

News Digest

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

Asian migrants gather for first HK Summit

ORGANIZED BY THE Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) composed of the Asosiasi Tenaka Kerja Indonesia (ATKI), Thai Regional Alliance (TRA), Friends of Thai (FOT), Far East Overseas Nepalese Association (FEONA), Association of Sri Lankans (ASL), and the United Filipinos in Hong Kong, the first ever Asian Migrant Workers Summit (AMWS) held at the Hong Kong City University in Kowloon Tong on November 25 this year was very fruitful.

Certainly, the summit provided a venue for migrant workers in Hong Kong to discuss and formulate platforms of action on issues common among foreign workers such as wage and labor, immigration policies, and other social services as well as share the condition and concern from their respective governments.

Keynote speaker Connie Bragas-Regalado, chairperson of Migrante International, presented the root causes of the Asian migrants' miseries such as liberalization, deregulation and privatization policies of neoliberal globalization which are implemented in sending countries for the benefit of foreign powers and the few elite who control the economy and politics. A former domestic worker in Hong Kong, Regalado was one of the pioneers in the formation of the AMCB as the former UNIFIL chairperson.

While abroad migrant workers are placed in no better condition, according to her. They are the first to be subjected to labor and

immigration policies that seriously violate their rights. Wage cuts, unjust taxation, reduction of benefits and further constriction of immigration laws are the usual responses of labor importing countries in times of economic instability, she stressed.

A strong migrants' movement is the best strategy to confront these issues, Regalado said. In this light, she expounded on the formation of the International Migrants Alliance, a broad international alliance composed of progressive and anti-imperialist migrant organizations of different nationalities, which shall act as the voice and force of migrants of various nationalities in advancing the rights and interests of migrants, refugees and displaced people in different countries.

Local migrants' rights advocates provided inputs during the AMWS. Foremost was Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) director Apo Leung who spoke on wage and labor rights. He lauded migrant workers for their vigilance and unity in advancing their rights and welfare. Similar concern was expressed by Elizabeth Tang of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), the proponent of a universal legislated minimum wage.

One of the highlights of the event included panel presentations by leader representatives of the AMCB namely Rendy Warsiating for the Indonesians, Parichat Jaroennon for the Thai, Shaba Lama for the Nepalese, Ariyadasa Ganganayake for the Sri Lankans and Betty Palabay for the Filipinos. From their



The historic Asian summit drew in a significant number of organizations of Asian migrants who are mainly domestic workers.



Connie Regalado of the preparatory committee of the International Migrants' Alliance discussed the migrant's situation and the need for IMA



Local trade unions, a regional worker's NGO and members of the academe also attended to give inputs and declare support for the summit.

Summit participants are set to present their demands to the HK government on December 16, as part of their celebration of the International Migrants' Day.



Cultural presentations further enlivened the gathering. They also showed the situation and concerns of migrant workers of each nationality.

population report it was gleaned that Filipinos lead by a narrow margin the number of Asian domestic workers in Hong Kong at 120,000 followed by Indonesians -110,000, Thai -5,000, Sri Lankans- 3,000 and Nepalese- 1,500.

A solidarity message was also delivered by Elmer Labog, the chairman of the KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno or May First Movement), the biggest militant trade union center in the Philippines and member of the International League of Peoples Struggles (ILPS), an anti-imperialist global alliance of people around the world.

Five major workshops tackled common issues and concerns namely: Workshop 1 (Wage and labour rights) facilitated by Jun Tellez of the Migrante Global Council and program coordinator of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW); Workshop 2 (Immigration and police concerns) facilitated by Eni Lestari of ATKI with input from Cynthia Tellez, director of the MFMW Hong Kong Society; Workshop 3 (Racial discrimination) facilitated by Lakshan Dias of the Association of Sri Lankans with inputs from Chong Yiu Kwong, Chairperson of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor; Workshop 4 (Access to social services) facilitated by UNIFIL chairperson Dolores Balladares with inputs from Jacky Hung of the Justice and Peace Commission; and Workshop 5 (Women's health and reproductive rights) facilitated by Bungon Tamarsorn from Thai Regional Alliance with inputs from Elijah Fung of the St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre.

A lively plenary hosted by Eni Lestari, ATKI chairperson and AMCB spokesperson together with UNIFIL secretary general Eman Villanueva, finalized the resolutions and recommendations from the different workshop groups including two special

resolutions to participate on the International Migrants Alliance in Hong Kong and submit the results of the AMWS to the Hong Kong government on December 16, 2007 on the occasion of the International Migrants Day.

Aside from the AMCB members, major alliances from different nationalities also attended the AMWS. These include: PILAR (a coalition of Indonesian migrant groups fighting against overcharging of recruitment agencies resulting to the underpayment of Indonesian migrant workers), GAMMI (an alliance of Moslem groups of Indonesians), major Filipino formations like the Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society (ATIS), Cordillera Alliance (Corall), Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU), and United Pangasinan Hong Kong (UPHK) and other new comers like the Radio Veritas Asia Sri Lankan Listener's Foundation of Hong Kong, The Sri Lankan Fraternity of Hong Kong and Thai Women Association.

Without doubt, the AMWS strengthened the unity and cooperation of Asian migrant workers not only in addressing common issues but also in sharing their culture of food, songs and dances.#

Campaign for Rights of Immigrants and Migrants Bears Fruit

AFTER FOUR YEARS of campaigning for changes in the Immigration and Entry and Exit Law, the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants' (AHRLIM) efforts finally bore fruit. On November 30, they gained several breakthroughs in the amendments to the said law in the Legislative Yuan.

A day earlier, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) conceded in lowering the financial requirements for immigrant brides who would want to apply Taiwanese citizenship. Previously they should show proof that they had NT\$414,720 in a bank account.

Besides AHRLIM's efforts in Taiwan, they together with APMM submitted a petition to the MOI on this issue. This was signed by 95 organizations and some individuals from twenty countries and territories.

The other gains of AHRLIM include the following:

1. In cases where a foreign woman is married to a local man, the wife will not lose the right of abode if the divorce is due to domestic violence.

2. Established a general anti-discrimination provision for all people residing in Taiwan. This includes migrant workers and immigrant brides.

3. Immigration department officials cannot inspect a foreigner's documents unless some requirements are fulfilled. Removal orders cannot be issued without a hearing.

4. Commercial marriage is prohibited. Matchmaking services profiting from Taiwanese finding spouses from other countries will be banned.

5. Foreigners working and living in Taiwan will have the right to join and speak in protest activities.

6. Migrant workers who are in the process of a legal proceedings are allowed to extend their stay.

7. Women who are smuggled into Taiwan for prostitution can stay for 6 months with medical care and placed into temporary refuge centers.

One limitation of the gains made by AHRLIM is that it does not

include Mainland Chinese immigrant brides. According to Taiwanese officials, this is because they fall under the jurisdiction of the Mainland Affairs Council.

Overall, however, this is a great victory for AHRLIM. And this triumph was made possible by AHRLIM to mobilize not only NGO's but a great number of immigrant brides and even migrant workers in their mass actions and even lobby work. #



With determination and collective action, immigrant brides in Taiwan have shown that victories can be achieved.

Crackdown on Migrants' TU in Korea Ongoing

THREE KEY LEADERS of the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) in Korea were arrested on November 27. In addition to this, more than 20 MTU members and their officers were caught by the police since August of this year. Clearly there is an ongoing crackdown on the MTU whose members are mostly undocumented workers.

Those arrested include MTU President Kajiman, Vice President Raju and General Secretary Masum. The MTU is an affiliate of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). The KCTU has launched an international appeal for their release and an end to the crackdown not only on the MTU but on the undocumented migrant workers in Korea.

Clearly the dissolution of the trainee system and the introduction of the Employment Permit System (EPS) has not deterred the rise in the number of undocumented migrant workers. Under the EPS, migrant workers can only legally work in Korea for three years with very few being rehired.

Oher than this, the EPS has spawned many violations of the migrant workers rights. These include the following:

1. Long working hours imposed through contract substitution
2. Unpaid salaries in certain companies
3. Maltreatment by the employer through verbal and physical abuse
4. Imposition of physically exacting kind of work

Because of these, a great number of migrant workers under the EPS tend to runaway from

their employers. This is no different during he time of the trainee system.

Migrant workers and advocates should thus heed the KCTU and the Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union's calls to:

- a. Immediately release President Kajiman, Vice President Raju and General Secretary Masum!
- b. Stop the targeted crackdown and labor repression against MTU!
- c. Stop the crackdown and deportation of undocumented migrant workers!#



International and regional groups have condemned the arrest of the MTU leaders. The MTU and other groups in Korea have called for solidarity actions and support to their beleaguered leaders. The APMM has sent a statement to Korean authorities calling for their release. Actions in HK are being planned by the AMCB.

Peoples' Lawyers meet locals and migrant workers in HK

THREE LAWYERS FROM the Public Interest Law Center (PILC) in the Philippines headed by Attorney Romeo Capulong arrived in Hong Kong to meet with local people and the Filipino migrant workers. They discussed the human rights situation in the Philippines and their role as peoples' lawyers. A series of forums and personal meetings with eminent persons in Hong

Kong were organized during their visit. Atty. Capulong was joined by Attys. Rachel Pastores and Charmaine dela Cruz.

A discussion with local institutions and supporters here in Hong Kong was the first activity held for them. This was jointly organized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Asian Students Association, Asian Human Rights Commission, HKCAHRPP and the Amnesty International-Hong Kong. The Filipino lawyers discussed about the extra judicial killings, abductions and enforced disappearances in the Philippines.

In the forum, the lawyers emphasized their gains in handling so many cases. Their victories include the case of the Batasan 5

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HK migrants attend radio broadcasting training

TWENTY-NINE ASIAN MIGRANTS in Hong Kong underwent a basic training seminar on Online Radio Broadcasting from November 10 and 11, 2007 organized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) in coordination with the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB). AMCB is an alliance of grassroots organizations of migrant workers from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines and Indonesia.

The training program was a first for Asian migrants and was held in order to equip migrant workers in maximizing radio as a medium for education and awareness-raising.

As part of APMM's thrust of empowering grassroots migrant workers, the skills learned in the training program shall further be honed by creating an actual pre-recorded radio program for migrant workers of different nationalities. This pre-recorded program shall be distributed

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Human rights advocates in HK took time off to listen to UN judge Romeo Capulong and fellow lawyers from the PILC who discussed the developments in the cases of human rights abuses in the country.

STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

Annete (not her real name), 41, came home in a casket on November 7 and was buried in Urdaneta, Pangasinan. Her family and siblings expected her to come home after completing her contract on September 7. However, she went missing in September until her husband received a notice from the Department of Foreign Affairs on October 21 and an autopsy report that declared she killed herself.

A midwifery graduate, she went to Saudi Arabia in 1992, first as a caregiver and later as a domestic worker.

On November 2, the eldest sister of Annette communicated with the Mission

Mysterious deaths never end

for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) to ask for assistance in the repatriation of Annette's body. Annette's in KSA, together with the Kapatiran sa Gitnang Silangan (KGS-Migrante Riyadh) met with the Philippine Embassy and acquired documents declaring Annette's cause of death was suicide on September 7.

The Shubrah and Al Soaidi police station reported that on the September 6, the employer and her son brought Annette to a police station accusing her of stealing SR10,000. The son withdrew the charges but wanted her deported. The report further said

that Annette requested to use the toilet but did not come back. Later, they found Annette with a tarha cloth (head cover) that was tied around her neck and on the door handle of the door.

But the siblings and Annette's husband do not believe this. They await another autopsy report from the NBI.

"Gusto lang naming malaman ang totoong kung nagpakamatay nga ba ang kapatid namin" (We just want to know if our sister really committed suicide). Like all family of migrant victims of violence, waiting doesn't seem to have an end.



Malou Logan of SBS Australia gave inputs on community radio broadcasting to Asian migrants in HK who are all set to try out online broadcasting.

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as widely as possible and will be uploaded in the internet as well.

The activity was aimed at encouraging grass roots migrant workers to use the technology in addressing their limited access and capacity in disseminating information in their own languages, relating to their socio-cultural rights and working conditions, and educating migrant workers on their issues.

Training input was given by Ms Malou Logan, an experienced radio broadcaster and executive producer of SBS Radio in Australia. She is also the chairperson of GABRIELA-Melbourne. She gave inputs on the concept and forms of communications and broadcast journalism. This was followed by group workshops on how to produce and present a program, program planning and radio program production.

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) supported the training.#

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(progressive legislators) and the surfacing of some abducted activists using the *Writ of Amparo*. The *Writ of Amparo* is a new ruling used by the Philippine Supreme Court in response to the grave human rights violations in the Philippines. It originated in Mexico.

Atty. Capulong said that the *Writ of Amparo* can be described as the 'flashlight from the wilderness'. He stated that this new rule can pressure the military and the perpetrators of human rights atrocities to surface the victims of involuntary disappearances and explain their whereabouts as well as what actions are they taking to solve said cases.

On December 2, a jam-packed room in Fanny Li Hall in St. John's Cathedral welcomed the peoples' lawyers. There they explained their role as the lawyers of the poor. The Philippine government thus considers them enemies of the state as they are branded communist sympathizers. This does not deter them of helping the victims of political killings and enforced disappearances to seek justice. They emphasized that their victories in the cases that they handled will not be complete without

the support of the mass movement. In fact they said the mass movement is very essential in winning the strategic battle of pursuing justice and genuine peace against the Arroyo government.

Additionally during their visit, the lawyers met Cardinal Zen who is head of the Catholic Church of Hong Kong. And Mr. Basil Fernando of the Asian Human Rights Commission. Both expressed their continuing support to the struggle for justice and peace in the Philippines.#



An SRO crowd of migrants listened to the PILC lawyers who discussed the HR situation in the country and the political situation as well.

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