

## **NARRATOR**

This is a nightclub in suburban Tokyo. May is a professional singer from the Philippines who came to work in Japan 13 years ago. There are many Filipino migrant women like May, who have come to Japan to work as entertainers.

In the 1980s an agreement between the Philippines and Japan allowed and actively encouraged Filipino women to obtain entertainment visas to work as professional singers and dancers in Japan. However, in reality most of the jobs turn into entertaining men in nightclubs – chatting to them and serving them drinks. The girls are known as hostesses.

### **May Cano, Professional Singer**

I was told to with the customers and serve drinks. I was shocked! I didn't know what to do.

I am a singer and came here to sing. If I had complained, I would have been told to go back to the Philippines. But I needed the money. So there was no choice but to put up with it because there are no jobs in the Philippines.

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Having no other options open to them other than working in night-clubs, many Filipino women are often taken advantage of. They are forced into prostitution, exploited for wages and have their passports taken so they cannot run away.

To try and get themselves out of this horrible situation, many get married to Japanese men and gain permanent residency in Japan. However, many complain of domestic violence by their husbands. Having little knowledge of Japanese society, they don't have the means to defend themselves.

One woman decided she was not going to ignore the plight of her Filipino sisters. In 2000, Virgie Ishihara founded an organisation, called

FMC, the 'Filipino Migrant Center'. She used to be a hostess herself. After getting married to a Japanese man she began, through her sewing work, to meet many Filipino hostesses who were suffering.

### **Virgie Ishihara, Executive Director, Filipino Migrant Centre**

I saw bruises on their arms and realized they suffering from domestic violence. I couldn't get this out of my mind and kept wondering how I could help them.

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This led her to start FMC. Around 500 new cases come to the centre every month. Japanese staff support the women with counselling, helping with visa applications and governmental procedures.

### **Miki Goto, Volunteer, Filipino Migrant Centre**

I believe it's very important that Filipino migrants select a representative and form the organisation themselves. Our role as Japanese volunteers is to back them up.

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Through FMC's lobbying and pressure from international criticism, the Japanese government has restricted the number of entertainment visas for Filipino entertainers by 99% in 2005. However, this is now causing an increase in fake marriages and overstaying.

Now that these new problems are becoming more serious. More organizations like FMC are needed

**Virgie Ishihara**

If Filipino women are aware of social issues and of their rights, they will not be exploited.

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To raise the awareness, FMC aims to inform both Japanese and Filipino communities living about the problems.

Filipino female 'entertainers' face and about their rights as resident workers in Japan. Theatre performances are one way of heightening awareness of the exploitation these women are often subjected to.

**Virgie Ishihara**

We really need to teach women, you know, to be strong, to know their rights and to fight for their lives.

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In collaboration with Japanese volunteer staff, the Filipino Migrant Center continues to educate Filipino women about their legal rights and how to protect themselves.