

batingaw

migrante
melbourne 

ISSUE 16

News, Views and Analysis from Migrante Melbourne

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



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February - March '09



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2009: Grim Prospects for Migrant Workers

Welcome to the year 2009 full of terror and apprehension.

At the start of the year we are confronted with two very disturbing events - one is the worsening global economic crisis while the other is the specter of war as the Israeli military escalated its genocidal attacks on the Palestinian people.

Living in a first world country such as Australia, we are deluded into thinking we are shielded from the harsher effects of these developments. We say this because we still enjoy public services such as health and education albeit reduced and draw welfare benefits from the government in vast contrast to conditions in many third world countries like the Philippines. Also, we do not experience indiscriminate attacks by heavily armed military and paramilitary forces such as those the Palestinian people lived through recently.

Our relatively protected condition though does not mean that we are untouched nor feel for those gravely affected by these crises. We cannot and should not ignore the cries of the oppressed and the underprivileged.

The global financial crisis impacts severely on those who have created the world's wealth, the workers. While banks and multinational corporations are enjoying bail-outs from governments, millions of workers and employees are losing jobs; or if lucky enough to hold on to their jobs are slapped with wage freeze or wage cuts and reduced working hours. Companies cutting costs or on the verge of closing down, target labor primarily in their cost-cutting measures.

In the pecking order of workers, migrant workers are more likely the first to go. The Saudi Arabian government, for example, has instructed local companies to terminate migrant workers first before the local workers. British workers are protesting against the employment of migrant workers in one of the oil companies in England. Taiwan and countries in the Middle East had terminated and sent home many Filipino contract workers since October last year.

In Australia, many migrant workers under the S457 visa are also losing their jobs and losing their temporary worker's visas. Included are several Filipinos who have not even worked more than twenty percent of their contracts. Their remittances to their families have hardly paid the loans they borrowed for placement and agency fees, government exactions and the cost of settling into their overseas work.

With the consequent financial difficulties, many of the worker's family's basic needs are sacrificed and whatever assets they have such as houses or farmlands are often lost due to inability to pay further mortgage or loan collaterals. Food, living costs, education of children and health are also sacrificed. Nary a holiday or visits to friends and relatives are affordable.

Even worst, migrant workers are blamed first for the economic downturn. They become the subject of anger, racial attacks and scorn sometimes by local workers who lost their jobs.

Third world countries like the Philippines are most affected by this crisis. Since September last year, thousands of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) had gone back home without finishing their contracts. It is projected that returnee OFWs will reach a million at the end of the year.

To add difficulties to the already burdened workers, the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs announced an increase in passport and other consular fees. While other governments such as Australia are assisting its residents with cash subsidies, cut in taxes and hold on increases of government fees, the Philippine government is doing exactly the opposite.

In order to be seen as helping the OFW returnees, the Philippine government has announced a one billion peso Expatriate livelihood fund to help returning OFW's. Ironically, this livelihood fund is being taken from the OWWA fund which belongs to the OFW themselves through the \$25.00 fee charged to each of them in the first place. With the corruption engulfing the Arroyo government we just hope that this money goes to the rightful beneficiaries, and not the pockets of corrupt government officials

In the meantime, the Arroyo government continues to actively promote its labor export program (LEP). LEP is a program of exporting human labor which has been formalized by successive administrations. Annual revenues and remittances of about US \$15 billion from the millions of migrant workers overseas prop up the perennially ill economy and fill the empty government coffers.

Long before the global financial crisis, the Philippines had been mired in a perpetual economic crisis. Governments have been relying on LEP and the revenues from millions of overseas Filipino workers tethered to extreme working conditions to keep their administration and the Philippine economy afloat instead of generating jobs locally and pursuing a genuine and nationalistic economic development ###

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migrante melbourne

Our hearts are to those who are suffering in Victoria and Queensland

The Filipino-Australian community through Migrante Melbourne sends its condolences to all Victorians in particular to those who have suffered the loss of loved ones and loss of properties in the recent devastating fires in regional Victoria. We express our heartfelt sympathies to all of you and we pray that you endure and hope that the support of the community will see you through this difficult time.

We also remember those in Queensland who were ravaged by floods and continuous rain and pray that they also succeed through this difficult time.

Migrante Melbourne encourages all Filipinos in Australia to show their support through various means available be it financial, material or time and effort.



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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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Out of Sight, Out of Mined

by Maria Elena Ang

Excerpts of talk to the Padstow Greens group on February 4, 2009 and review of Out of Sight, Out of Mined video documentary produced by Oxfam Australia.

Oxfam Australia's Mining Ombudsman visits the villages affected by the mining disasters in the aftermath of mine tailing spills from the Marcopper and Placer Dome mines in Marinduque.. A decade after the toxic spill, the people of Marinduque are still suffering from the damaging effects of the mine and no relief and rehabilitation is in sight.

Marinduque is a heart-shaped island in the centre of the Philippine archipelago of 7,100 islands. They say Marinduque is a microcosm of Philippine society. This is quite evident in the state of mining in the island and the rest of the country.

Mining for gold has always been part of a colonizer's package of conquest of the country. Over 500 years ago, the Spanish cross and sword massacred and hacked their way into indigenous lands, especially in the Cordillera and Northern Luzon region, to extract gold for the Spanish crown. Subsequent American occupation of the country from 1898 allowed for more mining exploitation and the subsequent eviction of the people from their land.

With advanced technology, the Americans extracted more gold in their fifty years of direct rule than what the Spanish colonizers gathered in their 500 years of imperial rule. When the Americans relinquished direct rule and granted so-called independence in 1945, they left behind a raft of legislation and a trained government bureaucracy that granted monopoly-capital unlimited access in the exploration and access to the country's natural resources.

In March 1995, the Philippines Mining Act of 1995 was passed in a Congress dominated by then President Fidel Ramos' party and cronies. In its preface the act is supposed to institute a new system of mineral resources exploration, development, utilization and conservation - or legal terminology for further opening up the country to rape and plunder of its resources. The formalization of the full-scale liberalization of the Philippine mining industry has been characterised by critics as the most neo-colonial since sham Philippine independence was granted in 1945. There were reports that while the bill was being debated in the chambers of the Philippine Congress, the chambers of commerce of the United States, Australia and Canada were first shown a draft of the bill for their approval.

Immediately after, at least a hundred (100) FTAs or Financial and Technical Assistance Agreements were granted to multinational mining companies allowing them resources exploitation of nearly 100,000 hectares of lands considered to be inalienable.

At least half of these FTAs were given to Australian-based multinational mining conglomerates. Witness Western Mining Corporation taken over by Xstrata in the Maguindanao area in southern Mindanao; Newcrest in Abra, Northern Luzon; Arimco taken over by OceanaGold Corporation in Didipio, Nueva Vizcaya, Northeastern Luzon; La Fayette in the Rapu-

Rapu mines in Albay province, Bicol region; BHP-Billiton's nickel-copper project at Pujada Bay in Mindanao.

Most of these mining concessions are home to indigenous Filipinos or are areas declared ancestral domains and/or protected areas. They are also habitat for endangered species, especially dugongs, in the Pujada Bay area. Most of them are also in vast tracts of lands and mountains which are sources of freshwater and where virgin forests are located. People have lived and thrived in these areas for thousands of years. They have maintained sustainable living and agriculture on these lands, taking only from the land what they need and always acknowledging that they are mere stewards of nature and will eventually return what they take from it.

A mining operation, at its most productive, only lasts 50 years.

Most of these globalized mining operations are open cut and have no program of rehabilitation. With advanced technology, they hardly employ many contrary to their boast that it will create jobs to soften the impact of environmental damage.

Mining, with its cohort of environmental damage and abusive practices, always leads to the intensification of militarization. We have not heard of any big mining operation where there was no people's opposition nor any genuine consultation as required by the Act.

Instead people are subjected to divide and rule tactics: some are bribed or their acquiescence bought or intimidated or even killed as in the case of Fernando (Dodong) Sarmiento, secretary-general of the anti-mining alliance Panalipadan in New Bataan, Compostela Valley, Mindanao on December 23, 2008.

In activating the various Mineral Action Plans, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has created the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Investment Defense Force in February 2008. The IDF she said will act as a "protective shield" for transmission lines and mines infrastructure.

Going back to Placer Dome in Marinduque. Instantly, blaming the environmental damage as "an act of God", Placer Dome clandestinely left the island in 2001, escaping liability and further blame.

It is ironic that the Marinduque Tourism office promotes eco-tourism in the abandoned mine as good for four-wheel driving and the nearby Makulapnit River Dam - a human-

House of Representatives file resolution to conduct inquiry on Philippine Ambassador to Australia, Ernesto de Leon's full-time student status

Full-time student, full-time public servant?

Bayan Muna Representatives, Satur Ocampo and Teddy Casiño filed a resolution directing the Committee on Foreign Affairs to investigate the full-time status of Amb. De Leon as a student which apparently contributes to his negligence of duty as RP's current envoy to Australia.

Since February 2008, De Leon has been taking up his Masters in International Affairs at the Australia National University (ANU). In a report conveyed in the resolution, he asserted that he can "juggle full-time work and full-time studies". However, the resolution also stated that, "some members of the Filipino community in Australia lament the Ambassador is not as accessible as they'd like them to be since he's only available between 10am and 2pm on Wednesdays and Fridays".

As an international student, the resolution pointed out that De Leon's tuition for the one-year program in International Affairs amounted to 24,000 AUD, which is equivalent to 803,589 PHP. The lawmakers go on to emphasise that this amount is "presumably being shouldered by the Philippine government".

Ocampo and Casiño noted in their resolution that De Leon is among the list of political appointees to the Foreign Service by Pres. Arroyo. They continue to recall that at the height of the "Hello Garci" scandal, then Navy Flag Officer in Command De Leon's name came up. He was named by Brig. Gen. Gudani as one of the senior officers who advised him to leave his post during the canvassing of votes in Lanao del Sur.

Gudani was then commander of the 1st Marine Brigade and head of Task Force Lanao. He testified at the Senate about the alleged election fraud in the 2004 presidential elections.

The resolution further enumerates the benefits enjoyed by the ambassador: living in a two-storey mansion, a Mercedes service, and overseas, post, family, representation and clothing allowances, among others.

"In return, Ambassador de Leon is expected to be a full-time public servant to overseas Filipinos and the Filipino-Australian community and in advancing the interests of the Philippines within the coverage of the post," the congressmen asserted.



From Armed Forces to ANU : Philippine Ambassador to Australia Ernesto De Leon - A full time student

Out of Sight, Out of Mined (continued...)

made lake ideal for freshwater fishing and oblivious to the environmental disaster which has occurred in recent memory.

But Placer Dome is coming back in a new guise. Barrick, the world's largest gold producer, took over Placer Dome on January 19, 2006. Interestingly, seven mining companies in Mindanao formed Asiaticus Management Corporation (AMCOR) as an umbrella organisation. It is financed by BHP-Billiton.

Barrick is evidence of the globalization of the mining industry. It does not come with an untarnished image. It currently is confronted with stiff opposition in Chile and Argentina over its Pascua Lama mining project. Violent clashes has erupted there between police and environmentalists who claim the mines would destroy three glaciers in the Andes Mountains.

Although Barrick has a worldwide operation that includes mines in North and South America, Russia, Central Asia, Africa and Australia it has until recently not forayed into the Philippines. But it has shown its desire in the area when it attended the Philippine Mining conference in Manila in February 2005 and the Asia Mining Conference in March 2005.

Mining multinationals, with the active help of local governments, have long been doing their homework in the agenda of exploitation of Third World countries and plunder and destruction of poor people's resources. Yesterday and now is the time when we should oppose this and call on other peoples to support us. We all owe this to the world and to future generations of humankind not to accumulate more, using Macquarie dictionary's word of the year, toxic debt.

RETHINKING THE GAZA AND THE MINDANAO CRISIS: ADDRESSING THE REAL ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

By Reyvi Mariñas

It is narrow and naïve to think that the on-going conflict in the Gaza strip and, to some extent in Mindanao, is caused by religious intolerance. Bencard, a Contributor to FilipinoVoices.com, rightly claimed that the conflicts in Mindanao and the Middle East “have religion as a common denominator”.



Christian fundamentalists and alike have continued to propagate, in the name of religion, that ‘we’ have a permanent war against these so-called ‘terrorists’. Likewise, Muslim hardliners have sustained their militant call to eliminate the ‘infidels’ and the West who brought about great pain and struggle for Muslims around the world.

The result: it is claimed that religious bigotry and intolerance have contributed significantly to the spiral and endless violent reaction of both camps. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how Bencard has identified the Bangsamoro’s (Muslim Filipinos) claim to ancestral land; yet he never really expounded this issue nor claimed that this was, in fact, the root-cause of the Mindanao conflict. Instead, he argued that “more death, suffering and destruction” were done “all in the name of religion”.

These ‘elites’, from the very beginning, have manipulated and even instigated the conflict for their own benefit and self-interest.

I disagree. This view is flawed as it does not consider the broader socio-political and economic aspects of the issue. The issue is also about domination and control and the right to self-determination of the oppressed people within the territory.

It is easy to jump into conclusion that such conflicts within a particular nation-state territory, particularly where there is a significant Muslim presence, are actually rooted in religion.

Since the 9-11 attack, Muslim minorities in various countries around the world were demonized and were seen as the ‘other’ - that they are different from us.

Let me further elaborate the issue of self-determination in relation to the Mindanao question. Indeed, the struggle for the right to self-determination is at the heart of the Mindanao conflict.

Like the recent Gaza military attack, an all-out war policy of the current Macapagal-Arroyo government is a sloppy measure to solve the Mindanao problem.

Human rights recognition, in particular the right to self-determination, provides a good direction and the present contact of Bangsamoro people’s struggle. And initial common grounds on human rights recognition can be set forth that may encompass many aspects of Moro people’s lives.



MORE NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM MIGRANTE

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Rethinking the Gaza... (continued...)



Among the grounds' main components are the struggles for the right to the ancestral domain (land) of the Bangsamoro people, the right to political self-determination, the right to development and the right to cultural heritage.

Other components would also include the basic recognition of civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to live in peace, to be treated with human dignity, and to be free from hunger and fear.

The ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict, indeed, reflects the Palestinian struggle for the right to self-determination, that follows with the West's - initially the British and later on the American - control and expansion of territory and later-on the huge displacement of Palestinian refugees as a result of land acquisition by Jewish settlers after World War I and World War II.

Yet, to look at the Gaza and Mindanao conflicts within the confine of human rights fall short of the broader understanding of the issue. Of course, human rights issue is one of the key components in achieving sustainable peace, development and democracy in a country. But to stress solely on human rights factor does not really address the root cause of the problem. There is a bigger aspect at play, which I need to emphasise in my conclusion.

Carol Pagaduan-Araullo, in her recent article 'War of Terror in Gaza', captures the essence of the problem:

"The Israel-Palestine conflict is certainly not about Israel and Palestine alone. It is about oil. It is about who controls the Middle East. And it is about the US drive for world domination currently in the guise of a US-instigated 'global war on terror'"

Similar to Gaza, the Mindanao problem is also rooted in the question of who actually controls the land and natural resources. One could wonder why the Manila national government is not about to give-up Mindanao: acquisition of Moro land by big multinational corporations including Dole and Del Monte, and access to the still untapped natural resources that includes gold, copper and natural gas, were all perpetrated in the name of so-called 'national interest'.

In short, it would be a long way until these conflicts are addressed unless one is able to understand and recognise the real origins of the conflict - that these are rooted in geo-political and socio-economic factors rather than a mere narrow claim of religious affiliation and intolerance.

References: Carol Pagaduan-Araullo, 'War of Terror in Gaza', posted by Bulatlat.com on 10 January 2009.

STOP THE GENOCIDE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE! GENUINE PEACE AND JUSTICE IN GAZA!

By George Kotsakis

MIGRANTE AUSTRALIA, an alliance of organizations of Filipino workers and migrants in Australia, strongly condemns the genocidal attacks of Israel's government and military on the children, women and the Palestinian nation. The bombing assaults from air, sea and land and from all directions leave Palestinian families no safe place to live. The attacks do not even give the Palestinians and the international aid and rescue agencies time and space to tend to the dead, the hurt and the hungry and the frightened children left by their dead families and relatives.

thousands of internal refugees displaced not only by the massive mining exploration by foreign capitalists (some of which are Australian companies) but also by militarization of vast areas. The link between foreign capital intrusion and militarization is clear when Philippine President Macapagal-Arroyo announced in February 2008 the creation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Investment Defense Force (IDF) as a "protective shield" for transmission lines and mines infrastructure.

It is horrible to witness or hear of the indiscriminate Israeli military attacks on Palestinians in a manner not even accorded wild animals. In this day and age when International Human Rights and Peoples' Rights conventions have gained universal acceptance, attacks like these, using high powered military weaponry on civilian areas are grossly inhuman, highly racist and quite barbaric.

We call on the Israeli people, the peoples of the world, and international bodies to press Israel to end the occupation of and attacks on Palestine.

We call for a just resolution to the root causes of the war in the Middle East and between Palestine and Israel as we believe that unless the causes of this major strife are addressed, the problem in Gaza will never be solved and lives will continue to be lost. The world is worse off every day that passes without the will to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their fight for genuine peace and justice. ###



Our hearts bleed for the women, children and hurt Palestinians who are also among the poorest people in the Middle East; whose land and livelihood are being robbed by the Israeli state; and who have never seen peace in their lifetimes. Our hearts bleed for the Palestinians who are left with no alternative but to fight for their families, their lives and their country, for they have been continually pushed to the edge - their lands are grabbed, their resources stolen, their dignity and identity are crushed, and their families and friends killed.

To many Filipinos, this type of atrocities and aggression is not new. Our brothers and sisters in Mindanao, southern part of the Philippines, experience similar horror. The Philippine Military regularly conducts bombing and gunfire attacks on Muslim and indigenous villages and residences. The Philippines has hundreds of



More than one hundred members with S457 visa (temporary working visa) of the local Western Australia (WA) Cordillera Association lost their jobs over Christmas.

Many of them were sent home under pretext of enforced holidays, then while in the Philippines they were then informed by their employers that they were terminated.

Stories of their grief and fear for their family on the media, on talkback radio, among Alan Jones' prime time diatribes?

Of course not : Filipinos are not prone to whingeing, they are prone to enduring - for families, children, parents - as a rarely recognized race of quiet glory and courage.

The Spanish colonizers calling them as 'indios', probably from the word 'indolent' and recording them as 'lazy'. The American colonizers jocularly referring to them as their brown (inferior) brothers.

Yet nothing of the S457 Filipino workers reflect these historically-formed and Eurocentric, US-centric stereotypes.

Many employers in WA refer to these workers' precision and dedication to their work of a quality that any employer would like to keep. They refer to their hardiness, flexibility and willingness to adjust to employers' needs. In short, they are some of the best, if not the best skilled workers in the world. And they do their work under conditions which local workers arguably rarely have to go through: very close to their families and children, these workers endure years of being apart from their loved ones.


In fact, the CEO of Austal Ships in WA -which had until last year employed at least 300 S457 visa workers from the Philippines - came out in the media amidst the furore of 'so who's going to be kept on in Australian businesses with these 3 trillion US dollar-loss in the world economy and how dare these migrant workers are here' to say that he wasn't shedding workers according to their origins - but it would be according to their level of skills concurrent with company needs.

Similarly, several other owners of large businesses told Federal Immigration Minister Chris Evans that they needed S457 visa workers' skills to keep up their production levels especially during these difficult economic times.

Yet these workers' government in the Philippines rarely demonstrate any action of care for these workers once they are overseas: many are left to hung in countries in the Middle East, in Singapore and Asia over crimes they have not committed; many are fleeced of their monies by so-called government agencies like the OWWA with extra impositions of some form of tax.

Grace & Values at a Time of Crisis

by Anibeth Desierto



When you talk to these workers' families, many may be struggling economically but they are together - and resilient.

Many Filipino families manage to stay together when parents are so far apart for many years and when existence is at times hand-to-mouth. They still manage to smile and joke knowing that tomorrow there might not be enough to pay for school fees or the next weeks' family meals.

My old classmate now in Washington sends me an e-mail to say that there are five workers left in his once thriving company and I can tell he silently prays to God all will be well. An S457 visa engineer in Perth whose colleagues have been sent home by their companies sends me an sms in the vein that hopefully times will be better with God's help.

I have the strongest urge to send them both - in my anger at men of greed and plunder since the beginning of time and when the 'great' Dutch trading companies introduced to the world the 'share market' (sturdy plank of capitalism) - the Asia Times analysis, the Ibon Foundation analysis and a host of other incisive, honest analysis which show that this crisis is MAN-MADE.

Analysis which show that in as much as there are millions of migrant workers and their families stoically enduring yet another blow to their survival and workers worldwide suffering job losses and uncertainties of how to live and where to get the money for them and their families to survive - those who control the share markets, those who control the capital, the big money-makers will continue to live on happily in their towers rolling in gold and greenbacks.

And I wish ever so fervently that there was another Renato Constantino who would write and publish worldwide not just a revision of the history of the Philippines but of the true history of this world under capitalism.

I wish he would write a true history of the workers of the Philippines, their courage and their endurance. We should then all be compelled to learn these histories, God-willing. ###

Ang Migrante International at mga kasaping organisasyon

(ang report na ito ay hango sa mga dokumento na galing sa
5th Migrante International Congress na ginanap
sa Maynila noong 4-5 Nobyembre 2008
at Annual General Meeting ng Migrante Melbourne)

Sa loob ng tatlong taon ay maraming nakamit na tagumpay ang Migrante International hindi lamang dahil sa galing ng pamunuan kundi na rin sa walang humpay na suporta ng mga iba't-ibang sangay, kasaping organisasyon at ng mismong pagkilos ng mga indibidwal na miyembrong bumubuo nito. Sa mga taong 2006-2008 ay maigting ang pagpapalaganap ng mga kampanyang tumutulong hindi lamang sa mga migrante sa labas ng bansa kundi pati na rin sa kanilang mga pamilya sa Pilipinas at sa mga masang Pilipino sa kabuuan.

Ilan sa mga kampanyang ipinatupad noong 2006 ay ang repatriation ng mahigit na anim na libong OFWs sa Lebanon at ang pag-expose sa mga anomalya ng P10 bilyong OWWA funds na inilipat sa dalawang bangko ng gobyerno ang Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) at Land Bank of the Philippines na hanggang sa ngayon ay nanatili pa ring bukas na kaso.

Isa sa pinakamalaking kampanya ng 2007 ay ang kampanya para kay Marilou Ranario, isang Pilipina domestic helper sa Kuwait nahatulan sa death row sa salang pagpaslang sa kanyang amo. Dahil sa laki ng innabot ng kampanya para sa kanya ay napilitan ang gobyerno na makipag-usap sa gobyerno ng Kuwait upang matanggal si Marilou sa death row. Ang ilan pa sa mga ibang kampanya noong 2007 ay ang para sa Sentosa 27++ nurses at tulong para sa iba pang

mga death row victims sa iba't-ibang panig ng mundo. Lahat ng ito at iba't-iba pang multi-sektoral na kampanya ay naglayong isiwalat ang pang-aabuso at pagsasamantala sa mga migrante.

Noong 2008 naman ay umaalingawngaw ang isyu ng mga stranded OFWs sa Middle East. Sa pamamagitan ng mahabang dayalogo at walang pagtigil na pagkilos ay napwersa ang gobyerno na gumawa ng paraan upang maiwi ang mga natirang stranded OFWs. Ang kampanyang ito ay nagbunga ng pakikipag-ugnayan sa opisina ni Sen. Manny Villar na nagbigay ng isang proyekto para sa mga OFWs.

Kasama sa iba pang matangummpay na kampanya ay ang tawag sa pagsuspindi ng MCO4 o "Supermaid" guidelines at ang sama-samang pagpapatupad ng Zero Remittance Day campaign. Maigting rin ang mga kampanya laban sa illegal recruitment at iba't-ibang kaso ng pang-aabuso at ang pagpapatalsik sa Sabah ng mga undocumented workers. Ang mga kampanyang ito ay nakalikom ng malalaking suporta dahil sa madalas na paglabas ng Migrante sa media kagaya ng radyo at telebisyon at sa pagbitbit din sa mga kampanya ng mga kasaping organisasyon sa iba't ibang bansa na gaya ng Migrante Melbourne.

Sa kabila ng mga kampanya at iba't-iba pang mga gawain ay patuloy pa rin ang pagbibigay ng serbisyo ng Migrante Int'l

Get Involved!

Name: _____

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I would like to:

- become a member of Migrante Melbourne
- be updated with information from Migrante Melbourne
- donate to Migrante Melbourne



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.

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sa mga migrante at sa kanilang mga pamilya. Kabilang sa mga serbisyong ito ay ang pagbibigay ng temporary shelter at counselling sa mga nangangailan. May mga panahon na humina ang shelter dahil sa kakulangan sa pinansya ngunit dahil na rin sa pagpupursigi at layuning makatulong ay nakaisip ng iba't-ibang paraan ang Migrante Int'l upang makapagbigay pa rin ng serbisyo. Ilan dito ay ang paglulunsad ng 'referral system' at pagtatayo ng mga community-based shelter at paglapit sa mga pribadong organisasyon. Sa ngayon ay pinaghuusay ang pagsasadokumento ng mga kaso at pinapalawig ang koordinasyon sa mga lugar katulad ng Middle East at Hong Kong.

Ang bagong pamunuan ng Migrante ay naglalayong mas lalong patatagin pa ang nasimulan ng nakaraang pamunuan. Ang mga bagong halal na opisyal:

Migrante Int'l: Chairperson: Garry Martinez; **Vice Chairperson:** Roy Anunciacion **Secretary General:** Gina Esguerra; **Deputy Secretary General:** Gina Gaborni
Finance Officer: Rina Anastacio

Dito naman sa Victoria heto ang mga opisyaless ng **Migrante Melbourne Chairperson:** George Kotsakis; **Deputy Chairperson:** Reyvi Mariñas; **Secretary:** Stephanie Rabusa; **Finance Officer:** Sheila Galacio

Ipapa-abot namin sa mga susunod na isyu ang mga opisyaless ng mga organisasyon ng Migrante sa Sydney, Perth at iba pang lugar dito sa Australia.

Kinikilala ng Migrante ang kalubhaan ng magiging epekto ng kasalukuyang krisis pampinasya. Malaki ang magiging epekto nito sa 'remittances' na katig sa ekonomiya ng Pilipinas. Ito pa naman ang nakikitang pampuno ng gobyerno para sa pagababayad ng utang sa malalaking bangko sa labas ng bansa.

Dahil dito isinusulong ng Migrante ang pagbabago ng lipunang Pilipino tungo sa pagtatayo ng 'pambansang industriyalisasyon' at reporma sa lupa na magsusustina sa kinabukasan ng lahat ng masang Pilipino upang hindi na kailanganin pa ng milyung-milyong manggagawa na mawalay sa kanilang mga pamilya at mahal sa buhay.

Sa susunod na tatlong taon, ang Migrante Int'l ay tututok sa pagpapalawak ng kanyang kasapian at 'pagpapalakas ng alyansa at kooperasyon sa mga tradisyunal na organisasyong migrante'. Layunin ng Migrante Int'l na ipagpatuloy ang mga kampanya para sa pagtulong, pagtatangol at pagsulong sa karapatan ng mga migranteng Pilipino. Layunin din nito na palawakin ang pag-aaral at pagsisiyasat sa mga lugar na may kinaroroonan ng mga Migrante. Isusulong din ang paglaban at pagpapanagot sa mga imperyalista at sa kanilang mga kaalyansa na nagpapahirap sa mga migranteng Pilipino. Patuloy pa ring hahamunin ng Migrante ang mga patakarang ipinatutupad ng gobyerno ng Pilipinas na nagpapahirap at umaalipin sa mga migranteng Pilipino. Ang mga obhetibong ito at iba pang mga aksyon ay ipatutupad ng Migrante Int'l at mga kasaping organisasyon para sa kapakanan ng migranteng Pilipino at ng kanilang pamilya. **SULONG MIGRANTENG PILIPINO!!!**

Altona's Bayside Festival

Arts and craft show, art works, models, cooking, sewing, all ages. Art Show, fill your canvas with flair. And of course your favorite - the ever popular Pet Show. Carnival rides, food stalls, multicultural food and displays, live entertainment, dance schools, "Main Act" Saturday night, watch this space, and Fire works to be let off on Saturday night at approx 9.15pm.

Theme:

"Fantasy and Magic"

Come and join us in this mystery and magic realm of Fantasy. Wizards, warlocks, and even goblins roam all around us from day to day, fairies too. A treat for the whole family. Grand Street Parade on Sunday 15th starts at 11am from the beach end of Pier Street. Decorate your bikes, trikes, scooters, and pedal cars.

457s the modern-day slaves

by Annamarie Reyes

The concept of indentured work found its early roots in the early practice of slavery. A condition enforced through various means by the more powerful economies against the less developed ones. In its simplest form it is the export of human labour into the more advanced civilization, where the main purpose is to maximize profit with the minimum cost to the importer.

In the context of the story of the S457 workers it has manifested itself through the use of cheap labour sourced from poor economies to feed the needs of modern world economies. The Philippines like other less developed countries are a common source of cheap labour.

Deliberate policy agenda

The S457 policy was introduced in Australia as early as the 1990's. The public face of the policy is to fill the gap in skilled labour, it couldn't fill within its own population. But the then Liberal Party Senator Amanda Vanstone has admitted in public, 457 visas are to suppress wage claims.

'Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone has come under fire for admitting that importing foreign workers helped suppress wage claims. Senator Vanstone defended the controversial foreign guest worker scheme, saying it stopped unions from pushing excessive wage demands.

'(Some parties) are opposed to the recruitment drive because it opens up the industry to other pools of employees, which undermines the unions' ability to exploit high wages amid the skills shortage,' she told the West Australian.' (Shaw, M., 'Guest workers cut wages: Vanstone', The Age [Melbourne], 8/06/2006)

Publications such as the influential Australian Business Intelligence, academics networks such as the Asia Pacific Research Network, and a report titled, The Flexibility of Labour in Australia and the temporary guest contract workers under the Australian Visa Sub-class 457 by Peter Geoffrey Brock (Chairperson, Action for Peace and Development in the Philippines-Solidarity Group) and Jane Corpuz-Brock (Co-Vice-Chairperson, Philippine-Australia Union Link [PAUL]) all cited Senator Vanstone's controversial statements. Similar statements came up during the Parliamentary session debates taking place in Australia's Lower House during that time.

Most of Australia's local workers refuse to take on the type of work within the 457 scheme as oftentimes, the work is dangerous, found in remote isolated areas which inevitably lead to family breakdown due to the enforced separation and disruption it creates in what is perceived to be normal community lifestyles.

The industries which have capitalized the benefits of the policy are largely within the construction, mining and manufacturing industries, which are the main source of employment for the bulk of the Australian workforce. But has found its way within the hospitality and the medical and health sector in Australia, as a result of an ageing population.

From the policy's inception in 1996, 457 visa approvals has increased from 24,000 to 70,000 in 10 years, with a lesser emphasis on family migration and more towards skilled migration.

Impact on the Australian economy

The local economy continued its business of development enjoying relatively little resistance with the Australian population barely noticing the impact of the policy. But most of those who were directly impacted and became vocal against the policy included immigrant communities and the union sector that were directly impacted by the policy.

It was only during the recent crash in the United States financial markets which triggered a global economic meltdown, that the s457 workforce became more visible in the internal workforce.

In a recent article with Australia's Sydney Morning Herald, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union has been quoted as saying that the 457 visa in Australia has created a black market industry. The Union has been exposed to a practice wherein a few 457 visa workers were allegedly involved in receiving favours from employers in exchange for maintaining silence about violations of certain industrial codes within Australia.

This author who has also come across the practice has begun to question whether a different set of rules are put in place when the s457 policy is applied offshore. An example has been where promised long tenures of work contracts are bypassed by the termination of contracts in a much shorter period of time, when in Australia. A similar practice also involved the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements to the s457s which is used to surpass the better conditions of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreements which are based on minimum Australian Award conditions.

Various clauses taken for granted in Award conditions are often violated such as the period of termination notices, clauses which prohibit any form of contract disclosures and non-unionization. In some of these contracts there is an inherent expectation that union membership will only be allowed if the unions are fairly conservative and doesn't challenge exploitative employer practices.

The s457 workers dilemma

For all its worth, many of those who suffer most from the policy are the temporary visa workers themselves. Many of them spend most of their lifetime savings and are forced to leave their families and secure homes to join the exodus of overseas workers desperate to overcome the current economic crisis. The crisis for them has started longer than this period as a result of globalization.

Increased prices of basic commodities such as food, oil and shelter brought on by globalization has left them with no

457s the modern-day slaves (continued...)

choice but to leave their home countries to seek any work where it's offered. Most of these types of work are inadvertently jobs that many in the Western population are refusing to take on due to its nature. The union movement in Australia has invariably asserted that there's no skills shortage, nor lack of employment in their local economies, and has called for more training and increased budgets in job creation from their own governments.

S457 middle class

There is also an increasing trend among Filipino s457s themselves where most who become fodder to this policy are from the middle classes. Most of them go through a stringent clearing process and pay exorbitant fees in the Philippines to get through immigration. On the other hand this author has also observed a practice where increasingly recruitment agencies themselves have become an extension of big multinationals to forcibly implement the employer agenda in the local Philippines economy.

If this agenda is not implemented most of the 457s are painfully aware of the negative impact this may bring to the future of their families who may also experience threats by recruitment agencies if they don't acquiesce to the multinational agenda.

On the other end of the scale is a Philippines government who continue to remain silent despite an increasing number of its s457s being caught up in life and death situations while contracted within the policy in Australia.

A recent gathering in Australia's Central West in Mudgee, has unveiled a plaque, led by the CFMEU, in tribute for those who've died in the course of their work. The local newspaper reported the plaque unveiled was in memory of s457 workers, Antonio Pili and Rey Jardinel who died in a work vehicle while at work in Queensland. The family of the deceased are still awaiting full compensation following the death of the 2 workers. The 2 joins 3 other 457s that died in the course of their contract.

The CFMEU has called for the removal of the 457 policies but Filipino organisation LINGAP MIGRANTE who attended the event, has asserted this will not provide the solution as it victimizes the s457 workers themselves. They've suggested that the blame for unemployment cannot be put over the visa

workers as most of these workers are doing jobs that many Australian workers are averse to taking on due to its exploitative and dangerous nature, hence the market for these types of jobs.

There is now a call from the union movement for one single code to be introduced that doesn't pit local workers against foreign guest workers, but rather provide jobs for all on equal industrial footing.

LINGAP MIGRANTE, based in Sydney's West has also suggested that a monitoring of unscrupulous employer practices may be a much fairer approach. A further recommendation suggests that both the Australian and the Philippines government should take more responsibility in introducing labour codes which maintain just conditions for all workers in the world.

Expenses	Paid to	Amount Philippine Currency	Australian dollars Php38=AUD
Initial payment to the recruitment agency in the Philippines (includes processing fees, one-way airfare and POEA fees)	Recruitment Agency (Philippine-based)	250,000	6,580
Additional payment required by the recruitment agency due to adjustment in foreign exchange	Recruitment Agency (Philippine-based)	15,000	400
Assistance Fee	Recruitment Agent -Recruitment Agency (Philippine-based)	8,000	210
Registration Fee	POEA	1,2000	35
Airfare (some of them have to pay for their own airfare)	Recruitment Agency (Philippine-based)	36,500	960
5 blank cheques worth PHP20,000 each cheque (for emergency needs in Australia)	Agent will ask for a payment for things like rent and / accommodation	100,000	2,630
Fees	Department of Foreign Affairs	600	15
Records Retrieval	National Census and Statistics Office	250	10
Health Check-up	Australian Embassy Doctor	7,000	185
Registration Fee	Malacanang (Office of the Philippine President)	300	10
Certification	Local City Hall	500	15
Required pocket money (cash & shown to the agent at the airport)		[US\$1,000]	1,500
Additional payment because the POEA was able to negotiate a higher salary	POEA	60,000	1600

The Table above provides an example of exorbitant and unrealistic fees charged towards 457 applicants. This chart refers to the case of 457 nurses who were assisted by the organization, Philippines Australia Women's Association from Sydney NSW. The chart is lifted from page 7-8 of the submission The Flexibility of Labour in Australia and the temporary guest contract workers under the Australian Visa Sub-class 457 by Peter Geoffrey Brock (Chairperson, Action for Peace and Development in the Philippines-Solidarity Group) and Jane Corpuz-Brock (Co-Vice-Chairperson, Philippine-Australia Union Link [PAUL]).



The unveiling of the plaque was a joint initiative by the CFMEU and LINGAP MIGRANTE

by Norma P. Dollaga

Exerpts from ‘The Tale of a Widow’

What I will be sharing with you is more of a reflection than a theological discourse. I am not a theologian, for somehow my religious training has alienated me from the world of theology. My theological “trauma” is still troubling me. The orientation given to us is that to be theological is to be academic, logical, and intellectual--a domain traditionally presumed to be reserved for men. While there is nothing wrong with being academic, logical, and intellectual, there is something wrong with using misogynistic attitudes to invalidate the credibility of someone else’s theology. I must honestly say I still have to recover from the “trauma” of being on the receiving end of these attitudes.

I have chosen a passage from the Bible as I reflect on the stories of two simple and ordinary women of today whose lives have made a tremendous impact on others. My immersion with hundreds of women in the churches and communities of the Philippines gives me the courage to reflect and write as I painfully but joyfully try to understand the Bible from the perspective of women and from a liberating point of view.

Scripture: Luke 18:2-5

He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’”

With this passage in mind, come walk with me through the stories of these two ordinary and simple women.

Nanay Mameng

Nanay Mameng is the current national chairperson of the Kalipunan Ng Damayang Mahi- hirap (KADAMAY), an alliance of urban poor peoples’ organizations.

Nanay Mameng does not know me personally, but I have witnessed how her life has made a powerful impact on others. She is a living example, a symbol of undying love and passion for justice and peace. Nanay Mameng is a poor laundrywoman who is not afraid to speak her mind to expose social injustices, oppression, and exploitation that deliver deadly blows to the lives, limbs, and dignity of the impoverished majority of our people.

In a letter to Nanay Mameng, I wrote: “We do not know each other personally. But I am one of those who admire you. You do not have the glamour of an urbanized woman who ‘shops ‘til she drops.’ You are a woman who has been bent over for many years and yet has found transformation through an organized will of the people to liberate themselves. Coming from an urban poor community and having suffered violence and extreme poverty, you have gained much character, an eagle-like strength, wisdom, unselfish love, and commitment to build, for coming generations, a future with peace and justice.

“Rather than passively watching events unfold in demolition and militarization of communities, you have stood firm and emerged as an empowered woman blaming neither God nor fate for the suffering you and the rest of our people are now experiencing. You have aptly and sharply analyzed that our situation represents the injustices inflicted by an oppressive system. You have articulated well that there will be poverty as long as powerful blocks of a very few people and a small number of nations hold monopolies and control the vast resources of the earth--a human practice that undermines the agenda of equality, justice, and abundance for all.

“This is what academicians, politicians, and religious leaders fail to explain. Yes, you have emerged as a transformed woman, able to synthesize personal experiences of daily tears, pain, and persecution into a joyful journey of struggle and of joining other people who suffer. You have shown the world that your organized anger, compassion, and devotion to liberation can lead people to the dawn of freedom. The fire and passion that mark your speeches have brought you popularity.

“You have remained steadfast. Your integrity has earned you the respect and admiration of people from all walks of life. (Because people thought that you earned silver and gold from that popularity, a snatcher has slashed your bag, only to get an old worn-out pair of eyeglasses for his efforts.)

“You are a symbol of power living a dangerous life--the life lived by those who shaped the past and continual herstory/history.

“You are one of those who has meaningfully challenged and contributed to the process of transforming our society. You share your life story with other women, named and unnamed, who risk their lives and dare to fight for life.

*To you and to them my highest salute . . .
...always in danger but never losing faith
...always threatened but never worn down
...always despised but holding on to integrity and dignity.*

“And while reflecting on your life and on the lives of women who have dared to overcome the stereotyped roles assigned by a patriarchal society, I remember Jesus’ parable of the widow and the unjust judge.

“You have inspired me to read this text in the light of your struggle and the struggle of other women and the Filipino people.”

Nanay Maxima

“*Ito po ang aking anak*”, this is my son. She shows the picture of her son whenever she shares her testimony--her voice so soft, her face marked with pain and agony.

If tears could only ease the pain, we would have shared ours with yours.

The Tale of a Widow (continued...)

But when you speak of the death of your son, Our tears would not be enough. At the moment they killed your son, Even the angels must have wept, And God the creator must have wailed!

At the heart of our faith journey, we believe in a God who knows the agony and anguish of many mothers, fathers, and other family members and friends over the unjust and brutal deaths of their loved ones. We hold the current president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whom we expect God to judge at the end of her life, responsible for these deaths.

Who is Nanay Maxima Punzal? Nanay Maxima is a 71-year-old vendor in Payuma, Norzagaray, Bulacan. She is quite old and fragile, so she lived with her son Leodagario Punzal, who looked after her. Leodagario was a member of the Anak Pawis Partylist, a legal political party representing peasants and workers.

On September 13, 2005, while her son was making a streamer inside their house, Nanay Maxima suddenly heard a blast. She immediately looked up at the ceiling, thinking at first that it was an electrical explosion. When she looked down, she saw her son with a gunshot wound to his face. She hurried to her son, embraced him, and held him on her lap: "I raised his head, but he was shot again in the back," she explained. She cried out, even while the guns were still aimed at her and her son, and said: "Why? Why did you shoot my son? He did nothing wrong. Is it a crime to earn a living in our house?" When the assailants noticed that a lot of blood was oozing from the body, they knew Leodagario was already dead and they left the house.

Leodagario is gone. He can no longer feel the warm embrace of his mother. The lullaby of Lucio San Pedro and Levi Celerio's Sa Ugoy ng Duyan can no longer soothe his wound. His life was senselessly snuffed out because he was a humble servant of the people in his lowly community.

Policemen came and asked Nanay Maxima what happened. She told her story while her son was still on her lap. Then she pleaded with the policemen to please get a vehicle to take her son to the hospital, but a policeman replied, "He is already dead." Her son was taken to the morgue.

Whenever Nanay Maxima shares her story, she bursts into tears and is almost voiceless as she remembers the goodness and kindness of her son. She tells people that her son committed no crime and offended no one. She has shed so many tears that the anguish has deeply marked her face. When you look into her eyes, you see her deep pain. Certainly God's heart is crushed with the story of Nanay Maxima.

The Tale of a Widow

In Luke, a widow's persistence, vigilance, and militancy were characteristics that challenged even the most heartless, unfeeling, and callous of judges. She banged the walls of a court dominated by men of power and influence. She raised her voice so loud that they could do nothing to make her quiet.

Who would not be afraid of such a widow? The first impression she gives is that of a woman full of rage and anger. Those are negative emotions that should be suppressed and met with antagonism. But looking deeply into the story, we can see that her life was filled with love and hope. What she fought for was right and just. Her life was not filled with anger and rage but love and life. One cannot fight for life and justice without hope and love.

Patriarchy has taught women to be meek and patient, virtuous and plain. And when confronted with crisis and contradiction, they are taught that the best thing to do is to wait and be passive.

The widow in Luke's story contravened and subverted the tradition and role assigned to women. She became dangerous and subversive, but by her being dangerous and subversive, justice was served.

The tradition of women who subvert the patriarchal mold is an important reminder to women today. The ability to resist and defy patriarchy shows that a woman's place is not only in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the market--a woman's place is in the struggle! Only those who struggle can hope, and those who hope can struggle.

Nanay Mameng, poor and unlettered as she is, is able to speak out loud about people's lives, struggles, and hopes.

Nanay Maxima, though in great pain, did not allow her pain to immobilize her. She tells the story of her son; she demands justice.

Nanay Mameng and Nanay Maxima are senior citizens, but they inspire youth and young adults. Their wisdom is not less powerful because of their age. They may look fragile and old, but the experience that has marked their lives is not wasted. In the midst of turmoil and distress, they have been able to rise above the storm. They are the crones whose shining strength and hope encourage both young and old to form a movement for the cause of justice. They can bang and bash the judicial system and whether they are heard or not, this we know: they have not let up in their struggle. Nanay Mameng struggles for the urban poor, and Nanay Maxima, pursues a quest for justice for those who have been extra-judicially killed by government forces.

Like the widow who was marginalized but pursued what was justly hers, these women went out and participated in causes that truly count. With inner strength like a river that never runs dry, they have been consistent and persistent.

Norma P. Dollaga is a deaconess serving The United Methodist Church in the Philippines.

Events Calendar - Mark your Diary

28th February 2009 - 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.

8th March 2009 - International Women's Day

Gabriela Australia's 12th year Founding Anniversary
Details of the events will be announced later

Gabriela Philippines 25th year Founding Anniversary

14 - 15th March 2009 - Bayside Festival

Cherry Lake park, Altona & Altona Shopping Centre

A two-day festivities being participated by local organisations, community groups, local businesses and residents of Hobsons Bay. The festivities includes display stalls, food stalls skills demonstrations and workshops, performances and a parade.

Migrante Melbourne is participating in this festivities.

April 2009 - Multicultural Event

Speeches and performances from different ethnic groups

3rd May 2009 - Mayday rally and march



To:

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