

News Digest

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

Int'l confab tackles foreign brides

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, the Awakening Foundation, and Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies in coordination with the Alliance for Human Rights Legislators of Immigrants and Migrants organized an international workshop for Asian NGO's on women immigrants and migrants last May 13-15, at Chien Tan Overseas Youth Activity Center in Taipei, Taiwan.

Around 80 representatives from various churches, human rights groups, academe, women's groups, migrants and immigrants institutions and organizations in Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, United States, Thailand and Philippines attended the activity.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Lucie Cheng of Hsih Hsin University and Dean of its Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies, provided the framework and challenges on the issues affecting women and migrant workers. Dr. Irene Fernandez of Tenaganita spoke on the issues brought about by the neo-liberal policies of globalization. She also talked about the struggles of peoples as well as migrants in addressing the root causes of forced migration.

The event was highlighted by three major workshops: Problems with brokers on migrants and immigrants; On violence against women migrants and immigrants, and; On the international and national instruments related to these issues.

In the first workshop, it was pointed out that migrant workers and foreign wives have been made as commodities. The

former have to pay exorbitant fees to placement agencies in their home countries and brokers in Taiwan just to be able to work in the island. Prospective husbands, on the other hand, of foreign wives have to shell out US\$10,000-15,000 to brokers once they have successfully married the women they chose.

There have been many cases when brokers have taken the workers against their will to the airport to be deported after being illegally terminated. Other cases include brokers taking custody of workers in their shelters even if the latter have labor disputes with their employers and/or have complaints with the brokers themselves. There are even a few cases where brokers detain the workers who have been involved in fist-fights before being sent home or who have committed certain crimes.

The workshop participants agreed that Taiwanese authorities should abolish the broker system. They also agreed to advocate for the removal of the six-year ceiling on migrants' employment contracts.

In the second workshop, the speaker revealed that even if Taiwan has passed a law on domestic violence and provided related services, foreign wives have a hard time availing of these services or being properly served due to language barrier, lack of access to information, and the lack



of training for multicultural issues on social workers and other service employees.

Battered immigrant women without Taiwanese citizenship are also deported if they get divorced. They find it hard to return to Taiwan to visit their children. Usually, the custody of the children is given to the fathers by the courts which is why many battered immigrant women decide to endure domestic violence. The Taiwan government does not grant foreign women citizenship in their own rights, but mediate their rights through their status of wife.

In the third workshop, a Taiwanese lawyer described the discriminatory laws against newly arrived foreign wives. These include the following: a. pre-entry barriers including the discretionary rights of government officials to reject entry

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applications; b. the threat of deportation is always present between entry and naturalization; c. those from mainland China are not allowed to work unless they can satisfy some very limited, narrowly drawn, circumstances provided by law; d. the Nationality Act's "financially affordable" requirement constitutes an unsurpassable or at least troublesome burden for those low-income families; e. the 10-year ban on being civil service employees for immigrants whose national origin is mainland Chinese, and; f. absence of a general anti-discrimination law.

Migrant workers are not given the right to freely change their employers. Domestic and caretakers are not even covered by the Labor Standards Law. The participants called on Taiwan to adhere to UN conventions on migrants and immigrants, and to support actions that promote their protection and eliminate discrimination.

To face the concerns of women migrants and immigrants, the participants agreed to form a network that will work for the following: a. conduct education, share data, and exchange information; b. conduct collaborative researches on the policies, condition and struggle of foreign brides; c. link with NGOs and peoples organizations in Taiwan that promote migrant rights; d. collectively advocate for greater transparency and accountability of governments in the migration process; e. provide support for the establishment of a global migrants movement, and; f. mobilize and participate in the people's parallel activity against the Sixth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Hong Kong.

APMM joins Task Force Meeting on Food Sovereignty

The task force meeting on food sovereignty was held at Penang, Malaysia last 7 to 10 May 2005. The meeting was organized by the Pesticide Action Network-Asia Pacific and the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS).

The meeting discussed the overall impact and contributions of the 2004 Peoples Caravan held in various countries in Asia. Likewise, future plan of actions of the network were discussed and formulated. These came out from the three workshops that discussed the emerging issues, regional and national strategies and workshop on identifying the tasks and priorities of the task force.

Ibon Foundation provided the input on globalization in Food and agriculture in the region from the social movement perspectives and what is at stake at the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial Meeting. Mr. Antonio Tujan of IBON Foundation and Asia Pacific Research Network presented a paper entitled "From DOHA to Hong Kong".

Another workshop on what to do for the WTO ministerial meetings was also held and the result was incorporated in the over-all plan of action of the network.

APMM participated in the meeting and presented the current stage of preparation of the Hong Kong Peoples



Alliance for the Peoples Action Week in December in Hong Kong during the 6th Ministerial Meetings of the World Trade Organization.

The action plan of the task force includes peasant-legislators dialogue, research study of WTO Agreement on Agriculture on rice, popularization of education materials on Intellectual Property Rights, General Agreement on Trade and Services and AoA, formation of national and sub-regional level task force, as well as the preparation and during the actual Action Week WTO event in Hong Kong.

Deeper study on forced migration as a result of landlessness and ecological situation was also planned as part of the solidarity action.

Other plans include organizing the people's caravan in 2008 and people's assembly in 2009.

APMM attends CCA 12th General Assembly and the Peoples Forum

More than 500 representatives of different protestant and orthodox Churches in Asia including guests and observers participated in the CCA 12th General Assembly held in Changmai, Thailand, from 31 March to 6 April 2005, with the theme "Building Community of Peace for All".

Highlight of the assembly is the appointment of the new secretary general of the CCA, Mr. Prawate Khid-arn from the Church of Christ in Thailand and former CCA Associate General Secretary for Finance. Other elected officials were Ms. Manju Baroi (Bangladesh), Rev. Dr

Khamphone Kounthapanya (Laos), Ms. Lu Yuen-Wen (Taiwan) and Rev. Francisco Maria De Vasconcelos (Timor Leste) as the new presidents of the CCA. Also elected as new honorary treasurer is Bishop Thomas Soo (Hong Kong).

The People's Forum 2005, meanwhile, was held as part of the preparation for the CCA 12th General Assembly. This was organized by the CCA-Urban Rural Missionaries on 25-29 March 2005.

During the forum, Ramon Bultron, APMM Managing Director, presented the overall situation and struggle of migrants in the



region together with Dr. Irene Fernandez who spoke on the plight of migrants in Malaysia.

Mr. Bultron was also present during the CCA assembly and made a presentation during the work group discussions on migration as part of the assembly program.

HK workers fight for rightful wage on International Labour Day

Wage and livelihood took centerstage in the celebration of the International Labour Day in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong workers – locals and migrants – took to the streets and brought forth the pressing issue of wage and employment rights after several years of wage freeze, wage cuts and the pressing crisis that has beset the Hong Kong economy.

For the migrant workers, the struggle for wage and rights has been heating up since the HK government implemented the first wage cut in 1999. Since then, migrant groups led by the Asian Migrants Coordinating (AMCB) and migrant-support institutions have been vigilant against propositions that impinge on the rights of overseas workers. Towards the end of every year as well, the AMCB remained watchful of the annual review of the minimum wage of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs).

Last May 18, the HK government announced an increase of HK\$50 to the minimum wage of FDWs. However, instead of jubilation that they might have expected from the FDW groups, the decision was met by fury and an even stronger resolve to recover the HK\$3,670 minimum wage.



For the local workers meanwhile, the labour group Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) pushed their demands for a minimum wage and a reasonable wage increase for the local workers. Other local groups carried the issue of privatization of social services such as health and housing that is also very much related to the issue of worker's wage.

The recent May 1 rally showed the unity, not only in issues, but also in action of the workers in Hong Kong. Trade unions and groups that participated in the Labour Day march are now looking forward to even stronger and bigger actions by the Hong Kong people – migrants and locals alike – especially in the light of the coming meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in HK whose policies many deem have gravely impacted the wage, rights, employment condition and livelihood of workers and the people.

Cordillera Day in HK and Macau highlights Mining Act of 1995

Migrant workers from the Cordillera region comprising the the provinces of Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mt. Province celebrated the traditional Cordillera Day at the Chater Road in Hong Kong on 24 April this year.

Organized by the Cordillera Alliance in Hong Kong, the event reiterated the call for indigenous migrants to unite to defend their land, resources and the national patrimony. The indigenous culture of the Cordillerans was relived in an extravaganza of ethnic songs and dances.

Norman Uy Carnay of the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers spoke on the impacts of the Mining Act of 1995.

Meanwhile, about 200 overseas Filipino workers gathered at the Morrison Chapel grounds on May 1st to celebrate the fifth Cordillera Day in Macau. This tradition started in 2001 through the efforts of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants based in Hong Kong and the Macau Cordillera Alliance.

The MCA gathered indigenous workers from the Cordillera provinces who showed off their respective ethnic dances and music to the delight of local residents, tourists and fellow migrant workers from other provinces.

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United Filipinos in HK celebrates 20 years of militancy

About 3,000 migrant workers, human rights advocates, and members of the business community joined in the historic celebration of the 20th anniversary of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong on 29 March this year at the Chater Road, Central focusing on the theme, "*Sahod, serbisyo, proteksyon, karapatan – Ipaglaban! Kalayaan at Demokrasya para sa Inang Bayan*" (Struggle for wage, services, protection and rights. Freedom and democracy for the Motherland),

Bayan Muna Partylist Representative Satur Ocampo, keynote speaker, expressed extreme appreciation on the display of talents by the migrant workers who interpreted sectoral and national issues in a variety of cultural

extravaganza like Balagtasan, skits, and choral recitation.

As chair of the House committee on Peace, Unity and Reconciliation, Congressman Ocampo exhorted the crowd to join in the campaign against the rampant violations of political and civil rights in the Philippines. He urged the UNIFIL and the other groups present to fight the growing fascism in the country as shown by the killings of activists and critics of the government from different groups such as Bayan Muna, the media, and human rights advocates including priests and lawyers.

The 20th anniversary of the UNIFIL showed the migrant worker's commitment to fight. We are prepared to fight for our



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rights and wellbeing in Hong Kong. We are prepared to fight against the policies of the Arroyo government that plunge the Filipino people to heightened poverty, unemployment and forced migration. We are prepared to kick out GMA. We are prepared to confront imperialist plunder and aggression to the Filipino people and of the world," according to its chairperson, Dolores Balladres.

Indonesian migrants group seeks justice for dead compatriot

“Justice for Suprihatin does not only pertain to the criminal aspect of her case. A comprehensive justice for Suprihatin also means the prosecution of irresponsible Consulate officials who have neglected her case. It also means the prosecution of the employment agency that did not lift a hand to help Suprihatin.”

This was the statement of the Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (ATKI) when they staged a protest action at the Indonesian Consulate following the death on May 3 of Suprihatin who fell into an eight-day coma after allegedly jumping from her employer’s 19th floor flat in Pok Fu Lam on April 24.

The case of Suprihatin, 21 years of age from Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia, has yet again shown the neglect of the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong in particular and the Indonesian government in general to the plight of Indonesian migrants, according to ATKI chairperson Eni Lestari.

Lestari condemned the attitude of the Indonesian Consulate officials for trying to downplay the real cause of death of Suprihatin. They even said that

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With the theme “Cordillera migrants unite; defend our national patrimony, assert our rights to our land and resources,” the Cordillerans revived the campaign against the Mining Act of 1995, which the Supreme Court declared as legal in January this year.

The MCA leaders performed a skit depicting the history of how indigenous peoples in the Cordillera have been robbed of

Suprihanti’s case is already closed despite the fact that the HK police are still conducting their investigation.

According to news reports, Suprihatin attempted to commit suicide due to depression because her family was among the victims of the tsunami disaster last December 26.

However, a friend of the deceased revealed that she received a letter from the latter which stated that she was maltreated by her employer, was always scolded and was not given enough food and rest. The letter also mentioned that Suprihatin wanted to find another employer but her agency threatened her that they would not help her find another employer.

Suprihatin’s case deserve deeper investigation, urged ATKI and migrants-serving institutions to the HK police.

Meanwhile, with the assistance of the ATKI, employee’s compensation claims for the deceased have been filed by her cousin Sulastri, also a domestic worker in Hong Kong. There is no guarantee, however, pending the results of the police investigation, according to Lestari.

their natural resources by unscrupulous officials and the military.

“We have to expose the evils of the greedy agents and corrupt government officials who are selling our natural and mineral wealth to foreign investors,” stressed guest speaker Vicky Casia-Cabantac, Migrante Hong Kong chairperson.

Migrant groups hold dialogue with MECO

Migrante Sectoral Party (MSP) – Taiwan Chapter in coordination with Kasapi and the Hsinchuang Filipino Community, initiated a dialogue between MECO and Filipino migrant organizations at the Philippine Representative office on June 5. Representatives of Tamshui Filipino community also attended the activity.

The main points of the dialogue were proposals by the migrant organizations for MECO to shelter Filipinos who assert their rights against forcible repatriation by their brokers at the airport and for MECO to take custody of migrant workers who have been turned over to their brokers by local labor bureaus even if the two parties have a dispute.

MSP pointed out two such cases in Taoyuan in the past. Earlier, MECO pointed out that it needed the go-signal of labor and police officials to be able to shelter its own nationals.

Labor Representative Reynaldo Gopez’ expressed his fear that if they took in too many migrants, it would be too easy for some of them to escape and become undocumented. MSP said that its like saying that brokers are a better option as the migrants would have no chance of escaping.

The groups present also did not agree with Mr. Gopez’ assertion that brokers need to shelter migrants just because they pay exorbitant services to the former. If that was the case, the workers suggested that MECO should propose to the CLA to

the brokers’ fees, disguised as payment for services rendered.

MECO, meanwhile, proposed a special hiring program for household workers to the CLA which include a provision on securing a return visa in Taiwan so that no more placement fees, brokers fee, other documentation fees and medical exams would be needed when one needs to exit Taiwan.

However, it was pointed out by MSP that MECO or the Philippine government can abolish this anomalous practice on its own if it wanted to. It was also pointed out that the issue is an immigration policy aimed to assure that the foreign workers would not be eligible for permanent residency.

Other matters discussed were a suggestion for MECO not to let the migrants make hasty decisions in labor and other disputes. The groups also agreed with the suggestion that OWWA membership be increased to three years instead of the prevailing one year.

It was also pointed out to MECO that the migrants do not agree to a standard employment contract for household workers under the Employment Service Act. MSP proposed that this be under the Labor Standards Law. Kasapi urged MECO to support the Household Service Act campaigned by some NGO’s.

MECO will take up these issues at a Philippine-Taiwan labor summit within the next three months.

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