

# *Recognize Domestic Work as Work*

## **Domestic workers are but modern day slaves.**

Subjected to hostile working conditions and even anti-migrant policies of host countries, they are also hostaged by recruitment agencies and brokers who make milking cows out of them.

Their contracts are violated both by employers and recruitment agencies yet they are forced not to complain due to the hopeless situation back in their home countries that coerce them to find work abroad.

They do more than what they are supposed to— clean the house, wash the dishes, cook, take care of their employer's children and the elderly, tutor or teach, even drive sometimes and do carpentry work.

They are 24-hours on call in their employers' houses, where they are usually living as stay-ins.

The policies of most host countries do not include domestic workers in their protection and hence make the latter more vulnerable to harm, violation and even death.

### **The Campaign for Domestic Work as Work**

In the recent Global Forum on Migration and Development, the

Asia Pacific Women's Forum on Law and Development and the Mission For Migrant Workers (HK) Society were joined by various international and national organizations in calling the governments to recognize domestic work as work.

While governments and business establishments see migration as a tool for development, the rights and welfare of migrant workers are not ensured, much less even talked about.

This refusal or numb treatment of domestic workers' worsening condition only holds the workers hostaged to further exploitation.

Once domestic work is recognized and upheld as work, the rights of domestic workers as workers and as women will be ensured.

Already enshrined in the International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Their Families, the rights of domestic workers need to be further protected and national governments, both from sending and host countries, should be responsible in carrying out these measures through implementation of laws and policies.


### **The Importance of Involvement**

We in the Mission support the many grassroots migrant organizations who are campaigning for the recognition of domestic work as work.

The upcoming International Migrants' Alliance (IMA) founding assembly here in Hong Kong is a good opportunity to gather various grassroots migrant organizations and their supporters to discuss and develop a scheme in further pushing this campaign.

This historic gathering of migrant workers from all over the world shall further push the agenda of migrant workers on the negotiation table with governments.

Most importantly, the creation of the IMA is a strong reflection that the international migrants' movement is getting stronger and that we are not to be ignored, or further exploited.

As a migrant-serving institution, we in the Mission recognize the need for migrant workers to arouse, organize and mobilize themselves until they win the just demands and campaigns that are rightfully theirs in the first place. 

*Deaths of domestic workers  
show violence against women  
and migrants and flaws in HK  
migrant policies*

# Is Hong Kong Becoming Another Middle East?

*Statement of The Mission  
For Migrant Workers (HK)  
Society on the Recent Death  
of Vicky Flores, a Filipino  
domestic worker*

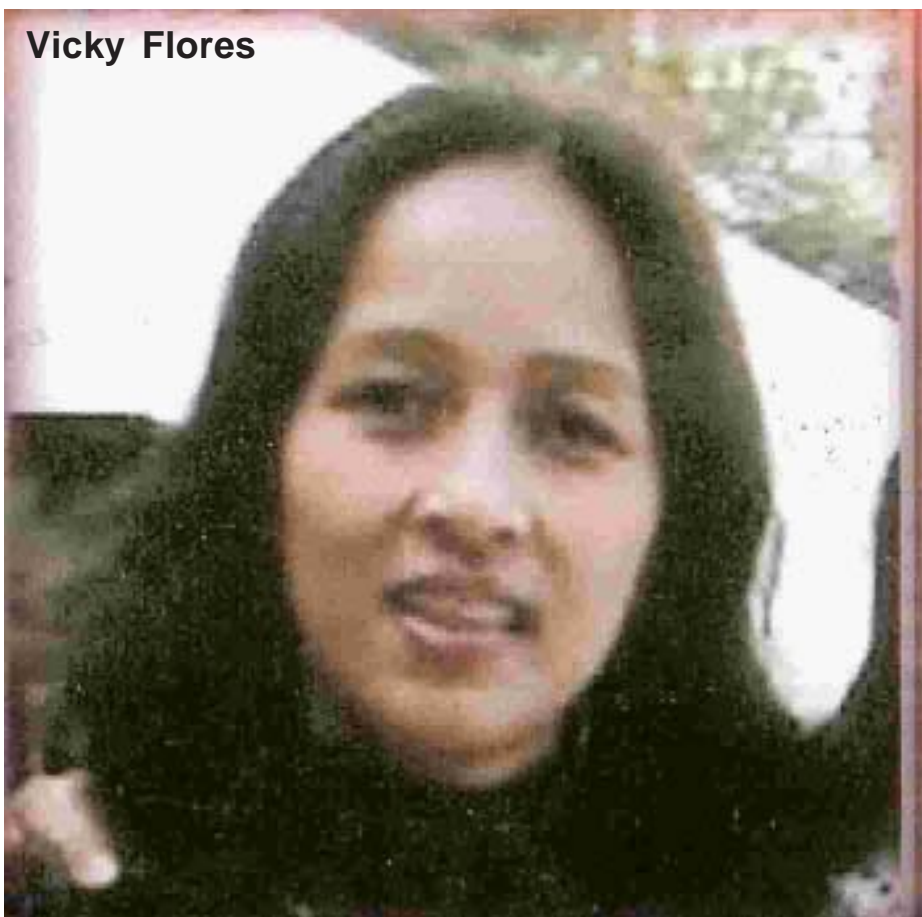
**T**he spate of deaths of domestic workers – three in less than a month – in Hong Kong should ring alarm bells. Is Hong Kong turning out to be another Middle East?

High incidences of tragic deaths among migrant workers, especially foreign domestic workers, are usually reported in various countries in the Middle East. There, women domestic workers have been killed, died in mysterious circumstances or are now in jail or in death row for killing their employers who reportedly abused them. Marilou Ranario and May Vecina in Kuwait are some of our most recent cases.

Hong Kong seems to be catching up with this record.

Vicenta “Vicky” Flores was the third victim of tragic death to hit the headlines. She was a 32-year old domestic worker at Discovery Bay whose dead body was found in Tung Chung Bay on Lantau Island.

Vicky Flores



Previously, Melba Alava Pardu, 50, from Roxas, Isabela, was found dead on April 7 by the security officer on the podium of her employers' apartment building at Comfort Terrace, North Point. On the same day, another OFW, Carolin Agabin Dacqui, 32, from Ilagan, Isabela, reportedly leapt from her own room at her employers' residence on the 9th floor at Hoi Chu Court, Aberdeen. Meanwhile, we also remember those migrants who were victims of horrendous crimes. Just recently, an Indonesian domestic worker was found stabbed twenty times inside her employers' dog kennel.

After a little more than a week of investigation, the Hong Kong Police reportedly declared that Flores' case is closed. However, residents of Discovery Bay, Flores' family and friends, and fellow overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are not convinced that the Hong Kong Police has done a systematic and thorough probe of the case.

The Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), that has been providing welfare services to FDWs for more than two decades now, believes that Flores' death has not yet been fully investigated and it shall be the height of injustice to let the matter rest without discovering the truth.

These cases of deaths - be that of accidents, suicide or murder, are highly alarming. Beyond individual circumstances, social factors play a role. These indicate serious and systemic problems with the working and living conditions that migrant workers in Hong Kong are subjected to.

Foreign domestic workers are some of the most vulnerable in Hong Kong. The slave-like working and living conditions induce immense physical and psychological stress to the worker. Job insecurity, financial difficulties due to low wages, debt bondage and increasing financial needs, family separation, occupational hazards, heavy work load, and lack of rest take their toll on the worker.

If the number of labor and police complaints and cases are to be a measure, violence against migrants in Hong Kong is prevalent. Physical abuse, sexual assaults and rapes, and even murder in and outside the

### Discovery Bay employers and domestic workers held a candle-light vigil for Vicky Flores. (Photocourtesy of <http://adeathinhongkong.blogspot.com>.)



workplace are indicative of this.

Hong Kong society cannot deny the reality of this vulnerability. It has to consider, then, that there are different policies set by the HK government that lay down the conditions for this vulnerability of migrant women to abuse and exploitation. Some of the major ones are:

**1. The New Conditions of Stay (NCS) or more commonly called the Two-Week Rule.** It limits the allowable period that an FDW can legally stay in Hong Kong to two weeks after the termination of contract with only few exceptions. They can only stay longer if they have ongoing cases and even then, they are not allowed to work.

This rule has forced FDWs to endure inhuman treatment of employers in order to hold on to their jobs. Despite physical, mental and sexual abuses, FDWs are forced to stay in order to keep their jobs and continue to support their families.

**2. The mandatory live-in employment arrangement for FDWs.** Because of this condition, FDWs are made to work even up to 20 hours a day, their privacy are taken away from them, and they are made prone to abusive actions.

**3. The unjust wage level and the wage cuts in recent years.** Especially in times of economic crisis, the wage of FDWs is one of the first to suffer the brunt of pay cuts. This has caused a great reduction in the economic

capacity of FDWs and has been a source of their financial woes.

It is worth mentioning that many cases of violation of rights inside the household setting complained by the FDWs are also not seriously investigated by the HK police because they are considered as "domestic problems". These include forced confiscation of passports and other personal belongings of FDWs, verbal abuse, among others. In contrast, when employers accuse their maids of theft for example, the FDWs are immediately hauled into jail. Where is justice in this?

In the reported of suicides of Pardu and Dacqui, it was reported that the reason of the former was financial problem while the latter was said to have killed herself because her contract was terminated after only 10 months of working with her employer.

Whether Flores drowned, committed suicide or, even murdered, there can be no doubt that the general conditions of work for FDWs in Hong Kong contributed to her demise.

We call for the Hong Kong Police to conduct a full probe on the death of Flores. Her death shows the prevalence of violence against FDWs. On this light, it is now even more urgent and right for the Hong Kong government to review its policies on FDWs and rescind those that are detrimental to migrants' rights.

Flores deserves full justice. So do her fellow FDWs. 🇭🇰

# Mission COMPLETES Two New Research Projects

*Baseline survey of Working Conditions and Recruitment Practices of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Macau and the Survey on Recruitment Fees, Wages and Remittances*

Two new research projects for migrant workers – one in Hong Kong and the other in Macau - were completed by the Mission last month through the assistance of ENGENDER.

The groundbreaking “**Baseline survey of Working Conditions and Recruitment Practices of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Macau**” was the first ever survey done by the Mission in Macau SAR as it extends its services to migrant workers there.

The goal of the survey was to gain a greater understanding of the effects of the recruitment process on Indonesian migrant workers, particularly on domestic helpers, in Macau, so as to better assist the felt needs of the Mission’s partner, ATKI-Macau, in serving the migrant community.

With an estimated 5,000 Indonesian migrants working there, it was imperative for the Mission to study the profile of its service constituency and understand their needs. According to the survey, an average Indonesian migrant in Macau is a newly arrived migrant, having been in Macau for only about two years, is a woman in her prime, between 21-30 years old, is single, comes from East Java from families whose main source of income is farming, worked before as a domestic helper in another country, mainly HK and works still as a domestic helper in Macau.

*“The goal of the survey was to gain a greater understanding of the effects of the recruitment process on Indonesian migrant workers, particularly on domestic helpers, in Macau, so as to better assist the felt needs of the Mission’s partner, ATKI-Macau, in serving the migrant community.”*

Excessive charging of recruitment fees and burdensome salary deductions are identified as major problems encountered by Indonesian migrant workers which affect their wages and livelihood. According to the research, an Indonesian migrant workers has to pay between six to eleven thousand *patacas* (Macau currency almost similar to HK dollar value) to land a job in Macau. Consider that the average wage is only 2,500 MOP, this is equivalent to three

to six months wages of domestic workers there.

This initial survey has already provided pioneering information for the use of migrant-serving institutions in their work in service-provision for migrant workers, especially Indonesians, in Macau. More importantly, this data can be used by Indonesian migrant associations in Macau who are currently grappling with the unfolding realities of oppressive recruitment practices and unfair working conditions there.

The **Survey on Recruitment Fees, Wages and Remittances** was completed by The Mission for Migrant Workers in early 2008 after almost six months of surveying and more than 500 respondents. The goal of the survey was to gain a greater understanding of the effects of the recruitment process on Filipino migrant workers, particularly on domestic helpers; and to uncover the systemic debt bondage that increases women’s vulnerabilities in labour migration.

Entitled “Overcharging by Recruitment Agencies and Burdensome Philippine Government Fees Eat Up Wages and Remittances of Filipino Migrant Workers”, the study analyzed how many women get trapped in the cycle of debt because of the high costs of agency fees. The high costs incurred from agency fees force many women to seek

# Realities of Life in Canada

## Forum Discussion on Caregiver Program in Canada



A total of 106 individuals representing 11 migrant organizations, four alliances, four church groups and several non-government organizations attended a Forum on Canada on 16 March 2008 at Li Hall, St. John's Cathedral. The forum was organized by the Mission for Migrant Workers to provide migrants about realities of working in Canada.

The Forum was opened with a film-showing entitled "When Strangers Re-Unite" which depicts the lives of three landed immigrants in Canada. It showed how three families were reunited in Canada after five years of

out loans through financing companies and individuals. Even though they are coming abroad to better their financial situation, many of the women find themselves in a worse financial situation due to loans and debt repayment. It is also important to keep in mind that the loan and debt payments are being paid on top of the other expenses of living and the remittances that they send home.

Among the major findings of the study are as follows:

1. Most of Filipino domestic workers come to work in Hong Kong by passing through Recruitment Agencies (RA).
2. It was found that among those who went through various methods of processing employment abroad, the processing fees being paid were highest among those who went through RA.
3. Filipino domestic workers who pass through agencies show higher incidences of paying additional fees on top of the recruitment processing fees

long separation, the joys and problems of being re-united in a foreign land where culture was very much different from their own. In braving the exile, they realized the importance of having an organization to protect their rights and welfare.

According to Cynthia C. Abdon-Tellez, MFMW's director, Hong Kong for years is a stepping stone to migrants who plan to work in Canada. Unlike Hong Kong, migrants can change their status in Canada as long as they fulfill all the necessary requirements as care givers. However, what are fortunate to some may not be true to many migrants as

as compared to those who pass through direct hire mechanisms.

4. The New POEA Guidelines for Household Workers actually intensified the malpractices of recruitment agencies and worsened the financial situation of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong.

5. Despite the high fees and costs incurred before even leaving, the domestic helper is also faced with charges by the Hong Kong agency once they start their employment.

6. Those who went through RAs had a higher debt rate than those who passed through direct-hire mechanisms.

Many factors were found to compound the debt problem of migrant workers. Among them are (1) continuing low wage levels; (2) high cost of living in HK; (3) remittances to their families back home.

The two researches have identified the commonality of issues among Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers and that between migrants in Hong Kong

there are victims of illegal recruitment, mysterious deaths, and victims of exploitation.

Connie Sorio, a representative of MIGRANTE-Canada and Community Alliance for Social Justice was the Guest Speaker who for many years has assisted migrants who are victims of illegal recruitment and contract violations. She discussed the Live-In Care Giver Program in Canada. According to her, it is one of the five Federal programs offered by the Canadian government to third world countries. It is also the only program that offers landed status to migrants after completing the required period of working as care givers. But this process comes with too many obstacles which are not known to many.

During the open forum, most of the questions relate to the recruitment process, cases of illegal recruitment, application for landed status and family re-unification.

Connie said that she is not here to discourage migrants to work in Canada but to prepare them on the realities of life in Canada, and the importance of having an organized community that they can depend on in times of crisis.

and Macau. The Mission is now in the process of popularizing the results of the researches to gain better advocacy and support to the struggle of migrant workers in the territories. 🇵🇭

*“Many women get trapped in the cycle of debt because of the high costs of agency fees. The high costs incurred from agency fees force many women to seek out loans through financing companies and individuals.”*

Coming to find a job to make money for her family, Indonesian Migrant Worker “Ria” arrived in Hong Kong in February of 2007. Now, just over a year later, Ria is in her sixth month of waiting for a court date for a police case against her former employer.

After working for her employer for only a short time, Ria noticed that whenever her employer didn’t like the way things were done she would get very angry and yell. Over time, her employer’s requests turned to outrageous demands. Ria wasn’t allowed to even clean until her employer said, “Clean this pot, then the dishes.” If Ria tried to take initiative and clean the kitchen, her employer would become very angry, yelling at her, asking her why she didn’t wait for instructions. In short, it was a very difficult working environment. After six months of employment, one day in August after cleaning in the kitchen, her employer became upset that one pot was washed, but not another. “Why did you clean this, but not this?” her employer yelled. Her employer told her to get her belongings and leave. As Ria went to collect her things her employer caught her off guard, hitting her in the face twice and once on her shoulder with her fist.

“It was very painful, and I was crying, but I kept silent, and didn’t yell back at her,” Ria explains. After the hitting incident, her employer apologized and left the house, leaving Ria to still care for the baby until she returned. Ria gathered her belongings and left her employer’s house once her employer had returned and went straight to her agency for help. The next day an employee of the agency took Ria to the police station to make a statement, and then back to boarding house at the agency. A labour case was filed against her employer, and during the four months it took for the case to settle Ria stayed in the agency boarding house. The day that the Labour Case was settled, Ria was told to head back to Indonesia, even though the police case was still open.

“I told them (the agency) that I didn’t want to go yet, because of my police case. it wasn’t finished,” said Ria. The agency became very angry at Ria,



# RIA’s Story

## Having the Strength to Stand Up

*“Ria had the courage to leave her employer and seek help. She had the courage not to back down even after heavy pressure from her agency to drop her police case. Ria continues to show strength as she perseveres in this case.”*

telling her that she had to go home, that it was best to just drop the police case.

“When I filed the report in August, the police told me that I had to stay to finish the case, that I can’t go back until it is done. I think it is better to follow the police than the agency, so if I have a police case, I must stay until it is finished,” Ria relayed.

It took a lot of courage for Ria to stand up against her agency. She said that there were many girls in the agency boarding house that also had police cases, but they always went home when the agency told them to. “The reason the agency got angry at me is

because I said no. They told me to go home, but I wouldn’t. So they got mad and told me to leave,” Ria said. Even though Ria trusted her agency to help her in her time of distress, the agency refused to support her as she pursued her police case. So Ria sought the help of the Bethune House, through a referral from Christian Action.

It has been over two months since Ria has come to the Bethune House, but she is hopeful for a good outcome from the police case. “If I don’t finish this case, what if my old employer has a new helper? I know she will hit again, and I don’t want that to happen.”

Ria also appreciates all that she has learned during her time at the Bethune House. “Here, I can learn many things; about my case, in the English classes and from my friends.” Ria says she is glad that she is learning to help others. She says that if she sees someone else who has a problem now, she knows that she can help, or how to refer them to the Mission and the Bethune House.

Ria had the courage to leave her employer and seek help. She had the courage not to back down even after heavy pressure from her agency to drop her police case. Ria continues to show strength as she perseveres in this case.

# Migrant workers participate in AIDS Festival 2008

For the third year in a row, migrant workers from different nationalities in Hong Kong filled the Chater Road in Central on March 27 to give life to the AIDS Festival organized by the St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre.

"Take the Lead, Stop AIDS – Universal Action Now!" was the theme for this year's AIDS Festival which aimed at raising awareness of AIDS among the public and ethnic minorities, and enhancing racial harmony.

According to Elijah Fung, manager of the Centre, the event also calls upon all leaders in society to take the lead, to confront HIV/AIDS through prevention, cure, support and care.

Speaking for the migrants, UNIFIL chairperson Dolores Balladares expressed the need for the

Bethune House clients



improvement of health services to HK migrant workers who are often neglected by their own governments.

Among the special guests, Revd Andrew Chan, Dean of the St John's Cathedral remarked that fighting against AIDS is a very challenging mission.

The AIDS Festival provided an opportunity for the migrants to display their culture in the form of arts, songs and dances. The colorful booths served as educational tools on AIDS and HIV awareness.

Undoubtedly, this year's festival was the most successful over the years, having the most number of participating organizations. Indeed, the event brought the migrants closer in solidarity for a noble cause.



Leaders and Members of Mission Volunteers (MOVERS)

## Forum on Health and Migrants:

# Who Doesn't Want Good Health?

On 6 April 2008, Dean Andrew of the The St. John's Cathedral Church and the Hong Kong Department of Health thru the Centre for Health Protection, organized a forum regarding the new bacteria called, "*Community associated-Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (CA-MRSA) Infection.*"

The said forum was mainly organized for the Filipino migrant workers who are one of the biggest congregation at St. John's Cathedral on Sundays.


According to the Dept. of Health, among the ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong, Filipinos have the highest number infected by this bacteria. Chinese has the highest number of people affected by it in general.

The presentation was very good but some concerns have been raised by the migrant workers during the open forum. According to Dr. Chuang, Wai Man Vivien, to

prevent the bacteria from spreading the person should consult a doctor at once if you have colds, cough or flu and one of the biggest problem of foreign domestic workers here in Hong Kong is the restriction of the employer's.

FDWs are not allowed to go out, even when they are sick. They will have to wait for their day off before they could be able to see a doctor, that is why they are resulting to self medication, (in which according to Dr. Chuang is

the one thing the person should avoid.) Not to mention that some of the employers are not paying them back with the medical expenses.

With these, the Hong Kong Health Dept. thru the Mission for Migrant Workers and some Filipino Organizations who were present in that forum, initiated that they will organized a caucus on how to educate the Foreign Domestic Workers specially their employers in preventing the *CA-MRSA Infection* from spreading. 

## Announcements



**The International Migrants Alliance will hold its founding assembly here in Hong Kong this June 15-16, 2008.** It will gather more than 100 migrant workers, immigrants, refugees and displaced peoples from all over the world to discuss

the issues confronting them as a sector and the challenges of the struggles and the migrant movement that they are presently building.

For more information about the IMA, please check its website: <http://www.pinas.net/ima>.

**Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW)**  
**St. John's Cathedral, 4 Garden Road,**  
**Central, Hong Kong SAR**  
**CHINA**



**MIGRANT FOCUS**

Migrant Focus is a monthly publication of the Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW Ltd.)

### Editorial Team

Cynthia Ca. Abdon-Tellez,  
 Norman Uy Carnay, Jun Tellez, Fr. Dwight dela Torre

### Contributors

Edwina Antonio-Santoyo,  
 Dolores Balladares  
 Liz Hooks, Sol Pillas

### Address

St. John's Cathedral,  
 4 Garden Road,  
 Central, Hong Kong SAR

Tel No. (852) 2522 8264

Fax No. (852) 2526 2894

### E-mail

mission@migrants.net

### Webpage

<http://www.migrants.net>

*Articles and/or graphics in this issue may be reproduced without permission provided full credit is given to the Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW).*

Your support will be most appreciated. You can issue cheques paid to:

**MFMW LTD.**

**Hang Seng Bank**

*(Donation of HK\$100 or more is tax deductible.)*




---



---



---



---