

It has been 12 years since a mother, a migrant worker, was hanged in Singapore. She was Flor Contemplacion. Flor was arrested and suffered behind bars under the two Philippine presidents – Mrs. Corazon Aquino and General Fidel Ramos. Her case was only given government attention 2 weeks before her hanging in March 1995 – sadly — was only meant to dilute the mass anger of the Filipino people for the lack of political will of the Philippine presidents to act decisively for Flor and other distressed overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

In December 1994, Migrante International and Flor's co-inmate who came home exposed the plight of Flor. Again, her children pleaded help from the Philippine government but were left unattended. It even castigated the people's initiatives inside the country for fear of breaking the diplomatic relations between the governments of the Philippines and Singapore.

Continued coordinated mass actions by caused-oriented groups of migrant workers, women, workers, and human rights advocates, including the faith groups to pressure the Philippine government's intervention for Flor's life resounded nationally and internationally. Dilly-dallying on his successive overseas trips, the last ditch action of General Ramos who asked the Singapore government for clemency — was too late to save Flor — a life was wasted, her children lost a loving mother.

Sold cheap and neglected

Migrant Filipinos and the criminal neglect of the Philippine government

Looking back, the Flor Contemplacion case clearly shows the highest degree of criminal neglect of the Aquino and Ramos regimes. Yet, the succeeding Philippine presidents never learnt from the case of Flor, other mothers and fathers whose lives and limbs were lost in various parts of the world. Joblessness and the grinding poverty remain unaddressed by the government, thus, forcing more or less 3,000 able-bodied Filipinos daily to seek employment overseas.

This time, under the questionable leadership of Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, her increasing statistics of criminal neglect and apathy over OFWs on death row, unjustly jailed, and cases of gross violations of labour and human rights, is gaining dismay

and condemnation amongst the OFWs globally. They renewed their call for Gloria Arroyo to step down or be ousted.

In February 2008, 35 year old Marilou Ranario will face execution in Kuwait as per the death sentence by the Kuwait courts in September 2005 and February 2007. It was recently affirmed by the Court of Cassation on November 27th despite a "tanazul" (affidavit of forgiveness) signed by the family members of her lady employer, Najat Mahmoud Faraj Mobarak, that they forgave Marilou. A victim of maltreatment, non-payment of wages, and degrading abuses on her person and the Filipinos, Marilou killed her lady employer on 11 January 2005. On the night before the incident, the employer wanted to record Marilou on VCD which the former intended to sell.

The abandonment and criminal neglect of Mrs. Arroyo's government in Marilou's case is a repetition of the fate of Flor Contemplacion, Reynaldo Cortez in Riyadh, Jocelyn Dulnuan in Canada, Crisolyn Esplago-Sicam and Anita Carvajal in Riyadh, Glenda Lorio and Mirriam Espiritu in Hong Kong. Dismally, it does not act, unless pressures of mass actions are done.



United for Marilou. Various migrant workers spent a few moments of their day-off for Marilou Ranario, a fellow Filipino migrant worker who was in the death row in Kuwait.

Passionate Protest

by Liz Hooks

Liz is from the Young Adult Missionary of
The United Methodist Church in the USA

There is a scene in the popular American movie, "The Bourne Identity." Jason Bourne, played by Matt Damon, is being chased through a crowded city at night. There is some sort of unrest in the city, and crowds are rallying around the American consulate. As the enemy closes in on Bourne, he breaks through the crowd, shouting at the guards at the gate, "I'm an American!" At the last minute he slips through the protective bars, away from the "bad guys" who are left frustrated on the other side of the consulate gate. It is a Hollywood scene that implies to the viewer, safety can be found behind the heavy gates of the consulate. When there is danger, there is always someone on the other side, helping you squeeze through at the last minute, leaving the bad guys on the outside. But, what if those gates didn't open, despite your pleas of nationality? What if the bad guys were the ones on the inside, and you were the one left out in cold?

One warm, sunny Thursday in October, the Philippine people in Hong Kong experienced what it means to be shut out,

literally. In early October, news reached the office that Jocelyn Dulnuan, a young domestic helper working in Canada, was murdered. Her mother and sister work here in Hong Kong and came to the Mission for Migrant Workers office seeking help. At that time, no one was giving them any information about the investigation. They had no money to ship the body home. They wanted justice and the governments, both Canadian and Philippine, were keeping silent. So the United Filipinos in Hong Kong did what they do best - they organized a rally. Planning to stand outside of the Philippine Consulate, as is common for this organization in conjunction with local and regional support organizations, they had intentions to cry out "Justice for Jocelyn." What they did not know was that their cries for justice would be laced with real tears. As the group of about 30 people gathered outside of the Philippine Consulate on the 14th floor of the United Centre, there was something different than the usual protests and rallies.

It is not uncommon for the group to arrive and be greeted by security, asking how many people are in the group, and accompanying them up the elevators. Nor is it uncommon to arrive and find one set of doors already shut. Closed, but never locked. Other patrons are free to come and go, and the demonstrations are always peaceful. So imagine the surprise and horror when the group arrived this

Angered. Josie Pingkihan, domestic worker and chairperson of the Cordillera Alliance, could not help but cry in anger for the tragedy that struck Joselyn, a fellow Cordilleran, and the criminal neglect the Philippine government has shown to the growing outcry for justice on Joselyn's death.

OUR FAITH,
OUR
STRUGGLE



particular Thursday to find that both doors were not only shut to the Consulate, they were barred and guarded. Others who had business in the Consulate were frustrated as they too were turned away. Some tried to direct their anger at the rallied group, while others expressed sympathy as they learned of the death of a fellow Filipina.

There were speakers asking the Philippine government to offer help to the family of Jocelyn. There were tearful pleas for justice for a life unnecessarily lost. There was anger at a government turning its back on the very people they are supposed to serve. As the police came up in more numbers than usual, and the doors refused to open, the emotions swelled to a greater height. The sweet face of Jocelyn waved on posters in the air. The demands of these people could be ignored, but that would not sway the passion. Everyone watched as men and women usually so filled with joy, found their cries to be heard were coupled with real tears. In an unusual display of urgency, there were shouts at the closed doors, posters being held up against the glass so all inside could see the face they were trying so hard to ignore. Fliers were slipped through the cracks. This group could be denied, but they would not be swayed. They refused to leave, refused to be ignored. Even after the scheduled rally was over, even after the police had taken notes, and the tissues had been passed around, many lingered, hoping for the doors to open. It seemed too much to hope for that the people sitting behind the safety of a government desk could come out and offer their condolences in the least, and their help if possible.

The passionate protest that day moved many. It left anger that followed the sad hearts down the elevator. It left the head of security against a wall, with shame in his eyes for being a part of closing and barring the doors against its people. It left a sense of uncertainty with those who were holding on to the last hope of security from their consulate. And it left a burning passion to continue to seek justice,



CORDIVOW (from page 4)

not only for Jocelyn, but for all migrant workers whose voices are ignored; Justice for all of the families mourning the separation or loss of loved ones overseas; Justice for all people of the Philippines searching for something better.

David Wildman, executive secretary for Human Rights & Racial Justice with the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, spoke once on the story from Luke 18:1-8. A widow spent every day going before an unjust judge, asking for justice against her adversary. Over and over, the cruel judge denied her, until one day, he could take her cries no more. He granted her the justice she was

“I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” (verse 5 of Luke 18) What this widow did is what Wildman calls the “Ministry of Erosion.” It is a persistence to keep asking, working, crying, and struggling for justice that pay no attention to unjust judges.

seeking, not because he had compassion in his heart, but because she was persistent enough in her pleas to wear the judge down. “I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” (verse 5 of Luke 18) What this widow did is what Wildman calls the “Ministry of Erosion.” It is a persistence to keep asking, working, crying, and struggling for justice that pay no attention to unjust judges. The Ministry of Erosion is a hope that one day - maybe many days, maybe many years from now - justice will truly be granted. It is not an easy task, to remain persistent in the face of adversary. Yet the men and women who desire

Empowering women migrants under threat of losing their lifetime savings

Vicky Casia-Cabantac

An unusual women’s welfare orientation was conducted by the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) at the St John’s Cathedral Li Hall on October 21 this year. More than one hundred fifty Filipino women migrants underwent empowerment skills training under Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, MFMW Director.

“Defending our savings, protecting our future!” This is the objective of this group of migrant workers who have organized themselves and named their group Platinum Planholders Organization Hong Kong (PPO-HK) after they discovered that the company where they invested their hard-earned savings encountered financial crisis and underwent rehabilitation.

According to Rosemarie Dela Rey, chairperson of the PPO-HK, they were all taken by surprise when the Hong Kong office of the Platinum Plans, a pre-need company based in the Philippines, was suddenly closed and they had no idea what to do and how to follow up their pension claims.

Some had approached a lawyer to help them and had paid an initial amount. The need to form a group arose when many members realized that instead of getting back their hard-earned money, they were again being victimized by unscrupulous individuals who offered to facilitate their claims at a price.

Initially, Ms. Tellez formed the participants into groups and asked them to solve a puzzle game to get familiar among one another. The activity achieved its purpose as the women migrants cheerfully performed the game.


An integral part of the training seminar was a group discussion which focused on the migrants’ understanding of the plans they purchased, their vision of their retirement, and their readiness to pursue the case to the end.

According to Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, it is important to empower themselves in the course of getting involved in claiming for their hard-earned savings. This entails functioning beyond their current motivation towards a group of individuals united towards the protection of their rights and welfare.

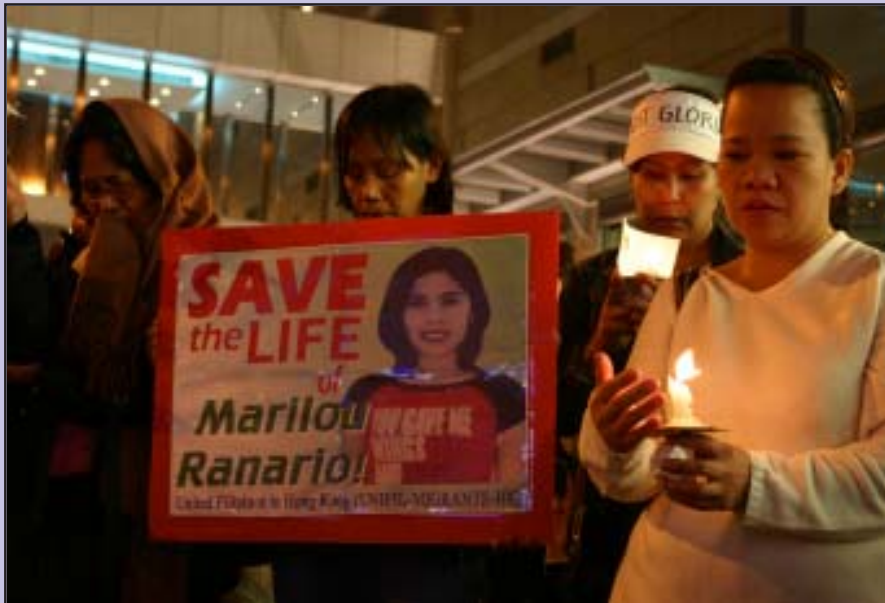
Without doubt, the welfare orientation training seminar was much appreciated by the PPO-HK members, most of whom have had no organization affiliation at all. A follow up activity was scheduled in the group’s next meeting to be held after three months.

nothing more in their hearts than true Justice, have the strength to carry on this task. One of the women at the protest that Thursday, speaking to why they keep returning even though they are ignored, explained, “We keep going, not because they listen, but because we can’t stop talking about it.” Their ministry of erosion is being the widow, marching up to the unjust judge every day, begging for something he has not in his own capacity to give.

The people should know: Your cries are not forgotten. Your passion is not in vain.

There is a community around the world who wants to hear your stories and your cries, who stands in solidarity with you. There is a greater Judge than the ones that sit behind closed doors. There is a God not of man or government, not business or NGO, but a God of compassion, of hope, and of peace in tribulation. When the enemy is chasing you down, when it seems that you are on the wrong side of the closed doors, know that the gates to God will always be wide open, with ready arms to gather in the hurting, the forgotten, the frustrated, the angry, and the passionate people. 

Revving up CORDIVOW



Braving the cold. The cold climate in Hong Kong did not stop more than 100 overseas Filipino workers to gather in Chater Road to attend the candle-light vigil for Marilou Ranario. A few days after, the Emir of Kuwait pardoned Ranario though still gave her the life sentence.

(continued from page 1) SOLD CHEAP

Marilou is a mother of 2 small kids, a former lowly paid public teacher. She became a domestic worker in Kuwait since 2003. Her family, along with alliances and organizations of OFWs worldwide, and the Filipino people – did their best efforts to appeal to the Kuwaiti government.

Notwithstanding the few weeks left before the “hanging”, the Philippine government has no excuse to immediately talk with the Kuwaiti’s head of state, Sheik Amir Sheik Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah — to spare the life of Marilou and have her

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because they just want to earn money for their children.” Cris says, waving to two of the Indonesian women who pass by. Gigi shares, “They are all very helpful, especially to me when I can’t move. The Indonesian and Philippine women help to bring my needs. They are taking care of my needs.” The chemotherapy treatments often leave Gigi and Cris very sick and weak. Cris also says, “Because we are sick we don’t do works.” Gigi cuts in, “They will not allow us.” They both smile, because all the women in the house work so hard to make sure that they are being taken care of and feel included. Being in the Bethune House is “very enjoyable, very comfortable,” says Gigi.

Both women have been overwhelmed by

repatriated home, back to her family’s fold. An execution of a court sentence could be stopped only when the Head of State does not sign it.

If it truly operates on its so-called protecting and uplifting the lives of OFWs and their families, Mrs. Arroyo must abandon its economic policy of earning foreign dollars from marketing cheap labour of Filipinos in various countries. The only answer to the grave impacts of forced migration is to create secured employment, protected decent wages and benefits inside the country and public social services funds are used and delivered to the beneficiaries, not corrupted.

the love and support they have been shown during their illnesses. Cris remembers, “After my first operation, I found out how many people loved me. I had so many visitors, that when I was in my wheelchair, the nurse asked me to come out to the lobby because there were so many people they would crowd my room. After the second operation, there were still so many people. So many organizations and churches were praying for me, giving money, food and drinks.”

When asked what they would share with other women going who might be going through the fear of facing an illness, Cris offers, “First of all to believe in God. Because He is the one who can help you most.” Gigi agrees saying, “Yes, belief. And I encourage all people, especially like me, to get strong.”

The second batch of volunteers from different Cordilleran migrant organizations had just wrapped up their two-day paralegal training course last November 11, 2007 which was conducted by the Mission for Migrant Workers (MMW) through its energetic Director Cynthia A. Tellez.

Topics dealt mostly on the frequently-encountered issues by the said institution such as computation of remunerations arising from long service and severance pay, labor cases and other complicated problems faced by the migrant workers.

The eager participants who will compose the Cordillera Volunteers for Welfare (CORDIVOW) come from organizations namely: Atok Comrades of Hong Kong (ACOH), Bangaan, Fidelisan, Tanulong, Aguid, Madongo, Pide (BFTAMP), Buguias Overseas Workers Association (BOWA), Adivay ni Itogon, Benguet Association (ANIBA), Hingyon Organization (HO), Kabayan Overseas Workers Association (KOWA) and Pinatud A Saleng Ti Umili (PSU).

Like their predecessors, the second batch of CORDIVOW will simultaneously undergo practicum to further their skills as well as conduct para-legal services with the assistance of the members of Mission Volunteers (MOVERS). They will be dispensing whole day counselling at Ice House Street, Central and conduct “know your rights” seminars with various organizations every Sunday.

Cordillera Volunteers for Welfare (CORDIVOW) was formed in 2005 by the Cordillera Alliance in Hong Kong (CORALL-HK) as an offshoot of the welfare training and workshop conducted by the MFMW. One of the major issues that were voiced out by the organizations was the lack of information dissemination on migrants’ rights by the Philippine Consulate placing the migrant workers in a vulnerable position where employers or agencies exploit them. Hence, in addressing this issue CORALL requested the MFMW to conduct a Paralegal Training Course to the participants of the workshop who eventually became the first members of CORDIVOW. Some members of the first batch had either migrated to other countries or went home for good leaving only a few who are active in their respective organizations thus necessitating a second batch of volunteers.



Gigi & Cris

Most of the women staying in the Bethune House are there seeking shelter from their working environments. There are cases of abuse, underpayment and maltreatment. But the stories of Gigi and Cris offer something a little different to the Bethune House.

The Story of Gigi

Gigi came from the Philippines to Hong Kong as a domestic worker nearly 4 years ago. Sometime in 2006 she discovered a small lump in her breast. At first, she did nothing about it. By 2007, however, the lump had continued to grow larger and the breast began producing discharge. She finally went to the hospital to have an X-ray which revealed a mass in the right breast. A biopsy in September confirmed that Gigi had Stage Three Breast Cancer. Stage Three Breast Cancer is a locally advanced cancer that can be treated through surgery and chemotherapy. The doctors wanted to check to be sure the cancer had not spread to other parts of her body and performed a series of tests, including a bone scan – all of which came back clear of cancer. On 2 October, Gigi was scheduled for an operation to try to remove the cancer, which would be followed with 6 cycles (4 ½ months) of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. After her treatments, Gigi will have to continue taking hormone medicine for 5 years. “It is a long process for recovery,” she says.

The Story of Cris

Cris also came from the Philippines and has been here as a domestic worker for 13 years and 10 months. She worked for her first employer for 10 years, after which time the employer moved to Canada, so Cris started working for her second employer. In 2003 Cris was preparing a bottle for the young boy of her employer. Instead of putting the powder in the bottle, she had not removed the lid, and poured the powder over the cover. Her employer was observing, and asked if she was ill. Cris admitted that she was a little dizzy, but felt no other symptoms, so she was told to lie down. Later, her employer came in and asked her to write two names on a piece of paper. After much difficulty, she finally did, though the second name was not correct. Her employer called an

Both women chose to stay in Hong Kong to receive treatment due to the high medical costs in the Philippines.

Their families researched what it would cost to receive chemotherapy there, and the costs ranged anywhere from P20,000 to P100,000. The costs in Hong Kong range from \$60-100HK per treatment.

“It would be too difficult to pay (at home),” Cris explains. “I am here because I am supporting my family.

ambulance, and even though she did not have any physical symptoms, the doctors scanned her head, where they found out she had a tumor in her brain. “At first, I didn’t want to believe them because I did not have symptoms.” Cris said. After a second medical opinion confirmed the tumor, Cris faced the fear of having an operation. She had been in Hong Kong for 5 years without going home, and was afraid that she would die without seeing her family. But through the encouragement of friends, family and her employer, Cris underwent her first operation to remove a tumor the size of a lemon on 14 July 2003. After which Cris spent some time at home in the Philippines recovering. Cris came back to Hong Kong in 2004 to work for her first employer. Not long after their second contract in 2006, Cris started feeling ill again. Another trip to the

hospital revealed that there was another tumor. After the first surgery, Cris had radiation therapy. After this second operation, the doctors recommended chemotherapy.

Their Struggles

Now, both women are staying in the Bethune House while on sick leave undergoing their chemotherapy treatments. They both speak very well of their employers, who still have them under contract. “My employer is so good. She took me to the hospital every time I had an appointment and is very supportive.” Gigi’s contract will finish in January, but she will still have two months of treatment left. Her employer has offered to extend the contract so that Gigi can remain in Hong Kong to receive treatment. Cris says that both of her employers have been very supportive, but her first employer, who she was under contract with during her second operation, treats her as one of the family.

Both women chose to stay in Hong Kong to receive treatment due to the high medical costs in the Philippines. Their families researched what it would cost to receive chemotherapy there, and the costs ranged anywhere from P20,000 to P100,000. The costs in Hong Kong range from \$60-100HK per treatment. “It would be too difficult to pay (at home),” Cris explains. “I am here because I am supporting my family. My brother is a painter, and my mother cannot work because of heart disease. How could they pay that much?” Gigi’s family wanted to bring her home to take care of her, but she knew that she could receive better and more affordable treatment here in Hong Kong. Her younger sister has offered to come to Hong Kong to work to help support the family if Gigi has to go home.

When asked if either was interested in working again in Hong Kong after their treatment, they both laughed and said a very definite No. “I must rest and be careful of myself and make sure it will not come back again. It is sad, but it is my second life, so I have to be careful with it. Maybe I can go back to the Philippines and start up my own business with the help of my family.” Cris says. Gigi echoes her sentiments, “We must be thankful for this second life!” She too hopes to return to the Philippines and maybe start up her own business.

The experience of Cris and Gigi staying in the Bethune House has been very different of most of the other women, but they are so thankful for the community they are surrounded with. They both expressed how hard it is to hear of the situations of the women whose employers were not good to them. “Its is really sad to hear

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Recognize domestic work as work:

Fight for One Paid Day-Off a Week!

The United for Domestic Worker's Rights (UFDWR) an alliance of 6 regional formations supporting the migrant workers in Asia successfully launched the One Paid Day-off a Week Campaign in Singapore on 4th November 2007. UFDWR was able to gather 57 individuals and many are domestic workers.

One paid day-off a week is the first part of the general campaign to recognize domestic work as work, a component of the Colombo Declaration of the 2002 Consultation in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This will eventually be followed by the calls on migrant workers' Right to Health and Right to Redress.

Foreign domestic workers present in the workshop welcome in high spirits the One Paid Day-off A Week Campaign because the Singaporean government

Promote our campaign:

ONE PAID DAY-OFF PER WEEK!

under their law does not specify days-off of foreign domestic workers.

There were speakers from Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Asia Pacific forum on women, law and Development (APWLD), CARAM ASIA and Mekong Migration Network that highlighted the importance of the campaign.

One paid day-off is very important for migrant workers for their physical and mental health, to further develop their social and political involvement and a chance to be with relatives and friends.

The workshop during the launch provided many domestic workers present, the space to share their working condition and experiences. One of the local institutions, the HOME, an NGO that helps distress migrant workers in Singapore has supported the testimonies.

Towards the end, there were several organizations and institutions that expressed interest to join the coalition. They were keen to conduct and facilitate similar workshops on the "Domestic Work As Work" campaign in their respective countries.

We urge everyone to support the 2002 Colombo Declaration and be part of the Campaign to Recognize Domestic Work As Work.

Promote our campaign for a One – PAID – Day-off – A – Week!!!



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Editorial Team

Cynthia Ca. Abdon-Tellez,
Norman Uy Carnay, Jun Tellez, Fr. Dwight dela Torre

Contributors

Edwina Antonio-Santoyo,
Vicky Casia-Cabantac,
Eman Villanueva, Dolores Balladares-Pelaez,
Liz Hooks, Sol Pillas,
Buhay Bangcawayan

Address

St. John's Cathedral,
4 Garden Road,
Central, Hong Kong SAR

Tel No. (852) 2522 8264

Fax No. (852) 2526 2894

E-mail

mission@migrants.net

Webpage

http://www.migrants.net

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Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW)
St. John's Cathedral, 4 Garden Road,
Central, Hong Kong SAR
CHINA
