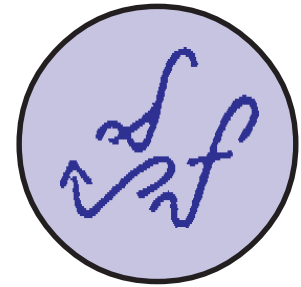


News Digest

February
2010



APMM

Monthly Newsletter of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)

Overseas Filipinos to cast their votes on May 2010 polls

The Philippine elections and the plight of OFWs

FOR THE THIRD time, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) shall participate in the Philippine elections through the overseas absentee voting (OAV).

This month, the campaign for various posts have started and OFWs around the region are taking up the cudgels of campaigning for progressive candidates, who have, by platform and records, defended and upheld the interests of OFWs and their families.

OFWs and the Philippine Elections

The Philippine elections have always been characterized with fraud and violence.

Many OFWs have expressed their lack of confidence in a process that is supposed to be the democratic expression of the people's will. Scandals have rocked past elections and in the recent past, it was the "Hello Garci" scandal that involved no less than Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself.

Vote shaving or the infamous "dagdag-bawas" has been a common practice everywhere while exploitation of the vulnerability of the poor has also made vote-buying and other schemes widespread.

Meanwhile, the condemnable crime of the Maguindanao Massacre has showcased electoral violence that has pervaded the system. Progressive party-list groups such as Bayan Muna, Gabriela, Anakpawis and Kabataan have also been targeted for harassment, intimidation and their members and leaders have also been killed or forcibly disappeared. Mass organizations that support them have also been subjected to gross human rights violations.



Amidst the unfriendly weather, Filipino migrants in Hong Kong welcomed with enthusiasm candidates from Gabriela Women's Party and senatorial aspirants Rep. Satur Ocampo and Rep. Liza Maza. Said candidates got the nod of many OFW groups for their record and platform of service to OFWs and their families.

Despite these, OFWs – especially in the progressive movement of Filipinos overseas – recognize the importance of election as one of the arenas where the rights of migrants Filipinos and their families can also be defended and promoted.

The experience of OFWs with supporting Gabriela, for example, as its party-list of choice in the 2007 polls has resulted to finally having a voice inside the Philippine Congress who can drumbeat the concerns of overseas Filipinos inside the halls of the Congress. A lone voice maybe, but with the support of other progressive legislators, OFWs has become a legislative concern.



Filipino migrants expressed fears of a new wave of disenfranchisement in the coming elections. This included the delisting of Migrant, breakdown of automated elections in HK and Singapore, and fraud and violence in the Philippines.

Now that more progressive candidates are running for positions led by Rep. Satur Ocampo and Rep. Liza Maza, there is a bigger push among OFW groups in different countries to clinch more electoral victories to gain a bigger and stronger voice in venues long-monopolized by the powers that be.

The Automated Election System – boon or bane?

For the 2010 polls, the Philippines will make its first attempt for an automated election. Overseas, automation will be done in Hong Kong and Singapore – two countries with the big numbers of registered voters.

While it is touted to speed up the process, many groups have already expressed worry on the viability of implementing the Automated Election System or AES smoothly. This close to the elections, there are still glitches on the machines and extreme lack of transparency on how it will be operated from the voting to the counting of votes to the transmission of results.

In Hong Kong, OFW organizations who actively worked to raise the rate of turnout during the registration period have already expressed concerns on how the AES will be conducted considering that no information or education drive has been done a mere month before the OAV starts. Worse, there is no backup plan in case the AES breaks down that may result to the denial of the voting right for many OFWs.

The concern on the viability of the AES is valid for what is at stake is the right to vote of OFWs who have long been disenfranchised and only through the OAV can be a part of the national political exercise that is the elections.

Even more than this, the unstable political situation in the country makes the fear of failure of elections

and other scenario that results to the current government staying in power a valid one. It is a known fact that GMA is desperately clinging on to power and news of a not-perfect AES or possible power outages during elections – compounded by GMA's own election-rigging record – are complete recipe for an electoral disaster.

People's International Observer Mission

As a civil society action, distinguished individuals from the grassroots organizations, NGOs, the academe, religious and other sectors are convening the People's International Observers Mission (PIOM) 2010 to monitor and investigate cases of fraud and violence, monitor the operations of the AES, protect the people's vote and gain international attention on the situation of democratic processes in the country.

In 2007, the first IOM was convened. Some of the observations they stated included: significant number of disenfranchisement of voters and vote buying, deadly election-related violence, direct intimidation of voters by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), suspicious absence and abandonment of duties and responsibilities of COMELEC officials at numerous voting locations and incidents of overt coercion by candidates from powerful political clans.

The said PIOM also noted the resilience of the organized grassroots communities despite the difficulties they faced.

The role of the PIOM is very important to inhibit traditional politicians from resorting to their tried and tested dirty tricks to win the polls. As independent observers, they are also in the position to say whether the democratic exercise of election really exists in the country.

Conclusion

In every arena of struggle, it is the organized strength of the people that is important. While OFWs recognize that the fundamental changes cannot be had through elections alone, their participation in the electoral struggle can also pave the way for meaningful changes that will alleviate the hardships OFWs and their families' experience.

United and concerted action is still the paramount mover of change.

In the end, this is also where the empowerment of migrant workers and their families lies. ☺

Be a part of the People's Watchdog

JOIN THE PIOM 2010!

Objectives

To monitor and investigate electoral fraud and violence Specific to the Automated Election System, to monitor its implementation, safeguards and uncertainties

To support the people's efforts to protect their votes To call the attention of the international community to the situation and practice of democratic processes in the Philippines



For details of the PIOM 2010, please contact the secretariat at piom2010@yahoo.com

Indon migrants slam gov't for neglect

THREE HUNDRED INDONESIAN migrants from the ATKI, PILAR & GAMMI held a protest action at the Indonesian Consulate on 7 February 2010 to condemn the newly-elected government President Susilo Bambang Yudhiono which marked the end of its first 100 days on January 28.

Karsiwen, ATKI vice chairperson, said that nothing changed in the new government of because his policies are not geared toward the well being of the Indonesian people.

"It is quite clear that he is only after the investments of multinational corporations. For example, he allowed PT Freeport Indonesia for the gold mining in Papua and oil drilling in Bojonegoro. Even worse, the government took the land from the poor people to plant coconut palm and develop this into another form of oil industry," she stressed.

The programs of the new Indonesian government have displaced many people in different parts of the country, according the Karsiwen. Displaced peoples have no place to go but apply for domestic work abroad which is a clear implementation of the government plan to export one to two million Indonesians every year.

Ganika, also of ATKI, described the Indonesian government as a money-making machine without any heart for the welfare of the migrants.

ATKI vowed to continue its education for all Indonesian migrants to expose the true nature of the government and to organize themselves to protect their rights both in Hong Kong and their families back home. ☺



Indonesian migrants intensify actions against neglect

APMM takes part in Anglican consultation on mission for migrants and refugees

THE ASIA PACIFIC Mission for Migrants (APMM) took part in the meeting last January 12 - 14 of representatives of Anglican Churches in various countries to discuss the revival of the Anglican Refugee and Migrants Network (ARMN) as mandated by Resolution 31 of the 14th Anglican Consultative Council.

Hosted by the HK Sheng Kung Hui (Province of Hong Kong Anglican/Episcopal Church), the meeting featured sharing of work on refugees and migrants by the participants and the finalization of the concept of the ARMN.

The consultation was attended by The Very Revd Andrew Chan of the St. John's Cathedral (Hong Kong), The Rt Revd David Lai of Taiwan Episcopal Church (Taiwan), Revd Joachim Kim of Towards Peace in Korea (South Korea), Ms. Deborah Stein of the Episcopal Migration Ministries (USA), Revd Dwight dela Torre (SJC, Hong Kong), Ms. Cynthia Abdon-Tellez of MFMW (Hong Kong) and Mr. Ramon Bultron of the HK-based regional group APMM.

Revd Peter Koon, Provincial Secretary of the HKSCH, Mr. Hessler Lee, Special Assistant to the Provincial Secretary of the HKSCH, and Mr. Aaron Ceradoy of APMM were also there to provide support for the meeting.

"A small step towards a giant leap in the future" was how Dean Chan described the meeting in his welcome remarks to the participants.

Those who



Representatives of Anglican churches and partner NGOs discussed the relevance and need of responding to problems of migrant workers. Consultation participants united on the importance of operationalizing the ARMN.

attended shared their work among migrants and refugees in their respective country. The sharing of experiences became a venue for sharing of ideas as well on how Anglican churches can further become responsive to the plight of migrants and refugees in the world.

Mr. Bultron, managing director of the APMM shared the work of the group in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions. He emphasized on the regional and global advocacies, research and education work that APMM conducts on the concerns of migrant workers of different nationalities in order to help build and strengthen the movement of migrant workers, refugees and other displaced people for more effective actions on their rights and wellbeing.

The concept paper for the ARMN was finalized in the consultation. Said document will be forwarded to the ACC and the HKSCH for their perusal. ☺

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The Doctors and Health Workers ARE IN... JAIL FREE THE 43 HEALTH WORKERS!

ON 6TH FEBRUARY 2010, many of us were shocked to read about the arrest of 43 community health workers including two doctors, a nurse and midwife who were gathered in a First Responders Training in Morong, Rizal. Around 300 soldiers blindfolded and brought them to Camp Capinpin where they were kept blindfolded for 36 hours, tortured and forced to admit that they were members of the New People's Army (NPA) and were making bombs instead of conducting health training.

On her first media interview while in detention, Dr. Merry Mia Clamor lamented, *"It's a shame... I chose to stay here in the Philippines instead of going abroad. I chose to stay [despite] the knowledge it would be a thankless job."*

Modern-day Heroes

Over the years, the Philippine public health system has been in crisis. With government's miniscule budget for health and failure to provide decent-paying jobs for the country's health professionals, the government should be grateful that there are community health workers and doctors like Dr. Alexis Montes and Dr. Merry Mia Clamor who offered their free services to the poor.

The 43 health workers detained and tortured by the Philippine military are also our modern day heroes for they opted to serve the poorest communities while thousands of health professionals work abroad. It is most appalling that like OFWs who are dubbed heroes but often neglected by government, the 43 health workers are now neglected by the President. Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo should heed appeals to immediately release the 'Health 43' and bring their abductors and torturers to justice according to the new anti-torture law that she signed last year. As the AFP Commander-in-Chief, she should exercise her power to stop her soldiers from further detaining, torturing and slapping the 43 victims with the most unfounded accusations.

It is a grave miscarriage of justice that the 43 health workers who have been treating the sick and saving lives are detained on false charges. Meanwhile, Col. Aurelio Baladad, commander of the Army's 202nd Brigade, and Lt. Col. Jaime Abawag, commander of the 16th Infantry Battalion will be decorated with Bronze Cross Medals for the arrest of the health workers. Now that more doctors and health workers hesitate to serve in rural poor communities, scared about getting



Groups worldwide condemned the continuing violations of HR in the Philippines

arrested for "being NPA and making bombs," the police and military forces who unjustly arrested the 43 health workers will have to answer for greater unavailability of health workers and services for the rural poor.

To the 43 detained health workers, know that the Filipino people including OFWs and their families are very thankful for your sacrifices and services to the poor. We join your families and supporters around the world in demanding the Arroyo government to dismiss the fabricated charges against you. Your abductors and torturers may get all the military medals, but they can never gain the life-long respect and appreciation of the Filipino people for you. 🙏

To support the call to FREE THE 43 HEALTH WORKERS, please click on:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/FreeD43/petition.html>

ATKI-HK Bekerjasama Dengan EOC Gelar Training Untuk Konselor

WANCHAI, MINGGU (21/12) BERTEMPAT di gedung Boys and girls club Association HK. Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (ATKI-HK) bekerja sama dengan EOC (Equal Opportunity Commission), menggelar training untuk konselor tentang bagaimana mempromosikan hubungan persamaan dikalangan ras minoritas dengan mengundang perwakilan organisasi-organisasi di daerah Causeway Bay. Acara ini disuport oleh EOC yang merupakan agenda tahunan untuk mempromosikan kesetaraan

antar ethnic minority di Hong Kong. Tujuan lain dari acara ini adalah, untuk memberikan pengetahuan kepada pimpinan-pimpinan organisasi untuk menyebarkan informasi ini dan berharap sebagai tenaga untuk menjadi konselor dimasing-masing organisasi mereka. Sebelumnya juga diadakan training serupa di daerah Kowloon dengan mengundang pimpinan-pimpinan organisasi di daerah Kowloon.

Training yang dihadiri sekitar 50 orang ini bertujuan untuk mendidik para pimpinan organisasi untuk menjadi konselor dan berharap mereka bisa menangani kasus yang berkaitan dengan diskriminasi ras. Selain itu juga sebagai wadah untuk mensosialisasikan UU anti diskriminasi yang baru diresmikan oleh pemerintah HK. Terlihat sekali antusias

dari para peserta, mereka rela duduk berdesakan untuk menghandiri acara ini.

Dalam kesempatan kali ini, ada dua pembicara sebagai trainer, Fermi Wong dari UNISON dan Devi Novianti dari Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC). Devi menjelaskan Undang-Undang tentang perlindungan ras diskriminasi yang baru disahkan tahun lalu. Dan Fermi Wong, memberikan tips bagaimana kita menjadi konselor yang baik untuk membantu korban dari pelecehan ras diskriminasi. Mereka juga menekankan kepada BMI agar tidak takut mengadakan perlakuan diskriminasi yang mereka terima, jika ada pengaduan bisa hubungi kantor EOC dan organisasi-organisasi BMI yang mereka kenal. 🙏