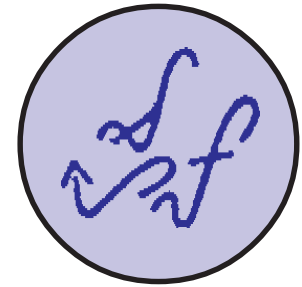


News Digest

October 2008



APMM

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

Migrants and refugees confront GFMD with int'l confab and protests

Migrant workers and refugees around the world have come of age. It was the very first time that their voices were heard loud and clear in an international gathering about them which has long been dominated by their advocates. Migrant workers and refugees said no to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) through their parallel activity in the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) held from October 28 – 30 in Manila, the Philippines.

The GFMD was exposed during the IAMR for what it is. It is an instrument of neoliberal globalization to use remittance for “development”. It does not answer the roots of forced migration and it does not uphold the rights, wellbeing and interest of the migrants.

Representatives of migrant workers and refugees were not even invited to the GFMD activity were most countries who attended have governments that violate their rights and welfare. This is especially true for the host government of the Philippines which has been touted as the most advanced in managing the flow or more precisely the export of labor.

Aside from the two day conference, the IAMR also had a speak-out where migrant workers and refugees from different countries talked about their problems, aspirations and struggles. This was augmented by different cultural presentations. A 5000 strong march capped the activities on the last day where they were met by a phalanx of riot police and soldiers.

The UN Special Rapporteurs on Migration and Slavery graced the occasion of the IAMR. Many of the more than 200 delegates of the migrants and refugees are members of the International Migrant Alliance (IMA) which was recently set up in Hong Kong on June 15 – 16 this year. The IAMR is a joint undertaking the IMA, Migrante International, the Asia Pacific



The International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees gathered grassroots migrants, immigrants and refugee organizations to oppose the neoliberal agenda of the GFMD and call for actions to their concrete issues.

Mission for Migrants (APMM-HK) IBON Foundation (Philippines), APWLD - Task Force on Labor and Migration, CARAM-Asia and BAYAN (Philippines).

Plans were drawn up by the IMA as early as June to help popularize the GFMD among grassroots migrant workers and the general public especially during the IAMR. These included extensive

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Migrants' Speak Out vs GFMD



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discussions on the issue. In Hong Kong two summits on the GFMD were organized by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL – HK) and PILAR, a coalition of Indonesian migrant workers against overcharging. Meanwhile, forums were also conducted among Thais and Nepali members of the AMCB.

A ten-day countdown to the GFMD was also initiated, with migrant groups in HK, Korea and Taiwan organizing protest actions during the 19th of November. In HK migrant workers protested against the Nepali, Indonesian, Thai, Philippine, European Union and United States consulates for their anti-migrant policies.

In Hong Kong other activities included pickets in front of the consulates of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The former exemplifies the worst place where migrant workers are treated including other parts of the Middle East while the latter was an action against the trial on the appeal of Migrant Rights defender, Irene Fernandes of Tenaganita which was calculated to be on the exact date of the GFMD in Manila. A picket was also held in front of the HK office of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to protest against the IMF's imposition of neoliberal policies in most countries.



Thousands of migrants, their families and advocates for the rights of migrants joined the various protest actions to mark their position against the GFMD.

More than 600 migrant workers under the AMCB attended the HK Migrants Assembly against the GFMD on Oct. 26 as part of their participation to the IAMR. This started near the Philippine consulate and ended in the Central Government Offices of Hong Kong where a position paper of AMCB was handed out to HK authorities.

The IAMR activities garnered a lot of media mileage from the press. This is mainly due to the fact that the media was able to cover the migrant workers and refugees themselves in the flesh. At the same time the participants of the IAMR vowed to continue their efforts to reach out to the most number of grassroots organizations as possible to assert their rights and welfare and against the neoliberal agenda of the GFMD. #

Network on undocumented migrants holds meeting in Manila

APMM organized a consultation meeting of its network on undocumented migrants held at Bay View Park Hotel Coffee Shop in Manila, Philippines last 27 October 2008.

The meeting was held in time for the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees organized by the International Migrants Alliance or IMA, APMM, MIGRANTE International and Ibon Foundation as a counter event to the 2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development or GFMD.

Thirteen leaders of grassroots migrant organizations from 10 countries which include The Netherlands, Italy, USA, Korea, Malaysia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Japan and Hong Kong attended the network consultation meeting.

The consultation meeting resulted on various plan of activities to be held before the end of 2008 and next year.

Highlights of the plan include a common statement to be released on the 18th December this year and an open letter address to the newly elected President Barack H. Obama of the USA. In 2009, the network agreed to work together in organizing an international conference on undocumented migrants, to set-up a blog site dedicated to the issues and struggle of the undocumented migrants, to send submission letter to the UNCHR during its council meeting to be held in June and initiating a fact finding mission in some countries with relatively high concentration of undocumented migrants and reported cases of human rights violations among migrants. #

ICB of IMA holds planning meeting to implement 3-yr GPOA

Members of the International Coordinating Body of the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) held a planning meeting from October 25 to 26 at the UCCP Shalom Center in Manila, Philippines. The meeting was held in time for the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees, a counter event to the 2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development.

The planning meeting focused on the activities stated in the three year General Program of Action of the alliance and a detailed one-year plan in terms of consolidating and expanding membership of the alliance was formulated. Highlights of the detailed plan includes organizing a counter event during the 3rd GFMD in Greece, publication of IMA basic documents in various languages, primers on GMFD and other migrants related issues including the EU Return Directives Policy and the impact of the current global recession on migrants, submissions to the international agencies like the UN and ILO and to develop a research team within the alliance.

The ICB also formulated a plan for more effective communication and systematic administrative operation within the alliance.

In order to ensure the implementation of the plan, a working committee to be composed by ICB members and representatives from IMA member organizations was proposed and approved. The working committee will be led by members of the ICB. #



Challenging the GFMD was the first major campaign of the IMA after its founding. The group gears for more actions in the future.

Migrant workers in Taiwan gain tax concessions from Ministry of Finance But struggle against excessive deductions on pay, far from over

Taiwan's Ministry of Finance (MOF) gave some concessions to migrant workers after a picket/dialogue by the latter yesterday in the MOF's office in Taipei. But the promise to lower the tax rate on migrant workers who would stay for 183 days or less in any taxable year would not solve their main problem of excessive deductions on their wage.

MOF Deputy Secretary Wu Ze Hsin promised that it would lower the 20% non-refundable income tax rate on blue collar migrant workers for they only receive the minimum wage or even below this when they stay only for the above stated period. MOF would need to consult first with the National Tax Administration (NTA), Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) and the Employment and Vocational Training Administration (EVTA). And that they would include the migrant workers and local advocates in said consultations.

Lately, however, a local advocate liaising with the MOF was told that they would not invite the migrant workers next time for security considerations.

Initially the MOF stated that the 20% income tax on migrant workers is legal since they do not know if the migrant workers would be terminated from their work before the 183 days of their stay in Taiwan.

When told by the migrant workers that there are many deductions on their pay which the CLA legalized, the MOF admitted that they were not aware of this and that there should be a new tax rate for migrants. Said oppressive tax rate is also one reason why newly arrived migrant workers are hesitant to complain against exploitative practices of their



Migrants and advocates in Taiwan resist the proposed regressive tax in time also for the GFMD campaign.

employers lest they be sent home and pay 20% income tax.

In a way the migrant workers and their advocates gained an initial victory against the oppressive tax rate. But they still have a long way in struggling for the elimination of the more severe deductions on their monthly wages.

Migrant workers in Taiwan are mostly covered by the minimum wage except caregivers in homes and domestic workers. They are also not covered by the Labor Standards Law of Taiwan.

All job categories of migrants are deducted monthly brokers service fees which averages NT\$1667 in a three year period. This alone is already 11% of the pay of those working in homes and 10% on other job categories. In addition to this they are deducted NT\$236 a month for their health insurance and pay for their Alien Residence Certificates and periodic medical examinations which total another NT\$300 a month.

For those working in other job categories, they are deducted a further NT\$576 a month for labor insurance and up to NT\$5000 a month for their board and lodging. This does not include illegal deductions for overcharging placement fees and for their airfare to Taiwan. Many migrants are also subjected to force savings of NT\$2500 – NT\$3000.

Indonesian migrants are deducted a further NT\$6703 a month for 15 months for their placement fee.

Eighty Filipino and Indonesian migrants together with twenty local advocates took
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HK migrants join World Foodless Day

On 19 October 2008, a public information drive on world foodless day was held to reach out among migrant workers in Hong Kong who mostly come from peasant families.

At the indoor forum attended by 100 migrants, Zen Soriano, the vice chairperson of the women peasants group Amihan, shared about why there is not enough food in the Philippines and other Asian countries. And the role of the neo-liberal policies imposed on poor and developing nations causing the global food crisis. She related the impact of the global food and financial crisis and how it affects the migrant workers and their families left behind in their countries of origin.



Asian migrants packed the room for the forum on the situation of food production.

Her presentation elicited validations and sharing of experiences not only amongst the Filipino migrant leaders but also from the migrant leaders from Indonesia, Thailand and Nepal.

Soriano also touched on the struggles of the Filipino masses for a real agrarian reform, which she says, is a long-time dream of the peasants and the landless. She also shared about a new bill introduced at the Philippine Congress by the progressive party list Anakpawis (Toiling Masses) that she hopes would somehow address some, if not all, the prevalent and most urgent problems faced by the farmers and the landless peasants.

Mrs. Soriano encouraged the migrant workers to support said bill as well as commended them for the strength of the migrant organizations in HK and to continue their unity for a real change on their situation and back home.

After this there was an outdoor public forum with various Filipino organizations at the Chater Garden, Chater Road and nearby places in Central District. Soriano met with the leaders and members of different Filipino migrant organizations. #

OFWs in UAE form new Migrante chapter at Ras Al Khaimah

Migrante – Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) had its founding General Assembly on 30-31st of October. It was attended by individuals from twelve companies. Cyrine Pinpin, Chairperson of Migrante-UAE discussed the Migrant's Orientation applied to the UAE setting.

Highlights in the said activity include discussion on Migrante's history, a critique of the movie Dubai authored by Axel (writer/poet and more popularly known as one of the Tagaytay 5 political detainees), Reading of Constitution & By-Laws and Reading of Solidarity Messages.

Those elected as the first officers of Migrante - Ras Al Khaimah Chapter were the following: Licelle Ramento, Chairperson; Marcelino Icaay, Vice Chair; Noel Tolentino, Sec Gen; Abegael Diñoso, Dep Sec Gen; Odessa Derla, Finance; Richard Gilbuena, Publicity/ Education; and Dennis Florentino, Krizia Rhonica Requilman and Mariecris Aldovino, coordinators.

The formation of Migrante – RAK is a milestone in the organizing work in the whole of the United Arab Emirates. Migrante had its first chapter in the UAE in Dubai. Aside from offering immediate assistance to more distressed migrant workers, Migrante– UAE will be able to effectively take a more leading role in developing the migrants' movement there while at the same time supporting the peoples movement in the Philippines. #



Migrante in the UAE continues to expand its membership in the country with chapter building in various areas.

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part in the protest against the proposed tax.

The migrant workers and their advocates vowed to gather more signatories to their petition and support from other groups against the 20% tax. At present more than 1700 have been gathered. This issue was also raised to the UN Special Rapporteur on migrants who visited Manila and attended the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees which is a parallel activity to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The migrant workers will also

raise this issue to the international community.

Filipino migrant workers from Migrante International – Taiwan chapter also lambasted the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) the de facto Philippine Embassy in Taiwan for not taking up the cudgels for the migrant workers. The Philippine government hosted recently the GFMD that supposedly talked about the rights of the migrants but it nary raised its finger for them in this issue especially on the excessive deductions on their pay. #

“unVEIL!”

An international campaign against state violence on marriage migrants set

Sixteen delegates from 11 organizations met on October 31, 2008 at the Gabriela National Office in Manila to finalize plans of action of the international network on foreign brides.

Updates from the delegates revealed common issues of women lured into marriage migration because of poverty in their home countries. Oftentimes, these marriage migrants fall victims of abandonment, discrimination, domestic violence, and deportation.

The highlight of the meeting was the formulation of the campaign and name of the group - “unVEIL!” an international campaign against state violence on marriage migrants and “AMMORE” (Action Network for Marriage Migrants' Rights & Empowerment). The campaign that will kick off on November 25 on the occasion of the international campaign against Violence Against Women (VAW) generally aims to expose the state violence on border control, discrimination and criminalization of marriage migrants.

Specifically, this would serve to gather public awareness and support for marriage migrants issues and concerns; help strengthen and develop grassroots marriage migrants in the host countries; strengthen the link with women organizations in both sending and receiving countries; and draw more advocates into the regional and international network that will lobby for the recognition, protection and promotion of their fundamental human rights and well being as women.

The delegates came up with various forms of action for the campaign foremost of which is creating a blog site to upload articles, statements, and reports specially designed for marriage migrants (MM); developing the MM logo; and collecting funds to sustain the campaign. Each country can also adopt its own form of protest like Tokyo's plan on a marriage migrants' march in their bridal gown or “Canada in June” to highlight the issue.

Finally, the group approved the Comparative Research on Equity and Access for Immigrant Brides that was designed by Jane Brock from Australia. It was agreed that objectives for specific receiving countries like Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Europe, and US be included.#

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