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BATINGAW; BELL; HERALD; The New Voice of Filipino Migrants in Australia



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The Realities of Forced Migration

Immigration and emigration should be about voluntary choices that people make when they leave their country of origin to start a new life somewhere else.

But these days, forced migration is now becoming the norm rather than the exception. Although there are some who tend to make their own decision, whether or not to migrate to another country, this is not the case for most migrants in impoverished countries.

It is important to understand why people migrate, and in particular, why people are forced to migrate. With the advent of globalisation, it is not surprising to see that movements of people have also become fluid and inevitable.

Governments of developed and developing countries have facilitated the movements of people across the globe, with a number of agreements already in place [e.g. World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements on trades and services, Free Trade Agreements - FTA's and other bilateral agreements].

For the developing countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and others, the 'commodification' of migrant workers becomes a temporary relief for the country's huge budget deficit, with billions of dollars of annual remittances used to prop up the ailing economies of these countries. The motive often springs from these governments' utter lack of ability to provide coherent economic strategies which would generate jobs at home. Inevitably, these forced migrants end up as milking cows for the states' gross domestic income.

For the developed countries like the US, Canada, Australia and the likes, this would mean further exploitation of migrant workers in the guise of so-called 'development through migration' with rigid migration rules and border security.

It is clear that migration is only being used as a method in which neo-liberal institutions and their client governments are able to exploit the migration phenomenon, the lucrative export programs and migrant remittances for the sake of billions of profit and revenue.

It is in this context that the forthcoming Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) session at the end of October this year in Manila, Philippines is being pursued.

Many of us would not know what GFMD actually does until we unmask the real purpose of this forum in relation to migration and genuine development for poor countries.

GFMD is only "a device to sell neoliberal anti-poverty and financing strategies by promoting the concept that "migration promotes development" and that the remittances of migrants helps the economy and therefore serves as a "tool for development".

This is the real horrible face of GFMD. It directs all its efforts to use migration as a tool for development because: first, it ensures superprofits for banks and other financial institutions; and second, it also guarantees that debt-ridden economies have a large currency reserve (it cannot produce otherwise from its inept economic strategies and methods) to pay-off debts.

Of course, migrant workers and their families are the ones who will be most deleteriously affected. Being forced to migrate, migrant workers endure intolerable conditions and attacks on their rights and welfare.

In sending countries, they are regarded as a lucrative business for recruiters and unscrupulous agencies. Many migrants are left with huge sum of debts even before they leave the country.

In host countries, they are the most lowly-paid and exploited workers. They are also made targets of discrimination and scapegoating for taking jobs from the locals, and are subjected to threats of arrest, detention and deportation.

In many cases, women migrant workers are the most victimised and abused because they are vulnerable to human trafficking for forced labour, prostitution and other forms of slavery.

These are some of the dreadful effects that migrant workers suffer regularly and daily. There are certainly many other gruesome stories.

It is imperative for us to study the effects of policies and programs that would come out of GFMD and its subsequent negative impacts on migrant workers all over the world.

It is also important for us in Australia to act together and understand the impact of force migration on migrant workers (i.e. temporary workers visa 457). In doing so, we can come up with immediate response to the global phenomenon of liberalisation of the workforce.

Migrante Melbourne, and its sister organisations in other Australian states, are conducting public forums to discuss the likely effects of GFMD's policies and programs on migrant workers.

Equally important, Migrante International and the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) are currently mobilising international action to counter GFMD's agenda. The International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR), a three-day gathering at the end of October, will be the culmination of such coordinated efforts.

The issue of 'migration and development' should be understood in the context of the root causes and consequences of forced migration, rather than a straightforward 'development' agenda, which is too remote to the harsh realities of migration and conditions of people in developing countries around the world.

Stranded Filipinos

“We had paid our dues to the Philippine government and we just want to go home” is the cry of many stranded Filipinos in the Middle East.

Many Filipinos in various countries are losing their homes, jobs, status and their hope for a decent living.

Towards the end September, more than 7,000 Filipinos were stranded in the Middle East with an estimated 2,700 in places near Oman-UAE border and about 5,000 in Iran-UAE border. Many were on visit visa when they left the Philippines to embark on an unsure goal of finding a job overseas to support their families back home. They were assisted by family members, friends or acquaintances already in the Middle East. When the United Arab Emirates changed its law requiring visitors to get tourist visa rather than the usual visit visa, many Filipinos were caught unprepared. They were asked to exit the country and can only re-enter back the country by getting a tourist visa. A tourist visa is more difficult to acquire than the visit visa.

In Kuwait, about 20,000 are affected by the crackdown on illegally staying migrants. Migrante Middle East is urging the Philippine Government to seek extension on the deadline for amnesty given which is the 15th of October to give ample time for the Filipinos to process legal documents.

While many of these stranded Filipinos are on temporary visit visa, there are those who were on worker’s visa but meted with various abuses and fraud and lost their jobs and contract. As in many occasions, they have not been given assistance by the Philippine government although they had paid their dues to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA). Many are yet to receive welfare from the government if there is any at all, welfare that they thought they can rely on when they paid the dues.

In many other countries such as Japan, United States, Malaysia, Korea and some European countries, the crackdown on undocumented residents continuous. In Borneo, Malaysia, illegal migrants are rounded up like animals, kicked, beaten and abused and thrown into overcrowded detention cells including women and children waiting to be deported. There are even reports stating that the detainees are being fed with spoiled food with maggots.

With the current global financial crises, more Filipinos will lose their jobs due to increasing unemployment in many first world countries and those who simply cannot find employers overseas. Many of them will become stranded Filipinos somewhere away from home.

Get Involved!

Name: _____

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Migrante Melbourne is a voluntary community organisation of Filipino and Filipino-Australian migrants and workers promoting and upholding their welfare, human rights and workers’ rights. It also deepens members’ awareness of the root reasons of the Filipino hegira to over 180 countries and settlement issues in their adopted homelands.

Visit us on the web at www.migrante.org.au

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Migrants and Peoples' challenged to the GFMD

Statement by the participants at the 'Kapihan' in Melbourne Australia 10th October 2008

As developed countries continue to look for ways to increase their profits and promote new forms of liberalization and the opening up of the world to increased exploitation, the worldwide expansion and pool of qualified migrant workers from underdeveloped and developing countries has created a new opportunity for exportation of skilled labour at minimum cost.

Everyday thousands of workers all over the world leave their home countries to venture into the unknown and try their luck in other countries. People who come from underdeveloped and developing countries especially take risks to be able to provide for their families and take opportunities that their home countries cannot provide. Poverty, oppression, joblessness, repression and displacement push people to find work elsewhere. In light of this, nation states' drive for Labor Export Policies has never been greater.



Members of Migrante Melbourne & PASA marching with friends and raising issues plaguing the Philippine society.

For many years, vulnerable migrants have been exploited and have experienced direct and indirect abuse. Many international bodies have claimed to address this issue. One such avenue is the GFMD or Global Forum on Migration and Development to be held in Manila in October.

The 2nd Annual GFMD will gather representatives of UN members states to participate in a roundtable discussion and evaluate issues surrounding 'migrant protection and explore migration's benefit for development'. As in the first session of the GFMD in Brussels last year, 'migrant protection' had just become lip service to the

participants and the policy makers. What was given most importance was the maximization of income and profits that both the sending and the hosting countries can get. The 'development' was focused on the benefit to the government and states but never to the migrants themselves, the supposed subjects of the forum.

An alternative to the GFMD, IAMR or International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees, will be attended by migrants and a diverse group of grassroots and progressive organizations involved in fighting for migrants rights. The objectives of the IAMR include critically analyzing the GFMD and the detrimental effects of neoliberal policies (ie Labor Export Policies) and forming a migrant consensus around GFMD.

We demand that the GFMD:

1. Be a venue to analyze Global Migration and the Labor Export Policy from the point of view of those who are affected - migrants and their families.
2. Form a consensus on how migrant workers should be paid, establish their basic entitlements and ensure more accountability and liability by host and sending countries and ensure that migrants are protected by the labor laws and accorded the same basic rights and entitlements as the workers in the host countries.
3. Create an international body where migrants, wherever they came from, could seek help and redress. This independent body should hold offices in different countries. This body can be called the 'Global Migrant Welfare Office', which will address migrants' welfare. This body should be able to implement international law to protect migrants.

Migrante Melbourne stands in solidarity with migrants and participants of this forum in the struggle against the unjust consequences of neoliberal policies on migration! We join them in fighting for their democratic rights and voice out their concerns and demands. We call on the international community and migrant groups to participate in the struggle and show their support.

**UPHOLD AND PROTECT MIGRANTS' RIGHTS!
STOP FORCED MIGRATION!
ENSURE JOBS BACK HOME!
END POVERTY!**

Zero Remittance Day

October 29, 2008

International Migrants Alliance is calling for a Zero Remittance Day on October 29 this year to highlight the dire situation of migrant workers around the world and to oppose the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) being held in Manila on October 29 - 30, 2008. Member organizations of Migrante International and International Migrant Alliance from more than 150 countries are call in to campaign for this day.

Filipinos around the world who send remittances and money to their families in the Philippines are asked not to send their money on the 29th of October. The campaign for a zero remittance day aim to make the Arroyo government feel and acknowledge that the Filipino overseas are the main dollar earners of the Philippines and should be given importance and their welfare be addressed

Overseas Filipino workers (OFW) and their families want to call the Arroyo government's attention to the many distressed Filipinos abroad including those stranded workers in various countries, forced deportation in Korea,

Malaysia, United States and other countries, Filipinos languishing in jail, Filipinos on death row, abused and exploited and many other struggles of the OFWs.

Overseas Filipino workers want to show the Philippine government that forced migration is not the solution to the poverty in the Philippines. Filipinos should have a choice to work wherever they want to rather than be forced to leave their families and work overseas because there is no work at home. Therefore the Philippine government should develop local industries and find employment for the Filipinos in the Philippines rather than export them to any country without the necessary support being afforded to them. They want to highlight the social damages the families bear in long separation and lack of parental guidance for their children.

Migrante Melbourne and Migrante Australia support this call and encourage Filipinos here in Australia for their support.

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About Batingaw

Batingaw is a bi-monthly newsletter expressing views, news and analysis from Migrante Melbourne. An important aspect of developing this newsletter is an intimate knowledge of and close involvement in all aspects of the Philippine and Australian struggles for justice, democracy and fair-go.

Contributing to Batingaw:

Articles, photographs, cartoons, clippings, comments or a few lines are all very welcome. All material should be sent electronically to: melbourne@migrante.org.au. Readers are encouraged to contribute whatever they can by sending donations to the above address.

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ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS

Issued by the Commission on Socio-Economic Development and Social Equity
of the International League of Peoples' Struggle,
September 20, 2008

Prepared for the Commission by the IBON Foundation

The deep problems of the imperialist-dominated world capitalist system are in very sharp focus today. The majority of humanity has long suffered unremitting poverty and exploitation - but the people are being pushed into even greater difficulties by the current episode of intense economic and financial crisis which is feared to be the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The current descent into greater socioeconomic turmoil doesn't just underscore the inevitability of crisis under capitalism. It also exposes how imperialism's dogged and vicious efforts to secure profits are precisely what create the conditions for ever greater instability. All this affirms how there can never be true socioeconomic development or equity for the people under the oppressive and exploitative capitalist system.

There has been a generalized growth slowdown of the global capitalist system in the nearly four decades since the early 1970s. The relatively high finance- and speculation-driven growth of the last few years hasn't been able to reverse this trend, aside from such hollow growth clearly being short-lived and unsustainable. The people in turn are further and further away from the false promises of prosperity through neoliberal "globalization". The number of those living on a conservative \$2 (PPP) or less a day has doubled in the last three decades and stands at 2.8 billion or nearly half the world's population. A billion people go hungry everyday and two billion do not even have clean water.

The current explosion of crisis appears to begin from financial excesses in the United States (US) which cause domestic troubles that have subsequent repercussions on the rest of the world. Yet while the sub-prime loan crisis in the US housing market is the most immediate trigger, this merely reflects the system-wide problem with world capitalism of an unprecedented reliance on paper profits and digitally conjured capital. There are initial estimates that financial losses could reach up to US\$30 trillion worldwide.

Monopoly capital has for decades been seeking to maintain its profits by forcing greater trade and investment liberalization on the neocolonies. But capitalism's basic crisis of overproduction is intractable and has even been exacerbated by this "globalization" offensive. Since these have been less and less effective imperialism has relied more and more on paper profits and digitally conjured capital. The financial crisis manifesting first of all in the US merely exposes world capitalism's system-wide problem of an unprecedented reliance on this largely fictitious capital.

The people are also now severely burdened by rapidly increasing energy and food prices. The giant transnational

oil corporations have used their monopoly control to drive prices up which has been exacerbated by speculation in oil futures markets. Neoliberal "globalization" of agricultural production and trade has destroyed backward rural food systems and depleted food supplies aside from worsening the poverty of agricultural producers. Subsidized food imports flooded domestic markets at the same time as producers have found themselves ever more tied to overpriced inputs from big foreign agri-business. The rising energy prices themselves have driven up food prices even further.

Imperialist aggression

Imperialism has become increasingly aggressive in seeking to relieve its crisis and maintain its superprofits. The intensification of the global crisis in the 1970s and the severe profit squeeze on the advanced capitalist powers drove them to seek deeper inroads into neocolonial markets through their "globalization" offensive. The people of the world have since been challenged to confront the big powers' ever more calculating rapacity and increasing economic aggression to multiply their exploitation.

Monopoly capital forced greater trade and investment liberalization on the neocolonies to exploit their cheap neocolonial labor, to plunder their raw materials, and to capture their markets. Backward agricultural systems were overrun and vast numbers of the peasantry thrown into greater hardship. At the same time there were more vicious attacks on labor even in the advanced capitalist countries. An economic assault pressed down wages, salaries and benefits across the globe while political assaults pummeled unions and other organized workers. Usurious debt burdens were used to directly extract massive economic surpluses from the neocolonies. They were quickly plunged into a debt crisis in the early 1980s which has even been opportunistically used to increase imperialist economic and political control over them.

The 1990s also saw the expansion of global labor markets for capitalism to exploit. In particular the opening up of China, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the greater openness of various Southeast and South Asian economies effectively doubled the number of people for exploitation. Imperialism tapped these hundreds of millions both through setting up investment enclaves overseas as well as by directly bringing in migrant labor or taking advantage of displaced refugees. Social services and public utilities were turned into sinister opportunities for profit.

However the limits of these wide-scale efforts to support capitalists' profits - at the expense of deepening misery

On the Global Economic (continued...)

on a global scale - could not but assert themselves. The economic dispossession of large swaths of humanity further constricted opportunities for investments which in turn further accentuated the glut of finance capital. By the 1990s imperialism increasingly relied on getting its profits from purely financial schemes disconnected from any productive activity. Parasitic capital took advantage of advances in information and communications technology not just to facilitate its global production networks but also to fashion complex financial instruments for creating profits outside of any actual productive activity.

Imperialism sought to surmount its crisis with a bewildering array of financial instruments that created unprecedented debt- and speculation-driven illusions of prosperity and growth. Global financial assets include equities, private and government debt securities and bank deposits. These have bloated sixteen-fold from US\$12 trillion in 1980 to an estimated US\$190 trillion in 2007, over a third of which are in the US. In 2006 the value of global financial assets was equivalent to 350% of global gross domestic product (GDP). Superconductive finance capital destabilizes economies of entire regions at a time and there was a record US\$8.2 trillion in cross-border capital flows just in 2006.

Previously unseen levels of profits were made from sheer speculation. But while seemingly increasing the capital stock these huge amounts of capital existed only digitally and were greatly diverging from real economic values. Yet the eventual economic impact of massive financial losses is very real.

The self-limiting and destructive nature of this conjured economic dynamic was soon exposed. The financial crisis that started in Asia in 1997 and that quickly spread around the world, including to the US in 2000, showed up the vagaries of financial markets. The adverse effects on the real economy of footloose international capital rapidly crossing borders were clearly seen.

All those problems continued to mount in the 2000s and are now coming to a head. Global markets kept on constricting in the face of the imperialist economic offensive. The relentless "globalization" of trade and investment continues to destroy productive forces in neocolonial agriculture and industry: subsistence farming, backward agriculture and incipient manufacturing industry. The working people in the advanced capitalist economies continue to suffer low remuneration for their labors. Debt and speculation are used not just to generate financial profits but also to artificially inflate demand and counter stagnation. But the resulting shallow growth in construction, real estate, commercial trading and finance sectors cannot compensate for long the pressures narrowing global markets. Despite the supposedly

rapid growth in the last few years there are shrinking opportunities for genuinely productive investment.

Global capitalism is fundamentally limited in how it deals with the crisis because this is rooted in the system's basic contradiction between private profit and social production, and in the resulting crisis of overproduction. Among the false solutions it is floating are neo-Keynesian New Deal-type fiscal stimulus, financial lifelines and bail-outs, and "reforming" the global financial architecture towards greater financial governance. These will all ultimately fail not just for being limited efforts but more so because they pretend that the problem is merely about financial excesses and resulting inadvertent instability. Yet the problem goes much deeper.

Imperialism's financial crisis

The situation of the US economy is illustrative and shows problems of the capitalist system in sharp relief. Real average and minimum wages started to steadily increase after the 1940s. These however became basically stagnant upon the onset of intensified crisis in the early 1970s causing the share of wages and salaries in national income to steadily erode. By 2006 this had already reached its smallest share of national income on record. The share of corporate profits on the other hand has correspondingly been rising and by 2006 was at its highest since 1950.

There was a seemingly rapid accumulation of capital since the 1980s and particularly since the 1990s. US financial assets which were equivalent to less than four times GDP in 1980 had by 2007 soared to over nine times GDP. In the late 1990s the share of financial profits in total corporate profits conspicuously increased from less than 20% to over 40 percent. This is even as the financial services sector accounts for only 5% of US private sector jobs.

But since these were largely merely paper capital it is inevitable, albeit unpredictable, for the financial bubbles to burst. This is exactly what is happening where the bubble-driven finance, construction, real estate and retailing boom is now going bust. Combined household, corporate and public debts have risen to an unprecedented and clearly unsustainable US\$51.1 trillion in 2007 which is equivalent to nearly four times US GDP of US\$13.8 trillion. Public debt breaks down into federal (US\$9.2 trillion) and state debt (US\$2.2 trillion) while private debt is composed of financial sector debt (US\$15.8 trillion), business sector debt (US\$10.1 trillion) and household sector debt (US\$13.8 trillion). Financial losses started in sub-prime loans but these will likely cascade into prime loans, commercial real estate loans, consumer credit, corporate credit and perhaps even much-vaunted public credit.

On the Global Economic (continued...)

The depth of the problem has already invited comparisons with the US recession in 1927 that eventually led to the stock market crash in 1929 which marked the start of the Great Depression. On the ground, tens of millions of Americans are facing crushing personal debts and uncertain futures. The number of Americans jobless or otherwise seeking more work has been rising particularly since the start of 2008 and now number some 15 million. Notable meanwhile is the resurgence in military production and rising militarism conspicuously accompanying rising competition between the imperialist powers.

In the 1990s the bulk of adverse effects occurred when financial crisis erupted that dragged down real economies. Today however the financial excesses have even greatly expanded into speculation in commodities which has resulted in ever more direct effects on the people through grossly higher oil and food prices. Among others this has driven oil industry profits to record highs with US\$155 billion in profits in 2007, three-fourths of which are of just the top five oil firms. The speculation in food markets has also greatly aggravated the destruction of neocolonial food systems.

Continuing challenges

The people face great challenges in the struggle against the oppression and exploitation intrinsic to capitalism and that are deepening further. Imperialism's international mechanisms for the domination of world trade, investment and economic life continue to set global rules and distort national economies. They establish exploitative economic relations between advanced capitalist powers

and neocolonies. The international finance institutions of the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other regional banks are thoroughly discredited but remain influential. Even if the talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO) have stalled it remains imperialism's most potentially expansive mechanism for pushing its plundering agenda.

Particularly important in the last few years are the bilateral and regional free trade agreements (FTAs) that the US, European Union (EU) and Japan are using to tighten their domination of individual countries and regions. From just a few dozen FTAs in the early 1990s there are now some 340 in various stages of talks as of mid-2007. And there is also how the US has for instance already seized and opened up economies through sheer military coercion and aggression.

In the neocolonies these burdensome socioeconomic policies are done with the compliance of increasingly subservient governments. They craft the domestic economic regimes most favorable for imperialism and its need for profitable opportunities and outlets for its capital. They maneuver to deliver labor and natural resources to imperialism at the cheapest possible price. And they wield state force to stifle peoples' resistance and to try and make the masses docile and submissive.

In the end the world remains divided into rich and poor, and into exploiter and exploited. On one hand are the strengthening of global monopolies and their increasing economic domination and ruthlessness. Forty-six of the world's 50 biggest transnational corporations are from the US, EU and Japan. Similarly, nine-tenths of global foreign



On the Global Economic (continued...)

direct investment outflows totaling US\$1.2 trillion in 2006 were from the advanced capitalist countries. Investment payments and the servicing of neocolonial external debt - which reached US\$3.4 trillion in 2007 - resulted in a massive net financial transfer from the neocolonies of US\$670 billion just in 2006.

The greatest share of the world's income remains concentrated in the imperialist countries that, as of 2006, have only 16 percent of the world's population but account for three-fourths of global GDP. Starkly, the world's 500 richest individuals had a net worth of US\$2.6 trillion in 2005 which is equivalent to the annual national income of the world's 48 poorest countries or the world's poorest 416 million people.

Meanwhile the majority of humanity is chronically deprived with generation upon generation going through lifetimes of hunger and destitution. The world's working people have less and less options for decent living, they are losing jobs and livelihoods, and their incomes are collapsing on a massive scale. Some 1.5 billion people do not have or are otherwise lacking jobs in 2007 - the 190 million unemployed and 1.3 billion so-called "working poor". Farmers, workers, indigenous communities, especially women and children, are driven into deeper misery. It is urgent for the people to achieve socioeconomic development, social equity and justice.

The people's struggle

Hundreds of millions of the people across the imperialist countries and in the neocolonies have risen up to expose and resist imperialism's economic aggression. The ranks of the oppressed working people that are mobilizing have broadened and prevented imperialism and neocolonial governments from easily pushing through with their plundering agenda. This strengthens the ability of the people to face the great challenges in the struggle against the oppression and exploitation intrinsic to capitalism.

The peoples' struggle for socioeconomic development against imperialism is integral to the overall struggle for national liberation, democracy and social liberation. This includes the commitment of the people of the exploited countries and nations to confront imperialist systems of plunder, exploitation and oppression, and to assert sovereignty and independence. All grossly unequal imperialist trade and investment deals and policies must be outrightly rejected. Alternative international relations of cooperation and solidarity between peoples must instead begin to be built. The efforts to build more progressive and democratic economies will be all the more effective the more peoples there are working together on a regional and global scale.

Neocolonial domestic economies must be rebuilt and drastically transformed so that our countries' natural resources and our peoples' labors serve the needs of the masses most of all. This means a socioeconomic program serving and thus wholeheartedly supported by the people. This shall redistribute wealth to peasants and workers and other basic sectors, beginning with true agrarian reform development that breaks feudal backwardness in the world's vast countryside. There must also be genuine national industrialization. The people's basic and vital needs for education, health and housing must be assured. We will take approaches as appropriate depending on the sizes, resources and economic strengths of our economies.

A humane, equitable and just path that does not exploit other peoples and economies and that is ecologically sound is being charted. The masses will be decisively in control of their lives, as well as at the center of building just and peaceful societies. The need to continue building and strengthening democratic mass movements is as urgent and vital as ever as well as underpins our movements for national liberation. The accelerating economic deterioration points in the direction of an upsurge in social and revolutionary movements worldwide.



MORE NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM MIGRANTE

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Australian call to action on global financial crisis

Source: Search Foundation

The global finance chaos is a disaster, Australia's two main political parties have no long term answer for it, and the Australian people need a good alternative, as it shifts into chaos in the real economy.

It is a disaster, not for wealthy bankers and shareholders, but for ordinary people trying to find affordable housing, well-paid secure jobs, reliable retirement income and good public services.

It is a disaster for the 2.7 billion people in poor countries living on US\$2 per day or less, and all those who made a sincere commitment to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015, to try to meet the just demands of the poorest communities in the world.

It is a disaster for all today's citizens in all countries who are seized of the need for urgent large-scale action to reduce and to stop global warming, far more seized of this than their elected political leaders.

Trillions have been found in the public purse to 'save the banking system', but we will have to struggle against this being used as an excuse for cutting even existing programs for communities and the environment and to cut real wages for workers.

The Rudd Labor government's A\$10.4 billion stimulus package gives welcome relief to pensioners, carers and low income families, but leaves out the unemployed, and continues the crazy boost in borrowing for over-priced homes.

Prime Minister Rudd is so right to blame 'extreme capitalism' for this crisis, but is he and his government ready to change capitalism, or are the emergency measures seen as the way to get back to 'business as usual'?

Not since the Great Depression and World War II has the capitalist system failed its promises of prosperity and freedom so spectacularly. It is the generation that had its childhood in the shadow of the Great Depression who have been hit first, as the value of their market-linked pensions has crashed.

The 'sub-prime' mortgages are not the cause, but only the trigger for this crisis, which in turn is causing a global economic recession. Over-production has driven a global competition for markets for consumer products, and too much debt has been used to maintain levels of

sales. Over-consumption in the rich countries, fueled by massive debt and by gross exploitation in poor countries, and by environmental damage everywhere, can no longer sustain profits, and so the system is collapsing into its biggest crisis ever.

This crisis must be met by broad community-based policies which protect the great majority of people, and take power away from the narrow wealthy elite who have led us to this debacle, and transfer power to democratic communities.

The deep changes required to avoid this kind of crisis again, must be the subject of a vibrant nation-wide and global debate, in which community organisations play a major role - trade unions, environment, social justice, faith-based, and pensioner groups - as well as academics, political parties, and individual citizens.

Create an alternative system

- Create a government-owned savings and trading bank.
- Regulate superannuation funds to ensure that superannuation incomes are not put at risk in the finance markets, including through investment into long term secure public sector infrastructure and renewable energy programs.
- Use the current review of the taxation system to promote a much more progressive tax system to provide the finance for government objectives for full employment with secure quality jobs, free quality public health care, quality public housing and affordable rental and private home ownership, free public education and low cost quality public transport, and urgent investment in river system survival and renewable energy systems.

Immediate reforms

- Democratic government control of interest rates charged by licensed financial institutions for home, business, credit card and personal loans, with advice from the Reserve Bank.
- Reserve Bank to regulate capital flow in and out of Australia, and the A\$ exchange rate.
- Any government aid to failing financial institutions should be on the basis of partial or full public ownership.
- Ratings agencies should be publicly-owned and regulated, so that they no longer rely on their clients for their income.

Australian call to action (continued...)

- Criminal sanctions for company managers and directors who commit fraud and mislead depositors and investors in finance markets.
- Abolish short-selling and strictly regulate loans for stock market investments.
- Strictly regulate all trades on futures markets and currency markets to connect them to transactions in the real economy, and to eliminate speculative trades
- Reduce salary packages of bank and finance agency managers and operators to below those of regulators.
- Greatly strengthen the role of Reserve Bank and APRA supervision of the finance sector.
- Bank credit to be directed to affordable housing, renewable energy, sustainable water systems, and industry development projects, especially on a regional basis.
- Public investment in jobs to counteract the global recession.
- Promote cooperatives and non-profit enterprises in all sectors of the economy.

Mid-term action plan

- Review Australia's role in the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation so that Australia promotes firm regulation of finance and trade, to enable fair trade and investment and environmental sustainability, not exploitation, destruction and speculation. Promote the Tobin Tax on international finance transactions.
- Use the new industrial relations law to fully implement Australia's commitment to fair workplace laws under the International Labour Organisation Conventions, including full collective bargaining rights, the right to strike, equal pay for work of equal value, and the right to solidarity actions, to shift power back from corporations to workers and their trade unions. Well-paid, secure and fair jobs, with employees having a real say in their lives, are vital to recovery from this global crisis, and to any a stable and democratic economy and society.

Background

So far, none of the buying of shares in banks, 'bailouts', 'liquidity injections' and interest rate cuts have 'worked'. The underlying bad debts are still there, credit is scarce, and debt-fueled consumption will be greatly reduced. Well before this process is played out, the US will be in a deep recession, along with Europe and Japan, and China will be slowing down sharply. There will be a global

recession or depression, with very real problems of higher unemployment, and consequent political, social and environmental crises.

The Rudd Labor government, and the Howard Coalition government before it, claimed repeatedly that Australia's banking system is strong, well-capitalised and well-regulated, and more broadly, that Australia's economic fundamentals are very sound. Now they both support the first \$10.4 billion 'stimulus package', and acknowledge that there is a crisis in Australia's economy.

Rudd is now calling for new global regulation of finance. This needs to be pushed further, because of the need for fundamental policy changes to the financial system and general economic policy.

Since the Hawke-Keating financial deregulation from 1983, both Labor and Coalition governments have celebrated Australia's integration into the global economy, celebrated 'globalisation', and 'international competitiveness'. As Henry Kissinger bluntly put it a decade ago, 'globalisation' is just another word for 'Americanisation' - US corporate control. This is the global economy that has given us today's massive crisis.

In fact, Australia's economic 'fundamentals' are much the same as those of the rest of the OECD countries. Australia's economy has been expanding on a massive tide of debt, much of it foreign debt, since the mid-1980s. The only significant difference is that the USA has a much larger sub-prime mortgage problem and a massive government sector debt as well as private sector debt, whereas Australia's governments have no net debt.

As Prof Steve Keen of UWS reports, at the time of the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the US's debt was 150% of Gross Domestic Product, but today it is 290%. In Australia in 1929, debt was 64% of GDP, but today it is 165%.

Australia's finance system is also regulated with a 'light touch' and its component agencies have all indulged in purchasing or selling of the toxic debts made notorious in the US sub-prime market, all are involved with hedge fund speculation, all are involved in loans for speculating on the stock market. The collapse of HIH should have demonstrated how poorly regulated the Australian finance system is, but the Howard government made no regulatory response of any consequence.

Even Australia's big four banks borrowed up to 60% of the funds they lent to property buyers in Australia, and about 40% of this came from overseas. Those loans were for two to five years, but the mortgages are for 20 - 25 years. The

Australian call to action (continued...)

big banks have to repay a large part of those loans now. This is a serious problem for Australia's finance system.

The business model of borrowing short term but lending long term, and simply rolling over the original short-term loan, was always risky, and now it has run off the cliff. It has been commonplace in Australia's finance sector in the last 20 years.

Australia's finance sector is fully integrated into the global finance system, centred on New York and London. Any crisis in these centres will have an impact on Australia's finance sector and on Australia's real economy.

We know that Lehman Brothers sold about a hundred million in bad sub-prime assets to local government units and charities in Australia, for example.

What is a viable policy approach to something so big, which can protect ordinary people as much as possible, and which can take power away from the corporate groups which created this massive crisis?

Let's embrace the pragmatic process now underway to nationalise banks and insurance companies, by throwing away the idea of a free market in finance altogether, because it is just too dangerous. Any public funds used to stabilise a bank or finance agency should be offset with public equity, board positions, and in many cases by full public ownership. Nationalisation, with real democratic roles for employees and consumers, is good!

This new kind of finance sector does not need the layer upon layer of 'risk management' instruments which are in fact huge gambling casinos - 'swaps', hedge funds, highly abstract 'futures' - and these should be abolished as well.

The credit that can be responsibly created by this new-look publicly owned finance sector needs to be directed to affordable housing, energy efficiency and renewable energy, and other real businesses, and away from speculative investment in housing, property generally, and stock market speculation.

Superannuation funds should not be conveyors of workers' money into the stock market and other speculative plays, such as dubious public private partnerships. They need to be radically restructured into much more regulated savings vehicles able to provide highly reliable income streams to retirees.

All of these policies are at odds with the main tenets of global capitalism, summarised by terms like neo-liberalism or the 'Washington Consensus' - tariff cuts, finance sector deregulation, privatisation and repression of workers' rights.

Clearly, an unregulated free market in finance is a massive global danger. But it should also be clear that the expanding and largely unregulated global trade and investment flows, and movements of temporary migrant labour that are maintained within it, are also unstable. They don't work for basic human objectives of peace, social justice and environmental sustainability. The capitalist system as a whole is called into question.

This means a major change in economic philosophy away from individual profit and toward collective responsibility and solidarity. Away from capitalism and towards a democratic socialism.

In turn this requires a major restructuring of the global institutions which today promote the unfettered free market everywhere - the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. Australia has votes in all these important bodies, and can start now to campaign for change, along with many like-minded people around the world.

Such a shift toward greater solidarity, social justice and environmental sustainability is no certainty. It is what is needed, but this global crisis, with the great uncertainty it will continue to generate, will also be used by ruthless corporate and political groups to grab resources and political power to consolidate themselves. They will try to exploit the great majority even more, using the tried-and-tested methods of war, national hatred, racism and generating fear to divide and rule.

So democratic and progressive people all over the world have to rise to this challenge and act now.

No one can afford the luxury of being an armchair critic of the failing system and its political leaders, all now caught completely unprepared for a crisis they fervently believed could never happen. Replacing capitalism with a democratic socialist system remains one of humanity's pressing needs.

Let's meet, discuss, lobby and campaign now to put people and the environment first, and regain control of our lives.

Migrante, migrant groups from different countries to say:

No to GFMD! No to modern-day slavery!

Migrante International, together with various migrant groups under the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) from various countries, condemn the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) - its utter elitism and exclusivism, and its agenda of forcing migrants to bear the burden of keeping sagging economies like that of the Philippines afloat.

Our position is in direct contrast to that of other so-called "parallel gatherings" like the People's Global Action and the Civil Society Dialogue being spearheaded by Ayala Foundation, which claim to complement the GFMD.

Unlike the organizers of these gatherings, we are direct witnesses to the palpable elitism of the GFMD through its exclusion of the millions of overseas Filipinos, as well as migrants of other nationalities, from this event. Even in its so-called "civil society days" that the PGA harps about, migrants and their families, including the thousands represented by Migrante International, have been excluded and were not given ample voice to speak out their concerns.

Recent news reports on the ongoing pre-consultations exposed the true nature of these gatherings. Most attendees were government functionaries, representatives of UN agencies and well-funded NGOs, and even recruitment agencies and corporate entities. A miniscule percent of them, if at all, can even claim to represent us the migrants who toil abroad everyday and whose fates are being shaped without our consent.

We are sure that the GFMD has no intention whatsoever to speak for our interests. It is well-expected that the thrust of this year's GFMD is to pursue the notion of "migration as a tool for development." It is a notion that has been proven to be patently false, even dangerous. Instead of strengthening basic local industries to provide work for its citizens, the GFMD aims to pressure governments to encourage their citizens to work abroad. One only has to look at the Philippine experience to realize that forced migration does not bring development, and comes at a terrible social cost.

With the recent ratification of Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) by the Philippine Senate, we can have a glimpse to what kind of agreements between states are going to be forged at GFMD. One-sided and onerous treaties are favorable to capitalist countries while disadvantageous to countries that are desperately dependent on labor exportation and remittances.

In place of these sham proceedings, Migrante International, together with the International Migrants Alliance (IMA), will be sponsoring the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR), a genuine gathering of migrants and migrants' organizations from various countries of the world. It is in the IAMR where the migrants will gather to discuss our own issues. It is where we will speak of the horrors, the struggles, the tragedies that forced migration has caused us, our families and our societies. It is where we will demonstrate how forced migration cannot lead to genuine development.

It is where real voice of migrants will be heard.

The IAMR will be held on October 28-29 at the Bayview Park Hotel in Manila, coinciding with the GFMD. Prior to this, Migrante International will be spearheading a protest campaign called "Ten Days to Shake GFMD". Every day for ten days prior to the GFMD, various mass organizations in the Philippines and abroad will be launching massive protest actions to condemn the sham gathering.

For reference:

*Connie Bragas-Regalado
Chairperson, Migrante International
Secretary-General, International Migrants
Alliance (IMA)*

Migrants Say No to the GFMD

No to forced migration. No to labor export.

Create jobs at home. End poverty.

Defend and advance our rights.

Nothing less.



IA MR International Assembly
of Migrants and Refugees
Manila, Philippines October 28-29, 2008

The International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) is a collaborative effort of the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) and Migrante International, with the cooperation and support of Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), IBON Foundation, Bayan Philippines, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development - Task Force on Labor and Migration (APWLD-TF L&M) and CARAM Asia.

People of the Diaspora: **Trust and Corruption**

(Part 2)

Anibeth Desierto

It seems an undocumented fact passed around by word of mouth: Filipino-Aussie recruiters who are Australian citizens are mercenary in their grab for the \$457 visa worker dollar.

Take one example, a Filipina massage therapist who goes around unofficially gathering unemployed \$457 visa workers in her house on a regular basis to check out their credentials for prospective employers she passes them on to.

Then she finds them the employer and they pay her enormous fees under the table - the amount of which she's set herself as she has no recruiter's license to be able to charge employers for finding them workers.

The charges can vary from \$8,000 to one \$457 visa surveyor or \$4,000 to another. In the case of another Filipino-Aussie recruiter who happens to be licensed by the way and had already been paid by the employer in the first place- these charges could be up to \$15,000.

Of course the transaction is all done in cash - and the \$457 visa worker gets a bit of mercy - they can pay in regular installments such as weekly cash deposits.

Recruiters in Australia, need to be licensed and are not allowed to charge employees or workers for their services. Sourcing fees are charged to the employers. So one would think the \$457 visa workers who are being fleeced in this manner would consider going to the proper authorities - like the police or the Workplace Ombudsman and file a report to squash the mercenary recruiter.

But they don't. Why don't they?

To answer this, let's look at another example. Seven \$457 visa mechanics at a huge car dealer service in Perth are paying \$110 a week to their Filipino-Aussie recruiter in Perth who is connected to the firm in the Philippines that recruited them in the first place. The mechanics had already paid huge amounts of money in the Philippines for their placement in WA with the car dealer. And, the car dealer had already paid the recruiter in Perth huge fees.

Nevertheless, the Filipino-Aussie Perth recruiter drums up some questionable charges on paper to the guys, accompanies the guys to their banks to open accounts which directly transfers the \$110 per week to the recruiter's account.

Fortunately, a couple of the guys rebel - they go to Immigration, to the Workplace Ombudsman, to DOCEP (Department of Consumer and Employment Protection), they consult and pay for a lawyer and they come to me, ringing at all hours and insisting on a meeting on a day of heavy storm.

They even broker a meeting between their car dealer employer, the mercenary Filipino-Aussie recruiter and

themselves - to no avail: the employer says he's already paid his fees to the recruiter and the recruiter insists (of course with threats to the men) that the workers owe him as much as \$15,000! Because that's how much he claimed cost him to bring them over to Western Australia!

Their case is noted by the Ombudsman, by DOCEP and forwarded to the Business Monitoring section of the Immigration Department. And then, these offices ask for the original paperwork and another meeting.

But then - silence. Complete silence.

Weeks and weeks later, I'm told that the leader of the rebellion had backed down on his fight: the Filipino-Aussie recruiter had stopped harassing and threatening him and a couple of his mates for the \$110 a week.

Instead, the other 15 or so mechanics (not just the original 7), also on \$457 visas, were meekly handing cash to the recruiter weekly - in front of the rebel leader during a confrontation with the recruiter. And the leader said he wasn't going to put his head on the block if the other guys weren't going to back him up. The recruiter was also leaving the rebel leader alone so the leader could hang on to his whole wages without further abuse!

So I've worked out just how complex this web is between the corrupt Filipino-Aussie recruiter and the \$457 visa worker - at least unraveled some threads.

Most often, the worker doesn't know what to do. Heavy corruption is so mired within the psyche of the Filipino in the Philippines as being a normal part of life - i.e. better to pay up than be shot, killed or imprisoned and anyway one doesn't have a private army for protection - and perhaps, there's also that belief that the other guy (e.g. the recruiter) must be allowed to make a buck as he must have a family to support too.

Ironically, these Filipino-Aussie recruiters are so rich already in the first place! They have big houses, university-educated children and big cars.

Then there is also that very evident fear: the \$457 visa worker being fleeced of his money is scared of what could happen to him if he puts up a fight against the abusive recruiter - maybe his family in the Philippines gets harassed, murdered? (that's what one recruiter's threat anyway), or he gets deported (according to the recruiter as well)!

To conclude (incompletely) - in the current reworking of \$457 visa laws by the Senator Chris Evans' Immigration Ministry, the focus is on the monitoring of employer abuse of \$457 visa workers. Overseas workers' recruiters on the ground in Australia really, really do need heavier policing and monitoring.

Migrante supporters rock Tipanan

More than 150 members, supporters and friends of Migrante Melbourne attended the fund raising fun night event dubbed 'Tipanan' with its theme, "I witness the suffering of struggling migrants, so I join them on their fight for justice" held at Laverton Community Centre on the 30th of August.

The fun night was a bi-annual activity of Migrante to raise funds for the continuous support to overseas Filipino workers and for the maintenance of Migrante Shelter in the Philippines.

It also aims to spend time with families and friends together and to share and enjoy the company of other nationality in the region.

In the opening remarks, Migrante Melbourne Chairperson George Kotsakis mentioned the current political and economic situation in the Philippines and the reasons why Filipinos are forced to leave the country and find a better job and opportunity overseas.

In relation to force migration in the Philippines, Kotsakis added that Migrante's vision is that they strive for a society where families are not torn apart by the need to survive.

Kotsakis ended his speech by welcoming and extending his appreciation to the supporters of the event.

Various activities spiced up the night apart from dancing. There were special intermission numbers from youth, trivia and karaoke contest and raffle draw.

In the intermission song number, Kay Kotsakis and Douglas Westmore sang 'It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.' Then, an impressive dance number was rendered by Systematik dance group.

In the karaoke contest, winners were chosen by the audience. Eight contestants competed in the contest.



Chosen second place winner was Nelson Maceda who sang 'Sa Kuko ng Agila.' Awarded first place winner, Estella Galacio sang her winning piece song 'Gaano Kita Kamahal' by Pilita Corales.

In the trivia contest, participants from 17 tables competed and table number 2 won the first place.

Among the donors and sponsors were Guilfoyle Wreckers Pty Ltd, Tactical Design, Fujitsu Ten Pty Ltd, Reyvi Marinas & Associates, Kowloon Noodle Bar, Letty's Variety Store & Asian Groceries and Abante.

The next Tipanan will be held on February next year.

Events Calendar - Mark your Diary

10 October - “Kapihan” - Migrants and Peoples’ challenged to the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

6 pm, Evatt Room, Victorian TradesHall, Cnr Lygon and Victoria Streets, Carlton South
Snack will be provided

23 October - Angelina Ladera Reports - ‘Workers and human rights in the Philippines, history’ and perspective’.

6 pm, Meeting Room 1, Victorian TradesHall.

28, 29 & 30 October - International Assembly of Migrants & Refugees (IAMR)

Manila, Philippines

The assembly will project the concerted voice of migrants led by IMA, Migrante International and other advocacy groups for migrants’ rights, on the real issues, concerns and positions surrounding the agenda of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

Bayview Park Hotel, Roxas Blvd, Manila

Visit: www.internationalmigrants.org/counter

11 November - Arms Expo - Exposition of Military armaments and other deadly weapons

South Australia

There will be various activities leading to and during this expo to expose and oppose the militarisation of Australia and the neighbouring countries.

** This event is cancelled by the organiser due to fear of massive protest**

7 December - International Human Rights Day Commemoration

A public activity to celebrate the declaration of International Human Rights Day and get together before Christmas and summer holidays.

The Church Hall, 10 Hyde Street, Footscray

10 December - International Human Rights Day

18 December - International Migrants Day

28 February - Migrante Melbourne’s Summer “Tipanan”

6.00 p.m., Laverton Civic Hall, Cor Railway Ave & Crown St, Laverton

A celebration and a venue for the whole family to dance, eat, perform, watch and enjoy together.

A fundraising activity for Migrante Shelter Philippines.

A good way to end the summer holidays and start the school days.



To:

Affix Stamp