

# News Digest

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

*APMM evaluates 5-year work for migrant workers*

## Movement building still at the core of programs



*Workshop with evaluator, staff in the regional office and coordinators in APMM focus areas*

“We dream of a society where families are not broken up by urgent need for survival. We dream and will actively work for a homeland where there is opportunity for everyone to live a decent and humane life.”

With this dictum, the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) was born.

Central to the principle of the APMM since its establishment is the belief in the importance of harnessing the united strength of migrant workers to address their various concerns. This has been the principle that guided the APMM since it was established in 1984 through the initiative of the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers – a Hong Kong based migrant institution that holds the

belief of helping migrant’s help themselves as its principle of welfare provision.

When it was still the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant Filipinos (APMMF), the APMM worked on its task of establishing strong migrant organizations in different countries in the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions. Such a task slowly saw concrete

gains until at last in 1994, a global alliance of overseas Filipinos – MIGRANTE International – was established.

In 2001, APMMF conducted an evaluation of its work. The evaluation process resulted to a more systematic program and plans that are all aimed at strengthening the movement of migrant workers – a movement that actively fights for migrant’s rights, stands in solidarity with each other and with the local people, and is actively working for a more just and genuinely progressive homeland.

In 2002, APMM formally adopted its current name to reflect the heightening demand of migrant workers of different nationalities in APMM focus areas to kick off their migrant’s

movement building in the context of their increasing numbers and concerns as well in the said areas.

Since the same year, the APMM has endeavored to assist grassroots migrant organizations to establish the International Migrants Alliance together with migrant worker’s organizations in Europe, Canada and the United States.

### **APMM for the past five years**

Indeed time flies. But it comes with experiences, lessons, victories and failures that make the APMM even more determined to achieve its vision.

Migrant movement building has always been at the core of APMM’s strategy to achieve its aim of empowering migrant workers to advance their rights and protect their wellbeing in their host countries and, more importantly, in their home countries.

In focus countries of the APMM, strides have been made towards this direction.

In Australia, organizations of Filipino women and young Filipino-Australians have been established in major cities. The recognition that it has gained among Filipinos down under because of its campaign on the rights and welfare of Filipino nurses and those victimized by various abuses can be seen to the extent that it has gotten involved in community efforts to understand the situation and importance of ethnic minorities in Australia.

(cont from p. 1)

Meanwhile, the KASAMMAKO in Korea continues to expand its membership and has developed very good relations with local groups and trade unions. KASAMMAKO and its allied organizations have been at the forefront of building a trade union of migrant workers. In the face of the continuing violations of the rights of undocumented workers in Korea, KASAMMAKO firmly pushes through with its welfare, education, and advocacy programs.

In Japan, APMM's work continues with the establishment of groups and centers in major cities of the country. New immigration policies in Japan have stirred up migrant workers. The situation of Filipinas married to Japanese and Filipino-Japanese children has not improved dramatically thus the importance of the community work that APMM partner organizations and NGOs.

APMM's work in its expansion areas such as Macau, Taiwan, Qatar and Dubai is making great strides as well. Seed organizations have established in these areas. Advocacy is also starting up ranging from issues of consular services, general rights of migrants up to particular fight of workers in particular work areas such as those of the Formosa Plastics Group workers in Taiwan who were beaten up when they went on strike.

APMM's programs on welfare assistance, education and research, advocacy and organizing, and on women work towards building and strengthening the migrants movement. The experience with Filipino migrant workers in the region has enriched the lessons of APMM in its work and has made it possible for APMM to apply these with migrants of other nationalities such as with Indonesian workers.

Eni Lestari, chairperson of the Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (ATKI, Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers) has this to say of APMM: "The education and trainings that APMM give to Indonesian migrants have helped a lot in developing the sense of united action among Indonesians in HK. It has come into a point wherein the former members of ATKI-HK even established their own group in Macau when they moved there while those who have come back to Indonesia are now actively involved in conscientizing our families back home and organize them as well."

APMM's advocacy for the rights of migrants has, for the past few years, dramatically expanded in terms of its scope. Thematically, APMM has pursued the cause of undocumented migrant workers, migrants working in factories and industrial areas, children of undocumented migrants as well as the issues of foreign brides. The APMM either organized or co-organized regional and international events such as the Regional Conference on Undocumented Migrants (2003) and the International Workshop on Foreign Brides (2005) that has strengthened the relationship and partnership of APMM with other grassroots and grassroots-based organizations and NGOs actively working for the rights of migrants.

Aside from these, APMM's advocacy also included its active participation on the issues of war and globalization. APMM's experience of assisting migrant workers during the Gulf War has made it firm in its position on the impacts of war to migrant workers. Its advocacy on this concern continues up to now as migrants, especially undocumented migrants, get unjustly victimized by anti-terrorism hysteria of many receiving countries.

In the recent meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the APMM actively participated in educating migrants on the WTO in general and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) – Mode 4 in particular.

While advocacy, organizing, education and trainings are conducted, the APMM also addresses the immediate concerns of migrants in distress in its focus areas. Welfare provision is done either through partner organizations or NGOs or through the direct intervention of APMM. An example of such work was the Fact Finding Mission organized by



*Movement building remains to be at the core of our work*

APMM to determine the situation of deported undocumented Filipinos from Sabah Malaysia. Together with the FFM, a medical and dental mission was also conducted to address the immediate health concerns, especially of children, of the deported families.

Currently, the APMM is assisting the Filipino workers who went on strike and then beaten up by hired goons of the Formosa Plastics Group in Taiwan before they were deported. As well, APMM, together with Migrant International and Migrante-Baguio, is assisting stranded women migrants in Saudi Arabia who were victimized by illegal recruitment.

### **Moving forward with the movement of migrants in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East**

The challenge to pursue the cause of migrant workers remains.

Migration is still on the rise as the issues of migrant workers also intensify. Trends in international migration brought about by the current global economic and political condition as well as the use of migration for national development even make the need to gather the united strength of migrant workers of all nationalities more urgent.

Building the international movement of migrants mainly through establishing and strengthening national organizations of migrant workers that are strongly related to movements for social justice, freedom and democracy in their home countries is a current thrust of the APMM. Such a movement addresses the burning issues faced by migrants in their host countries while also looking forward to the day when people will not be forced anymore to leave their family and their homeland.

Together with migrant workers in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East regions, APMM continues to take the steps for the realization of the migrant's dream.#



*Leaders of migrant organizations discuss the impact of APMM programs to migrant workers*

# Stranded in Manila

**Helen Manansala is a domestic worker in Muscat, Oman.** She fled her employer's residence due to ill-treatment by her employer and her wages were not paid for five months since she commenced work in 2005. On the referral and inquiry of APMM, Philippine government agencies like the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs of the DFA and the Office of the Secretary of the DOLE replied after couple of weeks to our letters that Helen is now in the custody of the Filipino Workers Resource Center and their post representatives are now assisting Helen in her claims at the Oman's Labour

Department wherein March 14 was the initial hearing.

However, Migrante-UK who referred the case to APMM, learnt that Helen is now back in the Philippines and could not even go home to Davao where her family resides because there is not enough money left for her transportation.

Earlier, APMM and Migrante-UK urged the Philippine representatives in Oman and in Manila to secure the safety of Helen, provide her safe accommodation and to assist her with her labour claims.

# Stand Up for Your Rights

*Starting this issue, we shall be featuring welfare cases that APMM handled in our focus areas for migrants to learn from. Names of victims are changed to protect their identity.*

**What she can do?** Helen has the right and the option to sue and claim from the local recruitment agency who deployed her in Oman. She was advised to contact Migrante International's Committee for Rights and Welfare to discuss the matter and for lodging her legitimate claims with appropriate government offices.

## **MIGRANTE International**

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## Striking migrants win biggest concession from Formosa Plastics Corporation

For the first time in the history of the migrant movement in Taiwan, Thai and Filipino workers are now exempted from paying their monthly service (brokers) fee in Formosa Plastics Corporation (FPC). This is the biggest concession they got from their March 13-14 strike, which was the third in less than a year. This also belies the claim of Taiwanese and Philippine authorities that the conditions of the migrants improved on January of this year.

The reaction of the head of the Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) Lee Ying-Yuan was swift. In a meeting in the Legislative Yuan on March 20, he was quoted as saying that what the migrants in FPC were demanding was beyond what was protected by the law. Legislator Zhong Shao-He of the People First Party (PFP) then asked him wouldn't it be dangerous if all the 320,000 migrant workers stand up and demand for the same privilege (of not paying the service fee).

Zhong added that, there were some labor organizations that interfered in the disputes and agitated the workers. He added that these groups want to manipulate and threaten to mobilize more migrant workers and ask for more, because they know that the government is afraid that its reputation might be hurt internationally. Legislator Zhong then exhorted the head of the CLA not to be cowed by these groups.

Other than the exemption from paying the service fee (as long as there are no absences), the Thai workers in the strike would also be

assisted by their government in providing a solution to the overcharging of their placement fees in Thailand.

The Filipino workers on the other hand were still restive after the two-day strike because the CLA, local Labor Bureau and FPC management ignored their grievances. The three entities stated that it was the Thais who instigated the strike and the Filipinos only joined later in sympathy. In addition to this the Philippine labor officials who went to FPC during the strike not only meekly pushed their nationals demands but also agreed that if the Thais agreed, they assured that the Filipino workers would also be amenable to this.

In coordination with some advocates, they went out to the South Gate of their company to conduct a public hearing of their issues. Because of this mass gathering, the FPC management was forced to directly negotiate with the workers and advocates that included APMM and Migrante Sectoral Party – Taiwan chapter. The next day, management gave more concessions to the workers.

This included the following:

1. The workers will have their own bank accounts and would have the right to get hold of all of their take home pay. The allowance system would be abolished.
2. They would also have the right to remit their own money
3. The guarantor system would stop

4. Their Alien Residence Certificate was given back to them and there was a promise to give back their passports

Before the March 13-14 strike against the CTCI subcontractor of FPC, another strike of Filipinos and Thais occurred on February 27-28 against the Samsung subcontractor. Four of the demands were granted although management reneged on the first.

1. Free air fare for those going home for vacation and abolition of guarantor system
2. The tax refund would be issued out
3. Food quality would be improved
4. Overtime payment would not be delayed by a month

Samsung incidentally has better terms for the workers including non-payment of board and lodging for its migrant workers. This is the reason why the Thais and later the Filipinos staged the strike in March. They claimed that different subcontractors have dissimilar policies.

Migrant workers in FPC should be vigilant that management would not overturn what they gained from their strikes and mass actions. At the same time they need to consolidate their strength to push more of their remaining demands. This can only be done if the migrants form their own organization inside FPC that would later include both Thai and Filipinos. #

## Victory for the Korean farmers is a victory for the migrants and anti-WTO groups



HKPA continued the anti-WTO fight with the successful campaign for the release of detained Korean protesters

Free at last! There was a deep sigh of relief as the last remaining Korean farmer, Yoon Il-Kwon, who was charged by the Hong Kong government of unlawful assembly and unauthorized assembly along with 14 others after the historic People's Action Week Against the WTO in December last year, was acquitted at the Fanling Law Court on March 31 this year.

HKPA reported that at 11:30 am on March 31, the Judge, though noting the quality of testimony given by the police witnesses and speaking positively of the police actions on the night of December 17, condemned the subsequent identification process employed by the police that denied Mr. Yoon, and the others, a fair and independent identification. It was on these grounds that Mr. Yoon's charges were finally dismissed.

"The acquittal of the Korean farmers is indeed a victory for people who are being suppressed in their struggle against the WTO," according to Ramon Bultron, managing director of APMM. Migrant workers, he said, are also victims of the neoliberal policies of the WTO.

As a member of the Hong Kong People's Alliance on WTO (HKPA), the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) has been actively involved in solidarity actions in support of the Korean farmers who were unjustly charged by the Hong Kong police.

Originally, 14 WTO protesters, 11 of them Korean farmers, were detained and charged after the MC6 event in Hong Kong. International solidarity action was immediately launched to defend the political prisoners. There was an incredible

outpouring of support, especially in early January when around 100 supporters joined the prisoners in a hunger strike. Ultimately, 11 of them were freed after the January 11 court ruling in Kwun Tong, 3 Korean farmers remained.

As the legal battle for the remaining three continued, local and international groups showed their unrelenting support. During pre-trial review on February 6<sup>th</sup>, Yang Kyung Kyu's case was dismissed for lack of evidence and on March 22 charges against Park In-Hwan was also dropped.

On March 30, the eve of the final court ruling, migrants joined other anti-WTO local groups in a candle light vigil at the Tsim Tsa Tsui ferry in support of Yoon Il-Kwon. Some local farmers in Hong Kong expressed their solidarity with their Korean counterparts. The HKPA fed the supporters with locally produced organic food. Other groups rendered cultural presentations all in the spirit of unity and pursuit of justice.

Their prayers and solidarity actions paid off as the final verdict came out the following day. Immediately, HKPA Chief Elizabeth Tang expressed her heartfelt thanks to all organizations for their support and solidarity actions that have contributed to a successful campaign.

"Many of you have sent protest letters, held demonstrations, sent donations, sent solidarity letters and so on in the last months. All of these have built pressure on the Hong Kong government, created awareness among people, kept our actions going and give us the much-needed moral support. This victory belongs to us all!" she stated.

Indeed, oppressed people's continued resistance against the WTO's globalization policies is essential to ensure protection on their legitimate rights to livelihood, security, dignity and freedom. #

## HR 4437 triggers massive immigrant's rally in US

House Resolution HR4437 also known as "Border Protection, Homeland Security, and Illegal Immigration Act" which was passed in the US Congress in December last year, has brought together hundreds of thousands of immigrants from various nationalities in a series of protest actions across the United States in March this year.

BAYAN USA member organizations from New York to San Francisco have been active in creating critical Filipino community opposition to the said bill and demanding more comprehensive immigration reforms absent from the majority of Congressional bills such as a concrete path to legalization, workers rights, and swift family reunification for those painfully separated because of visa backlogs, according to Kawal Ulanday, BAYAN USA Chair.

Meanwhile, the APMM has also issued a position on the issue and condemned the policy that it deemed is also a part of the US war on terror.

BAYAN USA was also highly critical of the Arroyo government for its indifference on HR 4437 which threatens to criminalize millions of undocumented immigrants as well as individuals and organizations that provide them basic social services.

The largest population of overseas Filipinos are in the US. Last year, half of the US\$10.7B in remittances to the Philippines came from US-based Filipinos.



## APMM NEWS Digest

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