

A line art illustration of a woman on the left and a man on the right, both shown from the waist up. They are facing each other and holding hands. The woman has curly hair and is wearing a short-sleeved top. The man has short hair and is wearing a short-sleeved shirt. The background is plain white.

Narrative & Declaration of Unity

of the Asia Pacific Interfaith
Dialogue on Children,
Family and Migration

Manila, Philippines

October 8-10, 2010

by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants

October 2010

NARRATIVE

OF THE ASIA PACIFIC INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON CHILDREN, FAMILY AND MIGRATION*

The Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue on Children, Family and Migration was organized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants and National Council of Churches in the Philippines on October 8-10, 2010 at the UCCP Shalom Centre in Manila, Philippines. It was supported by the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED)

On October 8-10, 2010, the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), together with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), organized the Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue on Children, Family and Migration. It gathered around 30 people from various faith communities and migrant organizations to discuss the issue of migration and how it impacts on families and children as well as find means to strengthen their cooperation as they reach out and work with migrants and their children and families.

The participants, who came from the Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu faiths, were welcomed by APMM board chairperson Reverend Cora Abugan and Migrant International chairperson Garry Martinez. Rev. Fr. Rex R. B. Reyes, general secretary of the NCCP, delivered his keynote speech that discussed the need for members of various faiths to further reach out to the migrant sector and challenged them to go beyond the dialogue and spend more time arriving at concrete recommendations and common actions.

Ramon Bultron, managing director of APMM, provided an overview on the current conditions of migrants as he relayed how the global economic crisis pushes governments and corporations to exploit migrant workers through policies, bilateral agreements and other oppressive schemes. He also laid down the need for migrants' rights advocates to take on the challenge of working side by side migrant workers in advancing the latter's rights and welfare.

In the afternoon, participants shared their experiences and advocacy work with migrant workers and their families. The first to share were those who came from labor-receiving countries, namely Japan (Rakuno Gakuen University; Kapatiran/Nippon Sei Ko Kai; Family Center Viola/Kisarazu Catholic Church), Korea (The Presbyterian Church of Korea) and Hong Kong (Hong Kong Catholic Commission on Justice and Peace; Mission for Migrant Workers; Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labor Affairs; Far East Overseas Nepalese Association).

The second set was composed of participants coming from labor-sending countries, namely: the Philippines (United Methodist Church, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd) and Indonesia (Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama). Thailand, as it is both a sending and receiving

country, joined the second batch. A Buddhist monk from Burma-Myanmar shared his work with migrants in Thailand.

On the second day, Mervin Toquero of the NCCP gave a recap on yesterday's program followed by Garry Martinez of Migrante International giving an input on the Global Forum on Migration and Development. A workshop on developing strategies and strengthening cooperation among faith communities and migrant organizations followed suit. The participants were divided into two groups to discuss these questions and come up with concrete recommendations after.

A declaration of unity containing 12 recommendations as result of the workshops was deliberated and approved by the participants to conclude the second day. A loose network among the participating organization was likewise formed to ensure the coordination among them. The said network is named INFORM, or Interfaith Network for the Rights of Migrants.

On the third day, the participants went to Salaam Compound in Brgy. Culiati, Quezon City. One of Migrante International's focused community areas, the Salaam Compound is known to be a transient destination for prospective migrants coming from Mindanao, one of the poorest regions in the country. Aside from the prospective migrants, the participants also met certain individuals who were housing the aspiring migrants and preparing the latter's documents. These people apparently were subcontracted by big recruitment agencies to facilitate labor export.

A short evaluation and an interfaith prayer led by our Christian (both Catholic and Protestant), Muslim and Buddhist participants closed the successful dialogue.



EXPOSURE

(ABOVE) Participants of the interfaith dialogue trooped to Brgy. Salaam to meet with migrants and their families. Here, they interacted with returned migrants who survived the Gulf War in the 1990s as well as very young Filipinos who were aspiring to work abroad. They likewise met some individuals who were working as brokers for the migrant-hopefuls.



WORKSHOP

(LEFT) Participants during the workshop talked about what other concerns of migrants and their families have yet to be addressed and how the faith communities can better coordinate with one another in responding to the needs of migrants.



KEYNOTE

(BELOW) Rev. Fr. Rex R. B. Reyes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, gave the keynote speech in which he challenged the participants from the faith communities to go out of their comfort zones and reach out through more concrete actions to migrants and their families.

DECLARATION OF UNITY

DELIBERATED AND APPROVED
BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
ASIA PACIFIC INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
ON CHILDREN, FAMILY AND MIGRATION

OCTOBER 10, 2010

We are peoples of different religions and faiths coming from six countries in Asia, the cradle of all major religions in the world, gathered in Manila from October 8 to 10, 2010 for the Asia-Pacific Inter-Faith Dialogue on Children, Families and Migration to discuss the impacts of forced migration on migrant workers, their families and children, and to build a common platform for common understanding and concerted action on the many intricate issues of labor migration.

From our diversity and the richness of our cultures, we have come to a common ground to uphold the sacredness of life. Life that is threatened by phenomenon of forced migration.

The desecration of human life caused by forced migration is an affront to our beliefs and faiths. In this modern form of slavery, migrants and their children and families are sacrificed in the altar of profit – to serve the insatiable greed for remittances of sending countries and to exploit cheap labor for receiving countries.

We see and hear their stories of abuse, discrimination and displacement around the world that has brought righteous indignation among us: the massacre of 72 undocumented migrants in Mexico, the forced deportation of Roma people in France, the deaths of Filipino migrant workers from Canada and the Middle East, the crackdown of undocumented migrants in Korea and Italy, among others.

We see the absence of national legal frameworks that genuinely promote and protect the rights and interests of migrant workers and their families and children. Receiving countries have yet to ratify international instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as well as International Labor Organization conventions.

While the United Nations takes efforts in improving the lives of the poor, it is far from achieving their objectives in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The policy of neoliberal globalization only creates more serious problems than solutions to the sufferings of the world's marginalized peoples, including migrants and their children and families. We embrace the cause of undocumented migrants for the recognition of their rights. They are the most vulnerable, powerless and defenseless of all

migrants. In host countries, they are ill-treated, socially-profiled, labeled as criminals and always without avenues for redress of grievance. In the eyes of their own governments, they are negligible or non-existent.

We are disturbed that families and children of migrants suffer debilitating economic, emotional and psychological hardships resulting from forced migration: families broken apart by long-term separation, children growing up without a parent and caught in the middle of this dilemma, as well as families and children of undocumented migrants.

We cry for the sufferings and pains of families and children of migrant workers whenever their loved ones perform back-breaking jobs abroad or when they grieve about losing a migrant loved one caught in accidents due to an unprotected work environment, murdered or executed for resisting abuse.

As we reflect on the kind of support programs and services we offer migrants and their families, we realize:

That current programs and services for migrants and their families provided by faith communities and faith-based programs and service providers vary in content, frequency and extent, yet they respond to identified needs of migrants and their families;

That these programs and services range from advocacy, research, human and labor rights education, language facilitation and communication, provisions for welfare services, including avenues for redress of grievances through legal assistance, crisis intervention and counseling services, provisions for shelter, particularly for victims of abuse, rape, domestic violence, trafficking, outreach for the sick, abused and detained and other humanitarian services aimed at promoting and protecting the rights and overall well being of migrants and their families; and

That these programs and services are expressions of our deep commitment as faith communities to social justice and respect of human rights of all peoples, regardless of religion, gender and sexuality, language, race, ethnicity, country of origin, or economic circumstances.

We see challenges that need to be cleared to optimize the participation of faith communities and faith-based programs and service providers in

promoting and advancing the rights and interests of migrants and their families.

While programs for migrants and their children and families exist, there is a dearth of issues and needs of the sector that faith communities have to address: (a) migrants' awareness of their rights, (b) the issue of stateless/undocumented migrants and their children, (c) the issue of marriage migrants, (d) shelter or refuge for migrants in distress, (e) accessibility to mechanisms for redress and justice, (f) space for rest and recreation, (g) lack of political rights, (h) lack or no existing support programs for migrants who return to their home countries; and (i) language barrier.

Faith communities and organizations who work with and for migrants have encountered certain difficulties, such as: (a) limited financial resources, (b) persecution by the state and even by religious leaders, and (c) their lack of awareness of existing laws both from sending and receiving countries on migration.

As we stand united and committed in our belief that forced migration is the cause of many problems faced by migrants and their children and families, we resolve to take the challenge of holding the cause of migrants and their children and families as our own and to continue expanding and consolidating our programs and services through the following:

- 1) Echo the unities of this interfaith dialogue with respective faith communities and congregations. Initiate faith-based gatherings and dialogues that will promote awareness of migrants' issues and concerns.
- 2) Map out existing services provided by faith-based communities and groups in Asia Pacific to strengthen linkages, referrals and other forms of cooperation and coordination.
- 3) Conduct country-to-country dialogues that involve migrant groups and faith communities and determine concrete needs of migrants and their children and families. Establish and strengthen networks of faith communities and organizations from sending and receiving countries.
- 4) Initiate dialogues that shall involve not only migrants but religious leaders and members, employers and local communities at the national level.

5) Extend the unities of this regional dialogue to other global regions by holding an international interfaith dialogue involving more religious leaders and migrant organizations.

6) Help develop capacity of faith communities and organizations in terms of advocacy, organizing and networking.

7) Actively conduct public awareness and education programs by releasing publications, maximizing various media (i.e. radio, TV, internet), and conducting education workshops.

8) Develop a campaign network that shall facilitate the cooperation and coordination of both faith communities and organizations and migrant groups in sharing resources and linkages.

9) Provide special attention on the rights and welfare of the children. Plan for a region-wide interfaith conference on children of migrants.

10) Further enhance advocacy and campaign for the rights of undocumented migrants, those languishing in jails, victims of human trafficking, marriage migrants, etc.

11) Engage with regional faith-based formations in addressing the urgent concerns of migrants and their children and families.

12) Raise awareness among faith communities and migrant organizations on the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the role of the G20. Hold and join activities as we critically engage with these international formations as part of our campaign to advance the rights and welfare of migrants and their children and families.

Signed this 10th day of October 2010 at the Shalom Center, Manila, Philippines.



(ABOVE) Ven Jotika (left), a Buddhist monk and member of the Migrants Rights Network shares about the conditions of Burmese migrants in Thailand and how they offer assistance to them. Seated beside him is Rev. Jang Cheong-won of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and Rose Kawashima of Kapatiran-Japan. (BELOW) Participants were divided into two groups on the second day to discuss the obstacles encountered both by migrants and faith communities as well as strategies in addressing these.



THE DIALOGUE

Participants from Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United States of America, and Hong Kong gathered during the Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue on Children, Family and Migration to share about their experiences in attending to the needs of migrants and their children and families as well as develop schemes by which they can further communicate and coordinate with one another as well as with migrant groups in advancing the rights and welfare of migrants.

Among the unities formed during the dialogue were the formation of a loose network of faith communities and organizations serving migrants and the holding of a regional conference on the situation of children of migrants.

The dialogue was held in UCCP Shalom Centre in Manila, Philippines last October 8-10, 2010

