



PCTC Officers: (back row) Gercris Sotana, William Hogg, Jean Brassard, Michael Calingo and Leo Cunanan, Jr. ; (front row) Tita Bognot, Laarni Liwanag, Grace Santos-Ocampo and Lissa T. Bentley.

Trade between Canada and the Philippines is now in excess of \$1.2 billion a year and British Columbia, the Canadian province on the Pacific Rim, is the major port for such bilateral exchanges. It is only natural therefore, that Filipinos in BC have taken major steps in promoting increased trade and other economic linkages between the two countries. Alongside this trade is the fact that there are now almost half a million people of Philippine ancestry in Canada and the remittances from these immigrants are significant contributions to the Philippine economy.

As early as 1983, a group of Filipino business people and professionals in BC launched the Philippines Canada Trade Council as a non-stock, non-profit corporation. However, after a couple of years, the council became inactive. In 1991, the PCTC was reactivated under the leadership of Ruben Verzosa and Vicente Asuncion. Since then, the PCTC has actively pursued a series of projects and programs.

By tradition, the officers of the PCTC are elected every year, with the presidency alternating between a Filipino and a Canadian. For 2008-2009, the PCTC officers are: Grace Santos-Ocampo, president; Laarni Liwanag, vice president; Lissa T. Bentley, board secretary; Michael Calingo, treasurer; Gercris Sotana, assistant treasurer; and the following as directors: Tita Bognot, Jean Brassard, Leo Cunanan, Jr., William Hogg and Gercris Sotana.

The primary objective of the PCTC is to promote trade and other types of economic linkages between the Philippines and Canada. To achieve this goal, the Council acts as a network of concerned individuals who bring together parties interested in bilateral economic relationship. The PCTC regularly sponsors events that keep members and potential economic partners informed of possible trade opportunities. It acts as a source and a clearinghouse of information about trade and business patterns that are useful to current and potential investors in both Canada and the Philippines.

A major activity of the PCTC is the sponsoring of trade missions from Canada to the Philippines. It also hosts trade missions from the Philippines to Canada. In September 2006, for example, the PCTC hosted a trade mission from the Philippines focused on "Philippine-Design Driven Products" in

collaboration with the Bureau of Trade Promotions of the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry. In cooperation with the Philippine Consulate General, the PCTC helped prepare a program for that included working meetings with business matches and potential Filipino-Canadian partners. Furthermore, the PCTC organized a dinner reception in honour of the visiting Filipino entrepreneurs.

In January 2007, a reciprocal trade mission to the Philippines composed of Canadian business people and professionals was organized by the PCTC. The mission, with the theme "Progress and Commitment 2007" enabled Canada-based entrepreneurs to meet potential business partners in the Philippines and to visit important business sites. A number of potential business agreements were initiated and later signed as a result of the trade mission.

An important function of the PCTC is the sponsoring of meetings, seminars and workshops that bring together Canadian and Filipino business people and professionals interested in bilateral economic exchanges. Often, these occasions have been organized to coincide with the visits to Vancouver of important officials. For example, in April 2007, the PCTC hosted a meeting with the newly appointed Philippine Ambassador to Canada, Jose Brillantes where he met with Canadian entrepreneurs and professionals. In June of the same year, Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines Peter Sutherland was briefed by the PCTC on enhancement of trade relations between the Philippines and Canada. A meeting and reception was also hosted by PCTC in honor of Labor Secretary Arturo D. Brion, who came to Canada to sign an important labor agreement between the Philippine and Canadian governments.

Aside from its economic and trade promotion activities, the PCTC is actively engaged in sponsoring cultural and other events that focus on Filipino contributions to Canadian development. Thus, it has sponsored activities such as a Pista ng Bayan that highlights a traditional Filipino celebration. The Council also provides important information about the Philippines for potential investors and visitors, through its Internet website under the LINK section.

- Henry & Luz Lopez-Dee