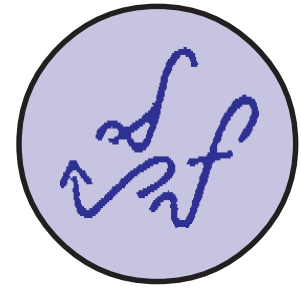


News Digest

June
2007



APMM

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

Foreign domestics push for their agenda in
Global Forum on Migration and Development

Governments urged to address foreign domestics' concerns

Sixty-three organizations from 26 countries signed a joint statement to be presented by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) representative Cynthia Abdon-Tellez during the 'Civil Society Day' of the Global Forum on Migration and Development that will take place in Brussels, Belgium from July 9 to 11 this year. The joint statement was initiated by the APMM and its networks in the region.

The signatories include grassroots organizations, unions, alliances, and federations of foreign migrant domestic workers, nannies, caretakers, caregivers and household service helpers in various countries worldwide.

Living witnesses to the grave impacts of neoliberal globalization on their homeland, the workers deplore the implementation of the neoliberal policies of liberalization, privatization and deregulation that resulted to the aggravated marginalization and poverty of the majority of the people. Loss of jobs, displacement of peasants, decrease of wages and benefits, underemployment, unabated plunder of our natural resources all contributed to their forced migration.

"This is even further aggravated by the worsening political situation wherein our governments give more emphasis and dependency to foreign interests instead of addressing our concerns. Instead of listening to their people, governments intensify human rights violations in our countries in the guise of combating "terrorism". This includes the recent attack on im/migrants in the US and the illegal arrest and detention of migrant workers in Brussels, among others," they stated.

The domestic workers' groups and their advocates stressed that instead of discussing how migrant labor can be further capitalized, remittances cornered and how much profit can be extracted from export of cheap human

labor, both sending and receiving governments must devise ways to alleviate migrant workers' conditions in their host countries and, more importantly, address the problem of forced migration from their homelands.

Foreign domestic workers are commonly neglected and abused. In most cases, their contribution to the host country is ignored and taken for granted. Despite the existence of an employment contract, protection of their wages and well being is not assured. No pro-worker bilateral agreement between the governments of the sending and the host countries exists ensuring and upholding their employment rights and equal access to social services.

The recognition of domestic work as work is essential, according to them. To achieve this, national and international labour standards, policies and instruments should be enforced to ensure the protection of their socio-

(GFMD, pls. go to p. 2)

(GFMD, continued from p. 1)

economic-cultural and political rights while at worksites and when they return back home for good.

Another serious concern raised is discrimination in various forms that foreign domestic workers face. In some labor receiving countries, socio-cultural practices of their faith and traditions are not respected or allowed. Others are barred from exercising their political rights while many suffer abuses ranging from verbal, physical, emotional, even resulting to death.

Governments of the sending and host countries should institute an effective mechanism to safeguard the rights and interest of domestic workers whether they are documented or undocumented. The immediate signing of the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families must be implemented, they declared.

The issue of undocumented workers, they said, should be addressed. Stringent policies and laws on undocumented migrant workers in countries like Europe and USA are unjust, discriminatory and unfair. Worse, undocumented migrants are unjustly treated as criminals.

The migrants and advocates also demand that host

governments repeal all anti-migrant laws and other mechanisms unjustly targeting migrants as possible terrorists, subjecting them to racial profiling and consequently denying them of their democratic rights. All governments who have cracked down on the migrant community and subjected individuals to such unjust and illegal conditions should stop such actions, release unjustly imprisoned migrants, provide redress and remuneration to all victims and apologize for the grave violations they have committed against them.

Both host and sending governments must provide transparency on all bilateral agreements and other free trade agreements that they have agreed on. Most, if not all, national policies negatively impacting on migrant workers are created and implemented based on these agreements. If they are deemed oppressive and exploitative of the migrant workers, these agreements should immediately be repealed, they attested.

Meanwhile, the International League of People's Struggle (ILPS) issued a statement on the occasion of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. The group asserted that the aim of utilizing migration for "development" implies the perpetuation of conditions for cheap labor and exposes the



RESPECT US! Domestic workers call for recognition of their work as work and full provision of rights and benefits.

fact that "neoliberal" globalization currently has not brought us closer to the eradication of global poverty and unemployment.

Migration, it states, as a "tool for development" signifies greater commodification of migrants and management of migration to augment state revenues and help cover deficits in foreign payments. The growing migrant workers' movement understands this and is prepared to resist the renewed offensive against their rights and welfare.

The ILPS through its study commission pushed for the building of the International Migrants' Alliance (IMA) which is envisioned to gather grassroots organizations of migrant workers around the world, to engage and conjoin the migrant workers, immigrants, and refugees in struggle; to push for the full

implementation of international conventions on the rights of migrant workers and their families; to protect the rights of undocumented migrants and women migrant workers; to end human and sex trafficking; and to participate in the struggle against imperialist wars of aggression, repression and fascism.

The holding of the GFMD aroused domestic workers' organizations and advocates all over the world to unite and organize on the bases of solidarity, protection and upholding of their rights as workers, migrants and people.

They pledge to struggle for just peace and democracy, against racism and discrimination, oppression, exploitation and all forms that subjugate their sector, families and own people.

Asian migrants in HK hold day against torture



On June 24, migrant workers in Hong Kong held the Asian Day against Torture as part of the commemoration of the June 26 United Nations International Day in Support of the Victims of Torture. A program was held in Victoria Park, Causeway Bay, a

popular place among Indonesian migrant workers.

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants joined the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, Asian Human Rights Commission and the Asian Students Association in working together to ensure the success of the first ever Asian Day.

The whole program was filled with informative and moving speeches as well as cultural presentations that kept the attention as well as moved

some of the audience to tears.

Basil Fernando of the AHRC opened the program as migrant leaders delivered speeches and other groups performed cultural shows.

Booths were set up near the main stage and provided more information about the situation of torture in countries, especially where the migrants came from, namely, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and the Philippines.

Taiwanese gov't excludes household service workers in wage increase

by Aurelio Estrada, *Migrante Taiwan*

New Council of Labor Affairs Minister Lu Tien-Lin's statement that household service workers (HSW) in Taiwan are not included in the Labor Standards Law virtually excludes them from the minimum wage hike starting July 2007. In addition to this, he also ordered an increase of a maximum NT\$5,000 in board and lodging fees of migrant workers of other job categories. According to Lu, this was due to demands of employers groups.

In effect, the wage hike means nothing to migrant workers and only serves the interests of employers, especially in the business sector. It is also the first time that those working in homes as caretakers and domestic helpers are excluded from the increase. This might set a dangerous precedent as new hires might be hired at a lower rate than the present NT\$15,840 a month which was the previous minimum wage.

The board and lodging fee was first introduced in 2001 and implemented the next year. Its legal basis is found in Article 22 of the Labor Standards Law that part of the wages can be paid in kind. But another sentence of said article stipulates that the conversion price of such wages in kind shall be fair and reasonable and the articles shall serve the needs of both worker and his family members. On how a wage cut of NT\$5000 on the basic wage could serve the needs of said persons is confounding to say the least.

Euphemistically though, this kind of wage cut was announced as an increase in the food and accommodation allowance was provided by employers to foreign laborers working in Taiwan. This reminds us of another euphemism called "monthly service" and even management fee, which actually is a brokers' fee.

In summary, the migrant workers themselves are essentially subsidizing the employers by being deducted 41%



INDIGNATION. Migrant workers poured out into the streets of Taipei to protest the new anti-migrant policies of their host government.

or NT\$7069 from their monthly basic wage. This includes a deduction of 29% or NT\$5,000 a month for board and lodging. Other fees, which the boss should pay in the first place, include management expenses in the guise of service fees; yearly Alien Residence Certificate; periodic medical check-ups and airfare to and from Taiwan.

However, migrant workers and advocates alike vehemently oppose these impositions. Migrante and APMM have launched a petition signing campaign among the migrants, which have generated more than 2,000 signatories from Filipinos and Indonesians. Two pickets have been organized in front of the CLA on June 3 and July 1 respectively. The last one was jointly organized with other groups. A dialogue with MECO is also being planned this end of July.

The CLA, that ironically has a former so-called labor leader at the helm, should not belittle the determination of the migrant workers to pursue what is just and right. His remark that he would only talk to representatives of migrant workers if they have their own unions smacks of insensitivity and contempt for the migrants. He knows fully well that workers cannot form unions there.

Thai workers in Kaohsiung MRT, even without a union, rose up against mistreatment and abuse by their employers and brokers. Filipino and Thai workers in Formosa Plastics Corporation, even without a union, organized five strikes in less than a year and won almost all their demands, including a stop in the payment of the brokers' fees. The CLA head should not be surprised then if other such mass actions occur in the near future.



Migrant workers

support minimum wage for all

Ka yan kong! Wage increase now!

Foreign domestic helpers from Asian Migrants Coordinating Body chanted all the way from Victoria Park in Causeway Bay to the Central Government Offices (CGO) in Central on the 10th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China on July 1.

AMCB spokesperson Eni Lestari stated that like migrant workers, local poor working people have to accept wage cuts in the past ten years and endure low pay and long working hours.

Foreign domestic helpers' wages were cut twice in the past ten years, in 1999 and in 2003, bringing down their wages from HK\$3,860 to HK\$3,270. Similarly, all local workers below managerial grade had their wages dropped at an average 14 per cent in the last 10 years. Among them, the wages of cleaners dropped by 10.8 percent between 2000 and 2005, according to Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions.

Eman Villanueva, secretary general of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL), an AMCB member, considered this year's July 1 rally as the most successful in terms of the migrants' participation and solidarity with the local workers.

"While we were marching and chanting 'wage increase now', local groups who were manning their own booths along the way, stopped speaking on their own issues and joined us in our call. It was really touching!" he remarked.

The increase in number of foreign domestic helpers who joined this year's march reflected their sentiments on the latest HK\$80 piecemeal wage hike by the Hong Kong government. The amount indicates the low regard on FDHs who have largely contributed to the Hong Kong economy and to the society, according to Villanueva.

Militant migrants stressed that their participation signifies their outrage at the unfair treatment of the Hong Kong government on their sector. It is quite ironic that despite the government's boast of sustained economic growth, the

working poor people of Hong Kong continue to deteriorate in wages and working conditions, they said.

Members of church groups like the St. Anne Filipino Catholic Community in Stanley managed to join their counterparts despite the distance. "We want to be counted in the struggle to protect our rights as migrants. We believe that the Lord listens to our prayers though our actions," one member said.

The sheer number of the people who joined in the rally, said one veteran protester, reflects the level of awareness on the issue of the migrants. Needless to say, the projection through the media and throughout the world would give a big boost on the campaign of the foreign domestic helpers who are the most exploited sector, she attested.

Aside from the return of the minimum allowable wage to HK\$3,670, the AMCB also reiterated their demand on

the scrapping of the

Employees Retraining Levy which obviously influenced the decision on the part of the government to give mere piecemeal increases of HK\$50 in 2005 and HK\$80 both in 2006 & 2007.

While democracy was the main call of the local population of Hong Kong during this year's handover rally, Asian migrants called for democracy and transparency from the government in determining their minimum allowable wage, protection of their livelihood, repeal of the two-week rule and other anti-migrant policies imposed by the government.

They affirmed their unity with the local working people in Hong Kong on the principle that through legislation they will be guaranteed a minimum wage despite changes in market situation.

The AMCB, an alliance of foreign domestic workers' from Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Philippines, has been actively involved in the campaign for the return of the minimum allowable wage to \$3,670 since this was drastically cut by \$400 in 2003 and the abolition of the levy.

Forum on the peoples' tribunal guilty verdict held in HK

A forum on the Permanent People's Tribunal's verdict on the US-Arroyo Government and George Walker Bush was held last June 15 in Hong Kong. The forum, the first in Asia, was organized by the Hong Kong Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (HKCAHRPP), and is part of the international efforts to popularize the verdict of the Tribunal.



OUTPOUR OF SOLIDARITY. Various leaders of institutions, establishments and organizations in Hong Kong as well as other individual supporters attended the forum conducted by the HKCAHRPP.

More than sixty people attended the said forum, the first to be held in Asia. There were journalists, human rights workers, church people, students, social workers, domestic helpers, peace advocates.

Some of those who attended were from the Asian Human Rights Commission and HK Christian Institute, HK Human Rights Monitor, Amnesty International HK, The Sun newspaper, Fr. Jim Mulrone and colleagues from the ACPP, member of Chinese University Student Press, and the HK AIDS Foundation.

In his welcome remarks, Bruce Van Voorhis of the Asian Human Rights Commission introduced the HKCAHRPP and explain the objectives of the forum and also talk briefly about the PPT.

The showing of a documentary film "Sa Ngalan ng Tubo" (In the Name of Profit) was another awakening moment for those who've seen it before and the first-timers, on the reality of poverty, the farmers' struggle and the violent response of the government and the landowners in the Philippines.

Silence gripped the whole audience as sounds of gunfire were heard from the documentary. There were 13 protesting farmers killed in what soon to be called as the "Hacienda Luisita massacre". More leaders, supporters from the church and local government – were assassinated right after the massacre.

Jackie Hung from the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese shared about her experience in the PPT and further discussed about the whole running of the tribunal, its indictments and results. Ramon Bultron of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants detailed the current developments in the

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Tribunal's proceedings in The Hague, Netherlands.

Meanwhile, Jun Tellez of the Mission for Migrant Workers shared about similar PPT's in Australia and Japan being initiated by some parliamentarians supportive of the cause.

Van Voorhis highlighted the need to pressure governments to discontinue their financial support to the Philippine government while Ramon Bultron raised the continuous struggles of the Filipino people against the repressive government despite the attacks.

In her closing remarks, Hung stated her and other people's involvement in this cause is not geared only to finding the solution but finding meaning in expressing solidarity and giving support to the Filipino people.

To close the gathering, Rey Asis of the Asian Students Association read the message of solidarity from Hustisya! (organization of the families of the victims of extra-judicial killings), Desaparecidos (families of the victims of enforced disappearances) and Selda (political prisoners and their families).

It was a heart-warming moment as these groups expressed their gratitude to the continuous efforts of friends outside the country in supporting the cause as well as their commitment to continue fighting for it.

INVITATION TO JOIN

Second International Conference on Foreign Brides

September 29, 30, 2007
Taipei, Taiwan

Organized by: Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Graduate Institute for Social Transformation, Shih Hsin University, Trans-Asia Sisters Association in Taiwan, and Awakening Foundation

For those who are interested to join, please contact the APMM.

Assessing the POEA Guidelines seven months after

The seven-month imposition of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration Guidelines that promised household service workers (HSW) a package of protection and welfare enhancement reforms is only a show-off. Undoubtedly, the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo government simply aims to legalize state extortion to rake millions of pesos from overseas Filipino workers while putting the latter to greater risks.

Even with the introduction of exemptions as answer to the overwhelming indignation from migrant workers, service providers and church groups, the trainings, assessment, competency and language certificates by the Arroyo government did not prevent early contract termination and abuses. New hires and returning domestic workers reported their dismissal soon after 5 days to less than 3 months of work.

Nothing has been done to investigate and stop the collection of Php500 to Php30,000 for the training provided by TESDA and its accredited training centers, mostly owned or partners of recruitment agencies.

Similarly a failure are the two components of the POEA Guidelines that Arroyo brags about — the prohibition of collecting placement fees whether done prior to departure or on-site salary deduction, and the US\$400 minimum entry salary.

Recruitment agencies in the Philippines and its counterparts in host countries go around the “no placement fee”.

In Dubai, HSWs receiving US\$400 is not the whole salary in itself. The breakdown is a measly monthly salary of US\$250 and the remaining US\$150 serves as food allowance. In Saudi Arabia, the monthly salary rate remains at US\$200 or less.

It is both laughable and ridiculous for a government to promise a minimum entry wage without having signed a prior agreement with the host government.

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants believes that every state is expected to assure an enforceable minimum wage for its workers to protect them from exploitation.

SCRAP POEA GUIDELINES NOW! Philippine Congresswoman Liza Maza from Gabriela Women's Party joined domestic workers in Hong Kong as they rallied against the Arroyo government's new money-making scheme called POEA Guidelines.



If the Arroyo regime is truly committed to ensure and protect a just wage for its OFWs and advance their well-being, it must now seriously regard the enormous demand to immediately scrap the POEA Guidelines scheme.

APMM stands along this legitimate position. The Philippine government must have the political will to put in place a set of concrete policies and substantial mechanisms with the host governments that will guarantee its nationals a minimum entry wage commensurate to their labour, the

“If the Arroyo administration is committed to ensure and protect just wages and rights for OFWs, it must immediately scrap the POEA Guidelines scheme. “

abolition of anti-migrant policies, the immediate redress and of distressed OFWs, and prosecution of abusive recruitment agencies.

Ultimately, the Arroyo administration has to address the ever worsening crisis of job insecurity and abject poverty in the country.

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