

# News Digest

June - July  
2005



APMM

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

*It started with a hello and is now expected to end with a resounding goodbye*

## “OUST GMA!”

MORE AND MORE people are now calling for the resignation or ouster of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. A mere month after the controversial “Hello Garci scandal”, the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of GMA last July 24 saw the biggest crowd of protesters so far. The more than 100,000 crowd who converged to declare the “People’s SONA” was an ominous sign of the restlessness of the Filipino people.

Opposition to the government of GMA came from a wide range of groups. From traditional politicians to progressive partylist groups. From former president Cory Aquino to former cabinet members of GMA. From Catholic bishops to major Christian churches. From the militant left up to the moderate groups who are disgusted with the immorality and illegality of the GMA administration.

However, most significant of these was the participation of people’s organizations coming from the grassroots – workers, peasants, women, urban poor, youth, students and migrant workers. If ever there is a barometer of the political tension in the Philippines, it will be the sentiment of those that form the majority of the people.

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It does not come as a surprise that GMA ranked the least popular among the past four presidents – including disgraced president Joseph Estrada.

The Gloria-gate scandal was only the tip of the iceberg. For a long while now, protests against the government have been steadily on the rise. The country's crisis has been so intense that proposed alternative political structures have been gladly accepted especially by the basic sectors of the Philippine society.

### The condition of the Filipino people

The Philippine economic crisis, concretized by the ongoing fiscal crisis in the country, has resulted to the dwindling livelihood of the Filipino people.

Immediately after the now contested elections, the nation was shaken by news that the country was fast approaching an Argentina-type financial crisis stemming from the inability of the national economy to keep up its earnings with its humungous expenses. It took a while for GMA to finally admit the crisis.

Upon admission, however, she immediately launched a litany of economic programs – primarily taxes – to supposedly prop up the sluggish state of Philippine economy. These programs were met by stiff resistance from the grassroots organizations because of its impacts to those who already are hard up. Proposals such as the increase of the Value Added Tax to 12% will surely jack up the prices of basic commodities.

Additionally, the government has miserably failed to curb the increase of



## Overseas Filipinos join call for ouster of GMA



FILIPINOS ABROAD HAVE pitched in their organized ranks to the swelling movement to oust the Gloria Macapaga-Arroyo government.

In response to the call of MIGRANTE International, Filipino overseas launched different initiatives to contribute to the Oust GMA campaign.

In Hong Kong, groups led by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK) formed the Overseas Filipino United to Remove the Arroyo Government (OUTRAGE-HK). OUTRAGE-HK resolved to gather the broadest number of Filipinos in Hong Kong in activities that aim to register the position of OFWs on the current political crisis in the country.

Last July 24, one day before GMA's State of the Nation Address (SONA), OUTRAGE-HK held a program that

oil prices (almost four times in July!) that resulted to more increase in prices of goods and transport.

Meanwhile, the demand of the workers for a wage increase, that was unanswered since 1999, was only met by a measly P25 hike. Instead of responding to the needs of the people – especially the workers and the peasants – for meaningful economic reforms that will help them cope with the economic crunch, the GMA government instead continued to implement the neoliberal policies of globalization that have for years been the cause of the economic slide.

The already bankrupt economy caused by lopsided policies that primarily

gathered more than 1,000 OFWs including members of Bangon Pilipinas National Renewal Movement.

OUTRAGE-HK is planning to organize an HK-wide signature campaign for GMA's ouster as well as holding of discussions among different migrant organizations to further broaden the network.

Overseas Filipinos in other countries of the Asia Pacific such as Korea, Japan and Australia also issued their statements on the current campaign. Filipinos in Australia, in particular, held a picket at the Philippine Consulate in Sydney.

Filipinos in the United States and Canada also conducted various actions. Some US-based Filipinos even joined the SONA march in the Philippines.



benefit big and foreign businesses was even made worse by the rampant corruption in the country. This long-running sickness of the Philippine society primarily involved those in high positions such as GMA and her family. Who can forget the scandalous US\$20,000 stay of Mike Arroyo in a hotel in Las Vegas just to watch the match of Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao? This happened while GMA hypocritically encouraged the people to sacrifice.

The restlessness of the people, meanwhile, was met by the government by active propaganda and even more active military operations against opposition groups. On one hand, the government wantonly used the mass



media to convince the people that everything was alright with the country. On the other hand, direct attacks involving military and paramilitary elements have been heaved especially to activist groups that resulted to an alarming increase of human rights violation cases in the country.

To alleviate the country's problem and the people's displacement, the GMA administration embarked in an even more aggressive labor export program. Jobs that were yearly promised turned out to be jobs abroad for skilled and unskilled workers.

To further increase the revenues coming from overseas workers, the government drastically cut down on the already wanting services that it provides to its overseas nationals. The OWWA Omnibus Policies – the most recent program that denies services and protection to many OFWs – has been implemented. Additional income of the government also came from various onerous and dubious fees that different government agencies charge to migrants and would-be migrants.

An example of the money-making scheme that the government implemented was the E-card that they advertised was for free but was actually only issued to OWWA members who pay "regularly".

Aside from the OWWA Omnibus Policies, Filipinos overseas also

assailed the GMA government for its neglect towards the plight of distressed OFWs.

Notable among the cases of neglect were the roundup of undocumented migrant workers who did not receive assistance from the Philippine government during crackdowns. This happened in Malaysia and in South Korea.

As well, stranded and imprisoned OFWs in the Middle East, until now, are waiting for concrete actions from the GMA administration for their release and repatriation.

Irresponsibility, criminal neglect, lack of protection and dwindling services - these are just some of the major "crimes" that the GMA government has committed to migrant workers. These were brought alongside the worsening situation of the families of migrants in the Philippines

### Where to go?

As a concrete proposal, different groups are now considering the establishment of a transitional governing council as a post-GMA scenario. Steadily, more and more groups are veering into the said alternative to the GMA government or to what others advance as the Constitutional succession of Vice President Noli de Castro.

As perceived right now, the council shall be formed by progressive and anti-GMA forces. It shall be composed of representatives especially from grassroots organizations.

The council will be tasked to immediately implement meaningful reforms in the economic, political, and electoral arena. These reforms include ensuring the process of GMA's prosecution for electoral fraud, investigation of big-time corruption cases, and immediate electoral reforms. It will also look into the problem of the country's foreign debt that continues to bankrupt the national economy.

The council shall exist for a minimum of six months after which a new election shall be conducted.

This proposal is in stark contrast to GMA's proposal of charter change. Inspired by former president Fidel Ramos, GMA took Ramos' cudgel of pushing for a federal and parliamentary form of the government.

The proposal, however, was met with criticisms. Many believe that the proposal is being used in order for GMA and her camp to get off the hook for their crimes. More importantly, for many Filipinos, charter change will not bring any relief to their condition because it will just be another circus where the rich and the powerful will carve out their share of the country's riches and territories. Currently, as it was before in 1997, the charter change proposal is facing doubts and sound opposition especially on the danger of it further opening up the Philippine economy to greater foreign plunder.

### The power of the people

Indeed, the Filipinos are again on the cusp of a boiling economic and political crisis. However it may turn out in a few months – or even a year – the Filipino people shall be the one to decide.

For many of the grassroots organizations, including migrant's groups, the fight right now is focused on the main enemy which is the illegal, corrupt, fascist and puppet GMA regime. While endeavoring to oust GMA, the oust GMA movement is also very much against the establishment of a military junta as well as *trapo* (traditional politicians) takeover in the persons of de Castro, Jose de Venecia or Franklin Drilon.

After GMA, there is still a long way to go for the people to achieve genuine freedom, democracy, justice and peace. Still, ousting GMA is another step towards that dream society.

*Photos were taken from arkibong bayan. Frontpage photo shows the front section of the huge rally in the Philippines. Left photo shows a section of the rally from Kairos. Above photo shows leaders of OUTRAGE-HK sign their name and organization on banner calling for GMA's ouster. Photos in the boxed article shows other actions by overseas Filipinos in the United States and Canada. For more Oust GMA photos, videos and statements, visit [www.arkibongbayan.org](http://www.arkibongbayan.org)*

# UN judge and people's lawyer, Romeo Capulong gathers support for HR fight

FILIPINO MIGRANTS, LOCAL and international groups got a first-hand account of the current political, social, economic and human rights situation in the Philippines from the famous lawyer activist Judge Romeo T. Capulong when he visited Hong Kong from July 8 to 13 this year.

Organized by the Hong Kong Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (HKCAHRPP), Judge Capulong's schedule included meetings with a wide-range of Filipinos in Hong Kong, from the Filipino domestic workers to the expatriates and the business sector; press forum with local media at the Foreign Correspondents Club; discussion with the Hong Kong University Faculty of Law; forum with delegates at the Asia Pacific Research Network Conference on Trade and WTO; and interviews with prominent media outfits such as the South China Morning Post, CNN, Star TV and RTHK.

On Sunday, July 10, he witnessed the life of the domestic workers as he met with various organizations in Central. In the afternoon, he was the guest speaker in the Leader's Kapihan (Leader's Meeting) that was attended by 180 delegates from 36 groups representing

Filipino migrants from Luzon to Mindanao.

A victim of an assassination attempt, Judge Capulong clearly pictured the human rights crisis that Filipinos are experiencing under the Arroyo regime. He challenged the migrants to unite and become a strong force in promoting the alternative solution to the political crisis – a transitional governing council. As a concrete result of the forum, the participants agreed to form the Overseas Filipinos United to Remove the Gloria Government (OUTRAGE!).

Meanwhile, a forum with Filipino expatriates and business owners was held on July 11 jointly sponsored by the HKCAHRPP and The Sun – one of the largest Filipino community newspapers in Hong Kong. Attended by more than 30 participants, the forum delved deeper into the current political situation and structure in the country, and the political history of the Filipino people.

A discussion with the members of the Faculty of Law and law students of the Hong Kong University was held in July 12. Nine people attended the discussion that saw Judge Capulong expound on the cause of human rights, public interest lawyering, and his experiences



in defending the civil and political rights of activists, progressive groups, trade unions and other grassroots organizations.

In the evening of that same day, a video "Sa Ngalan ng Tubo" featuring the Hacienda Luisita Massacre was shown to the delegates of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) Conference on Trade and WTO. After which, Judge Capulong presented the different proposals from the parties opposing Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and declared his own choice to replace the current government.

The forum drew the support of the international delegates to report the political and human rights conditions in the Philippines in their own countries. They were totally struck at the violence that the military wrought on the ordinary farm workers, as shown in the short film.

Similarly, Judge Capulong's discussion at the Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC) that centered on anomalies surrounding GMA's presidency and the growing call for her resignation drew a huge crowd. Even FCC president Ms. Ilaria Maria Sala, said that it was one of the biggest gathering of journalists that FCC has ever seen.

Indeed, Judge Romeo Capulong's visit to HK became a venue to project the concerns of the Filipino people, gather Filipino migrants in a common cause, and solicit the support of the local Hong Kong people and the international community to the Philippine movement for human rights, peace, justice, freedom and democracy.



*Judge Capulong speaking before one of the biggest press gathering at the Foreign Correspondent's Club in HK*



# “Keng Yee Sai Mao”

## HK peoples and migrant workers gear for WTO fight

**JULY 1**, THE 8<sup>TH</sup> anniversary of Hong Kong's reversion to Mainland Chinese government, was marked by two activities.

On one hand, the HK government celebrated with festivity at the Hong Kong Convention Centre, led by the new Chief Executive Donald Tsang, the Executive and Legislative officials, and big business lords. Attendance was estimated at more than 25,000.

On the other hand, a huge street march with an estimated 30,000 participants was held from Victoria Park to the Central Government Office (CGO) led by unions and sectoral organisations of workers, women, public employees, teachers, elderly, lawyers, youth and students among others. Marching in solidarity with them were about 1,000 foreign domestic workers led by the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB).

Socio-economic and political demands echoed through speeches, cultural skits and propaganda materials. The protesters denounced the government's cutting of social welfare services due to government collusion with big businesses in the name of the privatisation scheme of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Rallyists also demanded the government to implement universal suffrage and other democratic reforms for the interests of the Hong Kong citizenry.

The Hong Kong Peoples Alliance (HKPA) on WTO joined the marchers from Wanchai. Members and volunteers distributed reading materials to passers-by as part of HKPA's information and education drive to

further raise the local people's awareness and understanding about WTO, the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and impacts of WTO policies on the HK peoples' lives.

With the upcoming 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Hong Kong this December, HKPA also urged the locals to participate in the preparation and mobilisation for the “Peoples Action Week” from December 11-18 this year.

Likewise, the group lobbied the locals to support its current **“Get the Venue”** campaign that aims to pressure the government to make available public places, Victoria Park in particular, for people's activities on WTO.

The migrants sector supported the demands of the peoples of HK for social welfare protection and to junk the WTO. They regarded the WTO as an evil pressing people in dire poverty and

forcing them to leave their country for jobs overseas.

The migrant organisations renewed their twin demands to raise their wage and abolish the employer's levy. Additionally, they also demanded to remove the ban on entry of Nepalese that was imposed by the Immigration office last June 3. The ban also prohibited Nepalese from working in HK.

Meanwhile, the HKPA held a protest action last July 24 to the CGO in relation to the WTO's General Council Meeting of government officials in Geneva on July 27-29. The action was attended by about 140 people.

The Korean Peasant League and Via Campesina based in Indonesia delivered their solidarity messages to the HKPA. They vowed work hard in order to bring their people to HK in December for the anti-WTO events.



**“See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil”** - cultural presentation of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) to show the “evils” of WTO

# APRN holds confab on Trade

The APMM together with Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC) and the Documentation Action Group in Asia (DAGA) co-hosted the Asia Pacific Research Network's (APRN) Policy Research Conference on Trade this July 11-13, 2005 in Hong Kong. More than 100 representatives of NGOs and people's movements from 44 organizations in 19 countries throughout Asia, as well as countries from Africa and elsewhere attended the gathering.

The meeting denounced the increasingly desperate efforts of the World Trade Organisation to extend the reach of neoliberal globalization through the Doha Round of negotiations. The conference also resolved to intensify APRN's research, education and information campaigns to expose the impacts of the WTO to the people and advocate genuine people-centered alternatives.

The resolution was specially relevant as the global powers, led by the US

and EU, have intensified their drive to secure a favourable agenda for trade in goods, agriculture and services in advance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Hong Kong in December. These powers are already panicking due to the risk of yet another failed WTO ministerial meeting,

The APRN was established in 1999 to develop cooperation among alternative research centers, NGOs, and social movements in Asia and the Pacific in order to strengthen advocacy from the community up to the global level. APRN promotes exchange in researches and facilitates cooperation in raising research capacity among its members as well as non-members. APRN also promotes research cooperation and coordination among its members as well as with other NGOs and social

movements within and outside of the Asia-Pacific.

APRN members will return to Hong Kong in December to take part in activities that oppose the neoliberal agenda of the WTO Ministerial meeting, beginning with a Human Rights Speak Out on 10 December 2005. This is part of its commitment and in solidarity with the Hong Kong People's Alliance.



# AR-WACC holds Triennial Assembly in South Korea

APMM attended the Triennial Assembly of the Asia Region-World Association for Christian Communication (AR-WACC) in Seoul, South Korea from April 19-22, 2005. The APMM is a member of said association.

The theme of the Assembly is "Communicating for Peace and Life". The first session was on "A Conceptual

and Reflective Paper on Communicating for Peace and Life". Fr. Sebastian Periannan of the St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary in India delivered the presentation. The next session focused on "Life, Peace in the Reunification of Korea". Dr. Noh Jung-Sun of the Yonsei University of Korea provided the overview presentation of the North/South Korea divide, as well as current efforts at reunification.

Following the presentations were group discussions on: (a) key issues from the presentations at the Pre-Assembly Seminar; (b) priority issues for the AR-WACC; and (c) how best to communicate peace and life as a Christian communicator.

Another highlight of the assembly was a business meeting which highlighted the reports of the executive committee and election of new officers. Rev. Dr. John Henry Anand was elected as Chairperson, Rev. Judy Chan, Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Maria Theresa N. Lauron, Secretary. Rev. Cheon Young Cheol, Treasurer, Mrs. Hetty Siregar, Excom Member, Mr. Lin Sein, Excom Member and Mr. David Lin, Regional Coordinator for Asia and the Pacific

Subsequently, the Assembly also unanimously approved the Seoul Declaration 2005 that served as the assembly's unity statement.



Another session was also held on "Dismantling Empires: Radical Peace-ing Towards the Fullness of Life". Dr. Kang Namsoon, a professor of Women and Religion at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul delivered the presentation.

# Foreign domestic workers join local groups on July 1 protest action

A historic July 1 march of Foreign Domestic Workers.

For the first time, about 1,000 foreign domestic helpers from the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) joined local groups in the traditional commemoration of the of the July 1 handover of Hong Kong to China this year.

According to the AMCB, though they have been traditionally attending July 1 mass actions, their previous attendance was in support of the demands of the local people. However, for this year, they chose to march in huge numbers alongside the locals in order for the FDWs to project their concern as part of the issues that the HK government must address.

They called for just, righteous wages that every migrant worker in this territory deserves. "We are workers with rights and welfare to be addressed by governing institutions. We are part of the populace contributing to the growing

economy of Hong Kong," they declared.

Specifically, the migrants wanted the Hong Kong government to bring back the minimum

allowable wage to HK\$3,670 and to abolish the HK\$9,600 levy paid by their employers although indirectly deducted from their wages.

The current HK\$3,320 monthly wage of FDWs, including its HK\$50 increase, is still within the 1991 wage level, not commensurate to the workload and current working conditions, and is a far cry from what the standards of international labor institutions and conventions state, according to them.

In addition, the AMCB raised concerns about the Immigration Department's ban on the entry of Nepalese students, workers and businessmen. This was

considered discriminatory because there was no rationale provided by the government in implementing this policy, they said.

The issues on underpayment, overcharging and all cases of violations against foreign domestic workers were also included in the agenda that the AMCB wanted the Hong Kong government to immediately address.

The participation of the domestic helpers strengthened the solidarity among the local and foreign workers who are both victims of the state's abandonment to its social services for the people.



Photo by Corazon Amaya-Cañete

## MECO Washes Hands Off Overcharging Case

The Manila Economic and Cultural Office's (MECO) Labor Representative Reynaldo Gopez essentially washed his hands off on an overcharging case in Taiwan. Instead of pursuing the case to the Council of Labor Affairs' (CLA) national office, Mr. Gopez conveniently passed the burden to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).

This pertains to the case of the five Fu Lin caretakers in Hsinchu County wherein they got their maximum demands for overtime and separation pay only after their case was publicized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) and Migrant Sectoral Party – Taiwan chapter in the media. All five were not able to get a single cent from the broker for

overcharging his fees as Mr. Gopez deemed it would be better to pursue this in the Philippines. His basis was that the workers signed a promissory note and agreement in the Philippines.

This was despite the fact that there was strong evidence that the broker, Dallas Huang of Virtue Human Resources Inc., collected the illegal fees. Mr. Huang signed his name on a sheet of paper demanded by each of the five workers when he made the illegal collections. This was under the heading "brokers fee and salary deduction year 2004".

Secondly, there exists an agreement between the CLA and its labor counterparts from labor exporting countries that they will only honor the employment contract and the Fees and

Salary Declaration Form in overcharging of brokers/placement fees. Other documents such as the promissory note and side agreement are non-binding.

Third, it is illegal under the Labor Standards Law of Taiwan for loans to be automatically deducted by the employer from the wages of his employees. Fourth, the promissory note and agreement which each of the workers signed did not indicate to whom they were indebted to. However, the names of the broker's company and the employer were written in the former while the latter stated that their loan would be automatically deducted by their employer.

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When the Hsinchu County Labor Bureau (HCLB) did not invoke these four points, what Mr. Gopez should have done was to raise this issue to the national office of the CLA. Besides referring this to the POEA, Mr. Gopez also signed the minutes of the conciliation meeting with the HCLB that deleted the part that Mr. Huang overcharged the migrants. In the first conciliation meeting where Ms. Lydia Espinosa took part, this was stated in the minutes and that Mr. Huang even offered to give back  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the overcharged fees.

Adding insult to injury, when the five brought their complaint to the POEA they were disheartened by the attitude of the conciliation officer. They were told by Atty. Fung of the POEA that they better settle with their placement agency as they might spend more for

following up their case than in getting what are owed to them. It is like saying that they should not pursue their case against their broker.

APMM has written MECO requesting them to file a case against the broker for overcharging at the national CLA office and see to it that he be prosecuted for this. If the CLA does not want to pursue the case, MECO could file a court case against Virtue Human Resources Inc. Mr. Dallas Huang of said company had also overcharged other Filipino caretakers in Taoyuan and Sanshia. There are pending cases against him for this in the Philippines and in Taiwan.

In addition to this, APMM is also demanding that Mr. Gopez be investigated for the fiasco that he has made. He should either atone for this mistake or resign from his post for his incompetence, APMM added.

## APMM holds Regional Board meeting in Manila

Members of the regional board of APMM met last 22<sup>nd</sup> of July at the United Church of Christ (UCCP) Shalom House in Manila, Philippines.

One highlight of the meeting was the approval of the Board membership to the new Dean of the St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong, The Very Revd. Andrew Chan, and Professor Hsia Hsiao-Chuan of the Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies of the Shih Hsin University. Dean Chan attended the meeting.

Another highlight of the meeting was the presentation of the 2005 mid-year activity and 2004 annual reports. The reports

mentioned the formation of a network on foreign brides and the strengthening of other established formations such as the network on undocumented migrants.

The board also approved the proposed plan for the conduct of an evaluation of APMM's work for the past five years. The evaluation will try to address the identified weaknesses and missed opportunities in the APMM focus areas and in the region. The overall result of the evaluation will be the basis for the APMM plan for the next five years. The evaluation is expected to start towards the end of 2005.

## DFA Covers-up Fracas in Jeddah Consulate

Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo practically covered up the fracas instigated by Philippine labor officials at the Jeddah consulate on July 16. Instead of ordering an investigation on what transpired, Mr. Romulo ordered Philippine government missions in Saudi Arabia to tighten their security. In effect, this also ensures that no further protest actions be allowed inside said premises which are considered Philippine sovereign territory.

The July 16 incident was started when the head of the shelter housing distressed workers, Anwar Ampang, punched Leo Legaspi of Migrante. Mr. Ampang was then helped along by three other officials and guards in mauling Mr. Legaspi and those who assisted him while 37 of them were trying to start their protest action for the ouster of the Philippine president from office.

The 37 also had an appointment with the Consul General on that day to follow up their repatriation back to the Philippines.

As of this writing, Mr. Legaspi is being hunted down by the goons at the consulate and his request for a travel document is being delayed by the Con Gen. At the same time, women leaders sheltered by the Philippine government are being harassed by pro-GMA staff in the consulate. Migrante International is holding negotiations with DFA officials in Manila to resolve these problems.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### Conference on Globalising Economic Justice and Social Sustainability

9 - 11 December 2005  
Hong Kong

A **Workshop on Migrant Workers** will be organized by the APMM as part of the activity

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