

# News Digest

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APMM

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

## Migrants and the WTO campaign: Lessons and Challenges



*Creativity ruled the people's protests*



*Migrant workers - commodities for export*



*Solidarity with migrants in a cultural show*



*US government - terrorist of migrant workers*



THE PEOPLE'S ACTION Week in Hong Kong against the World Trade Organization (WTO) may have come and gone. But for the migrant workers and the migrant's movement, the experiences gained and the lessons learned have become an integral part of the continuing struggle for migrant's rights and wellbeing.

### **I. Building the resistance of migrant workers against the World Trade Organization**

Since the news that the 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the WTO will be done in Hong Kong broke out, migrant workers have been very much actively involved in ensuring that the People's Action Week will be a success.

More than a year before the PAW, a forum on the WTO and Migration was conducted in conjunction with the People's Caravan for Food Sovereignty of the Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PANAP). The forum was co-organized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) and PANAP.

As part of the Hong Kong People's Alliance (HKPA), organizations from the AMCB were at the forefront of rallying the migrant workers against the WTO through various activities. The migrant's anti-WTO activities intensified in the weeks leading to the PAW with the Migrant's 10-Week Countdown.

The countdown consisted mainly of education and propaganda activities aimed to make the WTO a talk of the migrant's



*Even before the WTO came to HK, migrants already prepared themselves for the battle through activities such as the HK People's Mardi Gras against the WTO*

community. Educational materials that were produced took into consideration the particular issues and conditions of migrants in Hong Kong. The campaign for wage increase, services, employment protection and rights (WISER) was integrated in WTO discussions in order to make concrete to the migrants what globalization is and its impacts to migrant workers and their families in their home countries.

WTO educators from different migrant organizations were developed in order to broaden the reach of educational discussions. The educators also served as sources for on the ground information on the feedbacks of migrants to the WTO campaign.

Cultural activities also became a popular form of educating the migrant workers. Simple cultural performances were launched such as a skit on The Three Monkeys depicting the three evils of globalization (liberalization, deregulation, privatization), a Ms. WTO pageant (a spoof of beauty contests), and the People's Serenade that featured progressive songs. A migrant worker even commented after a Ms. WTO presentation during the Tribal Filipino Sunday (TFS) that she has finally understood the basics of globalization because of the show.

Among the Filipino migrants, meanwhile, a network of anti-WTO organization was formed to broaden the organized mobilization for the People's Action Week. More than 50 organizations joined RESIST.

Even before the PAW, mass actions and mobilizations were conducted by migrant's groups. Of the mobilizations held, the most significant was the HK People's Mardi Gras

against the WTO. The Mardi Gras was participated in by various organizations who carried particular themes that depict the people's alternatives to globalization and their demands. Issues that were highlighted include education, health, human rights, war, mining, agriculture, worker's rights and the situation of women.

Aside from their own activities, the AMCB also actively

participated in the actions of the HKPA from community education drive to protest actions on WTO meetings and the visit of WTO Director General Pascal Lamy to HK.

## II. The People's Action Week

The active participation of migrant workers in the anti-WTO campaign continued throughout the People's Action Week.

Migrants were significant in marches, forums and other actions organized by local, regional and international groups.

The Christian Conference of Asia, together with their partners such as the APMM kicked off the December anti-WTO activities with a Conference on Globalizing Economic Justice that included a Workshop on the General Agreement on Trade in Services Mode 4. GATS Mode 4 specifically governs

migrants and migration. Migrants and migrant's advocates participated in the workshop that was one of the biggest groups in the said conference.

In celebration of the International Human Rights Day, the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) gave a chance for migrants in Hong Kong to Speak Out on the situation of migrant's rights under the WTO.

In December 17, the APMM, AMCB, Migrante International, and the International League of People's Struggle Study Commission on Migrants, Refugees, Displaced and Homeless Peoples held a Workshop on WTO and Migration. Topics that were discussed included GATS Mode 4, migration of people in the health professions, and the need for the establishment of an International Migrant's Alliance to rally the organized strength of migrant workers from different countries on issues that impact on their rights and wellbeing.

Aside from the forums, a significant contingent of migrant workers joined the centralized actions organized by the HKPA on December 11, 13 and 18. Though threats of termination were made by employers and employment agencies were made, it did not stop almost 1,000 migrants from joining the major protest actions of the HKPA.

Even the fear brought about by the violent police dispersal of the December 17 march of Korean peasants and workers and local organizations did not deter hundreds of migrants from participating in the December 18 protest march.



*Hundred of migrant workers joined people from all over the world in the week-long protest against the WTO. No amount of black propaganda against rallies stopped migrants from putting on their junk-WTO shirts. Even after the Dec. 17 incidence, many migrants still went against employer's order not to join the rally.*



*The WTO campaign showed the solidarity between migrants and local workers*

Aside from the centralized calls, migrants in Hong Kong also conducted their protest action on December. Around 100 migrant workers and advocates from Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia trooped to different Consulates in Hong Kong carrying various issues and concerns among which are the martial law in Nepal, the crackdown on undocumented migrants in Malaysia, labor export deregulation in Indonesia, lack of services by the Thai government, state exaction by the Philippine government, and the wage cut and unjust taxation of the HK government. The consulate-hopping protest action ended at United States Consulate General which they branded as the “No. 1 Terrorist”.

On the eve of the International Migrant’s Day, a fitting Cultural Solidarity Night for Migrant Worker was held.

Meanwhile in other countries, migrant workers have also been involved in various activities in solidarity with the anti-WTO actions in Hong Kong, migrants in Taiwan, Japan, Korea and the United Arab Emirates held discussions on the WTO and the GATS Mode 4 where they also invited local groups and unions.

### III. Challenges

The 6<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference might have ended. Still, the fight against the WTO and its policies remains.

In the recent WTO campaign, migrant workers have made their mark in the international fight against globalization. By concretizing WTO and globalization through showing of its impacts on the everyday life of migrants and their families,

thousands of migrants have been mobilized.

The anti-WTO and anti-globalization movement of migrants must be continued. The momentum must be pursued.

Primarily, the organized strength of migrants must be further

advanced. In the national, regional and international levels, a strong movement of migrants will ensure that their voice will always be present in any struggle leading towards the defeat of WTO and globalization.

This organized strength of migrant workers must be fully integrated with the people’s movement in the migrant’s respective home countries. Forced migration has its roots in the grave impacts of neoliberal globalization in migrant’s home countries. As such, it is necessary for migrants to identify their own issues and concerns with the concerns of their own people.

Education work among migrants on globalization should be continued. Migrants need to understand not only the immediate impacts of the WTO and its policies. Migrants also need to understand the comprehensive issue of globalization and its relationship not only to the issues affecting their everyday lives but also its relationship to forced migration, migration policies, trends in migration, and the place of migration in the national and international social, political and economic spheres.

Solidarity with the people of host countries is also very important. In the HK WTO campaign, migrant organizations were able to work very well with local organizations. It has shown in practice that working people – be they migrants or locals – can and should come together against a common enemy.

There’s still a long way to go to defeat the WTO. There is still an even longer way to go before globalization is defeated. But for sure, the migrant’s movement will be there throughout the struggle.



*Women marched against WTO*



*“JUNK WTO!” call reverberated*



*Filipinos held relief mission for besieged protesters*



*Migrants determined to make their mark in the anti-WTO struggle*



*Long live international solidarity!*



*The year that was saw the APMM engaged in major campaigns in the national, regional and international levels. New programs were initiated while the existing ones were strengthened.*

*New areas of organizing work were opened up especially in the Middle East while organizing in existing expansion areas has gained momentum.*

*The APMM has also strengthened relations with regional groups and groups based in APMM focus areas.*

## 2005 marks major advances in the core programs of the APMM

THE PAST YEAR kicked off with advocacy activities on undocumented workers in Malaysia following the violent crackdown by the Malaysian government. APMM initiated petition signing and picket actions at the Malaysian consulate to condemn the human rights violations committed against the undocumented workers.

Working together with Tenaganita in Malaysia and Migrante International in the Philippines, APMM also organized Fact Finding Missions – in three provinces in Mindanao where the undocumented migrants settled and in Sabah where majority of the victims came from.

Advocacy was also conducted among foreign brides in Taiwan where APMM, the Awakening Foundation and the Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies in coordination with the Alliance for Human Rights Legislators of Immigrants and Migrants, organized an international workshop for Asian NGOs on women immigrants and migrants in May last year at the Chien Tan Overseas Youth Activity in Taipei, Taiwan. The workshop brought about the creation of an Asian network which expanded APMM's contacts with other migrants' advocates in the region, notably Vietnam.

Other advocacy actions in 2005 included the undocumented workers in Korea, the plight of stranded migrants in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and in the Middle East region, and the fight of stranded Filipino seafarers in Hong Kong to gain the assistance of the Philippine government.

APMM's organizing work was remarkably carried out with the formation of the Migrante Sectoral Party in Taiwan and Dubai and the OUTRAGE also in Taiwan and Saudi Arabia. Contacts for organizing work were also established in Qatar and Kuwait. Here the various campaigns for the rights and welfare of migrants as well as national and local issues were undertaken.

Undoubtedly, the major

achievement of APMM in 2005 involved organizing activities before and during the People's Action Week campaign against the World Trade Organization (WTO). As a coordinating member of the Hong Kong People's Alliance on WTO (HKPA), APMM played a key role in the education of migrants on the WTO.

2005 reinforced APMM's networks through its participation in conferences, forums and workshops such as the Task Force Meeting on Food Sovereignty, the Asia Region meeting of the World Association for Christian Communication (AR-WACC), and the General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the formation of a network to commit to address the emerging concerns of the stateless and undocumented children in Sabah.

This was further strengthened through organizing activities together with partners like the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), the Christian Conference in Asia (CCA), the Pesticide Action Network-Asia Pacific and the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS).

APMM's research in 2005 dealt with Sex Trafficking of Women in the Asia Pacific with focus on Filipina women. The study included trafficking in Macau, South Korea, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates.

As a year ender, APMM published the Migrant Monitor, aptly titled "Globalisation, World Trade Organisation and Forced Migration that was released during the People's Action Week Against the WTO.



*APMM initiated discussion on concern of foreign brides*

# MIGRANTE International holds 4th Congress



*MIGRANTE International gears for more gains in the future*

THE LAST HOLIDAY season was a time for many Filipino migrant workers to be with their families. It was also a time for Filipino migrant's organizations from Asia, Pacific, Middle East, North America and Europe to be together for the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the progressive global alliance of Filipino migrant organizations, MIGRANTE International. The congress was held from 27-29 December 2005 at the Shalom Center of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress' theme was "Further advance our struggle for the rights and well-being of Filipino compatriots abroad. Heighten the exposition and resistance to the US-GMA regime and the US imperialist. Strengthen and increase the membership of Filipino compatriots overseas and their families in the Philippines. Strengthen the anti-imperialist movement of migrants of various nations!"

Working around the theme, the delegates from overseas along with the returned migrants and their families inside the country, shared experiences on their organizing, welfare assistance, and campaign work on migrants and related national issues (local level in host countries and in the Philippines) on the country and regional levels during the first day.

Prof. Jose Ma. Sison, noted analyst and political refugee in the Netherlands, gave the keynote address. In the paper he presented, he showed how neoliberal globalization has actually narrowed the availability of jobs for migrant workers. As well, he advised MIGRANTE International to build its own

strength as a movement by building chapters all over the country and abroad. Professor Sison's paper was read by Rev. Cesar Taguba of MIGRANTE-Europe.

On the second day, special reports were presented on major campaigns of MIGRANTE International for the past three years. These included the assessment on the electoral campaign wherein MIGRANTE International played a major role in the formation and eventual participation of the

MIGRANTE Sectoral Party in the partylist elections.

A report was also presented on the Junk WTO campaign and the participation of the MIGRANTE International and the International League of Peoples Struggle's Study Commission on Migrants to the activities leading to and during the People's Action Week during the WTO meeting in Hong Kong. The Executive Committee report was also delivered and approved by the body.

On the third day, the financial report, proposed plan, and recommendations and resolutions were presented and approved. Included in the major thrusts of the alliance are the building of country chapters of MIGRANTE International and the further forging of solidarity with other organizations of migrants. A special committee was also formed to study the Constitution and By-Laws of the alliance to accommodate major amendments raised.

MIGRANTE International also elected a new Executive Committee. Ms. Connie Bragas-Regalado, a former domestic worker in Hong Kong was elected as the chairperson. Meanwhile, Ms. Joy de Guzman, former APMM director and Ms. Maita Santiago were re-elected to the position of vice chairperson and secretary-general, respectively.

Mr. Lean Santos from Japan was elected as Deputy Secretary-General while Ms. Myrna Bacarro, also from Hong Kong replaced Ms. Betty Antonio as Finance Officer.

The Congress culminated in a cultural night where solidarity messages from sectoral organizations and religious leaders were also given.

The Amado V. Hernandez Resource Center took the opportunity to hold the awarding ceremony for the winners of the 2005 Gawad Ka Amado - a literary contest that the AVHRC conducts every year. For two years in a row, the AVHRC had for its theme in the GKA migration and the life of OFWs and their families. It was held in cooperation with MIGRANTE International. Winners in the visual, song, poetry and short story categories were recognized and their winning pieces presented to the crowd.

Delegates in the Fourth Congress left the event in high spirits with lessons learned and an even firmer conviction to strengthen the migrant's movement.



## APMM organizes forum with GCIM

The Global Commission on International Migration, a group established by the United Nations to conduct study on the situation and condition of migrant workers visited Hong Kong from 19 to 20 December 2005. The group was led by Mr. Jan O. Karlsson Co-Chair of the GCIM. He announced the publication of its report entitled "Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action".

GCIM visit was hosted by the Civic Exchange, an NGO based in Hong Kong.

The Civic Exchange organized forum and conference with groups in Hong Kong and abroad working on migrant issues and concerns to discuss and share the result of the GCIM report.

As part of the GCIM visit and in coordination with the Civic Exchange, APMM organized a forum with leaders of grassroots migrant organization in Hong Kong last 19 December. Around 20 migrants from different nationalities and organizations attended the forum.

Mr. Karlsson shared GCIM background and the highlights of the report during the forum. The report contains six principles for Action and 33 related recommendations that can serve as a guide to the formulation of migration policies at the national, regional and global levels.

## APMM holds workshops on migration/ food sovereignty at CCA Conference

APMM organized workshops on migration and food sovereignty during the conference on "Globalizing Economic Justice and Social Sustainability". The conference was organized by the Christian Conference of Asia together with its partner church-based organizations and institutions based in Hong Kong. The conference was held last 8 to 9 December in connection with the 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Hong Kong last December 13-18, 2005.

The migrant workshop was attended by 30 participants from Canada, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Hong Kong. The workshop discussed the effects of GATS Mode 4 on migrant workers and the international movement of migrants.

GATS Mode 4 is among the major agreements in the WTO.

Prof. Jane Kelsey of ARENA, New Zealand and Ms. Joy de Guzman provided the input of GATS Mode 4 and migrants movement respectively.

The participants agreed to oppose GATS Mode 4 and the WTO in general and to support the formation of the international movement of migrants.

Meanwhile, 30 delegates participated in the workshop on food sovereignty that APMM co-organized with the Pesticide Action Network - Asia Pacific (PANAP).

## CLA unperturbed by labor and human rights violations in FPC

The Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) of Taiwan remains unperturbed at the labor and human rights violations in Formosa Plastics Corporation (FPC) in Yun Lin County. This is despite the fact that the new head of the CLA, Lee Ying-Yuan heard for himself the grievances of the workers when he and a number of legislators visited the FPC plant on December 9, 2005.

The Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) on the other hand, has stated categorically that while they would like to protect the rights of the remaining workers in FPC, they would not want to jeopardize the recruitment of Filipino workers by the company. This is the reason why after only two months, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) has lifted the suspension on the hiring by the Taiwanese brokers despite the fact that there is an ongoing criminal case filed against two personnel of ATV, one of the Taiwanese brokers for beating up Filipino workers who were sent home on August 2, 2005.

The Filipino workers inside the plant and advocates in and out of Taiwan had waged a campaign to expose the situation inside FPC. And despite the threats and intimidation including withholding of food to a number of Filipino workers, the campaign has gained some headway including the identification and confession of two suspects in the beating, slapping of fine against the FPC for not issuing pay slips to workers, and the gathering of support from local and international advocates including the Amnesty International Asia Pacific and the Taiwan Association for Human Rights.

But despite these, both the CLA and MECO seem not to be alarmed by such developments. The economic might of FPC, which is part of the Formosa Plastics Group (FPG) is too large to be ignored. FPG had US\$57.9 billion of assets in 2004. It also had a net income before tax of US\$7.09 billion and 82,380 employees in the same year. FPC alone has 1,800 Filipino workers at present.

There should be a bigger campaign to make the CLA and MECO at least bend over to some of the demands of the workers. And this should not only involve the workers in FPC but in other parts of Taiwan itself. Organizing workers to assert their labor and human rights should be done immediately and the formation of solidarity groups should be enhanced. Then and only then would the rights of the workers be asserted and acknowledged.

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