

News Digest

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APMM

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

Slavery in modern times

Confinement of migrant workers in Malaysia, condemnable

THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT, already notorious for the way it treats migrant workers, especially undocumented migrants, is set to implement yet another anti-migrant program. This time though, the government is going to the hilt.

Last month, the government issued a proposal to forcibly confine migrant workers to their ramshackles called 'kongsi'. The confinement is aimed to monitor the movement of migrant workers.

Additionally, employers of foreign workers are being asked to make a daily log of the comings and goings of their workers which shall be made available upon request by the police. The confinement also covers the days off of foreign workers.

The plan is said to be part of the government's move to transfer the functions of 'management of foreign workers' from the human resources ministry to the home affairs ministry. This move assumes that foreign workers in Malaysia is part of a security problem.

According to the government, the proposal is aimed to curb the rise of criminality in Malaysia. Police data indicates that the crime rate in Malaysia increased by 40% in 2006 as compared to the previous year.

The increased rate is being blamed by the government to foreign workers. Even

Deputy Minister on Internal Security Fu Ah Kiow drumbeats the data that "34 per cent - or 11,900 - of the 35,000 prisoners in the country are foreigners, many of whom are held on remand". (*Malaysiakini, 08 March 2007*)

However, police data has also shown that of the crimes in Malaysia, only two per cent have been committed by foreign workers. The 11,900 migrant workers in prison are mostly due to immigration related offences.



Foreign workers in Malaysia are about to get 'confined' like slaves

Also, as the local Malaysian Trade Union Council (MTUC) has pointed out, the number of migrant workers in prison is less than 0.5% of the 2.6 million foreign workers in the country.

Modern Day Slavery

The proposal can be clearly characterized as a throwback from the time of slavery when 'slaves' are made to huddle in slave pens.

(cont to p.2)

2



Solidarity to victims of rights violations

3



Resistance to POEA guidelines continues

4



Training with foreign brides

(cont from p.1)

The plan reeks of violation of the most fundamental rights of the people as enshrined the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including the right to mobility as well as to due process.

As well, to treat them like chattels will place migrant workers in even more abusive and exploitative conditions. Many foreign workers in Malaysia are undocumented with estimates ranging from 700,000 to about million. As undocumented migrants, they are already faced with the problems of low wage, inhumane working and living conditions, lack of benefits, as well as lack of access to basic services including health.

Local groups have also rightly pointed out that the move will heighten xenophobia among the public and will create an unfounded atmosphere of fear. It is not far-fetched to think that hate crimes shall also crop up because of this.

Migrant workers as scapegoats for societal problems

The failure of the the Malaysian government to address criminality is being put on the shoulders of foreign workers. Putting the blame on foreign workers when host governments are at a loss on how to resolve national problems is not only exclusive to Malaysia.

In Hong Kong, for example, the unemployment problem experienced for the past years has been blamed to the presence of foreign domestic workers. This line of reasoning – despite the fact that studies made by the HK government itself state that the market for employers of local domestic workers and FDWs are vastly different – was used by the government to impose the levy for employers of FDWs.

At the same time as the levy, a cut on the wage of FDWs – the same amount as that



Undocumented workers are set to again face another inhuman policy

of the levy for a two-year contract period – was also implemented which made FDWs rightfully declare it as unjust taxation to them.

Also, in the United States, the US Patriots Act, that was implemented in the name of national security, also unjustly puts the blame of terrorist attacks in the US to foreign workers.

Aside from the fact that putting the blame to foreign workers is cruel and unjust, what is also condemnable of such actions is the fact that in host countries, the contribution of foreign workers in building their current society and economic progress is forgotten in the face of national crises.

Meanwhile, in times of economic progress, benefits hardly tickle down to migrants.

Resist modern day slavery in Malaysia

It is right for advocates of migrant's rights, human rights organizations, local people's groups and the international community to stand up against this new proposal. Countries sending labourers to Malaysia must also show their condemnation to this inhuman move.

Malaysia is fast-becoming the most unjust importer of foreign labor. Vigilance and militance of migrant workers and advocates, inside and outside Malaysia, are called for.#

Solidarity groups in South Korea hold protest action to stop political killings in the Philippines

ON THE OCCASION of the 21st anniversary of the People Power uprising in the Philippines, the MINBYUN-Lawyers for a Democratic Society, Imagination For International Solidarity, Korea Federation for Environmental Movements, Citizens' Solidarity for Human Rights, Seoul Migrants Center, Won-buddism Human Rights Commission, Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS), Korea Women's Hot Line, and KASAMMAKO held a successful rally in Korea on February 23 this year.

According to the groups, South Korean civil society organizations have already urged the Philippine government on September 25 of last year to stop political killings and to implement investigations on offenders. However, despite the appeals all over the world including South Korea, the political killings and violence in the Philippines are increasing rather than decreasing, they stated.

In a joint statement the groups stressed that during the last five years since President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo took office, more than 800 people have been killed and more than 200 people remain missing in the Philippines. The people in the Philippines are suffering more terrible human rights violations such as political killings and severe violence than during the time of Marcos' dictatorship.

The background of this law-defying violence, according to them, is the ongoing war on terror of the US and its



Solidarity still needed. Families of 'disappeared' search for justice.

implementation of neoliberalism. After their wrongful deaths, the victims do not have the legitimate right of investigation as they are branded as communists or Islam armed forces.

The groups think that the Melo Commission is just an instrument to avoid the pressure at home and abroad and that the Philippine government has no intention to solve the problem of political killings since these continue regardless of the results of the investigation.

Finally, the solidarity organizations urged the Philippine government to stop the human rights violations such as political killings and violence toward people and leaders of different sectors; conduct the thorough investigation and come up with the truth and bring justice to offenders; and implement the peace agreement signed together with communists and Muslim movement organizations.#

Migrant workers in Taiwan reiterate opposition to new POEA Guidelines

FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS in Taiwan held another protest action against the new POEA guidelines on Household Workers (HSW) on March 4. This time they marched along the Chung Shan North Road area where most Filipinos in Taipei congregate during their days off.



Migrants in Taiwan seek to address their concerns

The Taiwan chapters of Gabriela Women's Party and Migrante International led the mass action. Participants from other organizations and workers from factories also joined the activity.

The protesters also reiterated their calls for the Philippine government to press the Taiwan government for household workers to have regular days off and for the Balik Manggagawa of the POEA to be implemented to all those working in Taiwan instead of making another scheme to rip the migrants off of the workers hard earned money. Up to now, rehires who would need to exit Taiwan are considered new hires by the POEA and need again to pay the same placement fee when they were first deployed to Taiwan.



Resist new fees for OFWs!

While MECO and POEA state that Taiwan-bound Filipinos are supposedly exempted from the new POEA guidelines on HSW, the migrants should be vigilant as there are reports that a number of HSWs have paid P10,000-12,000 for the training required. HSWs in Taiwan are already required by the Taiwan government to undergo a shorter training and are required to pay P5,000.

Vigilance is also necessary in ensuring that a monthly sum is not deducted by brokers from the HSWs if the no placement fee provision of said guidelines would be implemented by March 1.#

Protest against POEA guidelines marks International Women's Day in action of Filipinos in HK

ABOUT A THOUSAND Filipino domestic helpers took to the streets to commemorate the International Women's Day with a protest against the POEA guidelines.



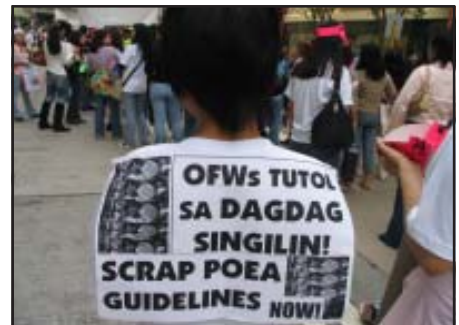
On Women's Day, exactions take center among OFW issues

Organized by the Gabriela Women's Partylist Hong Kong Chapter, the campaign sought for the scrapping of the unjust policy which is actually a perfect ploy for extortion by the government and unscrupulous recruiters.

P10,000 to P15,000 TESDA training cost plus P200 portfolio assessment assure government of an income on top of the P18,000 that new household service workers need to pay before leaving for work abroad, according to Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, GWP-HK chairperson.

The workers challenged the Philippine government to issue a new set of guidelines for the US\$400 minimum wage as the scrapping of placement fee. These should not be packaged with the training and assessment that require additional charges from the applicants.

As a matter of fact, even with the "no placement fee" policy, several new arrivals disclosed that they were made to sign documents attesting that they did not pay anything to the recruitment



Resistance to POEA guidelines continues

agency when they actually paid between P65,000 to 75,000 on top of the assessment and training fees.

GWP-HK vowed to continue their opposition to the new round of fees imposed on OFWs while monitoring the legal and congressional efforts that the GWP initiated in the Philippines to get the guidelines scrapped.

Certainly, the protest march was a fitting celebration of the historic International Women's Day when migrant women resist unjust policies and work for their empowerment, Tellez concluded.#

Filipino union holds 9th general assembly

THE FILIPINO MIGRANT Workers Union (FMWU) in Hong Kong successfully held their 9th general assembly on February 25 with the theme "Advance the rights and welfare of migrants and their families. Strengthen the progressive union of migrant workers in Hong Kong."

FMWU members voted, deliberated, and decided on the reports presented by the Executive Committee as well as the general program of action for 2007-2009.

Guest speakers were Mr. Lee Chuk Yan, a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council and also the executive officer of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) and Ms Cynthia Ca Abdon-Tellez, the chairperson of Gabriela Women's Party Hong Kong Chapter and also the director of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW).

Legislator Lee said that after 10 years of the hand-over, there is no "fat choi" to all workers as they continue to suffer from the insensitivity of the government shown



FMWU remains as one of the most active groups of Filipinos in Hong Kong

by the widened gap between the majority of the poor and the few rich.

"Local workers deserve a minimum wage. Foreign domestic workers deserve a wage increase. Both deserve better working conditions," said Lee.

Tellez, meanwhile, spoke on the overseas absentee voting rights of OFWs and the party list system which can serve as another venue for OFWs to have the migrant's agenda represented in the halls of the Philippine Congress. #

Immigrant brides join organizing training in Taipei



TASAT continues training for members

TRANS-ASIA SISTERS Association in Taiwan or TASAT organized a whole day training on organizing last February 10 at their office in Taipei. Twenty TASAT members attended the training including their staff. The training was facilitated by Ramon Bultron, and Prof. Hsia Hsiao Chuan, APMM Managing Director and Board Member respectively. Prof. Hsia also helped in the translation.

The training included input on some principles in organizing, sharing of APMM experiences on step-by-step organizing

and sharing of TASAT experiences in organizing the immigrant brides. Part of the training are some group exercises which helped the participants understand the topic better.

Mr. Gi Estrada, APMM coordinator in Taiwan shared experiences in organizing Filipino migrant workers which led to the formation of MIGRANTE Taiwan Chapter.

The training was part of the TASAT plan to provide skills development training for its active members and staff. Earlier, the same training was also held in Meinung, South of Taiwan.

The training conducted were part of the project on foreign brides of the APMM.#

Beaten OFW wins criminal case in Taiwan

JUSTICE FINALLY IS served.

Gil Lebria, a former worker of Formosa Plastics Corporation (FPC), won his criminal case against two of his perpetrators last November. The two who beat him up were sentenced to 5 months each in prison. Gil can now file a civil case to press for damages.

Earlier, Lebria and the six other workers who were beaten up by FPC personnel won their cases in the Philippines both in the POEA and NLRC. Their placement agency however appealed the decision in court.

Lebria was the only one to come back and file the case because of the support given to him by various Taiwanese NGO's and individuals including APMM and Migrante Sectoral Party – Taiwan chapter. They were the ones who provided him with his visa, airfare, housing and allowances while he pursued his case in Taiwan.

The rest could have also filed a similar case had not the Philippine government reneged on its promise to send them back to Taiwan. Under Taiwan's legal system you can only file a criminal case within six months of the crime. You can file a civil case though up to two years when the crime occurred.

Indeed, one official from MECO was wrong when he said that the workers could never win against FPC. Determination to fight is what counts.#

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