

Filipinas STILL on sale, ON the Net

by Richel B. Langit

“I would like to meet a man who is loving, caring, understanding, mature, kind and responsible. I am understanding, easy to go along with, faithful, loving, honest, caring, frank and a one-man woman.”

Looking for a mail-order bride? Surf the Internet, Filipinas remain on sale!

Mail-order bride agencies continue to use the Internet to peddle the services of Filipinas as young as 13.

“The Filipinas make excellent wives, are exceptionally loyal and are true Orientals from Southeast Asia. On the matter of sex, these ladies are passionate and uninhibited,” bannered the Life-Mates in its home page.

Managed by Gerry Gannon who is married to a Filipina, Life-Mates is one of the mail-order bride agencies that have taken up positions along the information superhighway.

Globalized sex trade

Other mail-order bride agencies include World Class Service operated by Larry

Pendarvis; Philippines Islands in the Sun, run by Alicia Faraon; Filipina Dream Girls, by a certain Mergie; Pearls of the Orient, by Kurt Kirstein; Asian Rose Girls, and the Hawaii-based Sunshine International.

“Before, the agencies did their business through actual recruitment and circulation of printed materials. Now, they operate through the Internet as a result of globalisation,” said Sis. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, national chair of the Philippine feminist organisation General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action (GABRIELA).

For almost 14 years now, GABRIELA has been working for the protection of women being “peddled” by the mail-order bride industry.

“We’re not against intercultural marriage. What we’re against is the commercialisation of Filipino women. They are treated as objects that can be bought and sold. They are even pitted against Caucasian women,” Mananzan explained.

No access

Last 7 February, GABRIELA campaigns officer Kermin Fortes tried to enter the World Class Service at HYPERLINK <http://www.best.com/-batf> <http://www.best.com/-batf>. but was barred.

“Residents of the Philippines are not allowed access to this system. The s—thead government meddlers of the Philippines have decreed that helping Filipinas to find decent marriage partners in other countries is forbidden. Therefore we must restrict access to this system so that we will not be in violation of goddam Philippine law,” read the censorship alert of WCS.

In June 1990, then President Corazon Aquino signed a law prohibiting mail-order bride



CHARKHA—A Development Communication Network at New Delhi

Charkha is a national-level development communication network having regional cells in Gujarat and Maharashtra (India). Its main aim is to establish an effective communication channel between mainstream media and development.

A meeting was organised last November 1997 at the Voluntary Health Association of India to review Charkha's activities and status and to plan the future directions and strategies to make it more effective and sustainable. Fifteen representatives from Charkha Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat, including CHETNA and NFI (National Foundation of India) participated in the meeting.

After the presentation of a brief history and perspective behind initiating Charkha, the new strategies and activities like research and consultancy work on developmental issues were discussed for sustainability of Charkha. A need was expressed for an NGO magazine which can authoritatively reflect NGO concerns on issues of importance.

It was noted that Charkha both at the national and regional levels were successful in sensitising the local vernacular media and further motivating and equipping the development workers to write for the mainstream media. Charkha Gujarat reported its activities toward enhancing the

capabilities of the development workers. CHETNA was involved in initiating a movement at the national level and has been actively contributing in an advisory capacity and in the editorial/working group in Charkha Gujarat.

However, suggestions were made that Charkha should take up an agenda-oriented, proactive role and undertake issue advocacy in the mode of a movement. For this, other mass media like television and radio should be explored and used.

Source: CHETNA NEWS, October-December 1997

agencies from operating in the Philippines. The law also banned the use of advertisements to broker marriages between Filipinas and foreign men.

Search for "Romeo"

Despite this, the mail-order bride industry has grown in popularity. Over the years, new agencies have been capitalized, featuring Filipinas in search of their "Romeos."

A typical offer reads: "I would like to meet a man who is loving, caring, understanding, mature, kind and responsible. I am understanding, easy to go along with, faithful, loving, honest, caring, frank and a one-man woman."

Most of the Filipinas prefer American men. "I want an American husband. I do not like to marry a Filipino," Luz Pintac, 29, said.

Why American husbands? "These women see Americans as much better 'husband material' than the men at home," wrote

Gary Clark in his book, *Your Bride is in the Mail*.

They're aware?

However, not all Filipinas whose pictures appear in the Internet are aware that they are being used by the mail-order agencies for easy bucks, according to GABRIELA's Kermin Fortes.

A copy of the address of a Filipino mail-order bride featured in Asian Rose Girls costs from US\$4 to \$5.

"Some of these women gave their pictures but they don't know exactly to what extent their photos will be used," Mananzan said.

The mail-order bride industry, she explained, started in the 1970s under the Marcos government, "when tourism became the pillar of our economy."

To curb the trafficking of Filipino women, she said, government should address the country's "economic crisis."

Many of the Filipinas on sale

in the Internet come from low-income families.

A grim reality

"I worked as a saleslady in a school supply store. To augment my family's income, I stopped schooling and went to work. I send my brothers and sisters to school with my salary. I want to have a pen pal who understands my status and situation regarding my family, who can accept me as I am," Marilou Villaver, 18, said in one ad.

Poverty remains a grim reality for the bulk of Filipino families, forcing Filipinas to look for husbands in the West, according to Mananzan.

"And when these women come back to the Philippines, they have sad stories to tell," she said, adding that in several instances, Filipino mail-order brides end up being beaten or murdered.

Source: *Today*, no date