



International Migrants Alliance

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Geneva GFMD 2011: Continuing and concretizing neoliberal globalization agenda on migration and development

International Migrants Alliance (IMA)
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(Established in June 2008, the IMA was founded by 108 organizations from 25 countries and composed mainly of grassroots migrant's groups. Thirty-two (32) NGOs and institutions that provide services to migrants took part in the founding assembly. IMA is a broad international alliance composed of progressive and anti-imperialist migrant organizations of different nationalities. It is unified under a clear Basis of Unity and General Program of Action.)

Since its inception up to its current fifth run, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has been faithful to its design of using migration as a tool to perpetuate the domination of the world's superpowers – chiefly the United States – and sustain the unjust world order through the continued commodification of migrant labor and the modern-day slavery of migrant workers.

For so long now, the powerful economies of the world have eyed migration and the enormous profit and finances to be had from the cheap and skilled labor of migrants. Failing to do so in the negotiations for the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) where movement of natural persons was a part of, powerful countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) devised a new way of controlling migration policies and, with it, the finances that the migration process and migrant workers generate.

In 2010, the global remittance of migrants reached US\$325 billion – three times more than the combined official development assistance to developing countries. This year, the projected remittance is expected to reach US\$346 billion and will increase to US\$374 billion in 2012.

The imperialist crisis intensifies with the crisis occurring more often and even more far-reaching. Even the twin strategy of neoliberal globalization and waging of war are not enough to end the crisis. As neoliberal prescriptions, labor contractualization is implemented and production is also outsourced - all to gain the biggest profit from the cheapest of labor they can find, the migrant workers.

With so much at stake, the world's powers are very much keen in making sure that labor migration that is a source of cheap labor remains and is further developed.

Such is the task that the GFMD is performing.

The GFMD professes to not substitute migration to genuine development. What it is actually doing is to use migration and the financial gains that go with it to cover up the destructive impacts of the neoliberal globalization model of development. What it is actually doing is making migration pander to the neoliberal globalization paradigm for development that the rich countries are pushing all others to embrace.

The GFMD, true to its adherence to neoliberal globalization policies, superficially analyzes the impact of globalization as making workers multi-locational internationally. It conveniently brushes off the fact that the implementation of neoliberal globalization policies intensifies the displacement of people that results to their forcible migration in order to survive. This condition is capitalized by the labor sending governments to keep its labor export industry alive.

As world continues to be mired in crisis, migration is becoming more and more important for the sending countries who are increasingly relying on the revenues generated by the labor export industry and the remittances that migrants send to their families to keep their economies afloat and the social volcano due to the discontent of the people controlled; as well as for the more powerful countries who need to keep the poor and backward countries as sources of cheap raw materials, as dumping grounds of their overproduced goods and as sources of cheap labor for their industries and their service sectors.

The GFMD's pandering to the neoliberal globalization design of imperialists can be gleaned from the processes it has undertaken and the thrusts it set forth in its meetings since 2007.

In Brussels, Belgium in 2007, the plan of OECD countries to bend migration to serve their purposes better was concretized with the convening of the first GFMD. The Brussels GFMD set the framework and the system of operation of the forum.

By the next year in the Philippines, the forum chose to pay lipservice to the rights and empowerment of migrants. In the face of the financial crisis that erupted in 2008, the GFMD has to assuage migrant workers and advocates struggling against the impacts of the crisis by formally including matters of migrant's rights in the GFMD. The result, however, was telling of the low level of interest on the human rights of migrants as its recommendations did not include concrete measures to address the most glaring of migrant's issues.

In the Athens GFMD, the overarching agenda of policy and institutional integration was clearly revealed as the forum took that said topic as its theme. In this meeting, it was made clear that the GFMD was fast tracking the systematization of migration as it issued recommendations that pushed for the development of migration policies in line with development plans of both sending and receiving countries of migrant labor.

By the next year, the GFMD in Mexico focused its attention in strengthening partnerships. Part of this partnership that the GFMD promotes is in the form of Bilateral Labour Agreements that are subsumed or related to Free Trade Agreements that have been sprouting like mushrooms in the past few years.

Bilateralism has recently been the way of powerful countries to push through their agenda outside multilateral platforms as the WTO. In the current global context, partnerships between the sending and receiving governments shall remain to mean migrant workers getting sold like trade goods at the cheapest – in terms of wage and other human rights – price.

The GFMD 2011 carries the theme "Taking Action on Migration and Development – Coherence, Capacity and Cooperation."

As with the previous sessions of the GFMD, the overarching plan topic of the GFMD 2011 is still on how migration policies will be integrated to national development policies. Such has been the major topic of the numerous meetings convened this year that are culminating in this GFMD.

Through coherence, it is ensured that national development programs – even adaptation strategies to address climate change! – include the maximization of labor migration. Capacity building targets the ability of national governments to systematically manage migration and its contribution to empire-designed development while cooperation pertains to working of states together towards the further exploitation of migrant labor.

Thus, the GFMD 2011 is now pushing for the activation of GFMD national focal points to make sure that the recommendations that were put in place will be implemented.

But the drive for nationalization and even regionalization of the GFMD also indicates that as a global meeting, the GFMD appears to also be losing its legitimacy and significance. Powerful countries need their agenda on migration to be put into action as the crisis rages on. The GFMD, however, is merely an informal forum where the participation and commitment of states are on a voluntary basis. This is obviously not enough for the crisis is already clear and present and the superpowers are in no way near finding real and effective solution – even cornering of remittance is not enough – out of the economic and political rubble they have buried the world in.

Through nationalization and, to some extent, regionalization, the neoliberal globalization design on migration can be more effectively pursued. As well in this process, imperial powers are more assured that national development policies that toe the line of neoliberal globalization shall indeed be comprehensive.

While states are all geared up to make true their grand design on migration process and on migrant workers, the grassroots migrant workers and their concerns are again sidelined if not totally forgotten. It is disturbing, albeit expected, to note that the GFMD 2011 has no effective venue whatsoever to tackle issues on the human rights of migrant workers. It is not offering any mechanism to review how sending states are selling their workers wholesale like chattels in the market and how receiving governments are treating migrants as cheap and disposable workers.

For the grassroots migrants and advocates, the lack of legitimacy of the GFMD as a venue where the situation of migrant workers will be improved and their issues will be address is a forgone conclusion. Since the Manila GFMD, grassroots migrant workers under the banner of the International Migrants Alliance and advocates from grassroots-based CSOs have exposed and opposed the imperialist agenda in the GFMD of commodifying and enslaving migrant workers.

Through the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) held parallel to the Manila, Athens and Mexico GFMD, grassroots organizations of migrants around the world posed the biggest challenge to the legitimacy of the GFMD. Grassroots migrants and refugees are in the best position to know the impacts of the GFMD and its agenda but those who have been forced to migrate due to neoliberal globalization policies and have been shoved into conditions of abuse and exploitation by the same policies.

The GFMD has always been a process where the main stakeholders – the migrants themselves – have been given very limited opportunities for intervention. As such, information about the GFMD has not extensively reached migrant workers.

As reflected in the initial results of the research study of the impacts of GFMD jointly conducted by the APMM and IBON Philippines, only about one-third of the respondents from the Middle East and Oceania regions have heard about the GFMD.

However, while the number of migrants who are aware of the GFMD is low, 84% of those surveyed have heard of the connection between migration and development. Of those who have, 73.8% do not agree that remittances should be relied upon for development objectives while 76.4% do not believe that relying on remittances for development will not result to long-term benefits for their home country.

Majority of the survey respondents (63%) said that GFMD should be concerned with the promotion of rights and wellbeing of migrants workers. Clearly for the grassroots migrants, the GFMD framework and process is not responsive to their concrete needs and condition.

As such, the GFMD needs to be further exposed to the broadest number of migrant workers. Especially now that the GFMD is trying to regionalize and nationalize its resolutions, the adverse impacts of neoliberal globalization directed migration and development will even be more felt by the grassroots migrants.

In this regard, it is even more crucial for the grassroots migrants to be made aware of the GFMD and from there, take actions. In different countries during this period, members and allies of the IMA are conducting various forms of actions to drumbeat the concrete issues of migrants and expose the inutility of the GFMD in addressing this. More than this, grassroots migrant organizations in many countries right now are exposing the very essence of GFMD as a tool of imperialists to continue its domination of the world through neoliberal globalization policies and brute force.

To oppose GFMD and its design is to resist commodification and modern-day slavery. To resist commodification and modern-day slavery of migrant workers is to oppose the economic, political and social order that breeds and perpetuates forced migration.

This is the struggle of the migrants. This is the struggle of all the oppressed and exploited people.