

# ***The Global Forum on Migration and Development***

## **Development not for the grassroots migrants**

**Release date: 24 October 2008**

*The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) is on its second year. Compared to other international gatherings of state representatives, it is relatively young. Yet, it has generated massive concerns already especially among the migrants and advocates for the rights and wellbeing of migrants.*

*This is not surprising. If there is a forum that spells a bleak future for migrants, then it is the GFMD.*

*It is thus very important for migrants to understand the GFMD along with its framework, context and plans. Only through this understanding can a movement of the grassroots that will challenge the GFMD right to its core agenda can be jumpstarted and flourish.*

*This why the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) and the Study Commission No. 16 (On Migrants, Refugees, Homeless and other Displaced Peoples) of the International League of People's Struggle (ILPS) are releasing this pamphlet.*

*We hope that this material can help migrants better understand the GFMD and its implications to their situation and prospects.*

### **Introduction**

On October 29 and 30, representatives of states are set to meet for the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

The first GFMD was hosted by the Belgian government and focused on the following themes: Human Capital Development and Labour Mobility: Maximising Opportunities and Minimizing Risks; Remittances and other Diaspora Resources: Increasing their Volume and Development Value, and; Enhancing Institutional and Policy Coherence, and Promoting Partnerships.

In the first meeting, the GFMD was described as “an informal multilateral and state-led multi-stakeholder process ... to identify practical and feasible ways to strengthen the mutually beneficial relationship between migration and development.”

Now, the GFMD is on its second year. This gathering is even more significant now considering that the meeting will be held in Manila, Philippines – a country known for its decades-old export of labor and ranks among the top labor-sending countries and is one of the biggest recipients of remittance from overseas nationals. From the estimated 10 million Filipinos working in other countries across the globe, remittances sent in 2007 reached US\$14.4B.<sup>1</sup>

In this year's Manila GFMD, the central theme shall focus on Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development with the roundtable themes on: a. Migration, Development and Human Rights; b.

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<sup>1</sup> 2007 Annual Report, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

Secure, legal migration can achieve stronger development impacts; and c. Policy and institutional coherence and partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

While the GFMD holds so much promise in words, delving into its agenda and framework reveals otherwise. What is really in store for migrant workers and peoples of developing countries is the grim future of intensified commodification of migrant labor.

Holding the second GFMD is even more conspicuous now in the midst of the rapid global financial meltdown. What started out as tremors are fast turning out to be a full blown crisis that shows the gravity of problems resulting from the implementation of neoliberal globalization policies intensified by the US-led War on Terror.

### **Globalization and Migration**

It is a foregone conclusion for the grassroots, including the migrant workers, that globalization has failed to deliver its promises of development for the majority of the people. In fact, the world is in such an unprecedented crisis that even the main superpower – the United States – has resorted to wars of aggression and occupation of sovereign nations so it can salvage its own dwindling economy.

Globalization and its policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization have not uplifted the condition in underdeveloped and developing countries. Unemployment, underemployment, landlessness and deprivation of basic services are more prevalent than ever. Their natural resources are plundered and their economies are held hostage by the powerful countries. The great majority either sink deeper into the quagmire of poverty due to accumulated problems and the current impact of the economic crisis.

According to the research group Ibon Philippines, the average annual unemployment rate of 11.3% and of underemployment of 18.9% from 2001-2007 is the “worst seven-year period of these rates in the country’s history.”<sup>3</sup>

Indonesia, another major exporter of labor, pegs its unemployment rate in 2006 at 10.6 per cent of 106-million workforce while the number of underemployed has exceeded 43 million.<sup>4</sup>

Poverty continues to worsen in the Philippines. Even with an absurdly low poverty threshold of P41.25 (US\$0.80) 32.8% of the population is poor. The economic disparity in the country is so wide that the top 20% of the population has total income of 52.8% and the bottom 80% shares the rest.

With the prevalence of poverty and shrinking opportunities to survive, millions of people are driven to seek employment abroad. In 2005, the International Organization for Migration estimated that there are about 191 million migrants worldwide.<sup>5</sup> This was about 3% of the total world population.

This does not yet include the 11.7 million refugees worldwide.

The current financial meltdown is expected to even further exacerbate worldwide poverty. Sending countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico have economies that are highly-dependent and dictated upon by the world’s superpowers, chiefly the United States, and there can be no doubt

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<sup>2</sup> [http://government.gfmd2008.org/forum\\_info/gfmd\\_philippines2008.html](http://government.gfmd2008.org/forum_info/gfmd_philippines2008.html)

<sup>3</sup> IBON Position Paper on Supreme Court Forum On Economic, Social, Cultural Rights, [www.ibon.org](http://www.ibon.org)

<sup>4</sup> <http://old.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20060925.A05>

<sup>5</sup> [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

that the financial crisis the global centers are experiencing will have even more severe impacts to lesser economies.

This will, in turn, result to migration of even more people.

Labor export has been a flourishing industry in many developing and underdeveloped countries. It is used to prop up the sagging economy of countries battered by perennial crisis induced by the drive of the monopoly capitalists to save their own businesses and economies.

Forced migration has also rapidly impacted women. In a study of the International Labour Organizations in 2000, more women in developing countries have become migrant workers such as in Sri Lanka – 69%, Indonesia – 65% and Thailand – 55%. The Philippines on the other hand, deployed 69% women migrants in 2002 and even reached 72% in 2001. Indonesian female migrants alone in 2002 were estimated by NGO's to be between 1.4 million and 2.1 million.<sup>6</sup>

By 2005, women account for 49.6% of the migrants around the world.

Labor-sending government also use forced migration of people to deflect the simmering social volcano of people's discontent in face of the massive joblessness, poverty and constriction of social services. It is a deception tool employed to enable daily survival of a big part of the populace.

However, the biggest and most evident impact of forced migration is the income it generates and the remittances that migrants send to their home countries. Government's income mainly comes from the various fees that it exacts from departing and current migrants. The Philippines, for example, earns billions of pesos a year considering that more than 3,000 Overseas Filipinos leave the country everyday for work abroad.

Still, remittances overshadow income from state exaction. The estimated US\$337 billion combined remittances of all foreign workers around the world far exceed the combined development aid from the rich and powerful countries. Of this amount, about US\$250 billion go to developing countries.<sup>7</sup>

It comes as no surprise then that monopoly capitalists will turn its attention to the lucrative business that is migration.

### **GFMD and the Neoliberal Agenda on Migration**

The GFMD process did not come about from a vacuum. While the decision to convene it came from a High-Level Dialogue on migration backed by members of the powerful OECD in September 2006, its gradual evolution can be traced to various other international gatherings that shaped the concepts of development and migration.

These include the formation of the World Trade Organization that radically shifted the concept of development to embracing the principles of neoliberal globalization in 1995. This was even further stressed in the Monterrey Consensus in 2002 that tackled financing for development. The Paris Declaration in 2005, meanwhile, dealt with development aids.

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<sup>6</sup> Abdon-Tellez, Cynthia. Women, Globalization and Migration. Filipino Women Migrant Worker's Summit in Hong Kong. August 2008.

<sup>7</sup> [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

The most obvious attempt to include migration in the globalization agenda was, of course, the botched attempt of the WTO to control the process through the General Agreement on Trade and Services Mode 4 in 2005.

GATS Mode 4 was about Movement of Natural Persons. It aimed to facilitate trading of skilled workers needed by businesses in developed countries. Mode 4 is (1) generally limited to the higher skilled service suppliers (skilled migrant workers) - managers, executives, specialists and only seeks to protect the managerial personnel of multinational companies who are being posted from one country to another, (2) very restrictive and excludes PERMANENT MIGRATION and (3) does not cover migration of people in search of jobs.<sup>8</sup>

Such limitations were detrimental to the aim of Third World governments to further expand their labor export program. The WTO meeting in Hong Kong in 2005 where this was discussed did not succeed in ratifying GATS that led to its eventual collapse this year.

Failing to do so in the WTO framework, OECD countries are now trying to assert its agenda on migration through the GFMD process. Members of the OECD are trying to circumvent United Nations processes and bring out its own agenda that are outside that of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

The GFMD's expressed nature is that it is "an informal multilateral and state-led multi-stakeholder process ... to identify practical and feasible ways to strengthen the mutually beneficial relationship between migration and development."<sup>9</sup>

It is designed "to enhance the positive impact of migration on development (and vice versa) by adopting a more consistent policy approach, identifying new instruments and best practices, exchanging know-how and experience about innovative tactics and methods and, finally, establishing cooperative links between the various actors involved."<sup>10</sup>

Though it professes to not substitute migration for genuine development, it is evident in the GFMD agenda and process that what it does aims for is to utilize migration as a cover up for the destruction that neoliberal globalization has heaved to the people's lives. What is even more shameless is that such a cover up is coated with development jargons.

### **Dissecting the GFMD**

To understand the GFMD is to know that it does not really depart from the neoliberal globalization framework. It is globalization applied to migration.

However, globalization has long been discredited by its actual impacts to the people. Since its full blast implementation, the condition of people especially in the underdeveloped countries has become even more dire.

*"Neoliberal" globalization, touted to salvage the global capitalist economy, has instead aggravated this crisis which has been suffered for decades by underdeveloped and developing countries and, now even by highly-developed countries headed by the United States at an intensifying rate.*

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<sup>8</sup> Carnay, Norman. GATS Mode 4: Globalizing Commodification of Migrant Labor. Migrant Monitor, December 2005.

<sup>9</sup> First GFMD background paper

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gfmd-fmmd.org/>

*Unemployment, underemployment, landlessness and deprivation of basic services are prevalent and chronic problems of semicolonies. Their natural resources are plundered and their economies are held hostage by their imperialist masters. While the great majority either sink deeper into the quagmire of poverty due to accumulated problems and the current impact of the economic crisis, a very few of the imperialist lackeys reap the rewards of the “neoliberal” globalization policies.*

*This global crisis has pushed the world’s capitalist powers, mainly the US, to launch brazen wars of aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq while also continuing to make threats of armed aggression against states that refuse to kowtow to US’ demands. Under the guise of fighting terror, the US continues to use its military might to push forward its interests and crush any form of resistance, especially from the anti-imperialist movements.<sup>11</sup>*

Despite these, however, nowhere in the GFMD agenda before and now even touches on how globalization intensifies forced migration and attacks on the wage, job security, rights and wellbeing of migrants.

In the first GFMD background paper, the effects of globalization are described superficially as making workers multi-locational internationally, “pulled by higher income and life opportunities elsewhere, and pushed by lack of opportunity at home.”

Under the GFMD, development for the underdeveloped countries will mean even further systematization of the labor export program and the commodification of migrants. In simpler terms, it will mean that migrants shall not be different from any other goods for trade.

In its conclusion, the first GFMD said that migration is an opportunity, not a threat; as such, migration policies can contribute to development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals; that development policies can harness best the potential benefits of migration.<sup>12</sup>

The GFMD does not, in any way, attempt to address the root causes of forced migration. While it hides under the cloak of universally-accepted concepts and principles such as the right to migrate and the “right to development”, its support for the perpetuation of forced migration and denial to take into account globalization as a cause of poverty, joblessness and maldevelopment is evident.

For as long as developing and underdeveloped countries remain backward and impoverished, monopolists have a steady and even increasing supply of cheap labor to exploit – both the workers exported as migrants and the workers left behind.

Remittance is on top of GFMD’s priority concerns. It thinks that though remittances cannot be appropriated by governments, their positive impact on development can be increased through options, incentives and tools designed and implemented by governments in partnership with other relevant actors.<sup>13</sup>

This view is reinforced by its belief that remittances to developing countries are one of the largest sources of external finance for developing countries, and can represent a large share of GDP for some of them. The World Bank estimates that recorded remittances to developing countries (i.e., excluding informal flows) reached \$206 billion in 2006, almost two-thirds of foreign direct

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<sup>11</sup> Prof. Jose Ma. Sison, ILPS Statement on the Global Forum on Migration and Development. July 2007.

<sup>12</sup> GFMD Conclusions and Recommendations

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

investment (\$325 billion), and almost twice as large as official aid (\$104 billion) received by these countries. Remittances are also considered to be more stable and evenly spread than other financial flows such as ODA or FDI, and are also considered to be countercyclical.<sup>14</sup>

Currently, there is a drive to corner the flow of remittance of migrants in the whole world. This is being done in order to ensure the superprofit of monopoly banks, and ensure that debt-ridden countries will have dollars to pay their debts. Even more than the superprofit, the cornering of remittances will lead to further concentration of finance capital. This concentration of finance capital will even be reinforced by the fact that for many migrants, working abroad means getting loans from banks.

It is not surprising that another major part of the first GFMD's conclusions and recommendations is to lower remittance costs as an incentive for migrants to encourage them to remit through formal channels which basically pertains to banks.

The use of remittances is hoped to do away with capital pump priming and Official Development Assistance (ODA) that donor countries and financing institutions such as the IMF have not been able to meet as a result of the globalization-induced crisis.

In order to do this, they must make sure that the administration of migration is going well. Aside from ensuring the smooth flow of labor export, migration management shall ensure that the labor-sending countries can squeeze the maximum benefits from labor export to augment state revenues and help cover deficits in foreign payments.

Management of migration as the GFMD designs it to be includes the principle of policy coherence the basically means the alignment of migration policies and mechanisms with that of other national policies. This shall ensure that aims and results of the migration process shall suit that of other government policies which, as it now stands, are faithfully compliant with that of globalization.

At the end of it, the GFMD deliberately misses the concrete concerns of migrants for its sole concern is the advancement of globalization policies in labor-sending countries and how monopoly banks, other private businesses, the monopoly capitalist states, and governments of labor-sending countries can benefit migration.

It is thus not surprising that the GFMD does not address the most evident issues of migrant workers – abuses, exploitation and discrimination. Wage of migrants are continuously attacked, services are either inaccessible or limited, there is no employment security and their rights are subjected to the most extreme of violations.

Concerns of undocumented migrants are also not included in the GFMD. Currently, there are around 30 to 40 million undocumented migrants.<sup>15</sup>

Undocumented migrants provide cheap labor needed especially by small- and medium-scale enterprises. They are unprotected by laws and are subjected to the whims of their employers. During crackdowns, undocumented migrants are treated inhumanly without sparing even undocumented children.

### **Migrant workers: The Missing ‘Stakeholders’**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> <http://go.worldbank.org/NN93K4Q420>

The extreme disregard for migrants is not only reflected in the GFMD's refusal to talk about the real issues of migrants and the roots causes of forced migration. In its actual conduct, the exclusion of the grassroots migrants itself is clear evidence of this transgression.

There is no place for grassroots migrants in the GFMD. Even the supposed space for civil society organizations is not that accessible to those who are on the grounds – the ones who experience the hardships of being a foreign worker.

The civil society organization meeting, which will happen before the official state meeting, will be attended mostly by big NGO's who are not necessarily representing the grassroots migrants. The result of the CSO meeting will be reported only to a small group of representatives from the official state meeting and no CSO will be represented during the actual official state meeting.

If the most important of the so-called stakeholders in the GFMD are absent, there can be no doubt that the results of the meeting will not really resolve the problems confronted by the migrants.

### **Response from the Grassroots**

For this coming GFMD, grassroots migrants are taking up the challenge of confronting the meeting, exposing its nature, and bringing to fore the real concerns of migrants.

The Manila GFMD is set to face the resistance of grassroots migrants, advocates for migrants' rights, and anti-globalization groups. Efforts have already been conducted in various countries to educate migrants and their advocates on what the GFMD is all about and its repercussions.

In June this year, the International Migrants' Alliance or IMA was formed. Composed of more than 100 organizations coming from the grassroots migrants – domestic workers, factory workers, agricultural workers, undocumented migrants, foreign brides, political refugees, workers in the service sector and the likes – from 25 countries, the IMA has resolved to mount actions that will challenge the very core principles and framework of the GFMD.

The establishment of the IMA is a milestone in the struggle of grassroots migrants. For once, the grassroots worldwide will have a united voice that will confront the attacks on the rights of migrants. It is committed to advance the struggles against neoliberal globalization and all the policies in the national, regional and international levels that adhere to such agenda.

It has been proven time and again that an empowered and organized grassroots people is the most effective in facing attacks to their rights. In struggles of migrants around the globe, any relief achieved in the grave situation they face have been results of their militant and consistent actions.

The GFMD will be no different.

While the GFMD is evidently a concern primarily of migrants, its framework and agenda impact to all other sectors of the society. As globalization ravages the life and livelihood of everyone, the GFMD is both a cover to globalization's failure and a venue to further advance its agenda.

Thus on October 28 to 30, the IMA together with Migrante International, APMM and Ibon Philippines will convene the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) as a parallel event to the GFMD meeting. In the IAMR, leaders from grassroots organizations of migrants and of other sectors in the regions of Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, Africa and Latin America will talk about the issues of migrants ranging from the challenges in building the migrants' movement to the

issues of seafarers. In attendance will also be regional groups such as the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and CARAM-Asia.

The International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS), through its Commission No. 16, recently passed a resolution during the ILPS third international assembly supporting the IAMR and called on to their members and partners to mobilize and participate in the IAMR.

To confront the GFMD is a daunting task. In face of such a challenge, the unity and solidarity of migrants and other sectors shall be most important weapon for an effective resistance to GFMD and the imperialists' and their servile governments' design on migration.###

## **The APMM**

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants is a regional institution, based in Hong Kong, which conducts organizing, education and advocacy work for the migrant workers in Asia, Oceania and the Middle East. It was established in 1984 and currently has various programs and themes to facilitate its work.

## **The ILPS Study Commission No. 16**

The Study Commission No. 16 of the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) is composed of members and non-members of the ILPS that work on issues of migrants, refugees, homeless and other displaced people. It was established in the first ILPS assembly in 2001.