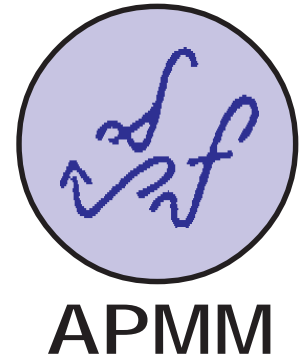


News Digest

June
2008



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

“For a long time, others spoke on our behalf. Now we speak for ourselves.”

Grassroots migrants launch int’l alliance

WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT of the International Migrants’ Alliance, grassroots migrants around the world can have a stronger unified voice in issues that affect the sector and the family.

Such was the hope of 167 delegates representing 118 organizations from 25 countries who participated in the founding assembly of the IMA on June 15 and 16 in Hong Kong. Among these, 102 were present as founding members (regular and associate members) while 16 came as observers.

For two days, the participants shared each other’s experiences, learned from each other’s actions, debated and reached unities that shall guide the IMA in its future programs.

The first day of the assembly was held at the City University of Hong Kong and co-organized by the Women Empowerment in Moslem Context of the Southeast Asia Research Center (WEMC-SEARC). The program was attended by more than 350 migrants including about 200 foreign workers – mostly domestic workers – from Hong Kong.

The Very Revd Andrew Chan, dean of the St. John’s Cathedral and board member of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) that are both based in Hong Kong, welcomed all the delegates and bid the conference to achieve its aims.

Renowned advocate for migrants, Dr. Irene Fernandez of Tenaganita (Women’s Force) delivered the keynote address where she expounded on the global context of the current migration process especially how the global trends under neoliberal globalization impact on the rights and wellbeing of migrants.

She also took note of the apparent debate between the right to migrate against the right of people against displacement. She said that such was a false debate, imposed by people with a superficial understanding of what it means to be a migrant. “Free movement and the right not to be displaced, are two essential elements to the assertion of collective and individual self-determination,” Fernandez explained.

Four panel presentations – composed mainly of representatives of grassroots migrants – were then held. The themes of the panels were: 1. Wages, Job Security, Remittances and GATS Mode-4; 2. War on Terror, Immigration and Refugees and the Criminalization of Undocumented Migrants; 3. Violence against Women, Trafficking and Globalization, and; 4. Health, Family and the Social Costs of Forced Migration.

After the various inputs on issue-based themes, a panel was held on the second day that dealt with Organizing, Building of Alliances and Campaign Strategies. Panel speakers were all grassroots migrant leaders from different countries

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Under this theme, the IMA delegates forged unities and plans of action.



It was a standing room only as hundreds joined the IMA opening program.



Grassroots migrant took up the cudgels of leading the IMA.

For more photos and documents of the IMA founding assembly, please visit www.apmigrants.org www.ima-2008.blogspot.com

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– Ms. Connie Bragas-Regalado of Migrante International in the Philippines, Ms. Teresa Gutierrez of the May 1st Coalition in the US, Ms. Wol San Liem of the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) in Korea and Ms. Eni Lestari of the Asian Migrant's Coordinating Body (AMCB).

The panel presentations became very important inputs in the finalization of the Alliance's Constitution and General Program of Action.

Plans included in the GPOA included activities and programs for education and information, campaign and mobilization that will pick up from the IMA concerns expressed in the panel topics, international advocacy including challenging the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in the Philippines this October, and expansion of the Alliance including the formation of country chapters and recruitment of more members from the regions of Africa and Latin America.

After the major important organizational documents were finalized, the participants then formed the International Coordinating Body (ICB) composed by representatives chosen of the different global regions as well as those elected at-large.

The following were elected by the regional caucuses as representatives to the ICB: Jose Gonzales of FIOB for Latin America, Teresa Gutierrez of May 1st

Coalition for the USA. Sol Pajadura of Migrante-Ontario for Canada, Mr. Ramesh Pandit for South Asia, Mr. Ufuk Berdan of ATIK for Europe, Mr. Nhel Morona for Middle East and Africa and Dr. Irene Fernandez for East Asia and Oceania.

Among those ICB members elected at-large were: Ms.

Tess Tesalona of Immigrant Workers Center, Canada; Prof. Robyn Rodriguez of PhilForum, USA; Ms. Rumana Sheikh of BOMSA, Bangladesh; Ms. Grace Punongbayan of MIGRANTE-Europe; Ms. Eni Lestari of AMCB, HK; Mr. Ali of Federation of Workers from Turkey in Switzerland; Hsia Hsiao-chuan of Taiwan; Ms. Connie Bragas-Regalado of Migrante-International, Philippines.

Associate members that comprised NGOs and migrant-serving institutions also selected among themselves two members who will sit as ex officio members to the ICB – Ms. Wahu Kaara of Kenya Debt Relief Network and Mr. Ramon Bultron of the Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). Ms. Kaara vowed to assist the IMA in its priority of expanding membership in the African region.



Founding members of the IMA are optimistic that in the spirit of international solidarity, IMA will continue to strengthen the migrants' movement around the world.

The ICB then elected among themselves officers of the executive committee.

Elected members of the executive committee were: Eni Lestari of AMCB-HK, chairperson; Ufuk Berdan of ATIK-Europe, vice chairperson; Connie Bragas-Regalado of Migrante-Philippines, secretary-general; Teresa Gutierrez of the May 1st Coalition in USA, deputy secretary-general, and; Tess Tesalona of Immigrant Workers Center in Canada, Treasurer.

Indeed the establishment of the IMA was a historic event in the struggle of migrant workers.

As the IMA communiqué concluded: We are the grassroots migrants. With our solidarity, we shall speak and we shall fight to gain more victories. #

ILPS Commission 16 draws 3-yr plans

THE STUDY COMMISSION on the rights and welfare of homeless persons, refugees and migrant workers of the International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS) organized a meeting during the ILPS Third International Assembly (TIA) in Hong Kong last 19 June 2008.

The meeting was attended by 40 participants representing 33 organizations from 15 countries. The meeting was divided into four major parts. First was the reporting and input on major concerns and issues; second was on the adoption of proposed resolutions; third was the discussion and approval of the GPOA for the next three years. The last part was devoted to organizational matters like the

appointment of the new chairperson and vice chairperson of the commission.

Ms. Connie Bragas Regalado, Chairperson of the commission gave the report on the activities of the commission for the past three years. This was followed by inputs on the results of the founding assembly of the International Migrants Alliance held on the 15 & 16 June 2008 and general information on the upcoming International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) to be held in Manila during the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in October.

The commission adopted a total of nine resolutions including the defense of the rights of Prof. Jose Maria Sison and Dr.

Irene Fernandez, the unconditional release of Onder Dolutas from Turkey, campaign against the commodification of health and health workers and other campaigns including support to Katrina victims and against the GFMD.

The three year GPOA focused on the education and information, campaigns and mobilization, international advocacy and organizational matters concerning the commission and membership to the ILPS.

Lastly, the commission appointed Mr. Ramon Bultron from Hong Kong and Mr. Ufuk Berdan from Turkey as the new chairperson and vice chairperson respectively of the commission for the next three years.#

Returned migrant activist joins exposure program in Hong Kong

A RETURNED MIGRANT activist in Indonesia joined the exposure program organized by Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK). Mukhlisin, an ex-migrant from Korea, is one of the leaders of Sekretariat Bersama BMI (SekBer), an alliance of returned migrants and their family in Indonesia, established in December 2007 as the result of workshop on migrant workers initiated by ATKI-HK, APMM and INDIES (Institute for National Democratic Studies). As a newly established alliance, SekBer recognizes the root causes of forced migration in Indonesia and aims to develop progressive migrant's movement that stands to fight for genuine protection for migrant workers and their family.

For one month, Muhlisin integrated with the Indonesians sheltered at Bethune House who have ongoing cases against their employers and agencies. The Indonesians in the shelter eagerly shared their life experiences as victims of exploitation and abuse while Muhlisin patiently documented their stories and asked questions.

He was impressed by the courage of these Indonesian women migrants in asserting their rights and taking the risk being unemployed for several months while they ongoing cases. Almost every day, Muhlisin went with them to different government agencies such as Immigration Department for visa extension, Labour Department and Labour Tribunal as well as offices of recruitment agencies to

collect the passports of Indonesians which were confiscated and employer's houses to pick up the belongings of Indonesians whose contract was terminated.

On Sundays, Muhlisin joined with members of ATKI-HK and integrated with their activities including counseling, cultural events, rallies and protest actions, discussions on Hong Kong employment ordinance, meetings and others. He gathered information in order to understand how to organize migrants or returned migrants and what kind of program they can implement in Indonesia as a national alliance.

Although he worked in a factory for two years in Korea, he never joined any organization there. His awareness came when he went home and joined a peasant organization that has a migrant worker's program which aims to assist and educate the people from his hometown on migrant issues.

As a leader of SekBer, Muhlisin was challenged to learn more when he was invited to attend the founding assembly of International Migrants Alliance (IMA) on 15-16 June 2008, in Hong Kong, he grabbed the chance.

To complete his knowledge in organizing returned migrants and their family back home, Jun Tellez from the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) shared with him the long experiences in organizing Filipino migrants abroad and in the Philippines. Muhlisin was excited and asked many questions about his own experiences and difficulties in organizing and mobilizing the returned migrants and their family to Indonesia.

Together with Muhlisin, the exposure program was also participated in by Zubaidah, a staff of INDIES for migrant workers program, and Vonny Linayanti, an ex-migrant worker from Hong Kong. #



Muhlisin enthusiastically shared developments in Indonesia and exchanged experiences with Bethune House residents.

South Korea and Malaysia pursue crackdown against undocumented migrants

It has been a practice of profit-oriented receiving countries like South Korea and Malaysia to consistently discriminate against undocumented migrant workers and their families, hound and flush them out en masse in order to pave way for the entry of hundreds to thousands cheap labour force coming from neighbouring poor Asian and African countries. It is also done to ease the tension between the migrants and local workers that the government has itself instigated.

Malaysia and South Korea molded themselves into a hardened devil image in the national and international communities of migrants, service providers and human rights advocates since they implemented their crackdown against the illegal migrants, they so tagged to justify their ill-actions.

In South Korea, the leaders of migrant organizations and now of the Migrants Trade Union (MTU) are being the targets of crackdown since the undocumented migrant workers begun to collectively articulate and promote their human rights. *(Please refer to related issue in the May 2008 and previous issues of ND).*

The 9,000 quota of "illegal migrants" that the South Korea government planned from January to July this year in specified places (250 in Busan, 600 in Seoul) will be another "achievement" for the Immigration forces.

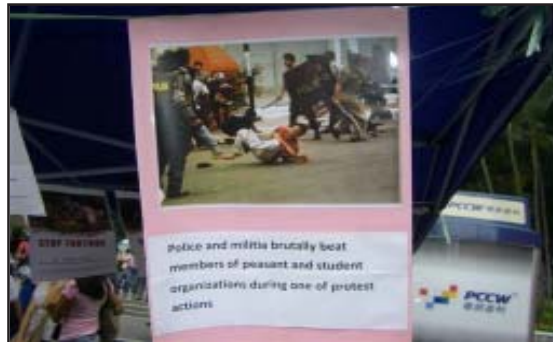
Such is also additional "trophy" for Malaysia whose ongoing crackdown specifically in Sabah and Kota Kinabalu shall bring about more and more cases of attacks and inhumanely treated undocumented migrants, along with their families, not to mention the innocent and stateless children.

But these massive and calculated crackdown on undocumented migrants and their families are not left untouched but are met with strong conviction and condemnation from

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Asian migrants join commemoration of int'l day vs torture

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY in Support for the Victims of Torture was held in Hong Kong on June 29, 2008 with an education and cultural program at Chater Road. The event was held to commemorate the United Nations Convention Against Torture (CAT) and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which was enforced on June 26, 1987.



Asian migrants showed their support to the global campaign against torture with exhibits and cultural presentations.

Most of the hundreds who watched the activity were Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers as it was held on their day off and in one of their congregating places. Others who took part were migrant workers from Thailand and asylum seekers in HK who came from different countries of the world.

Organizers of the activity include the Asian Human Rights Committee (AHRC); Hong Kong Christian Institute (HKCI); Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM); Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB); Asian Students Association (ASA); Justice & Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese and Ziteng.#

APMM attends AR-WACC Triennial Assembly and Seminar in Chiang Mai

THE ASIA REGION of the World Association for Christian Communications (AR-WACC) held its triennial assembly and seminar in Chiang Mai, Thailand on 17-20 May 2008 with the theme: "Communication is Peace: Building Viable Communities in Asia"

Indonesia, Korea, Myanmar and the Philippines.

APMM a member of AR-WACC was also invited to speak on the topic of the "Economic Impediments in Achieving Peace in Asia".

The triennial assembly was attended by 41 delegates from Thailand, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong,

Other speakers were also invited to speak on the political and cultural aspects of challenges in achieving peace as well as other peace initiatives in the region. A sub-regional group discussions were also held.

Then it followed by reports of the Chairperson and other officers of AR-WACC and approval of the Chiang Mai declaration.

The assembly ended with the election of the new set of officers of the AR-WACC and a closing worship.#



AR-WACC assembly delegates gear up for more challenges in the future.

Foreign brides network meet in Hong Kong

IMMIGRANT BRIDES INTERNATIONAL Network members who attended the founding assembly of the International Migrants Alliance in Hong Kong held a breakfast meeting on June 17 this year.

Facilitated by Professor Hsia Hsiao Chuan from the Shih Hsin University in Taiwan, fourteen other delegates coming from Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, and HK detailed some of the recommendations of the international conference on border control and immigrant brides that was held in September last year in Taiwan.

The delegates also shared updates on the conditions of foreign brides in their respective countries. For instance in Japan, 12-15 year-old-girls are being adopted and later married to Japanese men, according to Virgie Ishihara of KAFIN-Japan. In Malaysia foreign wives are made to work and even worse, required to pay a visa every month, Tenaganita's Irene Fernandez remarked.

An internationally coordinated action campaign on foreign brides was set to be launched on November 25 this year in time for the International Day on Violence Against Women. The next event will be on the International Women's Day in March 2008 and June 2008 will be the peak of the campaign because of "June Brides".

More importantly, the network members decided to participate and co-sponsor a workshop at the International Assembly of Migrants & Refugees that will be held simultaneously with the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Manila on October 27-29 this year.

Finally, the participants all agreed to undertake a comparative research on foreign brides both in sending and receiving countries in order to further raise the ante on the work for the defense of the rights of foreign brides as well as for the promotion of their wellbeing.#

Asia Pacific migrants pay tribute to renown Filipino labor leader

OVERSEAS FILIPINOS AND their local and other foreign friends organized fitting memorial activities to the late KMU Chairman Emeritus Crispin Beltran, more popularly known as Ka Bel in the Asia Pacific region. Ka Bel was also a Party list representative of Anakpawis (Toiling Masses) and astounded the Filipino people by living a simple life unlike most traditional members of Congress. He also served as chairperson of the International League of Peoples Struggles (ILPS).

Other than the memorial activities which were held in Hong Kong, Japan, Australia and South Korea written tributes and messages were also sent from the same including Aotearoa, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal and Taiwan. Another memorial meeting for Ka Bel will be held in New Zealand this coming July 7.

These commemorative activities prove Ka Bel and the labor movement which he represented through the KMU (May 1st Movement) as internationalists. He was also described among others by the country information officer of Bayan-HK as a champion of the working class, defender of Filipino migrants' rights and a hero of the toiling masses.

Ka Bel was with the Philippine labor movement for more than 50 years and suffered persecution during martial law and with the present Gloria Macapagal Arroyo Administration for his



Tens of thousands of Filipinos from all walks of life joined the procession to lay Ka Bel's remains. It showed how much the labor leader and his principles are respected by many.

unflinching commitment to the toiling masses. This commitment earned him to gain a seat in the Philippine Congress by representing party list Anakpawis for three terms even during the time of his death.

Congressman Beltran used to be the vice chairman of the Committee on Labor and Employment at the House of Representatives. He was also instrumental in the setting up of the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs. He never let go, however, the importance and primacy of the mass movement over the parliamentary struggle in obtaining changes for the working people.

He was also honored for his simplicity and humility which was best described by Hsin-Hsing Chen of the Taiwan Committee for Philippine Concerns (TCPC). "But he is the chairman. People of his position in our country don't do this kind of rookie's job." (On distributing leaflets to bystanders)

It is reassuring to hear about this and the other accolades and toasts offered to him. For as Roger Jowett former National Secretary of the Rail, Bus and Tram Union and current Chairperson of PAUL in Australia stated that the struggle of Ka Bel would be continued and "His struggle is our struggle".#

Tributes in the region and around the world



Hong Kong



Australia



South Korea



New York



Canada



Netherlands

Travails of stranded workers in Kuwait continue

AMANDO ABANDO AND Rosario Nunez are just some of the more than 100 stranded workers in Kuwait which have been nearly forgotten by the Philippine Embassy. Only the persistent efforts made by different groups including APMM and the publicizing of their situation prodded Philippine officials to do something about their cases albeit haphazardly.

It would be nearly four months since Amando has been jailed. Yet he and five others have only been recently discovered by 7 Filipino drivers from Al Jassim Trucking Company in Talha deportation center in the 2nd week of May.

Initially APMM and Migrante Kuwait followed up his case prompting the Philippine Embassy to slowly follow up his case. The Embassy moved faster when Rev'd. Andy Thompson of the Anglican Church intervened and threatened to publicize their situation in the local English papers. Three of the stranded workers were eventually deported.

Mr. Abando was initially told by officials of the Embassy that there was no pending case against him. And that he would be eventually released from prison and allowed to work again in Kuwait. Now the Embassy has told him that he would instead be deported and that they are just assisting him in lifting the travel ban imposed on him by Kuwaiti authorities. Two others Melvin Panaga and Allan Celestal have also this similar problem but unlike Amando do not have yet plane tickets for their deportation. Melvin has been jailed since January this year allegedly for non-payment of his house rental for three months.

Rosario Nunez on the other hand is a victim of involuntary servitude. Initially she worked for her 1st employer for only for months due to severe maltreatment; was given food only once, sometimes none; was made to carry cabinets which was beyond her capacity; and received no salaries.

Her placement agency called Shikha Al Majari allowed her to transfer to other employers where she was made to work

but her salary was collected by the said agency which was not given to her. Her repeated pleas to be sent home by Shika Al Majari went to deaf ears. She reported to Migrante International in the Philippines that there are a number of Filipinas with the same predicament as hers.

She also mentioned that she has a number of acquaintances who are in the Ministry of Interior's Temporal Shelter in South Khaitan. According to their SMS messages to her nobody is assisting them and that they are not being visited by Embassy officials. That is why their cases were taking a long time to be settled.

It was only after an expose was made in Arab Times about her condition and that of others did the Embassy do something to speed up their cases. They were given a lawyer and a number of migrants were set free, yet Rosario is still to be deported despite her being a victim of human

trafficking. Three others would likewise be deported back to the Philippines.

Migrante Kuwait has reported that there were 95 stranded Filipinas in Doha and Andalus jails. These do not include those from Khaitan which is the Kuwaiti government's shelter for runaways, in Talha deportation center and even in the Philippine government's shelter in Kuwait which houses up to or more than 200 runaways in a month.

It is reprehensible to say the least that even if no charges or trumped up charges are filed against Filipino nationals, most of whom are domestic workers or like Rosario who is a victim of human trafficking, the Philippine Embassy usually drags its feet on their cases or worse agree to their deportation even if they never committed any crimes in Kuwait. And the government only delivers proper services to same if these are exposed publicly especially in Kuwait's English newspapers.#

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organized migrant workers and NGOs such as Tenaganita, Migrante International, KASSAMAKO, MTU and other groups.

Noting from the blog of the MWTV (Migrant Workers TV) and website of the MTU, forms of educating and organizing migrant workers and getting support from the locals has been done by the MTU and other migrants groups in South Korea in the following activities, candle lighting and outreach in

different locations in South Korea. The MTU has also lately organized a conference in Nepal among returned MTU leaders deported back home. Coming from there, the MTU representative attended the founding assembly of the grassroots based International Migrants Alliance (IMA) in Hong Kong.

As part of its campaign resolutions, the IMA united to advance a comprehensive campaign for the rights and wellbeing of undocumented migrants.#

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