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Interviewers Marco Luciano & Don Bouzek, Camera Don Bouzek

Q: Tell us what happened after you got refused your humanitarian compassionate application.

EC: (Tagalog: Shall I talk about it from the very beginning) When I got the refusal of the humanitarian compassionate application for the second time, then the following week I got an email from the CBSA, the Canada border, and they're asking me to report to their office. So I think about it the whole night first. I am scared that if I'm going there they might send me home that day. But thinking the whole night, I said to myself, I'm not a criminal. I can go there, and I need to know what is the next step or what will happen to me next. So then I go there to report, and when I went there to the CBSA I waited for 30 minutes. The officer came out and then in person she handed me the refusal of the humanitarian and told me that I need to go home and I need to report to them every week. So I keep on reporting every week, and then the officer offered me to apply for the PRRA; the PRRA means the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment. The Pre-Removal Risk Assessment: you need to satisfy the officer and immigration why you should be allowed to stay here. Then, with the help of Migrante, they helped me to process the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment, because I want to stay here. My daughter is Canadian and she needs to stay here; she belongs here. I think I belong here, because I've been here since 2010. So they helped me process the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment, and when you apply for the plan you're also allowed to apply for the open work permit while waiting on the pre-removal decision. So Migrante also helped me to process the application for the open work permit. After a month of applying, we got a positive open work permit so I can work. After that, even if I have that open work permit, it says there that this is not considered as a status. I can work, but still I'm non-status. Even if I have the open work permit I still continue reporting at the CBSA office every week. Then, when I find a job as a baker, it's on a payroll basis. So they deduct all the taxes, EI, CPP and everything. But still I cannot use that open work permit for my check-up. I don't have any medical coverage. It's not valid, because it's not considered as status. It's been almost nine months that I keep reporting every week to the CBSA.

But after five months the PRRA was refused, and the officers summoned me to go to them. In person he delivered to me the refusal of the PRRA. It's like an exclusion order, and they told me

that I need to get my daughter's passport so that they can send us back home. Whenever I went to the CBSA office for reporting, they kept following for the passport of my daughter. I submitted it, but it so happened that there are a lot of documents that Passport Canada are looking for. My daughter, even though she's under my full custody, she's bearing the last name of her father, who abandoned us after I gave her birth. So that's why it's hard for me to get the passport easily for my daughter. She just recently left--only last month--my old officer; they changed to a new officer. So the new officer passes the application of the passport of my daughter. I think they have connection to Passport Canada. So within a week they summoned me again to go to the CBSA office, and they told me that they have already the passport of my daughter and they booked us already a ticket going back home. That's like almost three weeks already when I learned that the passport is with them already and they booked us right away. I have a lawyer. With the help of Migrante I have a lawyer. So the lawyer has applied for the stay of removal. We gathered a lot of documents, including the assessment and program of my daughter. My daughter was diagnosed with ADHD and ODD combined. She has hypertension and anger management, and the school helped to deal with the behaviour with my daughter. So they have a program on how to deal with my daughter. With that program, my daughter cannot go in a crowd at school. It has like a limit of only 20 persons or below, because of her behaviour. The program that's here in Canada with my daughter is really good for her. I was talking about the stay of removal application. It was refused just only this morning. I thought they were going to extend us because I want my daughter to finish schooling at this school. But it so happened that they refused it. Right now my mind is really, I don't know what to think, because I just got the refusal recently in the morning. I thought I could get extended so that I can prepare my daughter. I still really need help for her. It just is really hard for me because back home I cannot get the support that Canada can give to Canadian-born children here. Here I feel the support of the community for the needs of my daughter. I'm just worried about her if we go back home. I'll just give you an example. If you're going to school, one room in the school is more than 50 kids, and my daughter's not allowed to go in that crowd, because of her diagnosis. The medical in the Philippines is not like here. Before, when I gave birth to her, she doesn't have healthcare, even though she was Canadian. But because of the campaign that Migrante and I did, it's in the law that every Canadian born child has the right to access the healthcare. So we did that and she

can get access. But in the Philippines we cannot get that. We don't have free medicine there. It's so expensive, and I cannot afford to pay it.

Q: Tell us about where you lived in the Philippines.

EC: It's really a hard decision for me to go back home, but it just so happened that I don't want to hide. I just want to follow all the policy rules or the system that they're doing to me, even if it's unfair. I want to have a clear name so that I'm not illegal; I'm not a criminal. I just came here to have a better life, and I chose Canada because I know this is a good opportunity for me right now and a better future for my daughter. Back home it's really hard; that's why I came here. We don't own a house. We don't even have any assets there. All the siblings that we have, all of them, didn't finish even the high school. I'm the only one who finished, because I wanted to strive for it. I worked hard to get a degree and to have a better future going back here. So it's really hard for me to go back home. We really don't have a house; we're just squatting in the train, what you call it, the railroad. Now what I'm scared most is because the upcoming president is going to demolish us. That's what I'm scared of right now. It's really hard for my daughter to stay longer and to live there. I want to bring her back here if I'm going home, because she's not really safe there and it's not healthy for her to go there. All of the support that she needs is here, only here. She belongs here; we belong here. I stayed here for more than ten years. My daughter was born here. She didn't even speak our language. She has a lot of friends now and she loves to go to school.

Q: What kind of support can you get back home? What are your plans for MacKenna?

EC: Back home it's really hard to leave MacKenna alone. I just want to be with her 24-7 because I'm really scared of what will happen to her. It just happens that I'm so happy that there's a community, the Migrante organization. They are the one supporting us up to now, even before. They are a family. That's why I stayed here longer, because I feel the welcoming as one family for them. If not for Migrante, maybe I'm not here anymore. I don't know what to say, but maybe me and my daughter will not survive without their help, without their guidance and support. Back home I just want to focus on MacKenna with their help. Of course I still need help for my

daughter, but I will try to be strong because I need to. I want to still come back here. I want to bring back my daughter here. We belong here. Everyone has a right to choose where they want to stay, and we want to stay here. But it so happens that they don't allow me. I followed everything that they said to me. I know and I believe that there's still justice, equal and just, fair for everybody here.

Q: Tell us about your work.

EC: Before even if I was not allowed to work, I worked, because I had a daughter to support. She's a Canadian but she cannot get access to any benefit: only the Medicare that we obtain through Migrante. But other than that, no more. So how can I raise her without going to work, even it's not allowed? So I do lots of cleaning. Then sometimes I bring my daughter to the work. Sometimes Migrante have taken care of my daughter. Childcare is expensive; so I cannot afford to bring my daughter to the childcare. That is why sometimes I carry my daughter when I'm working.

Q: Tell us about the work you've done in the community to support people in similar situations as yourself.

EC: In our group we have a lot of same situations like mine; we call it non-status or not documented. It's really hard for them to show up, but I know they are there. They're relying on some organizations, especially Migrante, on how to regularize their status, because they're still hoping. We didn't want to be in this situation, to be called undocumented or illegal persons. It just so happened that there's a lot of unfortunate people who--what do you call that term for us--become undocumented. But we didn't choose this. I still acknowledge them to fight. I still want to fight. It so happened that I think I just need some rest, but I want to come back and continue to fight for them. I'm asking or begging to any organization. Migrante is always there to support all the undocumented migrants here. We came here legally; we pay taxes and everything. We're not stealing any jobs and we're not stealing anything from any Canadian or from any other race that's here. We work hard to go here. I just want to continue all the campaigns that Migrante is doing. I want to regularize all the undocumented that are here. I

want to have status for all, because it's so hard if you're in this situation. Right now I don't want the undocumented to say that I'm leaving, because I don't want them to lose hope. That's why I'm asking everyone to give their support to them. They really need it; we really need it. We really need the support of an organization, the support of the community, so that they become strong and they're not going to hide. Every day we are all scared of what will happen to us. We just want to have a peaceful life, a peaceful living, to communicate and to socialize with others without hesitation, without fear. I just want them to fight for their rights, but I don't know how long it will take. But still I want them to continue the work we started.

Q: How much of the 12 years you've been here have you been working, since the temporary work permit expired?

EC: For the first one, I worked three years with that work permit with one employer. The first year was a different employer because I left the abusive employer that I had. So then another, so that makes it three years straight that I worked, contributing to the company. Then I'm waiting for (tagalog: shall I talk about my case) another work permit because I left the second abusive employer. So I'm waiting on the third work permit. I got pregnant. Then the next work permit was taking so long. It was supposed to be two to three months processing, but I already gave birth. Then after I gave birth, that next work permit was refused. That's why I didn't have status after I gave birth. (Tagalog: that's my case, I don't want to talk about it) That's why after that I don't have status. But I keep applying, because if you don't have status, you cannot get another job opportunity or employer. All you can do here is apply for the humanitarian and compassionate; so I applied for the humanitarian. After two years it was refused. I applied again for the second time; two years later it was refused. That's why from that time, the four years up to now, I don't have status because I'm waiting for the decision of the humanitarian. I applied twice already. Then the last application was the pre-removal--so three times. It's six to seven years waiting for those three. I didn't have status at that time and I'm working under the table because I need to survive.

Q: So for all those years, Canada has been benefitting from your work.

EC: Yeah. I pay food, I pay taxes, I pay rent. I pay everything, clothes for my daughter, with the money that's coming from under the table work that I did. But that one is, they're not recognizing it, because from their term it's illegal, because I don't have status. But how can I survive while waiting on those applications that I submitted, if I cannot get any benefit from the government?

Q: Could you explain about the humanitarian grounds of the application?

EC: Humanitarian and the compassionate application for permanent residency is the last resort that you can apply for. Those are applicable only for us without status. You need to satisfy the officer about the hardship of going back home, and the stability that you have here in Canada. But I was refused, because they said I have a degree and I have a lot of managerial experience, and it's not hard for me to find a job back home. Then the second one was that my daughter can adapt easily to the environment back home because she's still young. Those are some of the reasons why they refused the humanitarian application.

Q: You mentioned that you had trouble getting a passport for your daughter, but then the officer changed and you were able. How much of these decisions depends on the person who happens to be processing your claim?

EC: Before when I had the old officer, at first she was very tough. But later on when I kept reporting every week and she finally knew me, she was getting nicer. Then after that she transferred me to a new officer because she said she was going to transfer to a different department. The new officer is really tough. She didn't even look at my eye; she didn't even smile; she didn't even talk to me. She just summons me whenever it's you need to sign this, you need to sign that. I always bring my daughter, the Canadian daughter, in their office so they will see my daughter personally. They don't care; they don't care.

Q: Each week when you reported in, you weren't sure whether or not you were going to be deported immediately. Did you hear stories about people who went in and then suddenly were put on a plane? How real was that fear for you?

EC: Yeah, that's the hardest feeling that I get every week that I go report. It's like, I'm going to say goodbye to my daughter. That's why sometimes I have brought my daughter, because I'm scared they might lock me in and then they're going to deport me right there and then. That's what I'm worried every week that I keep reporting. That's why sometimes I cannot sleep. Even if I have major depression and everything, the officer doesn't care. Even if I say that I have a follow-up checkup, and they refuse, they don't care.

Q: When you are first asked to go and report, you have to give your passport?

EC: Yeah. On the first day that I went there, they did not ask for my passport but I voluntarily gave it to them. That's why the old officer is really getting nice to me, because it's not hard for them to communicate with me. I brought in my passport because I know in time everything will be okay, because I'm not doing anything wrong on my part. I'm thinking everything will be okay and I'm going to follow orders on what they want me to do. I keep following all their orders. So I thought everything will turn out okay. But it didn't.

Q: Could you talk about the situation with your daughter's healthcare, and how you campaigned to have it?

EC: When I gave birth to my daughter when we were at the hospital, my healthcare was expired because I was waiting for the new work permit. So the hospital told me, your healthcare is expired. But I needed to give birth. When I gave birth it's not many hours before they told me, oh you need to go home, because your bill is getting up. But how about my daughter? Oh they will check it out. Then when I saw the bill, even my daughter had a bill. They billed her already with everything. It's like a thousand bucks and only one checkup for her. Then I didn't pay for that. So the collection agency kept calling me and calling on behalf of my daughter: your daughter has a bill. She's only a baby. They kept bugging me and I got depressed when the collection officer kept calling me at that time asking me to pay for the bill, like \$1,000 plus at that time. Just one day, after I gave birth, just a few hours, it's stand up and go pack your things, just like that. So the second week my daughter needed to go for a checkup; so when I brought

her to the clinic they told me I needed to pay. But I didn't have money to pay for them. So that's why I asked help from Migrante. Migrante and I did a lobby to the MLA. Lots of other parents also have Canadian-born children that cannot get access to healthcare. So after months of lobbying, it was a rule that all the Canadian-born daughters, despite the status of the parents, get access to healthcare. So after that even if there's already a bill that all the Canadian daughters have access to care, whenever I go to the clinic it's still not in the system; so they still need to verify. We have one contact person in the healthcare that needs to confirm that my daughter has healthcare already. Some other undocumented mothers with children also still are struggling to get their kids to be checked up, because it's not showing in their system. It's already approved in the law but (Tagalog: What do you call that when it's the law but...) it's not showing up on the centre or hospital when everybody gets the checkup. It took a while before it showed up in their system. But now we're good. But still they need to continue to follow up sometimes. Undocumented mothers can still be struggling to go for a checkup for their daughter. So they still need to contact me or the number; then we're going to give their contact number of the right person in the healthcare so that they will update their file that their kids are able to benefit from that healthcare.

Q: How were you coping with Covid without healthcare?

EC: During Covid I got positive; I got positive on the Covid. But still I cannot get access to Medicare. Only Migrante is the one helping me, giving me medicine and everything and support to recover from that Covid.

Q: How does the community support each other?

EC: Because Migrante is the number one who supports us, me and my daughter, they really helped me from the very start. Because I was active before in our dealings with other community members, I've been active also like in doing cleaning for the church every month, like voluntarily. I have a lot of volunteer work, but it just stopped when there's the Covid pandemic. Then the community that I met through Migrante, they are really supportive. That's why we survive. Without the community, without Migrante, we cannot survive. Right now I

have the support of the school, because my daughter is there in person. Last year she was on virtual, and it's hard. We need to monitor her all the time, so I cannot get a part-time job working under the table. Now she's in person, the school is really supportive with her behavioural development program. That's why my daughter has to really--she needs to be here. All of the assistance and support that can help me, and especially my daughter, are only here.

Q: Your family in the Philippines faces their own challenges. So they wouldn't be in a position to help.

EC: Back home all my siblings already have... I'm the youngest with all my siblings. My siblings there have their own family. They have a lot of kids and grandchildren already, and they're living in one house. The one house doesn't even have a room. They're sleeping all together. So we are not good there. I need to separate my daughter. I don't know how to get our life started there, because I need to remove my daughter from crowded places. I need to secure her; I need to make her feel safe and comfortable. It's really hard back home; it's really hard. Right now I cannot figure exactly what will happen for us there. All I know right now is really we need help. I want my daughter to come back here as soon as possible. I cannot let my daughter stay longer there.

Q: Is the house you mentioned in Manila?

EC: Like in the railway, they're squatting in the railway. But there's no more railway there; they already removed it. We've been there since I'm young. We stay there how many decades already. But now they are scared of the upcoming president because there's news that they're going to demolish it if that upcoming president will win.

Q: In those circumstances, there could be violence.

EC: Yeah, there's a lot of drugs there. It's hard to say, but most of them do also the drugs. That's why I cannot bring my daughter to that house. Two of my siblings are using, or they are midway

like selling drugs. I don't know exactly if they changed already; that's why I'm scared. I'm very scared.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say to Canadians about your story?

EC: I chose Canada when I came here because they told me Canada is really good opportunity to come and settle. All the people here are nice. So I want to be there. I want to go ahead there. That's why I chose here; I don't want to go to other country before. So when there was an opportunity going here, I grabbed this. Even it's hard, even it will pain me lots, that's okay because it's really a good country, very nice people. I came here legally. I pay everything. I didn't come here to steal some jobs. I made it here because I work hard. It just so happened that I didn't get the right employer, I was with an abusive employer. If I mention everything, that's too much to discuss. But I just want to say that we're not stealing your job. We came here with proper documents, and then after they don't need us anymore they just dispose us and throw us away. When I do cleaning jobs, no Canadians are cleaning the washroom. Only us Asians are cleaning the washroom. We are helping you do those jobs that you don't want. We are the ones who are doing it. Even if you went to any passport counter, you cannot see any Canadian working in passports, even as a passport server. They don't like it. So all those jobs that you don't like, we are the ones there replacing. It's just so frustrating that I heard a lot of things saying that we're stealing their jobs. We are not. We're helping you. Those that you don't like, we're the ones doing it. We work hard and we pay taxes and everything. We're not getting it for free; we pay everything. I thought there's an equal treatment for all of us, but I didn't get that. On my present employer, I get a lot of abuses because I'm brown – a lot of racial discrimination. But I ignore that, because I want to survive and I want to stay here. I don't want to erase the good reputation that they're telling me when I'm coming here. Some are true; some are not. I love the nature; I love Canada. But I'm so thankful for the community of other organizations who understand our situation. I hope someday with their help, I really need help going back here. I want to come back here legally. I want to continue to fight for my daughter. She belongs here; I belong here. I chose here; I chose to stay here. I just want a peaceful life. I didn't ask for anything. I just want to be legalized here and give back to the community, because they helped me a lot to become stronger. I want to give back.

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