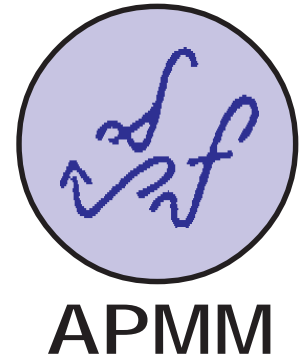


News Digest

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

For truth, accountability and the ouster of GMA Filipino groups call for “No Remittance Day”

WHAT WILL HAPPEN if OFWs stop sending remittances?

By the end of 2007, remittance of overseas Filipinos has reached an all-time high of US\$14.45 billion or about a 13.2% increase from last year. Such an increase even exceeded the expectation of the central bank by about US\$100 million.

The Philippines now ranks fourth in the world in terms of remittances of their nationals abroad with India on top.

The total remittance accounted for about 10% of the total gross domestic product of the country that has reportedly risen by 7.3% for the said year. Even the “strengthening” of the peso by 19% against the US dollar in 2007 was also significantly attributed to the remittance hike sent by almost eight million Filipinos in different countries around the world.

Of course, the Philippine government was glad with these developments. But for overseas Filipino workers, the situation now in the Philippines represents shows the seriousness of the problems of the people.

Corruption in the government is a concrete expression of how the powers that be use their position for their own gains. Corruption has contributed a lot to the continued deterioration of the Philippine economy that has forced millions of Filipinos to seek work abroad in order to survive.

Concretely, corruption means the depletion of public funds that should be allotted to services for onsite services to distressed OFWs such as the OWWA Fund, or for social services in the Philippines that can directly benefit families of OFWs. Even more strategic, these funds could have been used for programs for genuine development to address forced migration.

Aside from this however, corruption also impacts on OFWs either because it is their money – remittances and payments to government fees – that are the target of corruption or, if the money is taken from other sources, the government resorts to squeezing funds from OFWs to replenish what has been stolen. This situation is even compounded by the fact that OFWs are now experiencing hardships even worse than in previous years.



“No Remittance Day” is fast turning out to be a popular call for OFWs as migrant groups adopt the campaign in their particular areas.

It is thus not surprising that OFWs are now fully involved in the movement to uncover the truth of the NBN-ZTE scandal and impose justice to perpetrators. Many migrant organizations around the world have allied themselves with the movement to force Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to resign or be ousted.

A major action of OFWs is the “No Remittance day” campaign wherein OFW groups in various countries declare a day in a month when they actively discourage OFWs from remitting. The call was heralded by Migrante International to their various members and many, such as in Asia-Pacific and in the Middle East, have positively responded.

The Philippine government, meanwhile, has responded by calling the campaign “irresponsible” and an “economic sabotage”. Such a statement stirred the indignation of many Filipinos overseas.

Even with only a call, the Philippine government has already panicked with even the concept of a No Remittance Day. So what will happen if overseas Filipinos stop sending remittances?

It'll help a lot in forcing a most corrupt, illegitimate, fascist and puppet president to step down.#

Don't file in local Labor Bureaus - RP labor chief in Kuwait

THE PHILIPPINE LABOR Attaché In Kuwait, Leopoldo de Jesus has a penchant for discouraging Filipino migrant workers from complaining in local Labor Bureaus called Sho-on. Instead what the Labatt does is to either forge a compromise agreement between the workers and their employers and/or recommend the workers to file their complaints in the Philippines.

Mr. de Jesus justified this in a meeting in his office with workers of Kuwait & Gulf Link Transport Co. on February 23. A staff of APMM took part in said meeting. He said that if the workers would want to complain to the sho-on:

1. It will take a long time;
2. The employer might kick them out of their dormitories, and;
3. They might need to go to court and that they would have to pay for their own lawyer as the POLO has no money for this.

The Labatt then suggested to the workers who have a KD6 deduction for 17 months to just file a complaint in the Philippines against their placement agency as they have joint liability with their employer. This can be raised to the Philippine Overseas

Employment Administration (POEA) and to the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC).

This is easier said than done as even lawyers in the POEA would tell complaining workers to accept whatever amount the placement agencies offer as they might spend more for following up their case at the said agency. At the same time, the NLRC handles all cases of Filipino workers in the Philippines and outside. Any decision of the Commission can be raised to the Court of Appeals up to the Supreme Court and take years to be settled.

In other words what the Labatt wants is to just forge a compromise agreement between the employer and the workers so that both parties can benefit from the deal. This simply means compromising the rights of the migrant workers against exploitative and oppressive policies of the employers. At the same time, it makes the former sign quit claims stipulating that any complaint are withdrawn and that accordingly the workers and the management will not file any complaint of whatsoever nature in the future against each other in view of said dispute.



Filipino workers from KGL had to scrounge through trash bins to get food and survive. Though Philippine government officials have pledged to help them, no concrete assistance was really given.

In the AL Essa Medicare Co. that employs Filipino caregivers in homes and hospitals, the Labor Attaché even agreed to the company's request to designate Josephine Tuburan and Gemma Limsan for allegedly "agitating or disturbing other employees".

The conditions of the migrant workers in Kuwait are bleak if this is the case. This can change however if the migrant workers in Kuwait unite and act as one to ensure that their cases whether in the sho-on or in the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) are well taken cared off and not compromised.#

STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

MRS. SOL ESPLAGO, mother of OFW Crisolyn Sicam, shared happily the good news of her daughter's return to the Philippines on 23 January 2008.

She informed and thanked groups in Hong Kong and Riyadh who helped her find out the status of her daughter and for her repatriation when there was no clear information and response to her request from the Philippine government agencies whom she had been calling since August 2007. She did the sharing during UNIFIL sponsored Leader's Kapihan held on 3rd February 2008 and earlier in a meeting with the Council of Leaders last January 27th. She approached the help of service providers and migrant organizations in Hong Kong such as the MFMW, APMM, UNIFIL-Migrante and the Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU).

Representations through letter inquiry and referrals, phone calls and picket

Crisolyn: Home at last

actions were made to call the attention of the Philippine government that bore fruit when Crisolyn came home to her family's fold on January 2008.

It was ironic though that weeks and few days before Crisolyn's repatriation, the case officer and the Ambassador in Riyadh, even the case officer at the office of the migrant affairs under the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), did not know that she was going home. What they always answered to inquiries was that they were still awaiting the Saudi government's decision.

In the Philippines, Crisolyn was fetched by her father, uncle and child. They also went again to Migrante International's office who arranged a dialogue with the DFA previous to her homecoming. Crisolyn's monetary claim for six months unpaid wages from the Manila-based agency who deployed her to Riyadh was also successfully claimed in the amount

of P56,000 when they, along with Migrante International rights and welfare committee representative went to the Agency.

The Kapatiran sa Gitnang Sulangan (KGS), an affiliate organization of Migrante International helped follow-up the case in Riyadh.

Manang Sol saw the importance of a self-help migrant organization and working together with other migrant groups with this experience. She willingly shared what she went through with other OFWs in Hong Kong in order to show how united actions of migrant workers can push for relief to what OFWs are experiencing.

Manang Sol is now an active member of the Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU) Chater Road chapter. She is also the guitarist of a choir of a faith group in Hong Kong. #

Indonesian migrants continue campaign on Terminal 3

INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS are planning to pursue the campaign against the policy that orders all IMWs to pass through Terminal 3.

According to Eni Lestari, chairperson of the Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (ATKI-HK) or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in HK, the continued implementation of the said order has subjected Indonesian migrants to various abuses and extortion.

In a recent survey of about 1,200 Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong, 81% of them said that they went through Terminal 3. When they back to Indonesia, about 78% of them refused to enter Terminal 3. Only about 7% of them were allowed to choose whether to exit Terminal 3 or not.

ATKI's main issue with regards to the order was that it made IMWs more vulnerable to extortion.

As shown also by the survey, 95% of those who passed through the said terminal were charged different kind of fees such as for trolleys and the bus that took them to Terminal 3. Security personnel have extorted money from departing and arriving IMWs.

IMWs are also forced to get the services of taxis in Terminal 3 that charge way more than the usual. If family members are there to pick them up, they are ordered to show proofs of relation and some of them are also charged for more money even if they have done so.

"The only purpose of the order is to generate more income for the government and make IMWs vulnerable to extortion. Hasn't the Indonesian government done enough to make our lives hard?" said Lestari.

Lestari said they will pursue the campaign to remove the mandatory order. She said, that local groups in Indonesian have also taken up the issue and they are planning to do coordinated actions in Indonesia and abroad until the order is rescinded.#

Filipinos in HK speak out against multi-million dollar corruption on government NBN-ZTE deal

FOR THE FIRST time in Hong Kong, leaders of major church groups joined hand in hand with major alliances and other organizations in the fight against corruption and the pursuit of truth and accountability for the Arroyo administration in its involvement in the US\$329.5 million NBN-ZTE scam.

Organized by the Gloria Step Down Movement Hong Kong (GSM-HK), a "Prayer Rally for Truth and Accountability and Against Corruption" was held at the Chater Road on February 24 this year following the disclosure made by Jun Lozada, star witness on the scam involving Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's husband, Mike Arroyo.

The event which coincided with the commemoration of the first EDSA People Power revolt, was the OFWs' show of support to Lozada who dared to tell the truth despite government attempts to silence him.

Arroyo has committed so many sins against the Filipino people, according to the migrants, so it's time for her to repent. The impacts of the billion-peso kickbacks will ultimately result to the deprivation of food, shelter, education, and health services for families including protection and welfare that OFWs, they stressed.

Another protest action was staged by the GSM-HK at the Philippine Consulate



Filipino migrant workers, in Hong Kong and in other major countries of destination, continue to take part in the call for the resignation or ouster of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the face of major corruption cases against her.

General on February 28 as their contribution to the Interfaith Prayer Rally organized by churches and militant groups on February 29 in Makati, Philippines. The Philippine rally was considered the biggest in recent history.

The group reiterated their call for Arroyo to step down and be held accountable for the billions of pesos including OFWs' funds that her government has plundered in her seven years in office.

As a sign of protest, GSM-HK declared No Remittance Day for a day each month starting March 2 to express their condemnation of the blatant corruption and plunder with impunity by the First Couple of the Philippines.

Tired of government neglect and state exactions, the Filipino workers vowed to continue to demand for GMA to resign or be ousted by peoples' actions since she has lost the moral ascendancy to rule.#

APMM speaks in the IBON Europe launching

APMM MANAGING DIRECTOR, Ramon Bultron, was among the panel of speakers during the launching of IBON Europe last 15 to 16 February 2008 at the Jacques Brel Youth Hostel in Brussels. IBON is a data bank and research institution based in the Philippines and recently opened offices outside the country like in India and Europe.

APMM presented the current situation and issues faced by migrants in different

countries in Asia and call for support among NGO's and grassroots groups in Europe. Other speakers came from Kenya, Malaysia, Philippines and India. The theme of the launching is bringing southern voices and advocacy to the north.

The activity end up with a planning meeting on various issues including migration, debt, climate change, aid and FTA's.#

Stranded Filipinos in Jeddah: pushed to their death sentence by RP Embassy

FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have condemned the Philippine Embassy in Jeddah for pushing Filipino stranded workers to go through the legal deportation process of the Saudi government.

The situation of stranded overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) was highlighted at the height of the campaign against the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration Memorandum Circular Number 4 (POEA MC-04).

Migrante – Middle East and its affiliates in KSA exposed the situation of stranded workers in Jeddah to show the inutility of the Philippine government in providing for repatriation and assistance to OFWs.

As of this month, Migrante has documented more than 200 stranded workers who ran away from their employers due to various abuses and contract violations. Many of the stranded workers had to sleep under bridges before they camped inside the consulate's office in Jeddah to pressure the government to help them go back to the Philippines.

Migrante has condemned "legal deportation" as the recourse the consulate has offered to the stranded migrants. They said that such a way has only exposed stranded migrants to graver situation such as imprisonment or being taken back to their abusive employers.

According to their reports, 102 stranded OFWs are now incarcerated inside the



The issue of stranded migrants in KSA continue to be a serious one as their problems remain unaddressed by the Saudi and RP governments

Investigation Area (Cell 1) of Jeddah Deportation including the seven duped by the consulate to sign for "due process", the 72 who camped out of the Philippine Consulate also duped by them to go through legal deportation last February 27 and the rest are deportees who went through "fixers".

Out of the 40 women who were put in Jeddah Deportation last February 11, 12 of them were brought to different locations such as Riyadh, Gassim and Abha.

For Migrante, the plight of stranded workers in Jeddah has again shown the irresponsibility of the Philippine government to their nationals.

In a situation that can be categorized as life and death, the Philippine government has instead subjected stranded OFWs to an even worse situation, the group said.

Additionally, Migrante-KSA said that the plight of stranded migrants was also included in their petition for the ouster of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Migrante and its allies in different countries are now campaigning for the safe and speedy repatriation of the stranded migrants. They also continue to advocate for sufficient and improved services for OFWs in distress.#



Stranded migrants who ran away from abusive employers in the kingdom were forced to sleep under bridges

Rape of women continues in US bases in Japan

AFTER THE NEWS of the rape of a 14-year old Japanese girl, another woman, this time a Filipino migrant worker, again fell prey to the violence of US servicemen in Okinawa, Japan.

According to reports, a 21-year old Filipina was raped by a US army personnel in a hotel in Okinawa last February 18.

Migrante-Japan condemned the crime and said that they did not want another 'Nicole', referring to the Filipina raped by visiting US soldiers in RP in 2006.

The group also expressed their fear of a cover-up in the investigation of the case that will be conducted by US personnel. While US officers in Okinawa have said that they shall do a probe, Filipino organizations in Japan and in other countries are wary of the outcome of the said probe as what Filipina rape victims before have experienced.

Finally, Migrante-Japan called on to the Philippine and Japanese governments to exert full efforts in bringing to justice the perpetrators of the said crimes.

"Rape and other crimes do happen in and around US military bases and facilities around the world. But this particular case along with other most recent cases of rape and assault on innocent civilians will surely hurt efforts by the Fukuda government to convince the Japanese people to allow the continued hosting of US bases and other installations by Japan." Rosanna Tapiru, Migrante-Japan spokesperson said.#

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