

News Digest

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

Advocacy for undocumented workers goes to Mumbai

THE APMM WORKSHOP at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India was held in 18 January 2004 with forty participants coming from different institutions and migrant groups in Israel, France, US, Canada, Austria, Thailand, Philippines, Nepal, Malaysia and India.

The workshop discussed the issues, problems and struggles faced by undocumented migrants in some countries in Asia.

Workshop speakers from South Korea, Nepal, Malaysia and Philippines shared their respective issues and struggles faced by undocumented migrants.

Mr. Bajra Rai, one of the resource persons and former undocumented migrant in Korea and a Nepali national, spoke about the new Employment Permit System (EPS) and the Trainee System which he declared discriminatory and anti-migrant.

According to him, these policies are discriminatory because the new EPS will only apply to those undocumented migrants who are continuously working in Korea for less than four years while those who have stayed in Korea for more than four years have to return back to their home country and reprocess their papers in order to be allowed to reenter South Korea.

He further mentioned that, although the new EPS speaks about protections, its actual impacts still need to be seen. Mr. Rai also informed the participants about the continuous struggle being held by undocumented migrants in South Korea and supported by local migrant advocates groups like the Equality Trade Union, the Migrant branch of the Korean Confederation of Trade Union (KCTU).

He also reported about the sit down and hunger strike at Myongdong Cathedral and the arrest, detention and deportation of two Bangladeshi migrants who led the hunger strike last year.

Mr. Rai also called for more support and stronger solidarity among migrants in South Korea and in other countries worldwide.

Florida, a representative of TENAGANITA, a women's centre based in Malaysia, spoke about the worsening situation of migrants especially those who are staying at the detention centre and the increasing number of migrants who are forced to become undocumented migrants in Malaysia.

She also mentioned the case about the migrants from Bangladesh who are intended to be deployed by the government of Bangladesh in Malaysia but without assurance of employment and will only end up as

undocumented migrants. TENAGANITA provided the workshop with the actual migrant situation in Malaysia.

She also spoke about the case faced by Dr. Irene Fernandez, the Director of TENAGANITA who was sentenced to 12 months of imprisonment by the Kuala Lumpur Magistrate's Court on charges of malicious publication of 'false news'.

The court later allowed her a stay of execution pending an appeal to the High Court.

Her trial had lasted for more than seven years and dubbed as one of the longest running trials in Malaysian history. To date, a signature campaign is being circulated worldwide to gather more support for Dr. Fernandez.

The workshop participants expressed support for Dr. Fernandez by co-signing the letter of petition.

Mr. Kao Wei Kai, a local migrant advocate from the Labor Rights Association (LRA) in Taiwan, spoke against the Taiwan policy of massive arrest, detention and deportation of undocumented migrants in Taiwan last November 2003.

The LRA is one of the local networks in Taiwan of APMM that looks on the issue

of undocumented migrants. Kao mentioned that the LRA together with other local groups in Taiwan held a dialogue and picket demonstration at the Council of Labor Affairs.

Mr. Kao also mentioned that a national forum on the issue of undocumented migrants was held last year and one of the major highlights of the forum was the unity reached in understanding the issues and struggles faced by undocumented migrants.

A petition against the arrest and deportation of undocumented migrants was circulated and more than 100 different organizations and individual migrant advocates signed.

Mr. Felix Canimo, a representative from MIGRANTE International, the global alliance of Filipino migrant organizations spoke about the importance of building international alliance among migrants of different nationalities worldwide.

He informed the participants that MIGRANTE International and other grassroots migrant organizations in different countries are working towards the formation

of an International Migrants Alliance. The idea of forming this international group was conceived during the International Migrant Conference held in Manila last November 2001. He informed the participants of the meeting of the international initiative committee in late 2004.

After the resource persons spoke about the situation, condition and struggle of undocumented migrants in their respective countries, questions were raised regarding the campaigns and the formation of international migrant alliance and the resource persons responded and made the necessary clarifications.

The workshop ended with a unity and agreement to support the issue and struggle of undocumented migrants and the formation of the International Migrant Alliance.

They also showed interest in supporting the campaign against massive arrest, detention and deportation of undocumented migrants. APMM plans to conduct follow up activities on the campaign for the rights of undocumented migrants.

ATKI-HK holds GM, intensifies anti-deregulation campaign

The Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers, ATKI-HK) held its Third General Meeting last January 25, 2003 at the APMM office.

The meeting that gathered more than 20 members of ATKI aimed to unite the group's members on the assessment and plans of the organization.

According to the ATKI Executive Committee, the past year of the campaign was successful especially in terms of ATKI's campaign against the deregulation of Indonesia's labor export.

The rally that ATKI led last December 7 joined by more than 700 Indonesian migrant workers marked the said campaign.

ATKI drafted its annual plan that included the further broadening of ATKI's campaign, strengthening of ATKI as an organization and a massive membership recruitment drive. They are also planning to reach out to other Indonesian groups in HK.

OFWs in Taiwan launch petition, urges MECO to address concerns

A PETITION CAMPAIGN calling on the Philippine government to act on three immediate concerns of Filipino migrant workers in Taiwan was launched this February. This campaign is being spearheaded by Migrante Sectoral Partylist Taiwan chapter.

It calls on the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) to ask Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) to waive the penalty on undocumented migrant workers who are willing to go back home. At present, those who want to be repatriated have to pay a maximum penalty of NT\$10,000 for overstaying plus income tax and air fare back home. This could reach up to NT\$70,000.

In a dialogue held with the CLA last Nov. 25, they bragged that migrant workers who avail of their offer to voluntarily turn themselves in will only be detained for three days after which they will be sent back home. That is, if they have the money to pay for the penalty fees and their airfare. In practice,

however, undocumented migrants can stay up to six months in jail.

A survey made by Hope Workers Center last year revealed that Filipino undocumented migrants who ran away and overstayed were jailed from a minimum of 1 1/2 months to a maximum of six months. Majority stayed in jail for two months or more.

Another demand of the petition calls on the Philippine government to ensure that migrant workers who are rehired by their employers after three years of stay in Taiwan should not be made to pay additional placement fees to Philippine agencies back home.

Those who work in homes usually pay the same amount of fees after being rehired while a number of factory workers have to pay double the original amount that they originally paid.

This anomaly is being imposed only for Taiwan bound workers, not for Hong Kong

and other countries where migrants are rehired by the same employers.

The third demand of Filipino migrants in Taiwan is for MECO to strongly urge CLA to consider all side agreements as non binding. Almost all of these side agreements are detrimental to the interests and rights of migrant workers.

MECO Labor Representative Esther Guirao has even publicly stated that the CLA and Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) only consider the Declaration of Fees for Taiwan bound workers as the only legal document that both entities recognize. And under Philippine law all side agreements are considered as equivalent to contract substitution.

Migrant workers are hopeful that MECO will respond positively to this petition. The Migrante Sectoral Partylist which has four chapters now in Taiwan pledges to make sure that this will happen.

Philippine Government covers up negligence in Taiwan rape case

HYPOCRITICAL AND APOLOGIST. These best describe the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs' (DFA) stand on the rape of a Philippine caretaker by a politician in Taiwan. The DFA first stated that it is up to the Filipina rape victim to pursue her case in Taiwan even if she had been hurriedly spirited out by the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) back home. A day after, the DFA made the lame excuse that it could not file a diplomatic protest against Taiwan for the incident because the Philippines has no diplomatic relations with it.

Rose, the rape victim called up MECO on Jan. 23 complaining that she had been sexually assaulted by her employer named Elmer Fung. MECO then took Rose to Mackay Memorial Hospital for medical check-up before filing a complaint with the Chungshan police station. The Philippine representative office then notified Taipei's labor bureau of the sexual assault case on January 28. Then suddenly on the 29th, Edmund Miguel Tanco, head of the MECO's Assistance to Nationals division took Rose to the airport for repatriation accompanied by the wife and son of the alleged rapist.

Apparently, an out of court settlement was reached between Rose and Mr. Fung's wife. MECO can not deny knowledge of this deal as the victim was in its custody and staying at its shelter. This is despite the official position of MECO that according to Rose the sexual abuse allegation was just "a misunderstanding due to lack of communication" and that she was determined to drop her case despite being offered full legal assistance.

Mr. Tanco, on the other hand, went to the extent of denying any knowledge of the speculated settlement. Furthermore he was even more partial in favor of the family of Mr. Fung by stating that apparently Rose was not in visible distress when he accompanied her to the airport despite the presence of some of Mr. Fung's immediate family.

This incident created a big furor in Taiwan after it was publicly exposed by the Taiwan International Workers Association (TIWA). TIWA for its part even received threats for the expose.

What is ironic about all this is that the Taiwan government is more bent in prosecuting its own national for the alleged rape. This is in stark contrast to the Philippine government's attitude considering that its national is the victim in this incident. The case is now with the Shihlin District Prosecutor's Office. Under Taiwanese law, rape cases can not be settled out of court.

This is not surprising as historically, the Philippine government has a lackluster track record in assisting Filipinos in similar situations. Filipinos working in Taiwan should be aware of this.



Migrante Partylist rallies 5,000 in HK campaign sortie

ABOUT 5000 MEMBERS AND supporters of Migrante Partylist packed the Chater Garden in Central on Sunday, to kick off the party's official campaign overseas. Huge streamers expressing support from major Filipino groups, chants of slogans, videoke singing, ballroom dancing, and ethnic presentations, sustained the festive mood throughout the whole day event.

"As our first public proclamation for the May elections, we chose to bring it to the constituency we aim to serve in Congress," Connie Bragas-Regalado, the partylist's first nominee said. Together with fellow nominees John Monterona and Flora Belinan, she came to Hong Kong to present the party's platform of government for OFWs.

The sectoral group invited presidential and other national candidates to explain their platforms of government to the OFWs, a significant source of votes.

Bro. Eddie Villanueva, candidate for president from the Bangon Pilipinas National Renewal Movement and senatorial candidate Melanio 'Batas' Mauricio from Raul Roco's Alyansa ng Pag-asa, responded to the invitation.

Bro. Eddie during his speech lambasted the government engaged in

rampant corruption. He also urged his followers to vote for Migrante Partylist.

The Migrante Partylist, clarified that the event was offered as a venue for the candidates to promote their parties and programs of government. Except Gloria Macapagal Arroyo whose administration reeks of corruption and anti-OFW stances, according to Regalado.

"Pres. Arroyo shall never win the presidential race with Migrante and OFWs around. We shall rally the one million migrant vote that include our families back home to ensure her political demise," she stressed.

Meanwhile, she vowed to maintain the Migrante's track record, which in itself is the party's platform –sincere provision of services to OFWs and uncompromising stand on the rights and wellbeing of migrant Filipinos - right to the halls of Congress.



Macau OFWs affirm unity and support for MIGRANTE partylist

IN THEIR GENERAL Assembly, MIGRANTE-Macau members and friends discussed the framework of migrants' participation in the electoral process through their very own sectoral partylist. They vowed to reach out for their compatriots in Macau and elsewhere, their families and communities in the Philippines. As of February 23, MIGRANTE-Macau has 100 members.

MIGRANTE's current chairperson and first nominee Connie Bragas-Regalado stated that along with the continued legitimate mass actions of migrant organisations and support advocates, it is high time for overseas Filipino workers to take a stand to draw the line that migrants are worth more than the dollars they sent.

Regalado, who worked in Singapore and in Hong Kong as a domestic worker elaborated that, "A free and immediate welfare service especially to distressed migrants (legally working or undocumented) and a political will from the Philippine government to protect and uphold our basic civil rights is what we need". She abhors the "rhetoric of



sweet talks and promises from the politicians, treating migrants as milking cows legalised through anti-migrant laws and regulations such as the OWWA OMNIBUS POLICIES hatched in September 2003".

MIGRANTE has called to junk said policy.

Regalado said that MIGRANTE's platform is its years of track record in fighting for the

interests of migrant Filipinos and their families even before the OAV Act of 2003 was promulgated.

In Macau, 1,537 migrant Filipinos were certified overseas absentee voters by the COMELEC as against the 1,556 who registered at the Philippine Overseas Labor Extension Office (POLO) in August-September 2003.

Immigration regulation getting stricter?

SEVERAL MIGRANTS OBSERVED that at the start of 2004, the Immigration office has implemented a stricter measure in giving visas to those who have consecutive entries or three visa extensions in Macau.

Many are quite unaware of it not until an ultimatum visa (UV) is marked on the page of their passport. It means that in order to enjoy a one month visa stay in Macau SAR, they must have to comply to a straight three-months period of stay in their port of departure whether the visa stamped on their passports were spent full or not in Macau. Should they return to Macau without complying with this, they will be allowed to stay in Macau for only more or less 10 days.

To date, two cases were reported to APMM-Macau and phone calls inquiry were received. For the benefit of clarification and public information, an official information from the concerned authority is being requested.

Recognition of a Filipino migrant's art work in CAM's "Prieto Y Blanco" Arts Exhibition

THE "PRIETO Y BLANCO" Arts Exhibition ran for three weeks at the UNESCO building that ended on Valentines day, February 14th. It was co-organised by the Campampangan Association in Macau (CAM) and the Macau Fundacao. CAM's president, Fernando Quiambao said that they are thankful with the Macau cultural authorities who collaborated with them in recognising the art's skill of migrants like their artist and member, Oscar Balajadia. "We hope to have a follow-up similar activity in the future", remarked Quiambao.

Tidbits

OFWs celebrate Sinulog 2004

HUNDREDS OF MIGRANTS, religious groups and migrants organizations, expats and Macau citizens gathered at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Taipa in celebration of the Sinulog, an annual traditional Christian activity in Cebu. The festivity was organized by the Associacao do Santo Nino de Cebu em Macau.

Barbecue at Hacsa and trail walk

MORRISON CHAPEL CONGREGATION and its fellowship geared to Hacsa after the church service. This was organized by the Morrison Chapel Pastoral Initiatives Center.

Upcoming Activities by Migrant Organisations and Fellowship Groups in Macau

March 13 – Evangelistic Concert, 6:00-10:30 PM, Dynasty Plaza, Jardin Comendador Hui Yin. Organised by the Free Believers.

April 04 – Induction Day of the Batangeno Association in Macau, Ritz Hotel from 6:00-11:30 pm.

April 25 – Annual celebration of the Cordillera Day in Macau, Morrison Chapel's courtyard. Organised by the Cordillerans in Macau Association.

May 22-23 – 2nd Pahiya celebration at the Plaza Amizade, in front the Sintra Hotel. Organised by the Quezonians in Macau Association.

Four stranded migrants go home, Groups vow to continue lobbying for repatriation of all stranded in KSA

Migrante - Saudi Arabia chapter reported that four of the 16 stranded workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia who staged a hunger strike in the Philippine Embassy grounds last December have been finally repatriated.

According to the group, this was the result of the dialogues with Philippine government officials and actions that Migrante and the Kaisahan ng mga Migrante sa Riyadh (KAMI-SR16) have conducted.

The group identified the four as: Joe Tejada, Jimmy Cariño, Froilan de Guzman and Danilo Ladian.

Migrante said that they not cease their efforts until all the 16 stranded migrants are repatriated back to the Philippines.

However, the case of the 16 is just the tip of the iceberg. Migrant groups have estimated that around 800 Filipinos are stranded in Saudi Arabia due to various reasons mainly running away from their employers because of unbearable working conditions.

Migrante continues to call for support to the struggles of the stranded migrants.

While waiting for repatriation, the remaining workers are being assisted by their friends in terms of accommodation, food, medicine and finances.

Migrante and KAMI-SR16 have appealed for international support to sustain the stranded migrants.

Migrant Leader Arrested and Detained

ON FEB 15, SAMAR Thapa, head of Equality Trade Union – Migrant Branch of the Korean Confederation of Trade Union was arrested and detained by immigration officers at Yeosu detention center. Immediately after the incident, members and supporters of ETU and the Myoeng-dong Sit-in Struggle Collectives held protest actions at Myoeng-dong Cathedral and in front of the Immigration department.

A hunger strike was also staged at the Myoeng-dong Cathedral and inside the Hwaseong detention where other migrants are in detention. There are 2 from Nepal, 1 Bangladeshi and 14 others (7 from Mongolia, 2 from Russia and 5 from Kazakhstan) are on hunger strike. They commit to continue the hunger strike until they are released.

Local dailies in South Korea continue to publish Korean government pronouncement and threat to arrest, detain and deport undocumented migrants.

Japan groups lobby for reunification of child and family

Advocates and migrants groups in Japan released a petition to reunite a four-year old child with her parents who were detained after being denied refugee status.

The Friends and Supporters of Zilan and Family called for the Japanese government to “give justice, due respect and recognition” to the rights and welfare of Zilan Beltran, daughter of the legally married Vida Terestia Beltran, a Filipino and Salman Taskin of Turkish-Kurdish origin. Both parents of Zilan was placed in detention last January 28, 2004 after the petition for refugee status was denied by the immigration authorities.

Further, the group said that the petition for a refugee status of Vida Teresita Beltran and Salman Taskin are valid and still has all the legal means to appeal to higher court for consideration.

“Therefore detaining Zilan’s parents without giving respect to the child’s’ rights due for Zilan is unjustifiable especially that Japan is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Child,” the group concluded.

The APMM is assisting the group in disseminating the petition to the international community. To date, more than 80 groups and individuals signed the petition.

Police disperse sit-in camp for stranded workers *Migrante says Angelo ordered the dispersal*

DRUNK POLICEMEN BRUTALLY dispersed the sit-in rally organized by Migrante International in front of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) main office last January 27, 2004.

The peaceful sit-in rally dubbed “Kampuhan laban sa Kapabayaang at Katiwalian” (Camp-in Against Neglect and Corruption) was held in support of the 16 stranded migrant workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and participated in by family members of the stranded migrants.

According to Migrante International, the dispersal was ordered by OWWA administrator Virgilio Angelo who, in turn, denied the charges.

Maita Santiago, Migrante secretary-general, reported that scores of protesters got hurt in the scuffle including women and children.

Five of the protesters were arrested including Santiago. They were released several hours after the group called the assistance of human rights lawyers.

The dispersal occurred after Administrator Angelo turned down the demand of the group for him to speak to them about the situation of the 16 stranded workers and the government’s actions for their repatriation. Angelo instead sent a security guard to inform

them that Director for Overseas Operations Marianito Roque would speak to them in his office. Migrante International turned down the offer.

The United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), meanwhile, raised its concern of the growing repression of the government against actions by OFWs. Connie Bragas-Regalado, chairperson of UNIFIL-HK cited the ban on protest actions that the Philippine Consulate General in Hong Kong imposed in October last year.

“Is there a policy of intolerance and harassment against legitimate expression of grievances by OFWs?” she averred.

On January 28, Migrante International held a condemnation rally in front of the OWWA office. Migrante chapters and allies sent support letters and conducted support actions including a dialogue with the consul general in Hong Kong.

Migrante International called for an immediate investigation of the said event and additionally rallied for the resignation of Angelo.

Likewise, APMM also sent a letter of condemnation to the office of administrator Angelo and called for his immediate resignation.

Newsbriefs

Filipino IT engineers, nurses for Japan

The first round of bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) talks between Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and President Arroyo during a meeting in Tokyo last December brought about possible deployment of Filipino workers, especially information technology (IT) engineers and nurses, to work in Japan.

About 70,000 of the approximately 100,000 visas issued to Filipinos to work in Japan annually, are for workers in the entertainment industry. If negotiations push through in April, Japan may accept health workers from the Philippines despite its high unemployment rate.

Double registrants in Metro Manila & Mindanao

400,000 voters in Metro Manila plus 110,000 in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) have registered more than once in the computerized general registration of voters held last year bringing the number to over half a million double registrants.

Sex industry in Japan

Japan has a large sex industry based on Filipina, Thai and increasingly Chinese and South American women; the industry had estimated revenues of \$2.4 trillion yen in 2001. One researcher found that 95 percent of the women working in karaoke and hostess bars "were forced to engage in sex" with clients. Japan issues about 40,000 "entertainer visas" a year to Filipinas who are meant to be to be professional singers and dancers, but researchers say that few of them confine themselves to singing and dancing.

Malaysia bans bangladeshi migrants

Malaysia banned additional Bangladeshi migrants in 1996, but in November 2003 agreed to allow the resumption of recruitment under a new bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that aims to prevent agents from gouging migrants, and to prevent migrants from marrying Malaysian women. In northern Bangladesh, villagers are reportedly eager to leave for Malaysia; they pay 45,000 takas (\$750) for contracts from recruitment agents.

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**No. 2 Jordan Road
Kowloon Union Church, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel. No: (852) 2723 7536; Fax No: (852) 2735 4559
E-mail: apmm@hknet.com**

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Editorial Team:
Ramon Bultron, Gi Estrada, Buhay Bangcawayan,
Aaron Ceradoy

Contributor:
Vicky Casia-Cabantac

Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)
 Kowloon Union Church
 No. 4, Jordan Road, Kowloon
 Hong Kong SAR