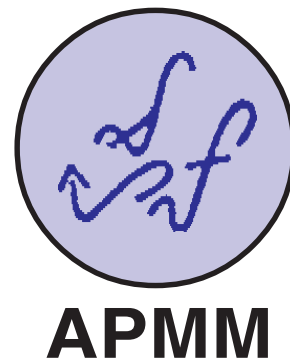


# News Digest

September 2008



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

## Indonesian migrant workers in HK hold summit on GFMD

In preparation for confronting the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) which will be held in Manila from October 28 - 30, Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong organized a summit on the GFMD on August 24 at the Hong Kong University.

Its main objectives were to educate the Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong, through the leaders of different organizations, to understand what the GFMD is, its effects on the migrant workers in general and how it will implicate on the conditions of Indonesian migrant workers in particular.

The Summit was attended by 127 people, including 57 leaders from 18 organizations and the rest officers and active members of Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI – HK) from 6 chapters.

The program started with the showing of the video documentary “Bergerak”. It is the story of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong and that of their empowerment and struggles. It was made by the Mission for Migrant Workers in partnership with ATKI – HK, Center for Environment, Gender and Development (ENGENDER) and Women’s Empowerment in Muslim Contexts (WEMEC).

There were two main speakers in the forum Eni Lestari, Chairperson of ATKI and Coordinator of United Indonesian against Overcharging and Ade Ahmad of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). Eni spoke about the GFMD itself and how it was founded, elaborating to the impact to migrant workers in general overseas and the prospect migrants, while Ade dealt on the current development of the labor export program of the Indonesian government.

Mr. Ahmad explained that the Indonesian government is targeting to deploy 1 million Indonesians overseas by 2009. He also added that the government has taken certain moves to concretize this plan by making the application process of private agencies licenses simpler and assigning a new established government body, BNP2TKI, to search for job opportunities abroad.

In essence what this means is that the Indonesian government is planning to take over the more lucrative training process for prospective migrants so the high placement fees Indonesians must pay in order to work abroad, will be given to the government directly instead of to the private agencies. The agency’s roles would be relegated to only the recruitment process itself and in providing language

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Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong tackled the GFMD in a summit attended by various organizations. They discussed the impacts of GFMD to migrants as well as the Indonesian policies on migration.

# APMM attends CSO parallel conference on aid effectiveness

APMM attended the civil society organization (CSO) parallel conference on Aid Effectiveness at Accra, Ghana from 31<sup>st</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008. This was attended by 700 CSO's from 80 countries.

Most of the CSO participants are members or related with the Reality of Aid Network. APMM is a member of the Reality of Aid – Asia Region.

The CSO participants were determined in making human rights, gender equality, decent work and environmental sustainability explicit and central to the aid effectiveness agenda. It calls on the donor states for their immediate and concrete actions towards improving implementation of the Paris Declaration (PD) and genuinely realizing its principles by 2010.

The Conference also came up with a final version of the policy paper "Better Aid: A



*Representative to the Philippine Congress, Rafael Mariano talked about foreign aids and their impacts to the country.*

civil society position paper for the 2008 Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness" which can be downloaded at [www.betteraid.org](http://www.betteraid.org).

There were 80 accredited CSO participants including Philippine Congressman Rafael "Ka Paeng" Mariano from the Anak Pawis (Toiling Masses) Partylist. He is also the Chairperson of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) or the National Peasant Movement in the Philippines and attended the official high-level forum III.

## Ongoing Petition Campaign Against 20% Income Tax on Migrant Workers in Taiwan

There is an ongoing petition campaign against the 20% income tax on migrant workers in and outside Taiwan. For the first time, 15 Filipino migrant workers organizations in Taiwan endorsed the petition together with migrants and advocates in 20 countries and territories around the world.

As of this writing more than 1100 migrant workers in Taipei and Taichung have signed the petition. This would greatly expand with the translation of the petition into Bahasa. The Chinese and Thai versions would also be ready soon. Two Catholic priests have also endorsed the petition together with almost 50

Taiwanese from the academe and other sectors.

A picket/dialogue with the Department of Finance is also set on October 26, 2008. Said department is the one administering the National Tax Administration in Taiwan.

It is expected that at least 5000 thousand signatories from migrant workers would be collected before the new rules take effect on January next year. Hopefully the measure would also be scrapped at it is contrary to the tax reform package of the new Taiwanese administration in power.

*(from p. 1)*

courses. It means that the main issue of high placement fees faced by Indonesian migrant workers will remain the same.

The Indonesian migrants on the other hand see the objective of the 2nd GFMD to be held in Manila to maximize migration to be the main source for the development of countries. This is contrary to the facts as so called development models in the past failed and created poverty in many countries that forced many of the people to leave and become migrants.

Indonesian migrant workers also see that the GFMD will further make the conditions of migrants worst since the GFMD never talks about the problems that are faced by migrants but only sees them as commodities.

Based on these the Indonesian migrants agreed to Say No to GFMD and made several resolutions that they plan to push.

For the Indonesian government, the participants demanded to:

- Ratify the UN Convention on Protection of Migrant workers and their Families
- Stop Overcharging
- Abolish Special Terminal for Migrants
- Right for direct hiring
- No to Training Center fees and other unnecessary fees
- Improve protection and services for migrant
- Right for information
- Stop Illegal deductions

For the HK government, the participants had the following issues:

- Wage increase
- Abolish the Levy
- Stop discrimination
- Scrap two week rule
- Scrap stay in arrangement
- Legislate minimum wage

Internationally, the summit united to join and advance the domestic work as work campaign carried by different regional and national organizations and NGOs.

## AMCB urges justice for beleaguered rights activist

More than thirty migrant workers and rights advocates joined the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body (AMCB) in a protest action in front of the Malaysian Consulate in Hong Kong on September 10 this year to demand justice and speedy resolution of the court appeal of Dr. Irene Fernandez.

A member of the IMA International Coordinating Body (ICB), Dr. Fernandez has consistently fought for the rights and welfare of migrant workers all over the world, according to AMCB spokesperson and chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance, Eni Lestari.

According to the Tenaganita, the trial of Irene Fernandez is the longest running trial in Malaysian legal history. She was arrested by the police at her home on 18th March 1996 and was charged under Section 8A(1) of the Printing and Publications Act 1984 for "maliciously publishing false news" through the issue of a memorandum entitled, "Abuse, Torture and Dehumanized Treatment of Migrant Workers at the Detention Camps".

She posted bail after being sentenced to 12 months imprisonment but her passport was impounded as part of the bail condition. Each time she wants to leave the country for any reason she has to make an application to the court for the release of her passport.

However The Memorandum, "Abuse, Torture and Dehumanized Treatment of Migrant Workers at the Detention Camps" was released by Tenaganita in August 1995. The findings in the Memorandum comprised information that Tenaganita received from interviews with more than 300 ex-detainees during the course of its research on "Migration, Health and HIV/AIDS".

Interviews with the ex-detainees showed consistent abuse, torture, denial of access to lawyers, denial of proper medical care, widespread diseases, lack of food and water and even deaths in the detention camps due to negligence on the part of the authorities. The Memorandum describes treatment of detainees in a manner which violates Article 5 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, which prohibits torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Lestari vowed to continue the Asian migrants' demand for justice which has long been delayed. It's about time that the Malaysian court recognizes Dr. Fernandez' call for good governance, integrity and accountability on the part of the Malaysian government, she stressed.



## Thai Regional Alliance hold migrants educators' training seminar on GFMD

"We cannot allow the GFMD to control our lives! The Thai migrant workers' community must actively involve countering the deceiving agenda of GFMD", declared the eleven officers of the Thai Regional Alliance (TRA) who completed their migrant educators training seminar on GFMD at their office in Kowloon City last 15 September 2008. The event was held at their office in Kowloon City with M. JunTellez, the education and training program coordinator of the Mission for Migrant Workers as their speaker.

The migrants' educators training seminar on Global Migration and Development (GFMD) is part of the coordinated educational activity of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) and the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) to confront the GFMD.

"So this is what GFMD is! In the past we think the government is helping us to work in other countries. We never thought our money sent back to our

country is not spent for the Thai people!" the participants exclaimed.

"We will do Thai translations of this module to aid us in our campaign to reach out to our compatriots in Hong Kong so that they will also understand and be enlightened of the real agenda of GFMD", says TRA's chairperson, Bungon Tamasorn. "We can also utilize our English class to get our members informed about the real intention of the GFMD", says Parichat, one of the officers of TRA and teachers of their education program on language skills development.

Apart from these, TRA also will reach out to their compatriots and their families back home via their online

radio program that is aired on Sundays. It will also send their official representative to the IAMR, an activity that will challenge the GFMD as well as expose the so-called model labor export policy of the Philippine government that is hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> GFMD at the PICC, Manila.



*The training of migrants educators on GFMD was done in cooperation with the Asian Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and the Mission for Migrant Workers (HK) Society*

# Filipinos in Hong Kong mark 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of martial law with protest & forum

More than a hundred migrant workers and human rights advocates staged a protest action at 11 am on September 21 this year at the United Centre near the Philippine Consulate in Hong Kong to mark the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martial Law declared by former President Ferdinand Marcos.

Organized by the HK Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (HKCAHRPP), the event highlighted the state of military rule under the current administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (PGMA).

The GMA regime has equaled Marcos' fascist dictatorship in terms of its notoriety in the number of gross human rights violations even if she did not declare martial rule, according to Eman Villanueva, secretary general of the United Filipinos in HK (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE HK).

GMA's desperation to hold on to power is so blatant that she has given priority budget allocation to the military while assigning former military officers in key positions in her government, Villanueva stressed.

These include Executive secretary Eduardo Ermita; Secretary of Department of Energy, former AFP chief of staff Angelo Reyes; General Ebdane, Secretary of the Department Public Works & Highways; General Esperon as presidential adviser on peace process; and retired General Leandro Mendoza, Secretary of the Department of Transportation & Communications.

A forum on Human Rights in the Philippines was conducted on the same day at 2 pm at the Li Hall of the St. John's Cathedral with former University of the Philippines (UP) College of Law Dean Raul Pangalangan and Martial Law political detainee Jun Tellez of the Mission for Migrant Workers as resource speakers.

Atty. Pangalangan who is also a regular columnist of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, stressed the need to speak out against human rights violations and corruption committed by the Arroyo government. He cited how the case of Jun Lozada, the whistleblower in the NBN-ZTE scandal involving US\$130 million alleged corruption by the GMA government, is now being derailed particularly when the Court of Appeals threw out his plea for protection through the 'writ of amparo' which the



*Abroad, Filipino migrants call for a stop to the 'undeclared Martial Law' of Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Human rights abuses remain unabated in the country.*

Supreme Court called as the "time-tested and inexpensive instrument for the protection of constitutional rights."

Comparing the situation between then President Marcos and President Arroyo, Jun Tellez said that there are distinct similarities. For instance, both claimed threats to their government by the opposition, the left, even the extreme right, when their term was near its end, so they capitalize on these threats as a basis to amend the constitution to perpetuate their stay in power, according to him.

The difference lies in their style, he told the migrants. Marcos had finesse when he declared martial law while Arroyo did not declare this but has a de facto military rule having committed more than 900 extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances with impunity. Moreover, these happened for a period of more than six years compared to the 20 years of Marcos' rule.

In terms of corruption style, Marcos was more subtle while Arroyo is vulgar and shameless with all the scandals and scams such as the Macapagal Highway, the North Rail, ZTE-National Broadband Network, the transfer of OWWA Medicare funds as well as the missing funds. Despite all the charges, no one has been arrested or convicted in court, Tellez said.

A fitting call during the forum was composed and sung by Danny Fabella, a member of Sining Bulosan which is a member of the Migrant International. Essentially, the message of the song was that we shouldn't fear the human rights violators; what are more fearsome are those who stand on the sideline watching and doing nothing.

## APMM NEWS DIGEST

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