

News Digest

December 2006



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

APMM marks 2006 with new thrusts *Programs for migrants strengthened*

The past year was marked by further advancement in the work of the Asian Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) in its aim to build and strengthen the movement of migrant workers in the region.

The involvement of the APMM in the campaign against the World Trade Organization and its meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005 was a fitting ending to its five-year program. The achievements the APMM has gained throughout the years shall serve as stepping stones for the furtherance of APMM's mission and vision.

On the first months of 2006, APMM underwent an evaluation of its work and programs. It was crucial process that resulted to the development of a new plan of the APMM for the coming years. Coordinators of the APMM in focus areas, leaders of migrant's organizations, and some members of the Regional Board actively participated in the evaluation

process which finalized the major objectives of APMM in its future work, namely: 1. Migrant workers in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East regions reached by APMM are part of the international migrant movement and are able to link migrant issues at all levels; 2. Organized migrants in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East regions reached by APMM have the capacity to defend and protect their rights; 3. APMM's women's constituency is increasingly visible in the struggle for migrants' rights; and, 4. APMM has institutionalized linkages with international formations working on the issues of justice, freedom and democracy.

Guided by these objectives, the APMM launched programs and activities in the region and even outside.

The formation of the International Migrant's Alliance is one of the central aims of the APMM. To this end, meetings and consultations with different

grassroots migrant organizations and advocates of migrant workers in the region and elsewhere were conducted. These efforts culminated in the holding of the IMA Convenor's meeting that discussed the preparatory processes for the IMA founding assembly.

International efforts to form the IMA was complemented by the painstaking work of APMM coordinators and partner migrant organizations in the national level to reach out to formations of migrant workers of various nationalities as well as assist in jumpstarting the organizing work among their ranks.

Strengthening of existing organizations and the formation of new ones were complemented by a sustained advocacy work among migrant workers on the issues of the sector as well as national issues in migrant-sending countries that impact on the rights and wellbeing of migrant

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(L to R) APMM staff and area coordinators evaluate program; picket-protest in HK on slow and insufficient assistance of the Philippine government to distressed nationals in Lebanon; anti-globalization protests continue in HK with HK People's Forum 2006

Overseas Filipinos and Taiwanese mark International Human Rights Day against the killings in the Philippines

International Human Rights Day was marked in Taipei by a march against the political killings in the Philippines. Some seventy overseas Filipinos and Taiwanese friends staged the mass action in the Chung Shan North Road area, where most Filipinos in Taipei are found during Sundays.

Shouting "Stop the killings!" and "Uphold human rights in the Philippines!", the marchers stopped three times to encourage migrant workers they passed by to place stickers on a plain Philippine map. This symbolized their intent that such killings would not occur in their home provinces back home.

At the start of the activity, the protesters pressed their reddened hands at the map to symbolize the rampant killings in the



Migrant workers call to stop the killings

whole country. It ended with a tribute and prayers to those who were killed. The poem, *Because They Call You Enemy of the State*, was read.

Luo Mei Wen, adviser of the Labor Rights Association (LRA) shared his experience during the International Labor Solidarity Mission to the Philippines last May. He explained that one of those he met in the KMU (May First Movement) led activity had recently been killed.

Wu Ching Ru of the Taiwan International Workers Association (TIWA) on the other hand stated that what is happening in the Philippines right now is like the white terror times of the 1950's in Taiwan. She added that state terrorism is the biggest threat to human rights and the US government supports many of the states that practice this.

Others who spoke included those from Kapulungan ng Samahang Pilipino (Kasapi), Taiwan



Migrant workers and locals join hands for human rights

Association for Human Rights (TAHR), Workers Democratic Association, Solidarity for Peoples Power (SPP) and Migrante Sectoral Party (MSP) – Taiwan Chapter. LRA, TAHR, SPP and MSP organized the said activity. Other local and Filipino organizations also took part in the protest action.

It was also announced during the activity that 31 Taiwanese legislators had already signed a petition condemning the killings in the Philippines. The next activity of the stop the killings network would be a concert by the cultural group of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) on January 6 and 7 also in Taipei.#

Nepalese association in HK holds community exchange programme

The Far East Overseas Nepalese Association in Hong Kong (FEONA-HK), one of the biggest Nepalese organization in Hong Kong, held a community exchange programme participated in by migrant organizations from Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and the Nepal. The activity was sponsored by the Home Affairs Bureau, a governmental agency that promotes racial equality and combats discrimination.

The programme aimed to give basic information about the Nepali culture and also to harness harmonious relationship among migrant workers in Hong Kong by understanding their culture initially.

The program was held last December 3 and attended by more than 40 individuals.

The participants were appreciative of the programme as they were exposed to the Nepalese community in Yuen Long. They were able to see the Chomolongma Multi Cultural Community Centre in Ping Shan where some of the ethnic minorities groups were holding their special events.

The cultural exchange was also expressed through songs, skits and interpretative dances. One common comment by the participants was that the Nepalese have a very rich culture and they were really amazed with it.

The whole day event brought new experiences to the participants. They learned that a Nepali magazine there runs for over seven years now. The secondary school that was established by the Nepali community to safeguard the interest of Nepalese in learning the English language

was also appreciated by the other ethnic minority groups.

After the exposure to Nepalese community, the participants went back to Chomolongma multicultural center where they held a short program.

FEONA expressed desire to repeat the event in the coming years.#



Rich culture of

Convenors discuss founding of International Migrant's Alliance

Members of the International League of Peoples Struggle Commission No. 16 (On Im/migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons), and advocates for the rights of migrant workers held a meeting to discuss the formation of the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) last December 12, 2006 at Cebu City, Philippines.

Representatives of organizations from Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Australia, United States, Canada and Europe attended the meeting and agreed to work together in order to ensure the founding assembly of the IMA targeted for the last quarter of 2007 with Asia as the proposed venue.

Target members of the IMA are grassroots migrant organizations in different countries worldwide struggling for the rights and wellbeing of im/migrants, refugees and

displaced people and against forced migration.

Migrant serving institutions and NGOs, meanwhile, were encouraged to form an International Migrant Support Alliance.

There will be seven global regions to encompass the IMA: East Asia and Oceania, South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Europe, USA, Canada, Latin America and the Carribean.

The participants also clarified that the IMA will be a separate organization from the ILPS formation.

Preparatory tasks were divided among the participants which include recruitment of members, fund raising, drafting of the basic documents (charter), programs and promotional materials among others.#

HK People's Forum 2006 Migrants, local workers unite on wage fight

Asian migrants and local workers agreed to cooperate for a wage campaign during the Labor and Globalization workshop held last December 5 at the City University of Hong Kong.

The wage campaign included the call of the local workers for a minimum wage in Hong Kong and the campaign for a wage increase by the migrant workers.

More than 100 migrant and local workers attended the workshop organized by the APMM, the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) and the HK Confederation of Trade Union (HKCTU). The said



Christmas wishes of migrant workers

workshop was part of the HK People's Forum 2006 by the HK People's Alliance on Globalization (HKPA) who continues its campaign against neoliberal globalization started during the WTO meeting in December 2005.

Ms. Cynthia Tellez, a member of the APMM Regional Board presented on the lessons gained from the anti-globalization campaign of migrant workers on the aspects on organizing, mobilization, education work and solidarity.

Ms. Eni Leastari of AMCB tackled the impacts of globalization to migrant workers while Ms. Elizabeth Tang of the HKCTU dealt with the labor policies of the government.#



Migrant workers and local trade unions join forces to advance a bigger campaign on the wage and labor rights in HK.

Filipinos in Korea score mandatory social security scheme

Filipino organizations in Korea expressed opposition over the new Social Security Agreement between the Philippines and the Korean governments signed December 15, 2005 in Manila.

The said agreement was presented by Labor Attache Rodolfo Sabulaoto over 200 migrant workers who attended a forum at Hyewa Dong last November 26.

"There is no way that we can accept such a blatant extortionist program," said Mark Padlan of KASAMMA-Ko, a federation of Filipino organizations in South Korea.

Padlan said that, under the agreement, workers will be forced to become members and pay the Philippine Social Security System in order to get long-term benefits such as for old age, disability and death.

Padlan said that the Philippine government has once again "shown its greed to corner every drop of money from overseas Filipinos" while still disguising the scheme as a service to migrant workers.

"Why force everyone to pay for another insurance policy whereas many of us are already covered by different insurance schemes? Even our membership to the OWWA, also mandatory, gives us the same coverage," Padlan remarked.

The group said that they very much doubt the promised services.

"Whenever they need money, the government drums up schemes coated with promises of service. Be it the OWWA, transfer of Medicare Fund to PhilHealth and even the E-card – the professed service improvements remain only as promises," Padlan added.

KASAMMA-Ko also scored the government for putting up such an agreement without consultation to Filipino migrant workers affected by the plan.

According to Padlan, they will launch a campaign to resist the new scheme.#

APRN holds Jobs and Justice Conference

More than 100 representatives from trade unions, labor centers, labor institutions and advocates gathered for the Jobs and Justice Conference last December 7 and 8, 2006 at St. Theresa's College, Cebu City Philippines.

The conference was organized by the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) together with its members, the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER), Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC), ARENA - New Zealand and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM).

The conference discussed issues concerning neoliberal labor market restructuring and workers' resistance. It highlighted various forms of trade union repression, suppression and curtailment of labor rights in the guise of labor market restructuring.

Distinguished speakers from various labor groups spoke of their experiences as well as their struggles confronting different forms of labor market restructuring. There were also testimonies from the workers themselves who shared their experiences on the continuous threats by the company management against organizing trade unions and fighting for the rights and wellbeing of their co-workers.

Policies of labor market restructuring in the national level as well as workers' resistance were shared by those in Australia, New Zealand and Philippines among others.

Part of the conference program was the showing of a documentary film about the condition and campaign for the immediate release of KMU (May First Movement) honorary Chairperson and member of the Philippine House of Representatives, Cong. Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran who was



illegally arrested and detained by the Philippine military because of fabricated charges. Another documentary film was shown on the labor rights campaign held in New Zealand.

Conference participants also joined in a protest action against the ASEAN meeting scheduled to be held in Cebu City but was postponed in January 2007 because of the on-going political crisis faced by the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.#



Panel of speaker on strategies of workers' resistance

were gathered for the Labor and Globalization workshop. Hundreds of workers also participated in the closing rally of the HKPF on December 10

On welfare provision, APMM provided assistance to distressed migrants in Macau, Dubai and Taiwan. The success of the workers at Formosa Plastics Group in Taiwan even gave numerous lessons to the APMM and the migrant workers on the relationship of organizing, welfare

provision and advocacy.

To further develop its education program, APMM published an updated version of the Migrant's Orientation for Filipinos in comics form. The said education material was a crucial resource for Filipino migrant workers in understanding the basic concepts of Filipino migration and the situation of migrant workers.

Research, advocacy and organizing of foreign brides became a part of APMM's major work for the year. The concern for this issue started during an APMM co-sponsored regional workshop on the said issue

in 2005. Though still an ongoing project, APMM is looking forward already to its successful completion.

Throughout the year, APMM also was actively involved in various international gatherings where APMM's relationship with other groups and institutions outside was reinforced. Among these events were the World Social Forum, the National Justice Conference in Canada, and the Jobs and Justice Conference of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN).

The year that was offered challenges and opportunities for the APMM. In the continuing service to migrant workers, APMM is prepared to take on these challenges and maximize these opportunities for the further advancement of its work.#

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workers. These advocacy campaigns included issues of standard contract in Taiwan, repatriation of migrant workers during the Israel-Lebanon war, the plight of undocumented workers in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, wage increase of domestic workers in Hong Kong, and against human rights violations in Philippines among others.

Advocacy against neoliberal globalization and its impacts to migrant workers also continued. APMM was an active organizer, as a member of the Hong Kong People's Alliance on Globalization (HKPA), of the HK People's Forum (HKPF) last December 3 to 10. Together with the Asian Migrant's Coordinating Body (AMCB) and the HK Confederation of Trade Union (HKCTU), more than 100 local and migrant workers

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Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)
 No. 2 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR
 Tel. No: (852) 2723 7536; Fax No: (852) 2735 4559
 E-mail: apmm@hknet.com Website:
www.apmigrants.org

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Editorial Team: Ramon Bultron, Gi Estrada, Aaron Ceradoy, Buhay BangcawayanVicky Casia-Cabantac