy cases of COVID19 among Filipinos to facilitate providing assistance to our kababayans. END.