

***Recognizing victims' capacity of challenging the system and structures that victimize and dehumanize them***

**Sharing best practices in combatting human trafficking  
CCA Diakonal ministry of the Church in developing effective response to combat  
human trafficking in Asia**

**By: Rev. Joram H. Calimutan**

*Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) and  
Asia Pacific Interfaith Network for the Rights of Migrants (AP INFORM)*

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**Introduction:** Good afternoon! First of all, on behalf of Asia Pacific. Mission for Migrants I would like to thank and congratulate the Christian Conference of Asia for inviting us here to 'Diakonal ministry of the Church in developing effective response to combat human trafficking in Asia.' I cannot imagine after I served the CCA as an intern of Decade to Overcome Violence focusing on Asia in 2005 I will be sharing with you the APMM's best practices in combatting all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery.

There are more than 11 million migrants and around 9 million refugees in Asia Pacific and Middle East region. These massive movement of people is but a result of failed economic policies that forced millions to leave their families and home countries hoping to survive from poverty, unemployment, war and conflict, environmental destruction, and climate change etc. The pandemic crisis compounded by government policies perpetuating discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization and marginalization exacerbated the already crisis situation of migrants, refugees and other displaced people that human traffickers are taking advantage of.

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) a regional migrant serving institution established in Hong Kong in 1984 by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and St. John Cathedral is pioneering in movement building of grassroots migrants in Asia Pacific and Middle East region. APMM through our programs on advocacy and campaign, education and research, network organizing and cooperation address the root causes of forced migration and massive movement of people and of combatting all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and modern slavery.

First and foremost, let me reiterate that in final analysis trafficking in its various forms could be categorize into two, 1) Trafficking as defined by Palermo Protocol and the Trafficking in Person Report of the US government as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit<sup>1</sup> and 2) Legal trafficking facilitated by governments through their labour export program (LEP) that forced their citizen to work abroad in exchange of millions of dollars of revenues that give life to their ailing economies like the Philippines and Indonesia.

**A case study** To share with you our practices in combatting all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery let me share with you the campaign against education trafficking that the APMM are involved with:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.html>

*In 2016 the Union Network of Migrants (UNEMIG), one of APMM partner in New Zealand successfully held a campaign against education trafficking. They did a research, advocacy, lobbying, and campaign that exposed the syndicate victimizing youth and students in the Philippines and South Asia aspiring to study and work abroad.*

*The UNEMIG learned that recruited youth and student paid more than USD \$8,000.00 to the rouge agencies operating in connivance with so-called educational institutions and businesses. Syndicates operates in the country with impunity promising youth and student jobs and permanent residency in New Zealand. But eventually they end as source of cheap and docile labour working in restaurants, bars and some are forced into prostitution in Auckland.<sup>2</sup>*

*The worst of it all, after graduation from the educational institutions where they studied, these youth and students found that the educational institutions are not even recognized by the New Zealand government.*

*Such campaign not only helped the victims to be empowered and be restored of their humanity and dignity. But more importantly it held immigration and government accountable that eventually led to policy reforms and protection of the most vulnerable sectors like international students and migrants.*

**Combatting all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery.** APMM's partners in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, and in Middle East region combat trafficking and all forms that dehumanized migrants, refugees and other displaced people with the following approaches:

1. **Direct services and clear orientation about rights and welfare.** Providing direct services and support to the victims and upholding their well-being should not be the end goal. Rather coupled with provisions of support and direct assistance, the victims should be empowered about their civil and political rights, understand the root causes of their victimization and the accountability of the government who are supposed to protect their well-being. Like the case of Erwiana Sulistyaningsih an Indonesian migrant worker who was a victim of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery in Hong Kong. APMM partners like the Mission for Migrant Workers and Asia Migrants Coordinating Body provided her with legal assistance, sanctuary and other necessities while she was attending court hearings. These organizations are also instrumental in developing Erwiana as a migrant right's defender and is now active in advocacy, campaign and lobbying for migrants.

2. **Organizing the victims and families.** Under the ambit of multiple crisis created by neoliberal policies perpetuating abject poverty, war and conflict, environmental destruction and climate change, more and more people will be victimized by trafficking syndicates. Churches, migrant serving institutions and other advocate groups should carry the cudgels of organizing the victims. Empowering them that the fight for justice and human rights will only be realized through collective actions and engagement. Most importantly, the victims should realize that usually governments listen to demand for justice and

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<sup>2</sup> **Warning of 'education trafficking' scams hitting New Zealand,**

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/76742569/warning-of-education-trafficking-scams-hitting-new-zealand>

accountability if it is back by collective actions and support of the community. Thus, being part of an organization (whether church-based or community based) aspiring for societal change is very important. Like the case of Mary Jane Veloso, a Filipina domestic worker who is a victim of drug trafficking in Indonesia, she was save from execution in 2015 after the organized actions of national, regional, and international groups pressing the Indonesian government to save the life of Mary Jane Veloso.

**3. Advocacy, campaign, and lobbying.** Advocacy, campaign and lobbying is important in addressing trafficking and forced migration for it engage the public on the issues and concerns of migrants, refugees and other displaced people. It points to the accountability of state actors in running after the recruiters and syndicate victimizing the most vulnerable sectors like migrants and refugees. On the part of churches and ecumenical institutions, migrant serving institutions it is important to identify common issues and concerns for advocacy, campaign and lobbying. Despite diversity of programs and concerns there will always be common issues that various organization can collectively work with. Like the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration or GCM. Particularly, on the accountability of the so-called champion countries like Bangladesh and the Philippines in ensuring protection and services to migrants.

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**4. Network and alliance building.** Building partnership and cooperation is but an important task of strengthening our advocacy, campaign and lobbying and of service and assistance to victims of trafficking. It affirms the ecumenical work of churches and other faith-based organization seeking to provide relief and empowerment to victims. In APM, we provide assistance to Asia Pacific Interfaith Network for the Rights of Migrants (AP INFORM) that continually seek dialogue and consultation with faith and migrant communities at the national and regional level. As well as exploring ways of cooperation and partnership that support migrant struggle for justice, human rights, and decent life which are equally important too.

**5. Referral System.** It is another important way of combatting trafficking and helping the victims. It is a reality that a migrant before he/ she work abroad, he/ she go to church/ church worker asking for prayer and guidance. Churches or church leaders should also refer your members to your partner churches or organization abroad. Like for instance if a Filipino wanting to work in Hong Kong, churches or church leaders should refer or endorse your members to either UCCP-Hong Kong Fellowship or IFI-Hong Kong Fellowship, or to various migrant serving institutions and organizations like Mission for Migrant Workers, Bethune House Migrant Women Refuge or Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants.

Through referral system the possibility of being victimized by human traffickers is lessen and if a migrant is victimized surely there are groups or individuals who will provide them with support and direct assistance and most importantly encourage them to join organizations for their empowerment.

## Conclusion

*Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.*

*Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

*(Proverbs 31: 8-9)*

*“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:34-35)*

Advocacy and direct service with and for migrants and victims is a two-prong approach recognizing victims’ capacity of challenging the system and structures that victimize and dehumanize them. It is through being organized that the victims can best protect their rights and promote their welfare. It is through collective actions that they can attain justice. Most importantly, by addressing the root causes of forced and massive movement of people until God’s kingdom here in earth is realized—wherein no one will be victimized and forced migration is nothing but a thing of the past.

Thank you very much.