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SMS-based system 'rescues' OFWs

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MANILA, Philippines -- A system based on text or short messaging service (SMS) developed using open-source software has helped "rescue" some 200 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) located in different parts of the world.

The system was developed by the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), a local non-profit organization.

Through the system, OFWs abroad can send SMS or text messages to a local mobile number, which the system automatically transmits to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Workers Welfare Association and the Center for Migrant Advocacy.

Since the system was launched five months ago, it has helped these agencies in assisting the return of some 215 OFWs who have reported abuse and other cases of maltreatment from employers.

IPD's system has also amassed some 800 messages, most of these coming from the Middle East, according to Jay Carizo, research and development officer for IPD.

"Most of them reported cases of physical abuse and express desire to return to the Philippines," he said, also noting messages coming from countries like Hong Kong and Australia.

The system originated from a similar one developed by OFWs in Saudi Arabia as a way of contacting fellow Filipinos during the Gulf War in the early '90s.

"We just enhanced the system, built the database and distribution mechanism to the different agencies," Carizo said.

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