

## Easter and the Overseas Absentee Voting

Beyond the agony and death of Jesus on Good Friday and the great silence of Holy Saturday, comes Resurrection Sunday. Jesus' resurrection was the victory of God over the forces of evil and death.

Many migrant Filipinos consider their lives as a perpetual Good Friday and would rather suffer their agonies in silence in a perpetual Holy Saturday.

Such can also be seen in the attitude of many to the Philippine elections. There are OFWs who view the elections as a waste of time and money for in the end, electoral fraud and violence shall dictate its results.

Experiences from the past elections, the forgotten promises of elected officials, poverty and societal illnesses, and the unresolved "Hello Garci" scandal – these and more have contributed to the mistrust of OFWs on the election process.

However, there are also groups that view the elections as a way to alleviate the sufferings of OFWs – to have a semblance of resurrection – and thus encourage their fellow migrant workers to exercise their right to vote.

Overseas Absentee Voting is a right of OFWs that have long been fought for. In 2003, Republic Act 9189 otherwise known as the *Overseas Absentee Voting Act*, was signed into law to enable overseas Filipinos to participate in the electoral process in the country.

Since its implementation, however, no significant empowerment of OFWs has happened. Out of the millions of OFWs, only a mere half a million have registered since 2003. Migrant groups around the world have blamed such low turnout to the lack of sufficient system and machinery to enable the most number of OFWs to practice this democratic right.

Despite this, the elections can be a venue where the rights of OFWs can be advanced.

The elections can be a statement of OFWs on the burning issues facing the sector.

Many also are seeing the Overseas Absentee Voting as a step towards a national

resurrection – as a venue to reject the evils of anti migrant policies and attitudes of the powers that be that impose such policies on them. The trends of the mock elections conducted among migrants in HK and Taiwan point to the rejection of Mrs. Arroyo's candidates. They are seen to perpetuate the anti-migrant policies of the current administration as well as national concerns that many have rejected such as Charter Change, extrajudicial killings and the anti-terrorism bill.

The election is also a venue that can be used to place an OFW representative in the Philippine lawmaking body. Though a lone representative cannot do much by way of preventing anti-migrant policies to get enacted, the mere presence of such a representative at least ensures that the stand of OFWs can be raised.

As shown in the past, election is not the end all in achieving societal changes. Election may not bring the total resurrection OFWs and their families have been waiting for.

However, barring violence and various fraudulent actions of unscrupulous candidates, elections can still contribute in bringing OFWs and their families towards the Easter that they are hoping for. 🗳️

## RP women's party holds public meeting

It was a day for Filipino women and for migrant workers.

The Gabriela Women's Party List – HK Chapter held its Meeting de Avance on March 18 in preparation for the Filipino overseas absentee voting (OAV) on April 14 to May 14.

Gabriela Women's Party is vying for three seats in the Philippine Congress and has taken up the agenda of migrant workers as part of its platform.

Ms. Flora Baniaga-Belinan, an OFW for 12 years in Hong Kong and now one of the candidates of Gabriela, graced the event. Leaders of alliances spoke on the issue of state exaction particularly the POEA guidelines, the disenfranchisement of migrants in the Overseas Absentee Voting and the national issues such as the Charter Change and extrajudicial killings.

Various presentations were mounted by different migrant organizations and children of migrants. It was a festive activity with songs, dances and cultural skits. There was a mini-concert participated in by migrant workers as well.

Ms. Cynthia CA-Tellez, the Gabriela-HK chairperson and Director of the Mission for Migrant Workers, challenged the OFWs to make a stand through the coming elections and vote for those who'll uphold OFW interests. 🗳️



Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong held a mock elections last April 8 as prelude to the OAV. The said activity was conducted to gauge the choices of OFWs on the senatorial race.

## Filipino union holds Leadership Training Seminar

The Chater Road chapter of the Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU) held a Leadership Training Seminar (LTS) for its officers and members on March 25 as part of the Union's program to further enhance the skills and talents of its members.

The seminar focused on the principles and practice of collective leadership that are often missed out by some unions or organizations which may become detrimental to the group's unity.

Ten participants took part in the seminar given by the Education and Training program coordinator, Mr. Jun Tellez, of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW). It was held at the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge.

FMWU Chater Road West has planned for a series of education and trainings for members such as a second session of the LTS, counseling and paralegal training, and seminar on migrants' orientation.

FMWU is a Union of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong that aims to assert, protect and uphold the labour rights and well-being of their members who are not spared from unscrupulous employers that deliberately violate the provisions in their employment contract and the HK labour ordinance.

FMWU assists and represents members with their labour disputes in the concerned labour offices.

## Mission volunteers and BH residents join AIDS Festival 2007



Residents of BH and Mission volunteers joined together to make the booth informative to the public.

Volunteers from Bethune House and MFMW joined the AIDS Festival 2007 organized by the St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at Chater Road.

While the main objective of Bethune House and the Mission is to provide shelter and legal assistance to distressed foreign domestic helpers, they also take into consideration health and women's reproductive issues that affect their working conditions in HK. They organize workshops and invite speakers to discuss health problems that are common among women.

The volunteers participated in the booth and dance competitions. According to Juvy Bustamante, chairperson of the Mission Volunteers (MOVERS), they participated in the festival mainly to educate co-residents of BH, clients of the Mission and the bigger community of women migrants on the issue of HIV and AIDS.

Bustamante said that, through their participation, members of MOVERS learned a lot, met different groups and were glad that they could contribute to the overall campaign for an AIDS-free society.

## Indonesian migrants hold 1<sup>st</sup> leaders' meet

The Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI-HK) organized the first Leaders' Forum of Indonesian migrant workers last April 1, at the office of the HK Professional Teacher's Union in Wan Chai. It was attended by 57 individuals from seventeen (17) migrant organizations.

The forum aimed to discuss the problems faced by Indonesian migrants, what could be done to help each other and why it was important for the different organization to attend and get involved with the issues affecting IMWs.

Eni Lestari, chairperson of ATKI-HK explained the condition of Indonesian migrants, why they became migrants and the



Leaders of IMW organizations united on major issues of migrant workers.

policies of the Indonesian government concerning migrant workers. Lestari explained the major issue on wage that IMWs face.

According to her, IMWs could be classified into those fully paid and those "underpaid". She said that such a situation arises from illegal salary deduction of HK\$21,000.00 being arranged by recruitment agencies, deducted for seven consecutive months.

A planning session, facilitated by Sri Utami, vice chairperson of ATKI, ensued after the open forum. One of the resolutions the forum agreed on was to form an alliance of the organizations who participated in the forum to conduct a signature campaign as well as an information and dissemination drive to educate and promote the issues of IMWs. The signatures will be submitted to the Indonesian Consulate.



Eni Lestari of ATKI-HK discussed issues of IMWs to fellow migrant workers



Residents and volunteers presented a folk dance from the Philippines.

# Guilty!

In the Roman Trial, Pilate explicitly declares Jesus to be innocent of the charges against him or of not finding any criminal offence against him (Mt. 27:24; Lk. 23: 4; 14; 22; John 18:38; 19:4; 6). Yet for self preservation (John 19:12) Pilate bowed to the mob most probably gathered (*bakot*) by their rulers and handed him over to be crucified. Not only that, legal scholars familiar with ancient Roman judicial processes, say that proper legal procedures were not observed. It was not therefore a legal trial. It was not even a judicial murder. It was an extrajudicial killing. His was one extrajudicial killing that changed the course of history and history will never forget Pontius Pilate. Every time the Creed is recited, his name will always be mentioned.

Extra-judicial killings in the Philippines committed with impunity finally moved organizations to convene the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) 2nd Session on the Philippines. The Complaints were:

+Violations of human rights, especially civil and political rights, with particular focus on summary executions, disappearances, massacres, torture as well as other vicious,

brutal and systematic abuses and attacks on the basic democratic rights of the people.

+Violations of human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights of the Filipino people through the imposition of "free market" globalization to exploit them; transgression of their economic sovereignty and national patrimony; various forms of economic plunder and attacks on their economic rights; and the destruction of the environment.

+Violations of the rights of the people to national self-determination and liberation through the imposition of the US war of terror; US military intervention; as well as the perpetration of crimes against humanity and war crimes; misrepresentations of the people's right to national liberation and self-determination as terrorism and the baseless "terrorist" listing of individuals, organizations and other entities by the US and other governments.

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) indicted both Philippine President Gloria M. Arroyo and U.S. President George W. Bush, Jr. and their respective governments.

OUR  
FAITH,  
OUR  
STRUGGLE

Father  
Dwight dela Torre  
IFI Chaplain  
MFMW

The PPT jurors were The Revd Dr. Francois Houtart, who is from Belgium and Director of the Centre Tricontinental (Cetri); Oda Makoto (Japan), well-known novelist and social activist; Ties Prakken (The Netherlands), professor in criminal law Maastricht University; Oystein Tveter (Norway), lawyer and former Director of the Karibu Foundation and former foreign ministry official in South Africa and Zambia; Irene Fernandez (Malaysia), lawyer, social development expert and head of Tenaganita; and Lilia Solano (Colombia), 2005 Right Livelihood Awardee (alternative Nobel) and Director of Project for Life and Peace.

As expected, Mrs. Arroyo and her media spinners rejected the verdict. The verdict may not have a legal force but its moral weight can not be ignored. History will one day judge Mrs. Arroyo. 🇵🇭

## Ika Puspitasri



I started working with my employer on November 21, 2006. There were five persons in the family and I also took care of 30 dogs, 10 rabbits, 10 turtles and six birds.

As part of my job, I would wake up at 5:30 in the morning, clean the garden and water the plants until 9:00 AM. After that, I would cook food for the dogs, clean the house and wash clothes. In the afternoon, I would feed the dogs, clean the rabbit and bird cages, and feed them.

At 4:00 PM, I would clean the garden again and help bathe the dogs. At 7pm, I would clean the house again and at 9 PM, I would start cooking dinner for my employer. They would usually finish at 11 pm and then that was the time when I could clean the dishes and take the rubbish out.

I would usually sleep at 4 AM and could only take a rest for two hours.

If I wake up late my employer would fine me \$5. If I did not finish my job for the day, my employer fine me \$20. Because I didn't have enough sleep, I found it hard to wake up on time.

On 20th January 2007, my employer told me that I am unfit to work and brought me to the airport. She just gave me my passport and air ticket. A police officer saw my condition and brought me to the hospital.

For two months I was with my employer, I was not allowed to take a bath. I had bruises all over my body because I often fall down while working due to lack of sleep.

On 24th January, I was accompanied by my friend to Bethune House for assistance. Everyone in the shelter was worried about my condition. They helped me take a bath, washed my dirty clothes, provided me with a clean set of clothes and fed me.

I lodged a complaint to claim for unpaid wages and other monetary claims. Bethune House inquired where I could file a case of neglect and maltreatment for the abuse I suffered and for denying me access to proper hygiene and healthy environment. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission, there is no government body at the moment that deals with such cases.

My health condition was monitored by a Chinese doctor who does community service in Bethune House and gave me regular Chinese medicine. After my two months' ordeal, I was able to eat three meals a day and had enough sleep and rest. After several weeks, I gained a few pounds and the bruises started to disappear.

I was paid HK\$6,000 by my employer. I accepted this because I wanted to return to Indonesia and be with my family. 🇵🇭

## Slain Bishop's son visits Hong Kong

Alberto "Aldos" Ramento, II, son of the late Bishop Alberto B. Ramento, came to Hong Kong upon the invitation of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) for the launching of the latest issue of "Article 2", an occasional publication, that features the failure of the Philippine judicial system in the face of the continued political killings in the country.

Bishop Ramento was the former Obispo Maximo/Supreme Bishop of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente/Philippine Independent Church who was

slain on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2006 at his rectory in Tarlac City, Philippines. As of the writing of this report, Bp. Ramento's murder has not been solved yet. Police claims it was robbery with homicide but many people believe it to be a case of extra-judicial killing.

On 12 March, Aldos met with different migrants' organizations in Hong Kong including the Philippine Independent Church congregation at St. John's Cathedral where he spoke at the



*The murder of slain Bishop, Alberto Ramento, remains as one of the hundreds of unresolved cases of extrajudicial killings.*

forum organized by the said congregation. The forum was attended by other migrants' groups. The forum was well attended and was extremely instructive. 📷

## Group of Filipino midwives holds 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary

More than 50 members and guests from other organizations joined the first anniversary celebration of the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines Hong Kong (IMAP-HK) last March 26 at the David Kwok Room of St. John's Cathedral in Central.

More than 50 members and representatives from some organizations graced the occasion. Just like any organization, IMAP-HK aims to promote camaraderie, protect and fight for the rights and welfare of OFW's in Hong Kong.

Under the theme "THE OTHER PAIN THAN CARRYING ON IS GIVING UP", members of the group were all inspired to advance the objectives of the organization to promote camaraderie and protect and fight for the rights and wellbeing of OFWs in Hong Kong.

Mrs. Patricia Gomez, national president of IMAP Incorporated in Manila, one of the guest speakers, gave some updates about midwifery practice in the Philippines. According to her, the Philippine Regulation

Commission (PRC) already approved the midwifery profession as a bachelor's degree, which boosted the morale of all registered midwives OFWs in HK.

The director of Mission for Migrant Workers, Cynthia Ca Tellez gave the inspirational message and mentioned that midwives play an important role in the community. "It was so sad that poverty in the Philippines caused migration of Filipinos especially those in medical profession like midwives" she added. 📷

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