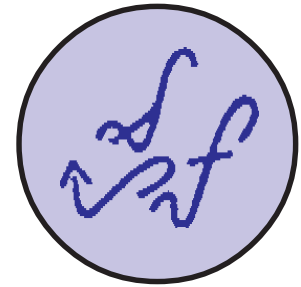


# News Digest

December  
2007



APMM

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

## *The Year in Review*

### *Victories won and challenges to face in the struggle for migrants' rights and wellbeing*

2007 proved to be a productive year for the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). The year kicked off with an advocacy empowerment seminar training for immigrant women married to Taiwanese locals on January 27 and 28 in Meinung, a town located at the southern part of Taiwan. The foreign wives came mainly from countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Mainland China and Philippines.

Meantime, foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong staged the biggest ever number in protest against the new policies imposed by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).

Hastily crafted in time for the 2007 elections, the POEA guidelines clearly provided another opportunity for extortion and corruption by unscrupulous officials and recruiters as the government made mandatory the training and assessment of household workers for overseas deployment with excessive ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 pesos.

Undoubtedly, one of the highlights of the year was the second Overseas Absentee Voting where Filipinos in Hong Kong and worldwide made the Gabriela Women's Party, their standard bearer in Philippine Congress, number one among all partylist candidates abroad.

Their efforts paid off as Gabriela won two seats in the House of Representatives. More importantly, the 2007 elections proved to be an expression of protest and discontent against the Arroyo administration as overseas voters elected majority from the opposition.

National issues always intertwine with the migrants' concerns. In this light, migrants not only supported the campaign against extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations committed by the military under the Arroyo government, they actively conducted forums and protest actions to stop the killings and pursue justice for the victims. They triumphed over the success of the Second Permanent Peoples Tribunal that was held in The Netherlands where the Arroyo government was declared guilty of gross human rights violations and economic plunder.

Human rights include migrant rights; hence, these were tackled in the second Filipino Women Migrant Workers Summit that was held in the Hong Kong University in August last year. Action resolutions were passed to address the worsening conditions of the workers as a result of the policies of the home and host countries.

The issue of foreign brides once again came into focus as APMM organized the International Conference on Border



*The POEA Guidelines was one of the hottest issue for Filipino migrant workers. Despite the exemptions introduced, the campaign to scrap pushes through.*



*APMM continue to support organizing efforts of Indonesian migrants.*



*New partnerships were forged by APMM such as the one with the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.*



*A major program of the APMM for the year was on foreign brides that included advocacy, organizing, education, training and bridging linkages of foreign brides and groups supporting their concerns.*

Control and Empowerment of Immigrant Brides together with the Graduate School of Social Transformation of the Shih Hsin University in Taiwan. Delegates from Australia, Canada, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, signed a declaration of commitment to unite and work towards the defense of the human rights of immigrant brides and the promotion of their welfare.

One of the key resolutions that were passed in the conference was the immediate formation of an International Migrants Alliance. This was again reiterated during the Asian Migrant Women Workers Summit that was organized by the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, an alliance of foreign domestic workers' organizations composed of different nationalities like Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

The summit that was held late November last year at the City University of Hong Kong, managed to define the common issues affecting all foreign workers in the territory and submitted these for action to the Central Government Offices during the celebration of the International Migrants Day on December 16 last year.

Meanwhile, APMM coped with various concerns in other areas around the region. Together with its Hong Kong partner, the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), they conducted a two-day consultation on 11 and 12 October 2007 that was attended by leaders and some members of the MIGRANTE Chapter in Dubai.

A paper on globalization and migration was also presented at the Asian consultation on Globalization and its Impact on the

Family organized by the International Anglican Family Network (IAFN) hosted by the Anglican Church in Korea from 19 to 25 October. APMM, together with other members of the United for Foreign Domestic Workers' Rights, also held public forum and launched the 'One paid day off a week' campaign as part of the campaign on domestic workers' human rights specifically the recognition of Domestic Work as Work on November 4, 2007, the last day of the 3rd ASEAN + Civil Society Conference at the Peninsula Excelsior Hotel in Singapore.

Radio internet broadcasting is the latest program that APMM launched in November last year. Members of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) were given training on Internet Community Radio Broadcasting by Malou Logan, from SBS Radio Australia and an experienced broadcaster of Migrant Australia on November 10-11, 2007.

Finally, 2007 witnessed welfare protection extended by APMM coordinators in all its focus areas in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Dubai, the Middle East and in Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, a number of welfare cases have transformed into continuing campaigns such as the case of Marilou Ranario, a Filipina who was initially sentenced for execution in Kuwait but through the international protest actions, the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

As the APMM enters the new year, it shall again face challenges in its thrust to empower migrant workers across the region as it contributes to the worldwide efforts of migrant workers to make the Global Forum on Migration and Development genuinely work for the protection of the rights and wellbeing of migrants.

As well, this year shall also be marked by the establishment of the International Migrants' Alliance (IMA).

Indeed it has been a fruitful year for the APMM. Together with friends and the migrants' movement, we look forward to an even better 2008.#

## Asian migrants in HK renew call for wage hike

Asian migrant workers in Hong Kong, led by the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body or AMCB conducted a protest action last December 16 as part of the International Migrants' Day celebration on December 18.

About 500 workers from Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines marched from Causeway Bay to the Central Government Office (CGO) to primarily demand for an increase in the Minimum Allowable Wage of Foreign Domestic Workers and the legislation of a minimum wage.

According to the statement of the group, the bouncing back of the HK economy is yet to trickle down to sectors most severely affected during the financial crisis in 1997 and afterwards. They said that the previous increases are still not enough to reclaim what migrant workers lost and the crisis in the home countries of migrant workers has eroded wage hikes implemented in the past.

The AMCB also carried the issues of the continuing ban on Nepali migrants, the New Conditions of Stay (NCS) as well as the prevailing racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

The protesters also submitted the demands that the First Asian Migrant Workers' Summit in HK came out with last November. The said summit gathered the biggest number of Asian migrant organizations in the history of the migrants' movement in HK.

More actions are planned by the AMCB for the year.



*AMCB gears for an intensified campaign for a wage increase for all HK workers.*

# Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs Indifferent to Foreign Household Service Workers



Major issues continue to plague migrants in Taiwan, the indifference of the Taiwanese government to their plight has led to the intensification of struggle of foreign workers.

It is not a surprise for Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) to remain indifferent and even ignorant on the plight of foreign household workers who are mostly caretakers. This is in reaction to a December 9 mass protest action of 1500 migrant workers and advocates calling for those working in homes to have regular days off.

CLA's Deputy Chairwoman Tsao Ailan pronounced the following:

a. It is "technically infeasible" for household service workers to be covered by the Labor Standards Law.

b. The CLA can just urge local employers to give their foreign employees some days off.

c. That the workload of a caretaker is light, in that they just take care of those who are incapable of moving.

The CLA already included those working in homes in its Labor Standards Law years ago for a number of months. And has included caretakers working in nursing homes and hospitals in the law since five years ago. There is no difference between

the job of caretakers in both places except that those in homes do other chores that is more appropriate for maids.

In effect the CLA is also violating the UN Declaration of Human Rights by not ensuring this inalienable right to these kinds of migrant workers.

Migrante - Taiwan chapter joined the December 9 protest of Migrants Empowerment Network in Taiwan (MENT). MENT is an aggregation of migrant NGO's in Taiwan most of whom belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Migrante issued its own statement in support of MENT's activity and at the same time APMM made a statement which appeared in a Taiwanese English paper that debunked the CLA's bankrupt position on its no day off policy.

The APMM is part of a regional advocacy network working for one day off for foreign domestic workers in the region, called the United for Foreign Domestic Workers Rights (UFDWR). #

## Korea and Malaysia

### Expanded powers of police and "vigilantes" against undocumented migrant workers

**Migrant workers, specifically the undocumented in Korea and Malaysia are becoming targets of an expanding campaign of harassment, arrest, imprisonment, whipping and deportation.**

*In Korea — union busting to crackdown the undocumented migrant workers has been adopted.* A case in point is the November 27 crackdown that arrested and detained leaders of the Migrant Trade Union (MTU).

MTU is a Korean Confederation of Trade Union (KCTU) affiliate of the Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union in Korea. The MTU advocates the rights of South Korea's migrant workers irrespective of their status. There are an estimated 420,000 migrant workers in the country with 224,000 of them, undocumented. The number is increasing even with the introduction of the

Employment Permit System (EPS) and the termination of the Trainee System in 2007.

It is widely thought that the arrest on November 27 was a clear targeted crackdown against the MTU leadership by the Korean government as a way to thwart their efforts in offering assistance to and protecting the rights of undocumented migrant workers. The arrests happened at the same time that the South Korean Immigration Control Office was proposing to revise an immigration law that would make it easier to carry out crackdowns on undocumented migrant workers, further threatening any protection to their basic human rights.

The MTU-KCTU called for solidarity protest actions in Korea and abroad to stop the

inhumane exercise by the Korean immigration authorities. KASAMMA-KO and other local allied non-government human rights organizations supported the call.

Counterpart migrant alliance, unions and regional cause-oriented groups in Hong



Fellow Filipino migrants in Korea took up the call to defend their undocumented co-workers.



Local advocates for the rights of migrant workers in Korea joined the campaign to stop the persecution of undocumented migrant workers and called for the respect of their rights.

Kong heeded the call by holding a picket at the premises of the Korean Consulate in Hong Kong on December 12 led by the Asian Migrants' Coordinating Body (AMCB), Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU), along with the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM, who also circulated an online petition), Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Union (HKCTU), and the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC).

The protesters said that *"The arrest of the MTU leaders, President Kajiman, Vice President Raju, and General Secretary Masum is a gross violation of human rights and a horrendous act of labour repression which targets not only the migrant workers but also the KCTU and the workers it represents and the international labour community"*.

Immediately release the three migrant union activists, stop the targeted crackdown and labour repression against MTU, stop the arrest, detention and force deportation of undocumented migrant workers were demanded to the Korean government.

Meanwhile, case update e-mailed by KCTU revealed that a forced deportation on the leaders was done in the early morning of December 13 while their legal representatives were continuously told by immigration officials that they would not be deported. The act of deportation has violated a common law in Korea whereby the accused person(s) cannot be deported until the case is completed. The act denied their right to trial and right to appeal. This is merely one example of the several human

rights violations committed by immigration officials, such as physical abuse, extortion of money and denial of health care.

***In Malaysia — the RELA force started to be trained to take control of 14 detention centers.***

The Rela is a civilian self defense corps made up of mostly of untrained civilians, numbering more than the military and police forces combined at half a million. In 2005, the Malaysian government transformed the Rela into an intense power group to massively hunt undocumented migrant workers that year, as it did viciously in 2002.

In July of 2006 the Malaysian government announced fresh plans to arrest up to one million undocumented migrants. It is estimated that there are 1.5 to 2 million migrant workers, asylum-seekers and refugees in Malaysia.

The Relas are left to patrol, question, raid and search any person they find questionable without any accountability

or supervision from the government or immigration authorities. They are not trained to deal with migrants and show no indications that they will follow basic human rights laws. They are armed, even

though they are only dealing with undocumented workers, not criminals. They are given monetary compensations for turning in "undocumented" workers.

What was feared by migrant serving and human rights groups in 2005 about Relas committing human rights abuses did happen. News reported on countless cases of abuses, theft, destructions of personal property, rape and even death.

Since they are unsupervised, they often steal or destroy the documents and passports of legal migrant workers in order to receive more rewards.

It is not just migrant workers that are affected, children of undocumented migrant workers, asylum-seekers and refugees from neighboring countries are also subject to abuse, imprisonment and deportation.

It seems to be a stark contradiction for migrants and other undocumented peoples to be targeted, while their employers are often left alone, free to continue exploiting their workers.

With these forms of abuses allegedly perpetrated by the Relas, what more when they control the 14 detention centers? These centers are already overcrowded where gross example of human rights violations happened like information that detainees are denied access to clean water, adequate food, health care and are subject to physical and sometimes sexual abuse.

In 2005 the prison population was 75% foreign, with migrant workers numbering close to 34,000 receiving whipping and lashes as punishment; while only 17 employers were arrested, and only 2 employers fined. As Rela continues to receive more power from the government, migrant workers and refugees will continue to experience more abuse, exploitation, fear and violations of their human rights.#

## APMM NEWS Digest

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