

# News Digest

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

## Asian migrants in HK vow to rally thousands in protests against WTO MC6

Globalization and the WTO have forced millions of people to seek employment abroad. The destruction that neoliberal policies have caused to our home countries has pushed us to work in other countries where we are faced with the same grave impacts of globalization and the WTO.

This was declared by the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB), an alliance of foreign workers from Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as they vowed to sweep out the anti-people and anti-migrant neoliberal policies and to junk WTO.

According to Dolores Balladares, one of the spokespersons of AMCB, globalization and the WTO attack the wage of workers, including migrant workers. This has been clearly manifested by the Hong Kong government – one of the most avid advocates of neoliberalism – when it blatantly snubbed petitions of foreign domestic workers for wage increase.

Instead, foreign domestic helpers experienced two wage cuts in the Minimum Allowable Wage (MAW) in a period of four years and were charged indirect taxation through the levy supposedly paid for by the employers.

The Asian migrants also assailed the WTO 's main concern which is maximum profit for big businesses that



*Migrants from the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) display their sentiments against the WTO during the visit of WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy*

are mainly from superpower countries such as the United States.

This is very much true in their countries of origin where public utilities such as water, electricity, and social services such as education and health are offered for sale to multinational companies resulting to price increases and deterioration of services.

Because of these, the migrant workers launched a series of activities to rally thousands of their compatriots to join the protest actions and participate in various anti-WTO events during the People's Action Week (PAW) in December this year.

**Education for mobilization** - this is the key element in the Asian migrants' campaign to ensure massive participation of foreign workers to actions against WTO and its policies.

As early as September last year, AMCB together with the Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PAN-AP) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) jointly organized the Hong Kong leg of the Peoples' Caravan for Food Sovereignty. The activities included a conference on WTO and Migration and public speaking at a huge rally organized by the Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (ATKI), an active member of the AMCB. More than 300

migrant workers, students and migrant advocates attended the conference where Irene Fernandez of Tenaganita and PAN-AP, Tony Tujan of APRN and Ibon, and Connie Ragalado of MIGRANTE International were resource persons.

Cultural presentations have also served as forms to educate migrants on the issues of globalization. The “Three Monkeys” – representative of the WTO, big businesses and governments that implement neoliberal globalization policies – is a short cultural presentation that, in a very simple form, shows the impacts of WTO and globalization to the people. The “Three Monkeys” was first introduced in the HKPA’s community drive event in Causeway Bay last July 17.

Since last August, AMCB has been organizing monthly seminars to train “Migrant Educators on WTO”. Already, more than 65 educators have been trained and are doing their rounds in different places in Hong Kong where migrant workers congregate.

Armed with their copies of “You and the WTO”, “What you need to know about the WTO” and the “WTO, migration and GATS Mode 4” – the three education modules given during the seminars – the migrant educators provide group discussions, short talks and in some occasions, public forums among migrant workers in Hong Kong.



*Migrants and locals unite against the WTO*

As the 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference drew near, the AMCB launched the “Migrants’ 10-week Countdown to Junk WTO” campaign. The countdown aims to create the atmosphere and climate of anticipation for the Peoples Action Week among the ranks of migrant workers.

Every Sunday since October 2, small, medium and large-scale activities have been held to mark a week of the countdown. From public forums, cultural events, public information drive, distribution of flyers, walking billboards, volunteer sign-up campaign and formal and informal public gatherings – AMCB affiliates are determined to rally the sector that they represent in order to

contribute significantly to the overall success of the PAW.

Meanwhile, as a member, the AMCB actively participated in events organized and/or coordinated by the Hong Kong People’s Alliance on WTO (HKPA). On July 24, AMCB mobilized its members to join the protest march from Hongkong Bank to the Central Government Office (CGO) to coincide with the WTO Council Meeting in Geneva.

On September 10, members of AMCB joined the HKPA in a candlelight vigil to commemorate the sacrifice of Lee Kyung Hae, the Korean peasant leader who killed himself in protest of the WTO in Cancun, Mexico and to reaffirm the people’s commitment to end the tragedies brought about by the neoliberal policies of the WTO.

Last October 1, AMCB members marched with the local groups to protest the privatization program of the HKSAR government. Most recently in October 16, AMCB stood side-by-side with our local brothers and sisters in a protest action during the visit of Pascal Lamy, WTO Director General, at the Hong Kong University

To guarantee full mobilization, documentation and media projection during the People’s Action Week, the AMCB pooled its own set of volunteers. Trainings for each of these activities were conducted among the migrant workers. Volunteers were given on-the-job assignments during the countdown



*The “Three Monkeys” - an AMCB presentation on the evils of globalization*



Photo exhibit of the UNIFIL-HK to educate migrants on the WTO and globalization and their impacts to the people

activities such as the Tribal Filipino Sunday on October 30.

In addition, the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), a member of the AMCB, organized the first ever **All Presidents' Meet** last October 30. The APM gathered more than 50 presidents, chairpersons and religious leaders of different Filipino migrants' associations, unions, religious groups, alliances and federations in a meeting that came up with a common position on the issue of WTO and confirmed their commitment to the PAW. Trade unionist and legislator Hon. Lee Cheuk Yan, who was the guest speaker, sought the participation of the Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong for the PAW.

In the same event, RESIST Hong Kong, a loose formation of Filipino migrants' organizations against imperialist plunder and war, was launched. "We shall rally our ranks to defeat the WTO in its Hong Kong Ministerial Conference this December. This is why, even beyond December, we shall continue to resist imperialist exploitation and oppression of the people as well as its aggression to countries and movements that dare resist its domination," the group said.#

## Tribal Filipino Sunday highlights the plight of indigenous peoples under the WTO

Focusing on the theme "Kumilos at Lumaban para sa Karapatan, Kagalingan, Patrimonya at Kasarinlan! Tutulan, Labanan at Biguin ang Anti-Pilipinong Rehimeng Arroyo at WTO!" (**Mobilize and Fight for Rights, Patrimony and Sovereignty! Oppose, Fight and Defeat the Anti-Filipino Arroyo Regime and WTO!**), migrant workers from indigenous groups in the Philippines, through their songs, dances, poetry and speeches, expressed their disgust and opposition to WTO policies on globalization that have impoverished the indigenous peoples and plundered their natural wealth and resources.

Around 1,000 Filipino overseas workers gathered at the Chater Garden to join in the celebration of the Tribal Filipino Sunday (TFS) that was successfully carried out by the organizers composed of the Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society (ATIS), Cordillera Alliance (CORALL), Mindanao Federation (MINFED) and Palawan Migrants Association of Hong Kong (PMA).

One of the main themes discussed during the celebration was on the liberalization of the mining industry under WTO and globalization.

The full blast opening up of the mining sector of poor countries to the plunder of multinational mining firms has caused the displacement of many indigenous peoples, loss of their resources and the plunder of the environment.



Migrant workers from indigenous groups in the Philippines display their stand on WTO

In the same venue, two photo exhibits were set up by the UNIFIL. One featured a basic explanation on the WTO and its impacts to the people. Migrant WTO educators trained by the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) were

around the area to explain the WTO to viewers as well as to encourage them to join the December mass actions. The second exhibit showed the intensifying human rights violations in the Philippines.#

## JOIN THE PARADE

**HONG KONG PEOPLE'S MARDI GRAS AGAINST  
THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION  
NOV. 27, CENTRAL**

The Mardi Gras is an initiative of the AMCB as one form of protest against the WTO. For details, contact Dolo (97472986), Eni (96081475), or Bungon (92174793). See you at the parade!

## Protesters welcome WTO Director-General in HK

Mr. Pascal Lamy, the new Director-General of the World Trade Organization together with Mr. John Tsang, WTO point man in HK and Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology, were welcomed with protest led by the Hong Kong Peoples Alliance on WTO (HKPA) during a dialogue organized by the WTO for HK-based NGO's.

The dialogue was held at the HK University and attended by around 150 representatives of NGO's and peoples organizations including some leaders of peasant organizations from the Philippines who attended the peasant workshop organized by HKPA.

During the dialogue, Mr. Lamy revealed that the WTO is an organization more interested in acquiring wealth rather than equal distribution of wealth. Hence it is clear that WTO is an organization for profit rather than addressing inequality and the alleviation poverty.

The HKPA members representing the migrants, trade unions, women's groups, research institutions and community-based groups raised the issues of transparency, government procurement, workers rights and privatization.

As the open forum started, some HKPA members stood up and held up placards with "NO TO WTO" and "Kung Yee Sai Mau" calls.

Mr. Eman Villanueva of Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) raised the issue of undemocratic process within the WTO. He said that government representatives in the WTO are not necessarily representing the interest and voice of its constituents.

Protesters from local groups reiterated their demand for a dialogue with the HK government to express their opinion on WTO and its policies.#

## APRN holds forum on WTO and Migration in Hong Kong

The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) together with APMM and the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) organized a forum on WTO and Migration last September 11 at the Boys' and Girls' Club Association in Wan Chai. The forum was attended by more than 200 migrants from the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI), United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), Thai Regional Alliance (TRA), Far East Overseas Nepalese Association (FEONA) and the Association of Sri Lankans in Hong Kong (ASL-HK). They are all members of the AMCB.

The forum was part of the OWINFS series of education activities in different global regions. In Asia, the regional exchange focused on Indonesia, Philippines and Hong Kong.

Mr. Antonio Tujan of IBON Foundation, Philippines and Prof. Jane Kelsey of the University of Auckland, New Zealand were the main speakers during the forum.

Professor Kelsey shared the latest information in the negotiation on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) particularly on the

"Free Movement of Natural Person" more popularly known as the Mode 4.

According to Prof. Kelsey, GATS Mode 4 will liberalize the free flow of people. However, the developed countries like the US are in opposition to this proposal. Instead, the interest of the US and of other developed countries is the free access to labor market in the Least Developed Countries. This will mean more competition to the local labor market among the LDC's and will create more unemployment.

Mr. Tujan provided an enlightening explanation about the WTO and its impact to migration. He compared WTO to an elephant and the masses as ants where both are sitting on the different end of a seesaw. Obviously, the seesaw will be tilted in favor of the elephant.

There were lots of questions raised especially on the possible effects of WTO to the wages of migrants. According to Mr. Tujan, the WTO can be a way to create a lower standard for workers including migrants.

At the end of the forum, migrant participants raised a united call to junk WTO.#

## APMM represents HKPA in Stuttgart confab on WTO

The APMM, in behalf of the HKPA, attended the conference on "Global Trade, People for Sale" in Stuttgart, Germany last 30<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October on behalf of the Hong Kong Peoples Alliance on WTO (HKPA). The activity was sponsored by various organizations in Germany such as ATTAC Germany and Bread for the World among others.

Mr. Ramon Bultron, APMM Managing Director spoke during the opening session and also presented the latest HK updates/preparations for the Peoples Action Week (PAW) for the WTO during a plenary session. Mr. Bultron also spoke in the workshop on Migration and GATS Mode 4.

The conference was attended by around 200 participants coming from various

places in Germany as well as other countries in Europe. Other speakers came from Honduras, Philippines, Switzerland and Germany.

The conference was held to provide public awareness on the effects of WTO agreements to the lives and livelihood of people.

Thematic workshops were held on Migration, Textiles, Food, Water, Work, Knowledge, Oil and WTO, Corporate Lobbies, Market Access, Income, Trade Barriers as well as Bilateral and Multilateralism.

ATTAC-Germany committed to support the HKPA through alternative media projection of the events during the PAW and in mobilizing people especially those coming from the third world countries in Asia.#

## Protest action forces CLA head to conduct probe into FPG beatings of Filipino workers

In a protest action participated in by 17 migrants and their advocates in front of the Council of Labor Affairs office, CLA Minister Lee Ying-Yuan was forced to commit to conduct an impartial investigation on the beating up of four Filipino workers in said establishment last August 2 and promised to call on the manager of the Formosa Plastics Group (FPG). He made this remark in an open forum after the protest action with representatives of the Chinese Federation of Labor (CFL) and the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions (TCTU) the afternoon of October 27, 2005.

Minister Lee also stated that he could invite representatives of labor unions to the investigation. The CLA head made the remark in response to a question raised by Lennon Ying-Dah Wong of the CFL who earlier in the morning emceed a protest action in front of the CLA to seek justice for the victims and to investigate their living and working conditions.

After the open forum, Lennon talked with Bureau of Employment and Vocational Training head Fong-Yu Kuo and requested him if groups advocating for the FPG workers could also be invited. Mr. Kuo, whose Bureau is under the CLA gave his assent to this informal request.

The CLA head led an inspection tour with representatives of Labor groups at

the G-Fun factory in Taoyuan to get their support in importing more foreign workers in such establishments. G-Fun makes dyes for textiles and is considered a dirty, difficult and dangerous (3-Ds) place where even locals are hard to recruit.

The protest action was made in front of the CLA to look into the beatings and the conditions of the workers still employed at FPG. Gil Lebria, one of those who were severely beaten up spoke at the activity. He explained that the company retaliated violently at them on August 2 for successfully holding a strike in July 14 and 15.

In that strike which was participated by more than 600 Filipino workers, they were able to stop the monthly collection of NT\$3000 cash bond and the deduction of NT\$4,000 plus for alleged loan which they incurred in the Philippines. In addition to this, the

illegal fee being imposed on them for health check-ups was reduced from NT\$300 above to NT\$50 and a mess hall has been built for them since last month.

The company however has been forcing the migrant workers to sign an illegal s i d e



Workers of the Formosa Plastics Group (FPG) take actions to defend their rights

agreement which includes an NT\$10,000 documentary fee for entrance to Taiwan; brokers fee in the guise of a loan; and the balance to be paid to the Philippine agent. Other than this, the migrants still in FPG are complaining that their overtime pay is always delayed.

The protest action also proves that as long as the migrant workers are united and organized and supported by local advocate groups, the voice of migrant workers will be heard.

The migrants and their advocates vowed to continue with their quest to seek justice to the FPG workers. Other activities lined up would be a protest action in the office of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) this coming Sunday, October 30. Another would be a dialogue with the Committee for the Human Rights of Migrant Workers of Vice President Annette Lu, which still has to be set.#

(Currently, workers of the Formosa Plastics Group, together with their supporters, are continuing to conduct actions to achieve their demands. The management, meanwhile, continue to conduct harassments to their workers and especially to those who have involved in the protest.)



Local groups and supports support the fight of the FPG workers

## MSP-UAE raises urgent issues to top PCG-Dubai officials

Leaders and members of the Migrante Sectoral Party (MSP-UAE) attended a meeting requested by Consul General Generoso Calonge of the Philippine Consulate General in Dubai (PCG-Dubai) last September 23 and raised pressing concerns of Filipino migrants in Dubai that include the problem of Filipinos from Dubai who are stranded in Kish Island in Iran and the arbitrary arrest and interrogation of Dubai police to unsuspecting OFWs perceived to have connections with a Filipino charged with the murder of an OFW.

Labor Attache Vic Cabe and OWWA officer Jun Mendoza also attended the meeting.

MSP-UAE chairperson Cyrine Pinpin reported that the dialogue was fruitful on one hand because 14 of their members were able to raise their problems with the officials present. However, she also expressed her disappointment of the PCG-HK's response to issues of stranded migrants and the conduct of Dubai police to OFWs in relation to the case of Mario Parangalan – an OFW at large and wanted for the murder of Mary Ann Wong.

Pinpin reported that with regards to OFWs who were given visit visa to UAE and were then sent to Kish Island and left stranded, PCG-Dubai said they

undocumented in Kish Island, the only reply they got was that Dubai has different policies.

With regards to the arbitrary arrest and interrogation of OFWs in relation to the Parangalan case, the participants urged the PCG-Dubai to intervene once they are notified of such incidences. The officials agreed though they said that the Dubai police can also stop them from interfering.

MSP-UAE suggested filing a diplomatic protest with regards to the said matter especially because cases of such arrests and detention were already documented. PCG-Dubai instead asked MSP-UAE to write the request to Malacanang.

Other concerns raised by the group to the Philippine government officials in Dubai include, among others, the registration for Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) and the monitoring of the conditions of OFWs in Dubai jails and hospitals. The officials admitted their inability to monitor the cases of all OFWs languishing in jails or admitted to hospitals.#

## PCG-HK gives in to demand for ATN posting in Macau

Consul General Corazon Belmonte-Jover of the Philippine Consulate General in Hong Kong (PCG-HK) announced the assignment of an Assistance to Nationals (ATN) officer in Macau starting September 2005 in a meeting with leaders of migrant organizations in the said territory last August 26 at the Philippine Overseas Extension Office (POLO-Macau).

The pronouncement was made as a response to the long-standing demand of migrants organizations, reiterated in the time of former ConGen Victoria Bataclan in 2003 when the Macau government announced a crackdown on undocumented migrants, for the PCG-HK to deputize an ATN officer to respond to immediate legal needs of Filipino nationals in Macau especially the undocumented workers.

According to ConGen Jover, the posting was made to avoid a repeat of the fate suffered by two OFWs who died in Macau and whose bodies were repatriated to the Philippines after four weeks. She reported that the ATN out shorter period of repatriation and will try to provide the repatriation cost while the transfer of funds from the Manila office is still pending.

The said cases were reported to the PCG-HK by APMM and Migrante Sectoral Party (MSP-Macau) who also consistently followed up the case until the repatriation process was done.

Other concerns raised by migrant leaders present in the dialogue include going to PCG-HK for passport renewal which is expensive and inconvenient to Filipinos in Macau, PCG-HK support to cultural and religious festivities organized by migrants' groups, and the continuation of skills trainings like computer literacy, leadership training, cooking, and Cantonese lessons among others.#

cannot do anything about them since the said island is a part of Iran. When the group demanded for the PCG-Dubai to run after travel agencies who bring Filipinos with only visit visas and then are left to be

## INVITATION

**Conference on Globalising Economic Justice and Social Sustainability, 9 - 11 December**

*A Workshop on Migrant Workers will be organized by the APMM as part of the activity*

**Forum on Trade and War, 14 December**

International League of People's Struggle (ILPS)

**Consulate-hopping protest, 15 December**

**Forum, Speak Out, and Cultural Night for Migrants Day,**

17 December, Victoria Park

AMCB, APMM, ILPS Study Commission on Migrants, Refugees, Homeless and Displaced People

*For details of other activities, please contact the APMM*

## APMM NEWS Digest

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