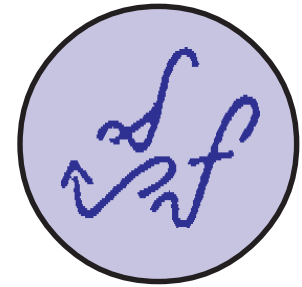


News Digest

January
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APMM

Monthly Newsletter of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)

Campaign vs Impact of Global Recession on Migrants in Asia Pacific to be Launched

A campaign against the impact of the global recession on migrant workers in Asia Pacific and the Middle East is being planned by APMM together with its partners in the region. The campaign will focus on education and monitoring that can be used as basis for more actions later. The crisis gripping the world today has led and will lead to further retrenchments and the lowering of the wages and benefits of migrant workers. It is also a very clear indication that the recession affecting the world today is the effect of the failure of neo-liberal globalization policies.

At present, one of the most affected place by the recession where many migrants work is in Taiwan. The statistics of Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) indicate that from October to December 2008 there is a reduction of 9644 jobs for migrant workers in the manufacturing sector. But the actual number is greater than that as the number of new hires for that period has not yet been taken into account.

There were 5322 Filipino workers documented from the said sector who were retrenched during that period. But CLA statistics reveal that there was a reduction of 4791 workers from the Philippines from Oct. – Dec. last year. There are reports that there were more Thais retrenched during that period and these do not even include those from Vietnam and Indonesia.

Other than the retrenchments many migrant workers in Taiwan like their local counterparts were forced to go on unpaid leave



Some of the workers at Walton in Taiwan were part of the migrant workers who have suffered from the creeping impacts of the global crisis.

and/or no work no pay schemes. The CLA has opined that these are legal as long as the take home pay of the workers do not fall below the minimum wage of NT\$17,280 a month. The problem with this is that there are a number of employers who do not pay the overtime rate on those who work more than 8 hours in a day or during their days off or statutory holidays.

In other countries like in South Korea, its government has announced that in its new bilateral agreements with labor

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Migrants in Japan hold concert tour



Migrant workers are in a very vulnerable position with the crisis. Wage and job security are the ones that are under intense attack.

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sending countries on their Employment Permit System (EPS) it will take away the provision on free board and lodging for the migrant workers. While Malaysia announced the banning of migrant workers in factories, stores and restaurants and like Saudi Arabia has a directive to lay off expatriates first instead of local laborers.

And Macau issued several measures this January to limit the employment of migrant workers to boost the employment of its local workers. These include not approving any supervisory position in the gaming (casino) industry; not accepting new applications for construction workers; and reducing by half the number of currently employed cleaners and security guards by not renewing their contracts when they expire.

There are also reports of terminations in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and in Singapore. And the benefits of many migrant workers in the Middle East like allowances and the like have been taken away while retaining only their wages. Even the World Bank has predicted that the remittances of migrant workers worldwide will decrease by 1% this year because of the crisis.

Some labor sending countries on the other hand have adopted different measures to soften the impact of the crisis. Malaysia for its part advises any of its 300,000 nationals working in Singapore who might be retrenched there to seek employment in Johor state which it claims has 10,000 job openings.

The Philippine government has devised more elaborate measures which critics say is almost useless. These include among others setting up a P1 billion livelihood loan support fund to set up

small businesses; referrals to employment opportunities in the Philippines and abroad; and skills training to avail of in-demand jobs in other parts of the world.

It is also expected that migrant workers who would want to stay in the countries where they are in at the moment might choose to become undocumented, accept lower pay and do riskier jobs as they know that the situation in their home countries is much worse.

Migrant workers and their advocates should be vigilant in defending their jobs, wages, benefits and working and living conditions. Those who are retrenched should get the maximum benefits due them like the following: separation pay; airfare; breach of contract from employer and placement agency; assistance against overcharging of placement agencies including reimbursement of the full amount paid by the migrant worker. This can be done by coming out with know your rights guides on said matter.

Aside from this, the campaign plan will conduct monitoring at the national and regional levels the number and nationalities of those being retrenched;

what compensation are provided them and if the wages, benefits and living and working conditions of the migrant workers are deteriorating.

Education work must be done also through forums, group discussions and the like on the cause of the global recession and its effects on the migrant workers and local working people. Statements and press releases should be issued out against any moves to attack the jobs, wages and benefits of the working people.

Solidarity with the local working people who are also affected by the crisis should also be encouraged. This is to forge a common understanding on the root causes of the recession and how both can work together to ensure that their jobs, wages and benefits are defended. This can be in the form of forums, dialogues and joint actions.

Actions can be staged either at the local or regional level in the form of petitions and protest actions to ensure. These should be publicized in many places as possible to a wider and bigger audience especially those that brought more benefits to the migrant workers.

Migrants in KSA Forced to Eke Out a Living Under the Bridge

Migrante International's chapter in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has reported that around a hundred migrant workers have again camped out again under Khandara Bridge in Jeddah. These migrant workers from different countries do this in the hope that Saudi Arabian police round them up for deportation.

Usually stranded workers would come out for weeks before they are rounded up by the authorities. They also do this only during winter time as summers are too hot in the desert kingdom.

Other than Filipinos stranded workers from other countries like those from India,

Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Indonesia use the bridge for the same purpose.

This has been going for a number years now as many find this is their only way to get out of the KSA as their employers do not provide exit permits for them.



Migrants run away from their employers in KSA due to abusive and exploitative situation. They end up as stranded migrants and get very little help from their government.

Filipinos in HK Launch Campaign vs Direct Hiring Ban

The devious implementation of the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE) memorandum circular banning the direct hiring of household service workers (HSWs) effective January 1 this year was met with strong protest and condemnation by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-Migrante-IMA) on January 8 at the Philippine Consulate General (PCG).

The group stated that this policy shall put HSWs in a worse situation than before like throwing them to the wolves in the form of recruitment agencies and leaving them vulnerable to more exploitation, abuse and hardship. The ban plays right into the government's plan of "unburdening" itself of its responsibility to its nationals abroad without grave impacts to its own gains from the migration of Filipinos, the group stressed.

Immediately, the UNIFIL convened leaders of Filipino migrant organizations in a Leaders Kapihan on January 18 to discuss the impacts of the exploitative policy and take action to resist this.

More than 200 Filipino migrants from 81 organizations representing major alliances, church organizations, national concern groups, individuals and institutions signed up to revive the Samahan Laban sa Katiwalian ng Recruitment Agencies at Patakarang Ban sa Direct Hiring, or **SKRAP** (Coalition Against Erring Recruitment Agencies and the Policy to Ban Direct Hiring).



Overwhelming opposition met the ban on direct hiring in Hong Kong. Filipino domestic workers believe that the ban will just subject more and more migrants to illegal practices of recruiters.

According to the group, overcharging of recruitment fees and the lack of government protection and services, not direct hiring, are the widespread and serious problems that HSWs are facing. In fact, direct hiring is the only recourse that could save HSWs from overcharging of greedy recruiters, they asserted.

A survey of the HK-based NGO Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) revealed that about 74% of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong were employed through recruitment agencies. Of this percentage, 54% of them paid P60,000 to more than P100,000 as agency fees.

concern was clearly evident in a published interview that although the POEA has a no-placement fee rule, it's the worker's choice to pay placement fees because there is no job in the Philippines.

UNIFIL chairperson Dolores Balladares-Pelaez asserted that with the ban on direct hire, the government is assured of profits from the recruitment agencies which include a filing fee of P10 000; License fee - P50,000; Escrow Agreement - P1,000,000; and P100,000 Surety bond with a bonding company acceptable to the Administration and accredited with the Insurance Commission.



Filipino migrants scored the Philippine government for abandoning its responsibility to protect overseas workers and provide sufficient services to them.

The Filipino workers criticized HK Labor Attache Romy Salud for muddling the real issue of the ban on direct hiring by saying that the ban is on 'name hire' not direct hire. Even worse, he cited that the 2,520 contracts to be affected would be insignificant.

Salud's inutility as a labor official and lack of

Right away, SKRAP members conducted a massive signature campaign against the ban on direct hiring. In three weeks time, more than 11,000 signatures were gathered in Central alone. These signatures were then submitted to the PCG during the first major rally on February 8 this year.

More than a thousand members of the coalition marched from Chater Road in Central to the PCG grounds in Admiralty. They chanted their demands to: a) scrap the ban; b) provide services and protection to migrant workers by the Arroyo government; and c) stop the intensification of export of Filipinos abroad as reflected in the recent Administrative Order 247.

Kasamma-KO Celebrates 10th Year of Fighting for Rights of Migrants

One hundred three (103) Filipinos from the seven (7) member organizations of the Katipunan ng mga Samahan ng Migranteng Manggagawa sa Korea (KASAMMA-KO), with their theme: "Dalhin sa higit na mataas na antas ng pagkakaisa at paglaban ang isang dekadang masinsing pakikibaka" "Raise higher our unity and resistance on a decade long struggle," celebrated their 10th year founding anniversary on January 26, 2009 in Seoul Jeil Church, Ojandong, Chung-gu, Seoul, Korea.

Convinced that the Church is a significant part of the peoples' struggle for liberation, the participants began the first part of the celebration with a solemn worship service presided by Rev. Frederick Q. Carmelo, United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), and Mission Co-Worker to Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK).

The proclamation of the KASAMMA-KO Vision led by Pastor Jones Galang, UCCP, Mission co-worker to PCK, served as the starting point of the liturgy: "We dream of a society where a family is not torn apart by the urgent need for survival. We dream and will actively work for a society where there is equal opportunity to live a decent and humane life.' The community then sang together "Ang Bayan Ko" after which Rev. Fred led the opening prayer.

The Chairperson, and Vice-Chairperson of KASAMMA-KO and the Chairperson of Migrante International, including seven head leaders from the following member organizations of the KASAMMA-KO lighted a candle each as a symbol of their unity as an association of migrant workers in Korea: Bicol Association, New Era Foundation, Federation of Filipino Workers in Korea, Quezon Association in Korea, Association of Filipino Migrant Workers in Kwangju Korea, Agumang Kapampangan, and Seoul Migrant Association.

After the heart-warming, nationalistic song rendered by Ms. Carol Dizon and Mr. Jones Galang, Rev. Fred proclaimed the word of God taken from Exodus 14:1-4. In his preaching, he showed a

parallelism between the Israelites' struggle for liberation from the cruelty of the Egyptians, and that of the Filipino migrant workers in Korea from the immigration's massive crackdown, forced lay-off from work, discrimination, and other forms of abuses. He highlighted the importance of a community of Filipino migrant workers striving to build a strong unity and cooperation among its members, and actively contributing their share in the struggle of the Filipino people for national freedom and democracy.

The first part of the anniversary celebration was concluded with the simultaneous proclamation of the KASAMMA-KO: Basis of unity and declaration of principles; the singing of "Pananagutan;" final blessings conferred by Rev. Fred; and the greetings of peace, and the joyous sharing of the Filipino delicious meal.

A nice cultural input, a song number given by the Osan migrant workers, and the gracious welcome remarks of Mr. Donald Policarpio, Vice Chairperson of KASAMMA-Ko at the same time the Chairperson of the New Era Foundation, set the mood of the participants for the opening of the second part of the program. This was followed by the interesting story-telling of the KASAMMA-KO History by Pastor Jones Galang. Through thick and thin for a decade now, the KASAMMA-KO has stood for its vision and principles. The good harvest the community is reaping now is the fruit of the sweat and blood of the risk-taking pioneers and members of the organization. The alliance was born from the struggle of the Pilipino migrant workers against the labor export policy (LEP) of the Philippine government.

Mr. Pol Par, the dedicated Chairperson of the KASAMMA-KO,

maintained the lively atmosphere of the celebration as he, with his good sense of humor, presented his annual report. The community members were refreshed of their particular good accomplishments within a year last 2008, and have had some sound ideas on what to strengthen and improve more for this year, 2009.

The good emcees: Bea, Carlo, and Chat creatively tied up the very good ideas shared so far, all geared towards the KASAMMA-KO theme as they kept the participants awake and involved through a short activity. This prepared the participants to listen attentively to the keynote speaker, Mr. Garry Martinez of Migrante International, who was introduced with conviction and pride by Chat.

Mr. Martinez eloquently shared about the current Philippines' political and economic situation and the effects of the global financial crisis to the Filipino people in the Philippines. He said that massive poverty is being experienced all the more by the Filipinos especially the poor who comprise the majority of the population. In spite of the cries of the poor, and the massive crackdown experienced by the Filipino migrant workers all over the world, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo keeps on

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Filipinos celebrate the growing movement of migrants in Korea. The alliance continues to lead the migrants with vigilance and militance.

Retrenched Migrant Factory Workers in Taiwan Gain More Benefits

Seven Filipino migrant workers who were retrenched by Walton Advance Engineering Inc. in Taiwan gained more benefits because they asserted their rights and were assisted by a local labor group.

They would have received less if they pinned all their hopes with the Manila Economic Cultural Office (MECO), the de facto Philippine Embassy in Taiwan.

The seven got the following:

1. Breach of contract equivalent to one month's pay of NT\$17,280
2. Plane ticket

3. Separation Pay
4. One month broker fee given back NT\$1,800, and
5. 20% income tax deducted to them would be refunded by the company

Most migrant workers get only their separation pay which is one month's basic wage for every year of service and separation pay. Almost 20% of the Filipino workers fared worse as many of them were intimidated into signing resignation letters which negated them to receive the two compensations stated.

The seven workers were assisted by the Labor Rights Association (LRA) and

Migrante Taiwan. They went directly to the head office of the Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) in Taipei and joined a protest action which was publicized in the media on January 9.

There was also a meeting with MECO Taipei arranged by Migrante on the same day.

An inspiring letter of thanks was made by some of the workers which encouraged other migrant workers in Taiwan to assert their rights as well as coordinate their efforts with local labor groups who are willing to help and express their solidarity.

Letter from Walton workers

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS!

Is the global economic crisis enough reason for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to suffer injustices by having their contracts terminated in advance?

We often heard of maltreatments and abuses from domestic helpers but as the global financial crisis arise, the most affected are the OFW's of electronic, garments and metal industries.

We, the Filipino workers risked almost all we have in our lives to the extent of selling our properties, borrowing money from loans with higher interest and seeking financial help from relatives to earn a living abroad expecting more income and benefits to support our families for a better life. The risks we made concern not only in financial terms but also sacrificing by way of living away from our loved ones and adapting to a new culture and language.

As foreign workers, we are bound to obey each company rule, working to the best that we can, setting aside the discriminations and facing punishments over some minor mistakes. Our expectations and hope for a better life abruptly vanished like bubbles in the air as the global crisis hits the market, leaving us doubtful and fearful of how we are going to survive amidst the chaos.

Although the company has its own losses and considered as the most affected among other businesses, we, OFW's also have lost almost everything in our lives such as personal properties and dreams.

As we had experienced, since the company can no longer sustain its workers (foreign and local) benefits and

salaries, they (company) started removing overtime work, followed by limiting the working days per month or imposing forced leaves (forced leaves imposed hardly almost to all Filipino workers), until they rudely terminated our contracts without (notice) earlier announcements enough for us to be prepared.

Terminating ones contracts means the company should shoulder the expenses of repatriating us and provide a fair severance fee according to its law and giving considerations to our financial situation.

Our company, Walton Advance Engineering Inc. is one of the companies who is so unfair to the migrant workers that led us to fight for our rights with the help of the Labor Rights Association (LRA) a local union, Migrante International Taiwan chapter, media and concerned individuals. We can not be blamed about the global financial crisis, so the company has no right to make lame excuses for not giving what is due to us. But why do these brutal capitalists (WALTON) blame the workers for this global crisis. We have the right to speak for ourselves to these exploiter capitalists who use our labor power to make them earn greater profits, yet they were not giving us any considerations. They earn millions from our sweat and blood, yet, they are being obnoxious in return.

With this, we encourage everyone not to lose hope fight for your right, let these capitalists learn from us, don't be afraid to make a stand even when we are in their territory because there are still good people out there, ready to lend their hands for us. Just believe and keep the faith.

Long live international solidarity!

Migrants in Japan Hold Dinner Concert Tour to Raise Funds for Advocacy on Rights

Migrante International in Japan organized a concert tour this January. The first was a dinner-concert organized by the Kalipunan ng mga Filipino Nagkakaisa (KAFIN Migrant Center Migrante) in Tokyo on January 24, 2009 at the Akabane Catholic Church. The second was in Nagoya on February 1, 2009, held at the Nagoya City Performing Arts Center jointly organized by MIGRANTE Nagoya and the Filipino Migrant Center (FMC).

The two-city-concert tour entitled "IBAYO", a Tagalog term to describe a place "on the other side" featured the songs and music of Sining Bulosan, the cultural arm of MIGRANTE International headed by Danny Fabella, and the talents of Japan-based Filipino artists, including Lahing Kayumanggi and former OPM (Organisasyon ng mga Pilipinong Mang-aawit) artist, Divine Avanzado and Myrna Fujita.

IBAYO was conceptualized primarily to raise funds for the programs and campaigns of MIGRANTE International and to raise awareness on the plight of over 10 million migrant Filipinos around the world.

The concert in its entirety mirrors the struggle of ordinary Filipinos wanting to find their niche to survive from the ravages of poverty and hunger that have forced many Filipinos to try their luck abroad only to find out that the grass is not necessarily greener overseas.

Every year, some 3,900 able-bodied Filipinos - very young and old, men and

women - leave the Philippines to work as construction workers, domestic helpers, entertainers, teachers, and health workers, among many type of jobs. They leave their families behind to cross unfamiliar grounds unmindful of the many risks that lie ahead. A few of them succeed, but many others do not. The most unfortunate go home in wooden boxes, victims of untold stories of abuse, pain and sorrow. Others who chose to resist and fight their tormentors languish in jail, bear hundreds of lashes, or land in death row.

IBAYO also tells about stories of migrant Filipinos who have been neglected and betrayed by their own government yet manage to rise up and become instruments for change.

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broadcasting that the Philippines is not affected by the global financial crisis, and that the Philippine economy remain intact.

Garry informed the participants that the Migrante International, along with other

progressive groups in the Philippines, even if it is highly-risky, are actively working for the protection, defense and promotion of the human rights of the Filipinos in general. In concluding his talk, he challenged the participants not



Cultural programs are some of the ways for migrant organizations to raise the consciousness of their fellow workers in Japan and also in other countries.

A predominantly Japanese crowd who came in droves and gave the performers a rousing standing ovation towards the end warmly received both the Tokyo and Nagoya concerts.

Various migrant advocacy groups, including local labor unions supported the concert. They earlier had separate meetings with Gina Esguerra, Secretary General of MIGRANTE International who also came to Japan to speak at various forums and meetings in the said cities.

to grow weary in fighting for the peoples' human rights in and out of season.

The Secretary-General of the KASAMMA-KO, Mr. Sol Lising, concisely presented the General Program of Action for 2008-2010. In his presentation he noted the importance of education, both individual and communal, that each member has to be well-informed of the local and world issues to help sharpen our critical and analytical thinking and our capacity to make good decisions and effective action.

Short messages expressing solidarity and well-wishes to the KASAMMA-KO were stated by a few more head leaders from affiliating organizations and guests.

As the celebration was closed with appreciation for everybody's presence, and a few announcements, and the groups posed for picture-taking.

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