



*In conferring the PAFIOO Banaag Award upon Elvira A. Dela Cruz, the President recognizes her relentless efforts and selfless dedication in helping overseas Filipino workers in distress and fervently advocating the rights and welfare of the Filipino community in Morocco.*



## *Elvira A. Dela Cruz*

**Morocco**  
**Hometown: Pozorrubio, Pangasinan**

**I**n a distant land, far from her hometown of Pozorrubio, Pangasinan, Elvira A. Dela Cruz, known to many as Elvie, has become an indispensable figure for many overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Morocco. Although she is not affluent in material wealth, her service to the overseas Filipino community is priceless. For over a decade, Elvie has been a lifeline for those in need, particularly maltreated and undocumented Filipinos, helping them transition into legal workers and providing them with a path to reintegrate into society.

Elvie's journey to Morocco began in 2009 when she arrived as a household service worker (HSW). Over the years, she has served various employers, but her heart has always been driven by a higher purpose—advocating for the rights and welfare of fellow OFWs. Known for her unwavering support and guidance, Elvie has glimmered hope for those who have fallen through the cracks, dedicating herself to changing lives one by one. Despite her modest income, she has become a strong voice for the voiceless, helping them find justice and a chance at a better life.

### **Heroism in Action**

One of Elvie's most significant contributions has been her advocacy for Filipinos who have faced abuse at the hands of their employers. A group of more than 40 OFWs can attest to her kindness and tenacity, having endured severe mistreatment, including unpaid wages, lack of days off, and even confiscated passports. Elvie didn't hesitate to step in, offering not just guidance and emotional support but also financial assistance—an extraordinary act considering her own limited means.

Among those she helped was a HSW who suffered contract violations, was denied her full salary, and even ended up hospitalized without adequate support. Elvie's intervention was nothing short of heroic; she not only helped the worker recover but also assisted her in finding new employment, proving that true compassion knows no bounds.

Another case involved an OFW who had been mistreated by her employer and left without the equivalent of four

months' pay. The OFW, along with four co-workers, sought Elvie's help. Through her determination, they were able to withstand their employer and finally received their due compensation. Her persistence and bravery gave these workers the justice they deserved.

Throughout the years, Elvie has taken on numerous cases of abuse and injustice. One of the most heart-wrenching cases was that of an OFW who had not been paid for two years and was subjected to severe maltreatment. She fought tirelessly to ensure the case was addressed, and she monitored the welfare of another Filipino who had been imprisoned in a detention center for two years.

Elvie's work extends beyond individual acts of kindness—she is a true advocate for systemic change. Since there was no Philippine Foreign Service Post in Morocco prior to 2021, Elvie filled the void by becoming a bridge between the Filipino community and Moroccan authorities. For instance, she helped a butler and a distressed worker navigate Morocco's complex labor laws to obtain legal residency permits. Her knowledge of the system and her willingness to fight for their rights ensured that these workers were no longer invisible in the eyes of the law.

Her role became even more vital during the COVID-19 pandemic when she risked her own health to help fellow OFWs. She assisted a Filipina OFW who had severe COVID-19 symptoms by bringing her to the hospital—an act of courage that demonstrated Elvie's unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of others, even in the face of personal danger.

### **Leading a Community**

In 2021, Elvie formalized her advocacy by founding the Filipino Society of Morocco (FSM), an organization that has since played a pivotal role in supporting the Filipino community. The FSM's efforts have ranged from organizing cultural diplomacy events like the *Pistang Pinoy* and *Paskong Pinoy* celebrations to humanitarian outreach programs. In one instance, the FSM donated medicines to the Rabat Children's Hospital and provided financial support to an OFW battling cervical cancer.

The Philippine Embassy in Rabat recognized Elvie's leadership and awarded the FSM a Certificate of Appreciation for its invaluable contributions to promoting Filipino culture and supporting the community. This recognition underscored Elvie's impact not only as an advocate but also as a unifying force for Filipinos living far from home.

Her commitment to the community is further highlighted by her efforts to promote cultural and

educational initiatives. In 2014, she organized a basic *Darija* (Moroccan Arabic) language class for Filipino workers, helping them integrate into Moroccan society more smoothly. The following year, she led the Filipino community in celebrating International Women's Day, underscoring her dedication to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

### **A Voice for Workers' Rights**

Elvie's advocacy is not limited to the Filipino community. In 2017, she attended a five-day training program in Italy organized by the International Labor Organization (ILO). There, she represented overseas Filipino workers in Morocco and advocated for the resolution of social injustices experienced by migrant workers. Her participation in international forums has amplified her voice, making her a key figure in the fight for decent work and fair treatment of migrant workers worldwide.

One of the most notable aspects of Elvie's activism is her commitment to ensuring that migrant workers are treated with dignity. Every Labor Day, she organizes a parade of Filipino workers to voice their concerns to the Moroccan government. Among the pressing issues she raises are the fight against domestic violence and human trafficking, the illegal confiscation of passports, and the urgent need for legal documentation for OFWs without the necessary resident permits.

### **An Honorary Diploma**

In recognition of her tireless work for migrant and asylum seekers' rights and support to the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, Elvie was awarded an Honorary Diploma in 2022 by the Democratic Labor Organization and the Democratic Organization of Immigrant Workers in Morocco. This prestigious award highlighted her contributions to the protection of human rights and her role as a leader in the migrant community.

For the Filipinos living in Morocco, Elvira Dela Cruz is more than just an advocate; she is a beacon of hope. Her selflessness, bravery, and unwavering dedication have transformed the lives of countless individuals, offering them a chance to reclaim their dignity and build a better future.

Through her leadership, compassion, and relentless advocacy, she has created a legacy that will endure long after her work is done—a legacy built on the belief that no one, regardless of their circumstances, should be left behind.