

National Migrant Justice Gathering: Building Solidarity, Taking Action Globalization and Migration

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York University, Toronto, Ontario
June 10-11, 2006

First of all, I wish to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to speak in this important event and contribute in the discussions on the issues confronting globalization and migration.

To travel is a right of every person. This is the reason why migration is as old as humankind. Historically, people are traveling to different places in order to find suitable places for them to survive.

Today, aside from the economic reasons, the numbers of migrant workers are continuously growing because their own respective governments are exporting them. Their huge remittances that surpassed their home countries major export earnings help to cushion the deepening economic and political crisis.

On the other hand, neoliberal globalization, which represents the current effort of monopoly capital to address the problem of deepening crisis of overproduction exacerbated by technological revolution, are doing the opposite. In effect, it creates more and more recessionary crises due to overproduction.

Financial speculation allows monopoly corporations to siphon off the lifeblood of economies, while trade and investment liberalization allows monopoly corporations to kill off local enterprises, which are in no position to compete. The overall result of globalization is the destruction of the domestic economy, the massive loss of jobs and livelihood, and the domination of foreign monopoly corporations.

For people, this situation has meant growing unemployment and deepening poverty.

The recent ILO World Employment Report 2004-2005, reveals that there are 550 million people who work, but still live on less than US\$ 1 a day. These "working poor" represent 20 per cent of total world employment.

Thus, it is not surprising to have such huge numbers of migrant workers, which according to the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), there are nearly 200 million international migrants in 2005, counting only those who have lived outside their country for more than one year.

Increased Forced Migration

According to the World Migration Report 2005,¹ "migrants represent 2.9% of the global population. The UN Population Division estimates the migrant population in 2005 at between 185-192 million people – up from 175 million in 2000. Nearly half of them are female. However, the socio-economic and political visibility of migrants, especially in highly industrialized countries, is much greater than this percentage would suggest."

¹ World Migration Report 2005, International Organization for Migration, June 2005

This continuing flow of people seeking jobs outside of their homelands is principally a result of the unabated conditions of poverty, landlessness and unemployment in many underdeveloped nations. In fact, since 1980, the “push factors” of emigration have intensified. In the said study² by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), this trend of economic migration is rooted in extreme poverty and differences in living standards between countries.

These twin agencies recommend “managing” this migration through generating rapid economic growth in the countries of origin. Broad-based and rapid development would induce migrants to stay at home of their own free choice rather than migrate under compulsion.³

However, governments of sending countries, instead of attending to these developmental issues and causes of forced migration, are managing migration in a different way. Export of labor, of people, have become cornerstone programs for national development. Remittances have steadily become the major factor that consistently cushioned the decline of many national economies.⁴

Instead of resolving the displacement of workers, farmers, and other low-paid service workers from these sending countries, their governments have exploited these socio-economic groups to become exports in return for much-needed dollars for the national coffers. Instead of generating genuine employment for the people, migrant-exporting governments have utilized migrants as revenue-generating commodities up for global sale.

Shrinking Job Opportunities and Intensifying Competition Among Migrants for Work

While it is obvious that an increasing number of people are being driven by worsening economic and social conditions in their respective countries to seek employment abroad, the shrinking global market for labor is actually limiting the types and number of migrants that can actually find work overseas.

Competition among migrant workers from Southeast Asia and South Asia for the bottom jobs in Asia and other regions is increasing.⁵ This is because employment opportunities coming from traditional migrant-receiving countries are shrinking in the past years coupled by the enforcement of stricter immigration laws.

These factors explain why fewer people emigrated to major OECD countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States and leading Western European countries including Germany and the Netherlands in 2003. Fewer people also sought asylum in OECD countries in 2003 and 2004, reversing the upward trend of the latter half of the 1990s, according to the latest edition of the OECD’s annual Trends in International Migration. Numbers of asylum seekers in the 15 countries that were members of the European Union at the start of 2004 fell by 25% during the year.⁶

According to the same report, many governments in OECD countries have imposed stricter laws on entry and residence of foreigners as a means to improve management of migration flows. These measures even include restrictions on limiting ability of settled immigrants to reunite with their families.

² "Foreign Direct Investment, Trade, Aid and Migration", IOM/UNCTAD, 1996

³ Development Aid and Forced Migration, Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants, June 2003

⁴ Global Trade: People for Sale, Ramon Bultron, APMM, October 2005

⁵ Keynote Address, MIGRANTE-International 6th Congress, Prof. Jose Maria Sison, December 2005

⁶ Migration flows to major OECD countries seem to be stabilizing, data show, OECD, 22/03/2005

Because of increasing unemployment in the receiving countries among its nationals, the general trend has been to devise policies to limit the inflow of workers and enhance employment among nationals.⁷ For example, in Saudi Arabia, unemployment has risen to about 13 percent among males and is estimated to be as high as 35 percent among youth aged 20-24. In response, many Gulf countries are implementing a “job indigenization policy”.

Because of such initiatives, immigrants, and particularly women and younger people, have more difficulty than nationals to find work. Young foreign men aged between 25 and 29 have a labor market participation rate (in work or looking for work) that is 14 percentage points lower than nationals in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, for example, and more than 12 lower in France. The gaps for women are even greater, reaching 34 percentage points in the Netherlands.⁸

Also as an example in the case of Filipino migrant workers: *“The crisis of the world capitalist system can take such a turn that the room for employment can become smaller even for cheap Filipino labor in factories and public works jobs, contrary to the wish of the Arroyo regime to export one million Filipino workers a year. Filipino migrants may be willing to take the 3-D jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs) but cannot be accommodated when the particular economies abroad or the entire world capitalist system contracts further. Political factors, such as the “anti-terror” hysteria, racism and all sorts of discrimination can further work against Filipino migrants.”*⁹

This condition is exacerbating the scarcity of job opportunities for temporary migrants as well as intensifying competition among immigrants for work in the host countries.

Asian Migration: Major Shift in Destination and Rise of Undocumented Workers

The Asian region accounts for some 14 per cent of the world’s total migrant stock.¹⁰

Asia is currently the primary source of migration of all forms to most of the world’s immigrant-receiving regions and countries. Almost one-third of all immigrants in Australia are from Asia, with China, the Philippines and India among the largest source countries. Similarly, 33 per cent of immigrants in Canada and 24 per cent of immigrants in the US are from Asia.¹¹ The nine largest Asian immigrant exporting countries – the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Sri Lanka and Myanmar – together contribute between one-half and two-thirds of all legal immigrants and refugees to the international migration stream.

However, in real terms, migration flows have actually shifted in recent years and in some cases, international migration is actually decreasing.

Although Asia, which has traditionally represented the largest international migrant stock, has seen an increase in the number of migrants from 28.1 million in 1970 to 43.8 million in 2000, in real terms, this represents a drop from 34.5% to 25% of the migrant stock in the same time frame. In addition, more and more Asians are finding job opportunities within Asia itself.¹² The number of workers migrating within Asia has increased in proportion to the

⁷ World Migration Report: Middle East section, IOM, 2005

⁸ World Migration Report 2005, International Organization for Migration, June 2005

⁹ Keynote Address, MIGRANTE-International 6th Congress, Prof. Jose Maria Sison, Dec 2005

¹⁰ United Nations, “The Doyle Report”, background report on migration N.Y., March 2003

¹¹ Migration Information Source, 2004

¹² Too Many Myths And Not Enough Reality On Migration Issues, Says IOM's World Migration Report 2005 No. 882 - 22 June 2005

fewer numbers of migrants moving to the Middle East, the original main destination for Asian migrants since the early 70s.

Today, many more Asian migrants are finding work closer to home. While South and Southeast Asian workers still travel to the Middle East, their number compared to those engaged in work closer to home has decreased. In part this is also due to the completion of many construction projects in the Middle East and the blossoming of work opportunities in East and Southeast Asia.¹³

The new millennium saw more than 848,543 overseas Indonesian workers employed in Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Brunei and Japan, among others, and only 504,656 in the Middle East.¹⁴ India also sends large numbers of migrants to East and Southeast Asia, rather than to the Middle East, with Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong as the key destinations.

Increase of undocumented workers is another striking aspect in Asian migration. Trafficking of persons is a huge and largely unreported problem in Asia. It is estimated that the region accounts for approximately one-third of the total global trafficking flow (close to one million), with 60 per cent of the women, men and children being channelled into major regional cities and 40 per cent to other destinations in the rest of the world.¹⁵

Malaysia and Thailand currently appear to have the largest numbers of irregular workers, with estimates pointing to some 500,000 to one million unauthorized migrants working there.¹⁶

GATS Mode 4 Designs Migration Trends

The data presented above and the trends that have been identified by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) closely approach the results as designed by the Mode 4 of the GATS.

“Free” movement of capital, goods and services across national borders did not mean the same for people. Under the WTO regime, the opportunities for movement of the majority of people remain limited. The right to work, mobility and migration is not an option under the WTO. This is the hypocrisy of the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

While powerful developed countries with their big corporations profess the speedy dismantling of barriers to trade in services, they maintain their barriers to the entry of migrants, except when it benefits them.

According to “GATS Mode 4: Globalizing Commodification of Migrant Labor”:¹⁷

Even though Mode 4 is (1) generally limited to the higher skilled service suppliers (skilled migrant workers) - managers, executives, and 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

¹³ Wickramasekera, P. “Asian Labour Migration: Issues and Challenges in an Era of Globalization”, International Migration Papers 57, International Labour Organization, Geneva, August 2002

¹⁴ Hugo, G., D. Rudd and K. Harris 2001 Emigration from Australia: Economic Implications, CEDA Information Paper, No. 77, June, Australia, p.19

¹⁵ United Nations, “The Doyle Report”, background report on migration N.Y., March 2003

¹⁶ Migration News, 2001

¹⁷ GATS Mode 4: Globalizing Commodification of Migrant Labor, Norman Uy Carnay, Dec 2006

MIGRATION and (3) does not cover migration of people in search of jobs, many Third World governments are wrestling with powerful countries for Mode 4 to become an instrument for international migration, in fact a license for expansion of their labor-export programs.

LDC members of WTO have an interest in market access or movement for low and semi-skilled workers. However, developed countries are conservative, if not totally hesitant, to reach agreements regarding opening their labor markets for migrant workers of this category.

The Mode 4 commitments that have already been made pertain almost totally to highly skilled personnel, in particular to the category of intra-corporate transferees coming from foreign multi-national investors. These commitments, at present, have limited use for developing countries because their "comparative advantage" lies in the export of low and medium-skilled "service-providers". Thus the less skilled have been markedly marginalized in negotiations.

Mode 4 of GATS under the WTO seeks to "further deprive migrants of rights and make them vulnerable to worse conditions under the notion of labor flexibility. They are bent on suppressing trade union rights, shortening contracts, lowering wages, preventing immigration and permanent residence and rotating the migrant workers all for the one-sided benefit of the multinational firms. We also observe an aggravation of the phenomenon of degrading and deskilling of Filipino professionals. Not only are teachers being reduced to menial servants abroad, but so are doctors of medicine to being nurses; nurses to being "care givers" and young engineers and highly skilled workers to being "apprentices".¹⁸

Remittances: Up for Grabs

Migrant Workers' remittances have emerged as a major source of external development finance in recent years.¹⁹ Given their magnitude, they have gained the attention of policymakers at the highest levels.

According to the Asian Development Bank:²⁰

"The human movement involved in labor migration is of obvious economic importance and... (labor export) has become the largest single foreign exchange earning activity, outweighing commodity exports, in a number of Asian labor-surplus nations."

ADB vice president Liqun Jin said that US\$53 billion (or 42 percent) of the world's US\$127 billion total of remittances coursed through banks in 2004 come from Asia. India, the Philippines, China and Pakistan are among the top five remittance receiving countries worldwide – the Philippines being number three.

Remittances continued to grow in 2004 reaching USD 23 billion in India, USD 17 billion in Mexico, and USD 8 billion in the Philippines. India and the Philippines are two of the largest beneficiaries of remittances globally, receiving between them more than USD 15 billion in 2000 alone.

¹⁸ Keynote Address, MIGRANTE-International 6th Congress, Prof. Jose Maria Sison, Dec. 2005

¹⁹ Ratha, 2003; The Economist, July 31, 2004

²⁰ More remittances from women emphasize feminization of migration – ADB study, Jeremiaah M. Opiniano, OFW Journalism Consortium, 08 October, 2005

Remittances are now more than double the size of net official flows, and are second only to foreign direct investment (FDI) (around USD 165 billion) as a source of external finance for developing countries. In 36 out of 153 developing countries, remittances are larger than all capital flows, public and private. In many countries, they are larger than their earnings from the most important export item. In Mexico, for example, they were larger than foreign direct investments (FDI), and about the same size as oil exports, in 2003. In Sri Lanka, they were larger than tea exports.²¹

These estimates do not include remittances coursed through informal channels. IOM estimates that another USD 100 billion is thought to flow home through informal channels²², making migrants as a key source of revenue for many poor countries.

Many multilateral agencies, like the World Bank, ADB, Inter-American Development Bank-Multilateral Investment Fund (IDB-MIF), UNDP and IOM, are currently eyeing the potential of this income. They are now holding conferences, studies and researches to look at how to siphon this huge financial flow for the use of national governments and international agencies for so-called “poverty-reduction and development”.

For example, the IDB-MIF, from 2001 to August 2005, has financed remittances projects through non-refundable technical cooperation grants and loans to the tune of US\$40,030,653. The ADB spent US\$650,000 for Philippine and Southeast Asian remittance studies alone.²³

In the guise of “enhancing foreign remittances”, these studies are not only culling estimates of remittances, or analyzing migration trends but more importantly understanding how remittances are sent, received and used. Monopoly banks are in the lookout for more “efficient” mechanisms of generating more profits from “financial intermediation initiatives” – that is, increasing transaction costs and business opportunities for these remittances.

Likewise, it is not surprising to note that the international organizations and agencies such as the UN, ILO and even the UN program of MDB speaks of enhancing and facilitating migration rather than addressing the root causes of forced migration.

Women and Trafficking

Asian women already constitute the majority of migrant workers in several countries: one million Filipina, 500,000 Indonesian, and some 40,000 Thai women worked outside their countries in the late 1990s, and their numbers have continued to increase. In 2001, women accounted for some 47 per cent of all migrants in Asia. For many years, most female migrants have come from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, where women make up between 60 and 80 per cent of all migrants.²⁴

Women are still predominantly entering (or being entered into) the services and welfare sectors. Some skilled migration patterns have been observed but only if admission policies are specifically developed, for example, recruitment of nurses and caregivers for the US and Canada.

²¹ Ratha, D. “Workers’ Remittances: An Important and Stable Source of External Development Finance”, in The World Bank: Global Development Finance, Washington, D.C, 2003

²² RP among top migrant sending countries, Agence France-Presse, www.inq7.net

²³ More remittances from women emphasize feminization of migration – ADB study, Jeremiaiah M. Opiniano, OFW Journalism Consortium, 08 October, 2005

²⁴ Asis, M. “Asian Women Migrants: Going the Distance, But Not Far Enough”, Migration Information Source, Washington, D.C., 1 March 2003.

They are preferred as domestic servants, entertainers, nurses, care givers, workers in electronic sweatshops, seamstresses, hotel workers, shop attendants. The large numbers of women, working as domestic servants and entertainers, are the most vulnerable to abuses and human rights violations, including mental and physical maltreatment, rape and murder.²⁵

The demand for female migrants in the Middle East has increased, particularly in the service industries, through the creation of low and unskilled jobs that migrant women are willing to take, while the local population is reluctant to do so. They are paid lower than the minimum wage and work longer hours. For example, according to UNIFEM, more than 90 percent of female migrant workers earned less than the minimum wage in Jordan.

These jobs are filled by women from the developing countries of Asia, principally Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The majority tend to work in private households as domestic workers, but also in the hotel and entertainment industries, the latter sometimes being a euphemism for commercial sex.

Women migrants also make up the majority of victims of trafficking in persons in the world.²⁶

Many stories can be culled even from the IOM reports: *“Many women from the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are attracted by promises of well-paid domestic jobs in the Middle east countries. At destination, some experience physical and sexual abuse, under-or non-payment of wages, or are forced into sex work. Women from Ethiopia, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and the Philippines have been taken to Lebanon, where they are subjected to mistreatment, under-payment and long hours of work without rest, at times sexually abused or forced into the sex trade. In Saudi Arabia, cases of sexual harassment, humiliation, severe beatings and delayed salaries have driven a number of housemaids to escape from their employers. In December 2002, the King Fahd General Hospital in Jeddah received several cases of housemaids with serious fractures caused by falls sustained in attempts to flee employers by jumping out of windows in high-rise apartments. The press also reported cases of housemaids attempting suicide in the same year.”*²⁷

Migrants’ Lives at Risk: War-Related Jobs

The US invasion and occupation of Iraq has highlighted the inhumane treatment of migrant labor by foreign superpowers. The phenomenon of conscripted labor, or migrant civilian labor fed into the war machinery, has increased under the auspices of the “war on terror”. This has significantly put migrants’ lives at risk and has intensified their exploitation and commodification.

Low-wage workers coming from more than a dozen countries especially from Asia have been lured to Iraq to work for projects led by Halliburton and other US-funded contractors hired to provide support services to the military and reconstruction efforts. Multinational corporations like Halliburton and Bechtel are importing ‘third country nationals’ (TCNs) – the corporate parlance for cheap migrant labor - and putting them to work in horrible conditions - to fulfill their U.S. government contracts.²⁸

²⁵ Keynote Address, MIGRANTE-International 6th Congress, Jose Maria Sison, Dec. 2005

²⁶ US Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act, Section 102, 2000.

²⁷ World Migration Report, IOM, June 2005

²⁸ Using Asia’s Poor to Build U.S. Bases in Iraq, David Phinney, www.corpwatch.org

They hail largely from impoverished Asian countries such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan, as well as from Turkey and countries in the Middle East. Once in Iraq, TCNs earn monthly salaries between \$200 to \$1,000 as truck drivers, construction workers, carpenters, warehousemen, laundry workers, cooks, accountants, beauticians, and similar blue-collar jobs.

Tens of thousands of such TNC laborers have helped set new records for the largest civilian workforce ever hired in support of a U.S. war. They are employed through complex layers of companies working in Iraq. At the top of the pyramid-shaped system is the U.S. government which assigned over \$24 billion in contracts over the last two years.²⁹

In connection with the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, Filipinos have been recruited as drivers, security guards, construction workers and the like in order to reduce the number of US casualties as well as the costs for wages, death and injury. Recruiting agencies deliberately recruit far more than enough Filipinos for available civilian jobs in Saudi Arabia and the emirates and then the excess recruits are redirected to war-related jobs in Iraq under pain of losing what they paid to be able to get the previous job prospect. The issue of war-related jobs has been brought about by the global capitalist crisis that has given rise to imperialist aggression and war.³⁰

Dangers and hardships face these migrant workers driven by desperation to cling to high-risk employment in war-torn Middle East. They frequently sleep in crowded trailers and endure the desert heat. They lack adequate medical care and put in hard labor seven days a week, 10 hours or more a day, for little or no overtime pay. Few receive proper workplace safety equipment or adequate protection from incoming mortars and rockets. When frequent gunfire, rockets and mortar shell from the ongoing conflict hits the sprawling military camps, American contractors slip on helmets and bulletproof vests, but migrant workers are frequently shielded only by the shirts on their backs and the flimsy trailers they sleep in.

Many are killed in mortar attacks; some are shot. Others have been taken hostage before meeting their death. In particularly gruesome set of murders on August 30, 2004, 12 Nepalese cooks and cleaners working for a Jordanian construction company were abducted. One worker was beheaded.

And yet sending governments like the Philippines who are staunch supporters of Bush's Coalition of the Willing have continued to deploy migrant labor to Iraq and elsewhere, feigning some restrictions when a compatriot has been kidnapped and threatened to be killed.

In a statement, MIGRANTE-International³¹ said that various internet and media outlets in the region, have confirmed intelligence reports from government authorities that Al Qaeda 'terrorists' are targeting in this particular order: American, British, Filipino, Italian and Japanese nationalities. OFWs have become fair game to 'terrorists' in both Iraq and Saudi Arabia because of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's support to the US government's "terror war of occupation in Iraq."

There are 940,000 Filipinos working in Saudi Arabia, with 200,000 in the oil city of Al-Khobar. An estimated 4,200 Filipinos are toiling in American installations in Iraq. And yet The Philippine government is content only at 'slowing down deployment' to Saudi Arabia and war-torn Iraq and declaring that "there is no need for an evacuation of Filipinos in the two nations.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Keynote Address, MIGRANTE-International 6th Congress, Prof. Jose Maria Sison, Dec. 2005

³¹ Filipino soldiers and civilians in Iraq, Saudi Arabia are targets of 'terrorists', Migrante International, Jun. 03, 2004

That is why Gloria-Macapagal-Arroyo, like other heads of state of sending countries, has been held accountable for jeopardizing the lives of migrant workers in the Middle East. As of 2004, at least 11 OFWs killed, 21 injured and 4 were abducted in Iraq and Afghanistan.³²

As it is currently, no official estimates of the magnitude of conscripted labor have been made. They remain invisible cheap labor and used as pawns for the war of aggression and recolonization efforts of the US. With the continuing policy of US “Project for the New Century”, the issue of war-related jobs and the role that migrant workers take in them will intensify and will need attention from migrant movements and advocates.

Migrants on the Rise

Migrant workers are the first to feel the impacts of the changing trends of the global and regional crisis and their impacts to migration. That is why migrants have been expressing discontent in varied forms these past years. Spontaneous protests in defense of their wages, job security and protection and general workers rights have occurred whether it be the actions of conscripted Asian laborers in US military camps in Iraq or actual strikes done by migrant workers in factories in Taiwan.

More and more, organizations of migrants have been gaining ground. They are leading the campaigns locally and are slowly able to project themselves internationally through the help of migrant advocates.

Inter-ethnic cooperation and solidarity among migrant workers and immigrants have also been felt and seen. Whether it be through conferences or joint campaigns, their common interests intersect and have borne concrete activities for cooperation. Through networking and actual exchanges, more and more migrants within the Asia-pacific and the other regions are slowly gravitating towards the formation of an international movement of migrant workers.

Understanding the varying levels of intervention – locally, regionally and internationally; home and host country – the migrant movements are taking on the tasks of building the broadest front for the defense of their rights and welfare seriously. As well, they are becoming ready to face the challenge of merging their strength in the international movement against neoliberal globalization.

Migrant workers are thoroughgoing in their fight to reclaim the dignity of labor and promote workers’ rights and interests. Through their organizations, are principally pressuring their national governments to address the root causes of forced migration and eradicate the existing labor export programs. “Jobs in our homeland!” has been a consistent battle cry for these migrants as they fully grasp that the solution in the long term to their diaspora and the fulfillment of their dream to live a decent life with their families back home lies in the genuine transformation of their own societies. They understand that gainful employment, livable wages, food sovereignty among others can only be achieved under a society that is based on social justice, respect and assertion of national patrimony and sovereignty, and human rights.

Hope this conference will contribute to the realization of such vision.

Thank you.

³² Why OFWs Want Gloria to Resign, <http://bulatlat.com/news/5-24/5-24-readersofws.htm>