



Petition for Filipino stranded workers in KSA gains worldwide support

AN INTERNATIONAL SCANDAL FOR the Philippine government but a victory of international solidarity.

The petition circulated by the APMM gathered more than 50 signatures of migrants groups, human rights organizations and other concerned associations from 21 countries to protest the irresponsible actions conducted by officials of the Philippine government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against stranded OFWs. Additionally, academicians, church people, and human rights activists also expressed their support to the petition

The petition also sought to lobby the government to grant the request of the stranded migrants in KSA for repatriation which is their right and the government's responsibility.

This said petition was sent to President Gloria

Arroyo, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Ambassador Guinomla.

Upon the circulation of the petition, APMM received reports that the Embassy conducted actions that aim to intimidate known groups and individuals who are assisting the stranded workers.

To date, no concrete action has been done by the Philippine government on this issue.

Stranded workers also clarified that contrary to reports, no ticket has been issued to anyone of them yet.

In fact, Labor Attache Borja even said that the 16 stranded workers who went on hunger strike should first send him a letter of request for repatriation - a clear dilly dallying tactic in the face of the clear demand of the workers.

The hunger strikers clamor primarily to be repatriated and for their welfare needs to be provided including the provision of a halfway house for male OFWs.

It is high time for the government to take up the cudgels of responding to the demands of their workers abroad.

Among the demands were to:

1. *Immediately repatriate stranded workers who seek to go back to the Philippines;*
2. *File administrative cases against embassy officials who requested the Saudi Police to take action and arrest the hunger strikers and ban them from taking any posts abroad;*
3. *Provide food and medical assistance to stranded workers;*
4. *Provide financial and legal assistance to immediately resolve pending court cases of stranded migrants, and;*
5. *Provide a halfway shelter for male workers who have ran away from their employers or who have cases against their employers.*

We call on to all those who supported the campaign to remain vigilant and stand with the workers on their struggle.

The 16 who participated in the hunger strike are now sheltered by their friends and migrant self-help groups.

They are being assisted by Migrante International and Migrante Sectoral Party to give greater pressure to the Philippine government to respond to their demands.

Philippine officials are yet to give their response to the petition.

Campaign against crackdown on undocumented migrants unites Taiwan groups

A campaign against the crackdown on undocumented migrants led by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) and four other local NGO's and an academician was a success. This campaign committee was able to unite diverse groups and individuals on a common issue - that of rooting out the causes why migrant workers in Taiwan run away from their employers.

A total of 18 Taiwanese NGO's, two student organizations, one local labor federation, three migrant organizations and 35 individuals mostly from the academe endorsed a petition about this issue addressed to the Council of Labor Affairs. These do not include signatories from abroad.

Other than this, a forum was held on Nov. 5 to gather more support for the campaign and which was widely publicized in a number of newspapers. Later on Nov. 25 a picket-dialogue was held in the CLA, wherein the CLA had to sit down with the organizations concerned to explain their side on the matter.

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Filipino Workers win concessions from broker

Nineteen Filipino factory workers at the Tai Hong Circuit Industry (TCI), Hsinchu Industrial Park won concessions from their broker this December. The broker, Asia Human Resources Mgt. and Consultancy Co. Ltd. together with TCI's management stopped additional illegal deductions of NT\$6,000 from each worker starting the 10th of December.

The broker also gave back to each of the migrants the excess amount collected from them as broker's fee before Christmas. The workers were forced to sign by their agency in the Philippines, Speedy Overseas Employment Agency, a side agreement stating that they have to be deducted NT\$6,000 a month for 20 months because they allegedly incurred a loan.

The APMM together with the Hsinchu Confederation of Trade Unions (HCTU) and its local union in TCI assisted the migrant workers. APMM wrote the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) requesting it to assist the workers. It reminded MECO that what the agency did was illegal as only the fees and salary declaration of Taiwan bound workers agreed upon by the CLA and POEA should be followed. At the same time, under Philippine laws, side agreements are considered contract substitution and therefore an illegal act. APMM pushed MECO to blacklist and punish both the agency and broker.

TCI's union which the HCTU introduced to APMM and the migrants, on the other

hand, called up the management and reminded it that under Taiwan's Labor Standards Law salary deductions for loans is illegal.

Next day, a representative of the broker met the Filipinos in their dormitory. At first the broker tried to divert the issue by saying that presently the company had hired a new firm and that it was the Philippine agency that forced them to sign the side agreement. Later, the broker mentioned that he was not aware that a complaint was filed against them with MECO or even the CLA. The migrants stood firm on their demand. This paved the way in forcing the broker to grant concessions to the workers.

This action by the workers proves that it is possible to win victories against the brokers as long as the migrants are united and assistance is provided consistently by advocates even during the negotiation process. Another factor for this victory was the positive role played by the local union in assisting the migrants. It only proves that local workers can be tapped and can be willing to assist their co-workers, even if they are foreigners, against exploitation by either the management or the broker.

These lessons should be propagated and emulated among the migrant community in Taiwan. What is next is to organize these workers as a potent force not only against exploitation by their brokers and employers but against the anti-migrant policies of both the sending and receiving countries.



(Crackdown cont. from p.1)

The CLA also held a public hearing last Dec. 2 on a draft migrant worker protection system which includes a so-called social management on undocumented migrant workers.

On the same day, CLA's chairperson Chen Chu issued a press release stating that their campaign to encourage foreign workers to turn themselves in was a success despite its obvious failure as only 1.78% of undocumented workers surrendered.

He even suggested that they might extend the period allowing more migrant workers to turn themselves in. Some of its recommendations include convincing police authorities and representative offices of labor exporting countries to make the repatriation process shorter and that free air tickets be provided for repatriation as incentives to persuade more migrants to surrender. Clearly it has no plans, whatsoever, to waive the fine on undocumented migrants.

Undoubtedly, the issue of undocumented migrant workers will not fade away. The number of migrants who absconded from their work in September this year is nearly 100 more than the average of those who ran away from January to July.

Other than this, CLA Chairperson Chen Chu is contemplating whether to lift the ban on importation of Indonesian migrants if the number of their absconders goes down and of imposing a ban on Vietnamese workers who have the highest numbers of run away percentage wise.

While the CLA has stuck to its original positions on its migrant policies that force migrants to run away, conditions to further pursue the issue on undocumented migrants look promising.

The CLA cannot forever stick to its present policies. To do so would only push more migrants to run away from their employers. This would only make the CLA a laughing stock to its own people and to the rest of the world.

APMM Participates in CCA Conference in Taiwan

The APMM participated in the Christian Conference of Asia - Faith Mission and Unity (CCA-FMU) conference in Kaohsiung last November 11-14. This was in co-operation with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and its Labor Concern Center. The conference's theme was "Affirming Fullness of Life in the Context of Migrant Workers' Struggles".

Besides CCA's network in the Asia-Pacific region, Catholic Church migrant NGO's based in Taiwan were also invited to the activity. The APMM contributed a paper entitled "Root Causes why Migrant Workers Become Undocumented in Taiwan" and got the support of the participants to endorse the

petition against the crackdown on undocumented migrants in the island.

Other than the APMM, a number of its partner organizations were invited to the conference. These include the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (MFMW), Migrante International and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). All contributed to the enriching of the activity especially as to the role of empowered migrant workers in leading their own struggle together with the support of the Churches and advocates. This was best captured in the contents of the final draft of the Declaration of the conference.

Migrant partylist holds 2nd confab

Regalado of HK leads candidates

A highly spirited and widely publicized event marked the 2nd Convention of MIGRANTE Sectoral Party (MSP) last Dec. 16 at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations in the University of the Philippines, Diliman campus.

This was participated by more than 600 members and delegates of MSP coming from its different chapters inside and outside the country. Sarah Balabagan, a former distressed migrant worker in the UAE sang the national anthem. Russel Contemplacion, daughter of Flor Contemplacion who was hanged in Singapore, and Joselito Alejo who was almost executed in Saudi Arabia graced the occasion and endorsed MSP.

MSP Spokesperson John Monterona stated that the migrant party is targeting to get 1 million migrant votes in the coming elections in May 2004. This includes the 360,000 registered overseas absentee voters abroad, and their families, friends and advocates in the Philippines.

This is the first time that overseas Filipinos will be able to vote in the national elections. The MSP has also vowed that it is now time for their sector to speak for themselves through their party and presented to the public the migrants agenda.



President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo whose presidency has neglected the rights and welfare of overseas Filipinos.

Former Senator and Presidential aspirant Raul Roco, who also spoke at the public launching, endorsed MSP's migrant agenda.

Others who spoke in the activity include House Minority Leader Carlos Padilla, Atty. Batas Mauricio and former ambassador Roy Seneres.

The candidtes of the MIGRANTE Sectoral Party for the partylist elections are MIGRANTE leaders Connie Bragas-Regalado (Hong Kong), John Leonard Monterona (Philippines), Carol Almeda (USA), Rowena Flores (Italy), Edgar Cadano (Saudi Arabia), Dominador Olavere (Belgium), and Flora Belinan (Hong Kong).



The migrant agenda and the track record of any political entity would be the basis for MSP to endorse any political candidate or even political parties if this becomes part of the latter's political platform.

MIGRANTE also made clear that they will never endorse incumbent

Korean government intensifies attacks on undocumented migrants

Not satisfied with the deportation and voluntary repatriation of 27,000 undocumented migrant workers since October 24, 2003, the Korean government has intensified its attack against the migrants including their advocates.

Korea's Ministry of Justice has announced that it will next target not only the members of the Equality Trade Union – Migrants Branch (ETU-MB) but even its officers. The ETU-MB which is under the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) is the only migrant workers' trade union and is leading the struggle against the Korean government's crackdown on undocumented workers.

One dangerous incident which the South Korean authorities have done is the claim which they made to Bangladeshi police last December 30 that two Bangladeshi workers

who are officers of the ETU-MB were terrorists.

The two named Khademul Islam Bidduth and Jamal Ali were forcibly deported to Bangladesh with South Korean Immigration officers accompanying them up to their country. As a result of this, they were jailed for five days but were released on bail this Jan. 4.

Other attacks made by South Korean authorities were to forcibly disperse and arrest migrant workers and their advocates during protest actions against the crackdown. This they did twice in Dec. 31 and Jan. 7 of this year. In the first incident, 50 immigration officers and 120 riot police tried to forcibly arrest a group of 100 migrants.

Two Korean students were subsequently arrested and later released by the police. The

Jan. 7 incident also involved brutal dispersal operations and resulted in the arrest of two undocumented workers. These include a Nepali and Bangladeshi who were fired upon by pepper spray stun guns.

While admitting that they need to review their tactics against the crackdown, the ETU-MB and the Myoengdong Sit-in Struggle Collective have vowed to continue their struggle inside and outside Korea.

One of this would be to highlight this issue at the coming World Social Forum (WSF) activity in Mumbai this coming third week of January.

APMM together with other groups will likewise have its own activity at the WSF which will tackle the issue on the arrest, detention and deportation of undocumented migrants in Asia and the Middle East. A Nepali will speak on behalf of the undocumented migrants in South Korea.

Newsbriefs

East Asian Women gathers for confab

About 350 women from various NGOs based in Mongolia, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong participated in the 5th East Asia Women Forum (5EAWF) "Embracing New Challenges: Women in Action" that was held at the Baptist University in Kowloon, Hong Kong from Dec. 19-22 2003. They recommended a general action plan focusing on the emerging issues of migrants.

HK groups organize conference on globalization

A two-day Conference on Globalization and its Impact to Chinese Workers was held at the City University in HK where around 50 delegates from workers union, federations and organisers, workers centers, the academe from Hong Kong, China, Korea, Thailand among others and HK Legislator Lee Chuk Yan participated in the inputs and sharing on the situation of workers in China and Hong Kong.

APMM attends APRN 5th Annual Conference

APMM attended the 5th Asia Pacific Research Network annual conference held in Beirut, Lebanon last November 2 to 5, 2003 and hosted by the Arab NGO Network for Development. The conference theme was on "War and Terror: People's Rights & the Militarization of Globalization".

Workshops on different thematic issues were held including migrants. APMM sponsored and facilitated the workshop on migrants. Future collaborative studies on the impact of war and terror on migrants will be held.

Annan calls for respect of rights on Migrant's Day

Celebrating the 4th International Migrants Day on 18 December 2003, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on States to become parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which entered into force in July last year. It is a vital part of efforts to combat exploitation of migrant workers and members of their families, he said.

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