

News Digest

November
2006



APMM

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

Filipino migrant workers unite in forum

Despite the incessant rains, more than 40 migrant workers from eight organizations attended a forum on national and migrant issues on September 10, 2006. Three advocates from the Human Rights Program of Soochow University also participated and assisted in the activity.

Migrante Sectoral Party – Taiwan chapter and Samahang Makata International (SMI), organized the forum. It was held at the basement of the General Assembly office of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.



A discussion and power point presentation on the Human Rights situation in the Philippines and on the Overseas Workers Welfare Assistance (OWWA) anomalies ensued. Other topics discussed include:

1. Non-Implementation of Balik Manggagawa to Overseas Filipino Worker's in Taiwan;
2. Proposal by the government for OFW's to become mandatory Social Security Services (SSS) members; and
3. On the Right of Caretakers and Domestic Helpers to Have Days Off and the Need for a Standard Employment Contract and for them to be under the protection of the Labor Standards Law of Taiwan.

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MECO admits helplessness in protecting migrant workers in Taiwan

Filipino migrant workers who had a dialogue with the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) on October 29 were not surprised when the latter admitted that they were helpless in implementing the rights of their own nationals in Taiwan. This pertains to implementation of the Balik Manggagawa (returning migrants) and the right to day off of Filipino migrants working in homes.

Philippine Labor Representative Reynaldo Gopez explained that the Taiwanese brokers and Philippine placement agencies have a bilateral agreement in processing the documents of overseas Filipino workers (OFW's). As such even those who need to exit Taiwan after three years of work (so that they would not be eligible for residency) and return to the same employer are treated as new hires even if they are essentially rehired.

The Balik Manggagawa is a program of the Philippine Overseas Administration Office (POEA), which states that rehires would only need to pay a P100 fee to its office plus OWWA and Philhealth membership dues. Because of this so-called bilateral agreement which Mr. Gopez mentioned, it is only those working in Taiwan where the Balik Manggagawa is not being implemented.

With regards to ensuring the right to day off of Filipino migrants working in homes as caretakers and domestic workers, the Labor Representative stated that the workers who would want to avail of this right might eventually be sent home by their employers. And that he would want to balance the need of the migrants to have work and that of having the right to day off. In response, a Migrante Sectoral Party – Taiwan Chapter official asked if that meant that MECO would rather want the migrant workers not to assert their right to have a day off every week. The MECO officials present could not answer this question.

As a whole, it seems that MECO and the Philippine government in general is more interested in extracting more fees on its citizens in Taiwan and in protecting the interests of the Taiwanese brokers and Philippine placement agencies. It would also want to ensure that the OFW's retain their work even if their rights are being violated like in its hesitancy to press those working in homes to have a regular day off.

The OFW's should not let this happen. They should resolutely campaign to be included in the Balik Manggagawa through a petition campaign for this and press on the government to assure that they would have days off and a standard employment contract that would do away with side agreements. They also agreed to raise these issues to the legal counsel of Bayan Muna this coming Nov. 12 so that said political party could raise this to the Philippine Congress.

The dialogue was requested by the MSP, Samahang Makata International (SMI) and the Fujen English Mass Community (EMC). Other than the three organizations a representative of the Cordillera Organization in Taiwan (COT) also attended the dialogue.



Involved migrants. Migrant workers spent their day-off meeting with the government officials to discuss the former's situation and demanding action from the latter.

Engaged. Migrant Ramon Bultron (right) sits with Tony Tujan of Ibon Foundation to discuss the matters involving migrant workers.



APMM attends academic confab on Im/migrants

The Graduate Studies for Social Transformation of the Shih Hsin University organized the 3rd Conference on Transborder and Diaspora : Governance, Survival and Movement last October 7 and 8, 2006. Around 100 participants mostly from the academe, students and representatives of grassroots organizations and institutions working on im/migration and human rights issues attended the conference.

The APMM Managing Director was one the invited speakers and spoke on the “Struggle and Development of Migrants Movement: The Philippine Experience”. Dr. Irene Fernandez, Director of TENAGANITA delivered the keynote speech.

The topics of the two-day conference includes, Globalization and Migration, Migration and Resistance, Conditions of Migrants in Taiwan, Survival and Civil

Rights of Migrants, Gender, Family and Migration, Marriage Immigration in Taiwan, Survival and Conditions of Immigrants and the im/migrants’ identity.

Invited speakers came from Japan, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines and Taiwan.

The Shih Hsin University celebrated its 50th year anniversary this year with the conference being a part of it.

The participants united in the common understanding of the issues. They also agreed on the following resolutions:

1. Conduct a petition letter campaign against the political killings in the Philippines; for OFW’s in Taiwan to be part of the Balik Manggagawa program of the POEA; and to junk the proposal of the government for OFW’s to become mandatory Social Security Services (SSS) members;
2. To conduct a dialogue with MECO on all the issues discussed earlier either on the 2nd or 4th week of October, whichever of the two dates MECO is available; and
3. Hand out and display materials and solicit signatures for the petition on September 24, 2006, which is the Catholic Migrants Day in Taiwan.

Other than those mentioned those who participated in the forum were the following: Cordillera Organization in Taiwan (COT), English Mass Community in Fujen University, Holy Family Church Choir, Formosa Plastics Corporation (FPC) migrants organization and Visayas and Mindanao Association in Taiwan.



A United Sector. Leaders and members of various organizations in Taiwan gathered together, discussed and collectively took a position on the issues that beset them in the country. They have likewise released a statement setting demands for the government to act on.

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Balik Manggagawa is a program of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). It stipulates that all returning migrants for whatever reason but who plan to go back to their same employer or

re-hires, should only pay a P100 fee to POEA plus for Philhealth and OWWA membership. This is not being implemented only on those OFW’s working in Taiwan as they are still charged placement fees and documentation costs similar to new hires.



Stop Political Killings in the Philippines!

Locals, expatriates and various individuals actively participated in the global campaign like in Taiwan (above) and Hong Kong (right).

Various gimmicks were made as locals themselves encouraged passerby and onlookers to join.



SEPTEMBER 21

A Day for Human Rights A Day for Solidarity with the Filipino People

*A Feature on the Participation
of Overseas Filipinos
to the International Day of Action
for Human Rights in the Philippines*



Expressing Solidarity. Japanese (top) and Taiwanese (above) locals braved police harassment and joined Filipinos in the global campaign against political killings in the Philippines.

It was a day for human rights. It was a day for international solidarity with the Filipino people.

September 21 was commemorated by Filipinos and other human rights advocates around the world with protest actions and other activities that condemn the spate of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations in the Philippines.

Led by the International Campaign to Stop the Killings and the International League of Peoples' Struggle, organizations from 15 countries around the world responded to the call for an International Day of Action. In the United States alone, actions were conducted in eight cities.

The international action highlighted the concern of people all over the world on the unabated political killings and human rights violations in the Philippines. It collectively pointed a finger to the Arroyo government as the perpetrator of such crimes against the Filipino people.

The killings continue. People's solidarity will push through.

Hong Kong

"It's Martial Law all over again." This was declared today by the HK Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (HKCAHRPP)

as about 100 people attended the candlelighting and cultural program the group organized at Star Ferry Pier, Tsim Sha Tsui.

The HKCAHRPP is a group of local organizations and individuals in Hong Kong that strive to gather the support of the international community to stop the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines.

Taiwan

More than 20 Taiwanese and expatriates from human rights and other organizations, including a number of students, joined the members and leaders of Migrante Taiwan in a picket/dialogue in front of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei.

The protesters wrote peace signs and slogans on their faces that included "Oust GMA!" and "No to Killings!" A short dialogue ensued after the picket. MECO admitted that they could not make any official statements and only re-echoed the Philippine government's position culled from the newspapers.

Korea

Civic organizations in Korea composed of Filipinos, Koreans, Bangladeshis and Nepalese bonded together and held a picket in front of the Philippine embassy in Seoul as part of their involvement in the campaign.

"On the 34th year after the Marcos declared martial law, said the Filipino migrants' alliance KASAMMAKO in a statement, that the series of killings under Arroyo government is much alike or even surpassed the Marcos's record under the current situation in the Philippines.

Lee Sang-hee, a member of the Seoul-based lawyers' group MINBYUN, expressed strong solidarity with fellow activists in the Philippines as "many Korean activists and innocent people were killed by our military regime, and so we feel that the Filipino people's problem is also our problem."

Australia

Filipino Australians and their supporters joined by holding a protest at the Philippines Consulate in Sydney and moving to the Town Hall Square for a candle-light vigil.

Trade union leaders also joined in the protest and expressed their solidarity with fellow workers in



Solidarity for Human Rights and the Filipino People. Protests spread like wildfire like those in Korea (above) and Australia (right) where trade union leaders and students joined in the campaign.

the Philippines. Peter Murphy of the Philippines Australia Union Link said that "the Philippines is now second only to Colombia for murders of union leaders, and second only to Iraq for murders of journalists."

Japan

Filipinos and Japanese protesters stood bravely in front of the Philippine Embassy to show their support and involvement in the growing global campaign to stop the killings in the Philippines.

Shuichi Koshiro, co-chairman of ASIAN WIDE CAMPAIGN Japan chapter, demanded the Philippine government to take immediate action on the demands to abide by the international human rights conventions and stop political killings in the Philippines.

Across the World

Protests, candlelighting vigils and various actions spread across Europe and North America when Filipinos and locals alike in those respective countries participated in the global campaign.

Countries like United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland as well as the United States and Canada had people trooping to the Philippine consulates or embassies and enjoining fellows in their respective countries to join in the campaign.

HK migrants score Phil. gov't for inutility to address demands



Biggest Leaders' Forum. Migrants flocked to the Bayanihan to hear what the Philippine Consulate had to say regarding the former's demands. They went home disappointed.

“...The Leader's Forum was an eye-opener. It showed them the insincerity of the Philippine government in addressing the concerns of overseas Filipinos.”

For the first time in the history of the Leaders Forum organized by the Philippine Consulate General, on 15 October this year the Bayanihan Centre Main Hall was jam-packed with representatives of the 99 organizations that participated during the First Women Migrants Summit that was held at the Hong Kong University on July 2.

Three months after the summit submission, it was time for concrete action. Unfortunately, all that the government officials committed were promises to study the issue, follow up with Manila, or hold further dialogue.

Emotions ran high as the migrants raised their urgent concerns foremost of which were excessive fees and government exactions. These include the unnecessary authentication fee, overseas employment certificate, OWWA contribution and the proposed SSS mandatory coverage.

Concrete cases of neglect and poor services left the Consulate at a loss for excuses especially when Migrante Macau representatives submitted the issues of migrants in their territory. With a PCG extension office in Macau, the migrants took the opportunity at the Leaders Forum to expose the officials' apparent lack of attention and action on their problems specifically on the issuance of Affidavit of Support which has become a source of corruption for Philippine Immigration officials.

The AOS, which is issued by the PCG with a fee, is being required by airport authorities in Clark for Filipinos departing for Macau. If a worker fails to show an AOS, he or she is then forced to give a bribe (from P5,000 to P10,000 each or cellphones) or be off-loaded, according to cases handled by Migrante Macau.

A heated argument ensued on the issue of respecting the rights of migrants who hold picket actions at the PCG on weekdays. The migrants reacted violently when Vice Consul Anee Arugay explained that the reason the Consulate shuts the gate to the counters is to avoid bad elements from the protesters from causing harm to the consulate.

Amidst all these arguments, Consul General Alejandrino Vicente remained
HK migrants score, go to p. 7

APMM meets Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. *Members of the APMM met with leaders of the PCT to discuss how they can work together for the migrant workers in Taiwan.*



APMM holds

talks with PCT

Earlier an endorsement letter from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) General Secretary Bishop Eleizer M.

The APMM and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) held talks in the latter's General Assembly Office in Taipei on October 27. Mr. Ramon Bultron introduced the work of APMM in the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions and in Taiwan. He also mentioned the organization's history and its links with different Churches some of which PCT has bilateral relations with.

On its part, PCT General Secretary Andrew Chang stressed that it maintains its ministry with the migrant workers in Nantzu in Kaohsiung. It is also encouraging its members to treat the migrants especially those working in homes in the Christian values.

Pascua for APMM was sent to the PCT General Secretary. It was suggested that the PCT, UCCP and APMM can come-up with an agreement that defines the role and responsibilities of each party concerning the long term basing and visa sponsorship for the APMM Coordinator in Taiwan. This would be on April next year during the PCT's General Assembly meeting.

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tough and indifferent to the issues at hand while trying to project an amiable and conciliatory attitude.

For the Filipino migrant workers of Hong Kong and Macau, however, the Leader's Forum was an eye-opener. It showed them the insincerity of the Philippine government in addressing the concerns of overseas Filipinos. It showed them that for the current government, as with the past regimes, Filipinos abroad are but commodities to exploit for the maximum possible income.

More importantly, it affirmed the principle that only through the collective and militant action of Filipinos abroad can there be gains in the struggle for migrant's rights and wellbeing.



Consulate cornered. *Migrant workers from Macau participated and engaged with the Philippine Consulate General of Hong Kong. Apparently, all they heard was "we will look into it."*

*Issues of Indonesian domestic helpers
are made part of their Ramadhan observance*

REFLECTIONS of Ramadhan

From September 24 to October 23 starting 5 am to 6 pm this year, Muslims all over the world celebrated the Ramadhan, a period of prayer and fasting in the tradition of their faith.

The Asosiasi Tenaka Kerja Indonesia (ATKI), also known as Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, maximized the celebration to organize and educate their members including non-members who belong to other associations.

As a matter of fact, ATKI invited GAMMI, an alliance of Indonesian organizations in the education and training activities integrated with prayer and fasting.

Sri Utami, ATKI vice chairperson, said that it is important that Muslim Indonesian workers take this opportunity to adapt their conditions to the prayer and fasting that they observe on their days off during this period.

This is a time to cleanse and reflect on their lives, she stressed, so it is only proper that they understand their rights and work for their wellbeing.

“Sakafitra” was also practiced as a sign of tax or payment which is done once a year. The amount that they collected was donated to an Indonesian NGO here in Hong Kong which also supports distressed Indonesians.

Sri made clear that not all Indonesian workers could follow the tradition of Ramadhan because their employers forbade them to do so. Employers

“As we observe Ramadhan, we incorporate the hardships and sacrifices we have as domestic workers here. We maximize it by learning more about our situation and how we can resolve it collectively. The Ramadhan is another way for us to consolidate our members and reach to more people.”
Sri Utami, ATKI

were afraid that the workers would not have the energy to work while fasting.

To culminate the Ramadhan, ATKI has joined with GAMMI in the celebration of ‘Idulfitri’ through traditional and religious dance and booth competitions among different organizations of Indonesian workers. This has been scheduled on November 19 at the Victoria Park in Causeway Bay.

Sri Utami stressed that this is another way for the ATKI to expand their membership and build a stronger movement of Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong.



Training held with foreign brides group

The Trans-Asia Sisters Association in Taiwan (TASAT), grassroots organization of immigrant women married to a local spouse organized a leadership training last October 22 and 29 in Taipei and Meinung, Kaohsiung, respectively.

The trainings in Taipei and Meinung were attended by 20 TASAT members, officers, staff and volunteers and held at the Shih Hsin University in Taipei and a community-based NGO office in Meinung.

The training included a brief lecture and group dynamics on collective and “elite” type or “person centered” leadership, handling conflicts, criticism and self criticism and evaluation and planning process as well as discussions and resolving practical issues and problems faced by both members and officers of the organization.

In Meinung, an officer of a day-care teachers union and a women’s community based organization joined the training.

TASAT is also in the process of preparing for the next general assembly to be held in 1997.

APMM NEWS Digest

is a publication of the **Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)** - Research, Documentation and Publication Program. Its office is located at:

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