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News, Views and Analysis from Migrante Melbourne

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



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An Uncertain State of the Nation Address

"I CARE for our OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) famed for their skill, integrity and untiring labor, who send home their pay as the only way to touch loved ones so far away. Nagpupugay ako sa kanila (I salute them)."

What a touching statement from the Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) in her 8th State of the Nation Address (SONA) 27th July this year.

YES, the OFW remittances keep the Philippine economy afloat. This is her government's labor export policy and program as one solution to the current economic crisis of the country. No jobs at home so get it abroad.

There is a global crisis in the capitalist world. GMA said this is the cause of soaring food and oil prices. So she made tough choices - "the global crisis did not catch us helpless and unprepared..... we have the money to care for our people and pay for food when there are shortages; for fuel despite price hikes."

Yet more and more Filipinos leave everyday. So why can't her government sustain this care for her people and keep them at home to work for her vision of a "self-reliant" economy?

Her vision is based on the value added tax on oil and electricity, destructive economic policies, continuing graft



and corruption and unresolved human rights violations - 910 killed and 195 abducted.

What is the real state of the nation under GMA's regime? Shall we say everything is at its highest: Inflation in the last 14 years; price of oil, rice and other prime goods; people's taxes, and the number of unemployment and lack of employment.

An average Filipino worker is not even getting \$ 2 US dollars a day

GMA hails the explorations of natural gas, biofuels, oil and mines as accomplishments under her governance. Oh, yeah?

The track record of mining companies - as in Australian Mining companies (e.g. Lafayette in Rapu-Rapu, Oceana Gold mining project in Didipio, Nueva Vizcaya) - destroyed the land, indigenous people were forced to leave. And they do not want to pay taxes for quarrying for example, in Nueva Vizcaya.

\$ 130 MILLION US DOLLARS OF questionable transactions in the National Broadband Network Philippine-China ZTE deal is still high up in the air.

I wonder how her caring translates into action. Does she sleep soundly at night because she cares ? GMA lives in a world of fiction. Her SONA can be a script for a very bad sci-fi movie. Maybe. Her fantasy is to make the country among the world's richest in 20 years. Because she cares.

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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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Statement on the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA)

GABRIELA- AUSTRALIA (Organisation of Filipino - Australian Women), Australia, 26 July 2008

// We should get ready for the day when we shall be a part of the First World //

(Northern Dispatch/Posted by Bulatlat.com).

So, declared by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) in her address to members of political parties July 19, 2008 saying that the Philippines will be among the world's richest in 20 years.

"GMA is leaving in a world of fantasy" says Malou Logan Chairperson of Gabriela-Australia. Ms Logan further said that GMA's assessment of the Philippine economy could be a script for a very bad sci-fi movie in the making.

In a few days, she delivers her state of the nation address at the opening of Congress and Senate. As in the past, it will be grand. Her minions will applaud the way she wants it.

This recent pronouncement of the Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) on the economic growth of the Philippines runs opposite to the economic crisis of her government.

Currently the Philippines is dependent on its Asian neighbors for rice, the staple food of Filipinos. Blue collar labour and professionals are jobless, more people are leaving the country to work abroad, more people are hungry, prices of basic goods and services are soaring, issues of graft and corruption in high places persist and the lingering questions on the legitimacy of her presidency have confined the people of this would be "first world" republic into intensifying misery.

Past governments and until the current Philippine government of GMA follow her export labor policy and program as the solution to the basic problems in the Philippines.

Majority of Filipino women has been carrying the burden of stretching the few pesos in their pockets in order to feed the family. Wake up now GMA from your fantasy.

Gabriela-Australia calls on Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to Step Down NOW. Philippine labour export is not the right tool to use in resolving the root causes of poverty and socio-economic problems.

GMA resign NOW!

Reference: Malou Logan, Chairperson-Gabriela Australia: 0433 216 548

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Communiqué of the International Migrants Alliance Founding Assembly

“For a long time, others spoke on our behalf. Now we speak for ourselves.”



Delegates to International Migrant Alliance (IMA) Founding Assembly, June 2008, Hong Kong

With the approval of the IMA Constitution, the election of its leadership and first set of officers and the approval of the General Program of Action (GPOA), the IMA was finally born.

United we shall break the chains of globalization

The first day of the assembly featured presentations on the different themes relevant to migrants.

Held at the City University of Hong Kong and co organized by the Women Empowerment in Moslem Context of the Southeast Asia Research Center (WEMC SEARC), the program was attended by more than 350 migrants including about 200 foreign workers – mostly domestic workers – from Hong Kong.

The message was clear: the time for the voice of the grassroots migrants has come with the resounding success of the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) founding assembly.

They came from all corners of the world. One hundred and sixty seven delegates representing 118 organizations from 25 countries participated in the founding assembly of the first international formation of grassroots migrants on June 15 and 16 in Hong Kong. Among these, 102 were present as founding members (regular and associate members) while 16 have come as observers. The assemblies also noted six organizations who have signified to become founding members but were unable to attend due to visa and financial issues.

In the spirit of international solidarity, the participants shared each other's experiences, learned from each other's actions, debated and reached unities that shall propel the IMA in its future programs.

Inputs from a battery of speakers who were mainly from grassroots organizations of migrants were helpful for the participants to arrive at common understanding of major issues that migrants face. After a painstaking process of finding common grounds, the basic principles of the IMA were firmed up.

A well applauded video that showed the situation that migrants face and why building the IMA is imperative opened the program. The crowd was moved, agitated and was put in high spirits to make the assembly a success.

As the names of the organizations attending the IMA were then called, it even heightened the atmosphere of the success of the assembly.

The Very Revd Andrew Chan, dean of the St. John's Cathedral and board member of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) that are both based in Hong Kong, welcomed all the delegates and bid the conference to achieve its aims.

Afterwards, renowned advocate for migrants, Dr. Irene Fernandez of Tenaganita (Women's Force) delivered the keynote address to the assembly. She expounded on the global context of the current migration process, how these processes have changed and were shaped by the developments of the global capitalist system, as well as the increased forced migration, especially of women.

She also took note of the apparent debate between the right to migrate against the right of people against displacement. She said that such was a false debate,

Communiqué of the International... (continued...)



Australian Delegation to IMA

imposed by people with a superficial understanding of what it means to be a migrant. "Free movement and the right not to be displaced, are two essential elements to the assertion of collective and individual self determination," Fernandez explained.

Finally, Dr. Fernandez congratulated all the delegates of the IMA as she also called for revolutionary changes "to break these chains of global exploitation and oppression."

Dr. Fernandez's address was then followed by a battery of panel speakers.

The first panel consisted of noted anti globalization activists who elaborated on the theme of Wages, Job Security, Remittances and GATS Mode 4. These topics were elaborated on by Mr. Aziz Choudry of the GATT watchdog and MR. Sonny Africa of the respected research think tank Ibon Philippines. The presentation of Mr. Jose Gonzales of Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales gave a concrete face to the ill effects of globalization as he expounded on the situation of migrant agricultural workers coming from Mexico.

In the second panel that focused on the War on Terror, Immigration and Refugees and the Criminalization of Undocumented Migrants, speakers that included Ms. Sarwat Vigar of the Center for Philippine Concerns in Canada, Mr. Ufuk Berdan of the Federation of Turkish Workers in Europe and Mr. Terence Valen of the Filipino Community Center in the United States discussed how the US led war on terror has eroded the rights of migrants especially with many anti migrant policies. Mr. Ramon Bultron of the APMM meanwhile expounded on the general situation that faces the undocumented migrants and their different concerns.

Afterwards, Filipino migrants in Hong Kong from the Cordillera region in the Philippines presented a short play that depicted, in a "Torch Relay" the history of the struggle of Filipino migrants in Hong Kong.

The third panel was composed of regional and national women leaders who talked about violence against women, trafficking and globalization. Speakers were Ms. Emmi de Jesus of the militant women's group Gabriela in the Philippines, Ms. Asfinawati of Asia Pacific forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and Hsiao Chuan Hsia of the Trans Asia Sisters Association of Taiwan (TASAT) which is an organization of immigrant brides in Taiwan.

The last panel of the day tackled the issue of Health, Family and the Social Costs of Forced Migration. Speakers for the panel were Ms. Valentina Soe of the regional group CARAM Asia, activists from Australia Ms. Vivi Germanos Koutsounadis of the Greek Orthodox Community of the New South Wales and Ms. Jane Brock Corpus of the Immigrant Women Speakout Association, Prof. Robyn Rodriguez of Philippine Forum and the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns in the US, and Mr. Syamsul of SEKBERBMI which is an organization of returned migrants and families of migrant workers in Indonesia.

In the evening, the IMA delegates discussed and approved the IMA's Basis of Unity that shall serve as the Alliance's guiding principles in its work and activities in the future.

United in one stand, firm and resolute

On the second day, the panel that tackled Organizing, Building of Alliances and Campaign Strategies was held. Panel speakers were all grassroots migrant leaders from different countries - Ms. Connie Bragas Regalado of Migrante International in the Philippines, Ms. Teresa Gutierrez of the May 1st Coalition for Immigrant and Worker Rights in the US, Ms. Wol San Liem of the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) in Korea and Ms. Eni Lestari of the Asian Migrant's Coordinating Body (AMCB).

The panel presentations became very important inputs in the finalization of the Alliance's Constitution and General Program of Action.

Plans included in the GPOA included activities and programs for education and information, campaign and mobilization that will pick up from the IMA concerns expressed in the panel topics, international advocacy including challenging the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in the Philippines this October, and expansion of the Alliance including the formation of country chapters and recruitment of more members from the regions of Africa and Latin America.

Communiqué of the International... (continued...)

The finalization of the IMA's GPOA related the delegates as it provided the roadmap of what the IMA wishes to to achieve for the next three years.

To lead the IMA, members of the International Coordinating Body (ICB) were chosen by the different global regions as well as elected at large.

To ensure that global regions are represented in the IMA leadership, regional caucuses were held to elect their representatives to the ICB. Among them were Jose Gonzales of FIOB for Latin America, Teresa Gutierrez of May 1st Coalition for Immigrant and Worker Rights for the USA, Sol Pajadura of Migrant Ontario for Canada, Mr. Ramesh Pandit of Nepalese Labour Organization for South Asia, Mr. Ufuk Berdan of ATIK for Europe, Mr. Nhel Morona for Middle East and Africa and Dr. Irene Fernandez for East Asia and Oceania.

Among those ICB members elected at large were: Ms. Tess Tesalona of Immigrant Workers Center, Canada; Prof. Robyn Rodriguez of Philippine Forum, USA; Ms. Rumana Sheikh of BOMSA, Bangladesh; Ms. Grace Punongbayan of MIGRANTE Europe; Ms. Eni Lestari of AMCB, HK; Mr. Ali of Federation of Workers from Turkey in Switzerland; Hsiao Chuan Hsia of Taiwan; Ms. Connie Bragas Regalado of Migrant International, Philippines.

Associate members that comprised NGOs and migrant serving institutions also selected among themselves two members who will sit as ex officio members to the ICB - Ms. Wahu Kaara of Kenya Debt Relief Network and Mr. Ramon Bultron of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). Ms. Kaara vowed to assist the IMA in its priority of expanding membership in the African region.

These seventeen members comprised the newly constituted ICB of the IMA.

The ICB then elected among themselves officers of the executive committee.

Elected members of the executive committee were: Eni Lestari of AMCB HK, chairperson; Ufuk Berdan of ATIK Europe, vice chairperson; Connie Bragas Regalado of Migrant Philippines, secretary general; Teresa Gutierrez of the May 1st Coalition for Immigrant and Worker Rights in USA, deputy secretary general, and; Tess Tesalona of Immigrant Workers Center in Canada, Treasurer.

Migrants on the march, onward we shall move

The establishment of the IMA marked a historic chapter in the movement of migrants and immigrants for rights and welfare and for comprehensive social change.

It was a timely effort of the migrants of the world to forge a stronger and higher unity in the face of daunting problems and issues that worsen the exploitation and oppression of the migrants.

Indeed it is now time to "speak for ourselves."

For we are the migrants forced to leave our countries and families. We are the ones displaced by poverty, political persecution, war on terror, economic hardships and other social ills perpetuated by imperialist globalization.

We are the grassroots migrants. With our solidarity, we shall speak and we shall fight to gain more victories. #

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Migrant 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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Notes From The Observer:
by: Ruperto Demonteverde

Disco event and a thunderbolt

It is disturbing how a small disco party could evolve into a potent force that would jog one's jaded brain into thinking... real serious thinking. Yes, thinking at such an event is utterly foreign, considering that the evening was reserved only for fun and tripping the light fantastic!

The organisers certainly outdid themselves in making such a happy occasion enjoyable to all. Kudos to them! It was equally generous of everyone who attended in response to the call of the officers to share an evening of fun, abundant food, and dancing in unselfish support of the organisation and what it stands for. They deserved the organisers' heartfelt thanks.

However, a small part of the activities reared its ugly head which, otherwise, would have elevated the affair into an excellent evening. It laid bare for all to see what kind of a race we, Filipinos, have evolved ... or more accurately, devolved into.

From time immemorial, the term "Filipino time" has indeed been proverbial. When we were in the Philippines, it meant one hour tardiness. Now that we are in Australlia, it is expected that we should have progressed with our time management. True to form, we have! We are no longer late by one hour; instead we have probably wound our clocks back so that our lateness has progressed to two, even three, hours.

The disco event was scheduled to start at 7:00 pm. Half an hour later, a remark from a white Australian was overheard, "Where are the masses?" Well, surprise, surprise! (Or is it?) The masses started to trickle in close to two hours later.

When the guest speaker of the evening was delivering his speech, the hall was transformed into a marketplace. People were chattering away like chipmunks in the woods or screeching like monkeys in a rainforest, drowning out what the speaker was

trying to say. It was embarrassing because I was sitting close to two white Aussies in the same table.

Immediately at that instant, I recalled the motto from a selective high school of my son's that I have attended about a year ago, which read: "Manners makyth man". "Man" in this motto is the collective term for both men and women, not the sexist kind.

I would have ignored this incident had it not been for the non-Filipino guests who attended the occasion. It was certainly not an impression that boded well for us, Filipinos. It is no wonder that as Filipinos we have to struggle hard to gain respect in the workplace or in the community. We still have a long way to go, an arduous climb if attitudes and manners are not improved.

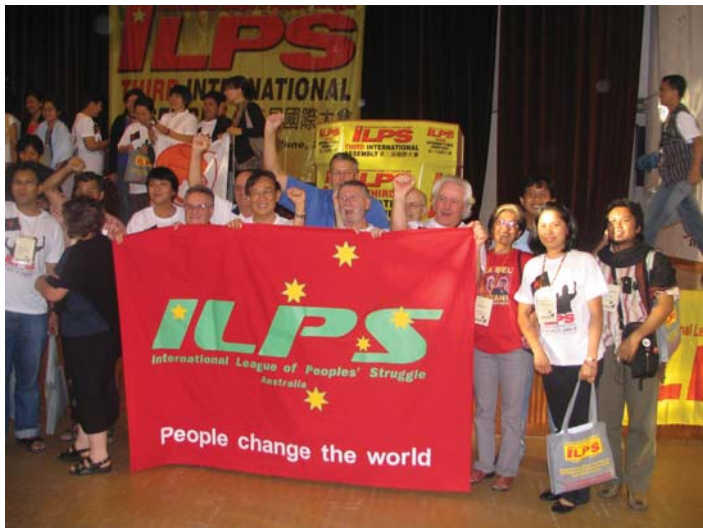
We cannot persist in living a life like a fly atop a carabao, boasting emptily about how the former is higher than the latter, just waiting there vulnerably to be flicked dead by the animal's tail. We cannot forever be like flies, buzzing noisily over a cow's dung. We need to rise above our present state in life, if not in wealth and prestige, at least in behaviour, discipline, and good manners. We only deserve respect from others if we respect ourselves first.

As long as we remain in our present state of denial, organisations like Migrante will have to labour too hard indeed in order to get recognition for our skills, resourcefulness, intelligence, and industry.

We see the Philippines going down in infamy in the eyes of world politics. We see the social and political cancer eating away at the ethical and moral fibre of society. Must we, who have excised ourselves free from the advancing chancre of the country, permit ourselves to perpetuate the same scenario in Australia, where we can really make our mark as highly recognised and successful individuals? I wonder!

They lifted my spirit

by May Kotsakis



Australian delegation to the ILPS TIA with Luis Jalandoni of NDFP, June 2008, Hong Kong

“We find a way”, was the common answer of the Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong who hosted us on our exposure tour around the Central Hong Kong.

I was with fifteen other Australians and more than three hundred international delegates to the IMA (International Migrant Alliance) founding assembly and the ILPS TIA (International League of Peoples’ Struggle Third International Assembly) held in Hong Kong in June 2008.

After the two conferences, some of the International delegates stayed two or more extra days to see Hong Kong. Some of us from Australia stayed and participated on an exposure tour organized by the APM (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants). It was on a Sunday which is the only day off of most Domestic workers in Hong Kong. Our tour was to meet and mingle with the Filipino Domestic workers.

I did not expect what I saw and witnessed on the streets. Thousands and thousands of domestic workers, ninety nine percent of them women are camped on every corner of the main road in central Hong Kong, the Chater Road, in a park called the Blackman garden or Chater Garden, at the ground floor of

the HSBC which is an open space or in other spaces they are allowed to stay. Some of them are seated along the window at the Worldwide Plaza or were walking around the plaza. (More than half of the 220,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong came from various provinces in the Philippines)

That day was their only free day in a week when they can do personal things, talk to their family back home, meet friends and acquaintances, read and find out news in Hong Kong and in the Philippines, study and teach and many, organized meetings and workshops to discuss current issues and concerns. That day was their only day they are not pressed with time, time to cook, feed the family they are serving, take care of the children, clean the house, do the laundry and many other chores and work they have to do for their ‘amos’ (boss). That day was their only day they can laugh with friends, cry, sing with gusto, dance and mock around.

We pass a huge group of women cleaning and coloring each other’s nails. Several women talking with their mobile phones cradled on their shoulders while manicuring their friend’s nails. Not far from the group was another group of women looking into some merchandise for sale. Selling on the street is prohibited in the area but they find a way to avoid the police. A man and several women seated on a blanket on a pavement were playing cards and laughing



Filipino domestic workers at the basement of the HSBC, Central Hong Kong

They lifted my spirit... (continued...)



Filipino domestic workers at the side of the Chater Garden, Hong Kong

their lungs out. A woman was proudly showing to friends a picture of her daughter receiving a medal at the school back home in the Philippines. She said sadly that her 'amo' did not allow her to go home to her daughter's graduation. Still another woman, bleary-eyed was speaking on her cell phone having a lover's spat with her husband whom she has not seen for months.

We stopped at a group conducting a program in the middle of Chater Road. They had speakers who talked about current issues in the Philippines. One of the speakers was Representative Luz Ilagan of Gabriela Women's Party. Some participants rendered songs entertaining the audience while they share their packed lunch and their picnic baskets. A very graceful dancer was interpreting the songs at the delight of the audience.

We listened to speeches about the effects of mining in the Philippines in a forum organized by various groups of Domestic workers and supporters. The forum was held at the Anglican Church hall where the temporary office of the Mission for Migrant workers was situated.

We participated in a birthday party of all those celebrating their birthday in the month of June. There was karaoke, the most popular entertainment and fund raising activity among domestic workers in Hong Kong. The irony is, in their activity, anyone who wants to sing pay HK\$5.00 and this is

part of the fund they raise. Many of the participants are queuing to be able to sing contrary to our parties here where we need to push and really persuade someone to perform.

There were also regional groupings such as Kapangpangans towards the end of the Chater Road, the Visayans at the Blackman Garden or the Ilocanos at the basement of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC) and others.

Every group we visited treated us with different delicacies. Pansit was one of the most common, prepared in various ways depending on the region the cook came from.

Our lunch was provided by the members of the Gabriela Women's Party, FilWomen Association and Migrante

Sectoral Party at the Eastern part of the Chater Garden. That was a lavish lunch, complete with sinigang, karekare, laing, pinakbet, inihaw na isda, pansit, puto, kutsinta and other food and to top it up, a delicious special halo-halo on a hot summer day.

Many of the domestic workers said that they have to leave their bosses' house as early as five o'clock in the morning before their "amos" wake up to avoid being asked to do chores on their day off. Others are made to prepare their bosses' family breakfast, lunch and dinner prior to leaving for the one day of the week they are supposed to be on day off. So we asked how they prepared all the food including "tinapa" (smoke fish) with their very tight schedule. They said that they find a way.

They find a way to educate a mate while on the way to the market. They find a way to discuss current issues while cooking for their 'amos'. They find a way to study while waiting for the children under their ward at school or at playgroup. They find a way to organize an activity while doing the laundry or cleaning the house with their mobile phones stuck to their ears.

They find a way to educate, organize and mobilize around many issues that affects them and their families at home, under a controlled, under resourced and difficult conditions. They lifted my spirit. ###

International migrant group condemns Kuwaiti police inhumane treatment to striking, unpaid Bangladeshi workers

*Eni Lestari, Chairperson
International Migrant Alliance (IMA)*

International migrant group condemns Kuwaiti police inhumane treatment to striking, unpaid Bangladeshi workers

The International Migrants Alliance (IMA), a newly founded broad international alliance of 112 progressive migrant organizations of different nationalities from 25 countries around the world, condemns in the strongest terms the brutal and inhumane treatment by the Kuwaiti police to striking, unpaid Bangladeshi workers.

IMA is working for the advancement of migrants' rights and interests regardless of their nationalities.

Citing reports from local newspapers in Kuwait, IMA said the Kuwaiti government has already expelled and deported more than 1,400 Bangladeshi workers with gross disregard to their basic rights as guaranteed by international human rights and migrant rights covenants.

Instead of heeding the legitimate demands of the striking Bangladeshi workers such as the release of their unpaid salaries for over 4 to 6 months, payment of their rightful wages as stipulated on their employment contracts, and their demand for better working conditions and accommodation, the Kuwaiti government let loose its mighty Police force in beating mercilessly the striking workers.

In time of soaring prices and high inflation in Kuwait as in any other GCC countries and around the world, its government should address and consider raising the salaries of all expatriates to cope up with the rising cost of living.

IMA deplores the Bangladeshi Embassy officials in Kuwait who kept its mouth mum over the labor struggles of their

nationals who are ironically boosting Bangladesh's economy by sending about US\$8 billion a year.

IMA further castigated the Bangladeshi Embassy Officials in Kuwait who did nothing to provide assistance and proper representation so that its worker's rights and welfare will be protected and safeguarded.

IMA is calling for the Bangladeshi Embassy Officials in Kuwait to investigate the reported unscrupulous labor agents who are taking advantage of their workers by taking cuts or deductions on the workers' salaries such as housing, medical and meal costs, which should be provided free by the employers to their hired workers.

IMA would like to remind all sending governments and receiving host governments that they are all accountable and have state responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of every expatriate worker as guaranteed in international rights covenants such as the International Human Rights Law and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

To this end, IMA demands to the Bangladeshi government to provide assistance and protect its migrant workers rights and welfare; and to the Kuwaiti government to stop the summary expulsion and mass deportation of Bangladeshi workers from their work and above all to pay respect the rights and welfare of all migrant workers in Kuwait.

IMA is also calling on the Kuwait Society for Human Rights and the Kuwait Trade Union Federation to extend local assistance to the workers, and to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Human Rights of Migrants and the UN Human Rights Council to investigate these reported migrants' rights abuses in Kuwait. (end)



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Workers, urban poor skip meals and sleep longer to cope with crisis *by the CTUHR team*

Rosa, 55, is a garment worker in Taytay, Rizal for almost ten years now. The company implements a quota basis which forces her to work for more than 12 hours a day, seven days a week, to reach the minimum quota. In total she receives around 2,000P (US\$ 43.94) during pay day, which she will use to pay previous debts, house rent, water, and electricity bills. Because she only has 300P (US\$ 6.59) left for food, she will have to reduce its quality and quantity, or borrow some money from illegal five-six operators.

Rosa's plight is not rare anymore. The worsening economic crisis, as obviously shown in continuous rise in prices of commodities like fuel and rice, forces workers and urban population to develop ingenious means of subsistence and to tighten their belts further.

Of course, the Arroyo government may delight of the poor's creativity. In fact, it is Malacanang advice to cope with surging prices while government is raking in billions of revenues from the very price hike that punishes the poor. Whilst the poor must be commended with how they continue to survive and refused to be robbed completely of their dignity, their plight should shame those who profit from their poverty.

The stories below are from direct interviews with workers from different factories and urban poor communities. Every account strikes similarities and echoes the same situation that every one of us was systematically placed into.

Skipping Meals

The soaring price of rice and other basic foods have resulted in reducing, if not the quality, the quantity of meals or food intake.

For example, Ruth, Rosa's fellow garment worker, told us that her family is eating breakfast and lunch at the same time (also widely known as "brunch") to avoid more expenses. Ruth is a casual worker and receives only 110P (US\$ 2.42) daily wage, 177P (US\$ 3.89) below the mandated minimum wage in Region 4.

Nanay Mildy, 60, an urban poor resident in Intramuros, Manila, has similar story. She told us that her family is now used to prolonging sleeps during daytime and wake-up past breakfast late in the morning.

These families, like most, are eating only 2 meals a day, not simply because they want to save money, but because they simply could not afford the standard three meals a day.

Teofilo Galalo, 55, is a regular worker in Reliance Farm Inc., a small scale piggery in Novaliches industrial belt. He has been working there for almost 27 years now. He receives 336P (US\$ 7.38) daily wage. He allots 186P (US\$ 4.09) for food everyday which will be shared by eight members of the family. This is far way below the 862P (US\$ 18.94) daily food allowance needed for a family of six according to National Productivity Wage Commission (NPWC).

At the time of this writing, commercial rice in Metro Manila is around 35-40P (US\$.77-.88) per kilogram, while in other regions it has already reached 52P (US\$ 1.14) per kilogram. Many had already shifted to either 25P (US\$.55) per kilogram NFA commercial rice, or to 18.50P (US\$.41) per kilogram NFA rice, for others who can withstand its soap-like taste. But even if their palettes refuse, the stark reality that they don't have choice makes the soap-like NFA rice delectable.

Walk to work

The soaring prices of petroleum products also created significant coping techniques among the workers.

Renilyn Tubay, 19, works in Unity Packaging, a factory with 50 workers which produces boxes for medicines and skin applications. Women workers receive only 281P (US\$ 6.17) everyday for eight hours of work, while men receive 331P (US\$ 7.27). The discriminating disparity between salaries in effect means more burdens for Renilyn compared to male counterparts. Minimum wage in Metro Manila is pegged at 382P (US\$ 8.39) per day.

As a result of insufficient salary, Renilyn started to walk everyday to save her travel expenses. She needs to wake up at 6am to reach workplace at 8am.

Celine Castillo, 32, is also suffering distress because of continuous oil price hikes. Though she doesn't work, she had to do all the budgeting for the family and necessary adjustments.

Her husband works in Rebisco Company which produces Hanzel, Rebisco Crackers, Marie Choco Sandwich, etc. Out of 2,900 total workforces, only 1,900 are regular workers. According to Celine, she now shifted to charcoal or uling in cooking instead of the usual LPG tank. Two sacks of uling are enough for a month which costs up to 300P (US\$ 6.59). She saves 350P (US\$7.69) at most.

At the time of this writing, gasoline is at 61P (US\$ 1.34) per liter, diesel at 54P (US\$ 1.19) per liter, while a regular LPG tank is at 650P (US\$ 14.28).

by the CTUHR team

Workers, urban poor skip meals... (continued...)

Dropping out

Education was deemed before by poor families as the best way to break the chains of poverty. However, in the present time crisis, schooling became very luxurious and unsustainable.

For example, Ruth, 32, also a garment worker in Taytay, Rizal, failed to enroll her eldest son, a second year college student in University of Rizal System (URS) Taytay campus. They were forced to spend enrollment budget for food. "Life was very hard... we need more income and so I want my children to look for work," she said in Filipino.

Even the International Labor Organization (ILO) expressed its worries over the decline in the enrollment rate in schools from 96.77% in 2000-2001 to 83.22% in 2006-2007. (PDI, 19 June 2008). Decline in enrollment will logically increase child labor, a condition that ILO and the trade union movement wanted eliminated.

Extra-income

Economic crisis have gripped the workers too much. For workers, performing well inside a factory is not enough to sustain a decent, simple life. They have to exhaust all means to generate more income outside working hours.

Direct-selling seems to benefit a lot from wage pegging and consistent price hikes. Workers that we had interviewed told us that they sell Avon, Natasha, DXN, and other products to create more money to augment financial needs.

Jose Campilos, 20, works as taga-igib ng tubig in an urban poor community in Intramuros, Manila. His work does not have a regular salary. It depends upon the need for water in the neighborhood and how much they want to pay him. He acquires 50-100P (US\$ 1.1-2.2) everyday. He also do laundry services sometimes, he receives 100-200P (US\$ 2.2-4.4) per labada. But due to high prices, he also collects plastic bottles and tin cans by night.

Celine, aside from saving money by using uling, also sells embotido to her neighbors in the afternoon. While Ruth do laundry services during Sundays in exchange of money or food.

Doles and subsidy to the poor will not address the problem

Despite the worsening crisis that had succumbed workers in suffering and pain, Ms Gloria Arroyo has remained deaf if not living in hallucinations. Her posters bearing her picture beaming in Ramdam ang Kaunlaran (Progress is

ubiquitous) continues to hang in major buildings, highways and bombard TV advertisements.

Another poster says 'Labanan ang Kahirapan' (Fight Poverty) fill the MRT stations. And the only thing that Arroyo government does is to hand doles and subsidy to poor consumers of electricity while benefiting from a windfall of revenues. The government collects P52 billion in revenues and expecting another P18 billion more due to weekly increase in fuel prices as a result of 12% VAT on fuel. The collection is needed, as Malacanang says, because it allots P2 billion in subsidy for the poor. Where the remaining goes, is a big question.

A big section of the population wants the VAT removed and the oil deregulation law that allows companies to increase oil prices anytime they want, scrapped. Arroyo government refuses stubbornly, the way it refuses the demand for a legislated 125P across-the-board, nationwide wage increase (US\$ 2.75). Instead, tried to deceive the people and create good public image by using temporary and artificial solutions.

The 2 billion peso, for example, allotted budget to give 500P (US\$ 10.98) allowance to some 400,000 low electricity consumers is not just temporary but it encourages people to depend and expect that some more charity will come from the government. It reduces the poor to beg, depriving them of their dignity, while the government smiles handing crumbs and a pack of rice from the money it gets from the poor through VAT.

Few days ago, the government ordered a fare hike under the pretext of giving drivers, jeepney drivers particularly some relief from high cost of fuel. The poor, mostly workers are the jeepney passengers. Whilst it is understandable to uplift the drivers, the fare hike will come from the very pockets of the workers, who have been denied of the substantial wage increase. This government insulted the workers with 10-20P (US\$.22-.44) wage hike, an amount that is just enough to buy 2 packs of instant noodles, loaded with sodium and MSG.

The government won't repeal 12% e-vat, legislate and implement 125P wage increase. It stands to benefit from them, unless, thousands of workers and the poor again fill the streets to demand not only the VAT repeal, but removal of the government which reduces its people into beggars. When that day happens, the poor will have more reasons to smile, even to laugh.#

People of the Diaspora: Trust & Corruption (1)

"But why did you give him \$1000 in cash without any receipt in return?" was my question asked so many times like a scratched long-playing record.

The S457 visa workers I was helping - in return for the \$1000 they handed over in cash - had had either their tax returns or their tax amendment forms supposedly done by another Filipino S457 worker (let's call him Sam) who said he could get them back tens of thousands of dollars tax credit. Sam claimed to have insider contacts at the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

It's a true story of which the ins and outs beats any long-time soapie mystery. From all accounts, Sam operating with his Sudanese cab-driver mate who claimed to be an accountant and another Filipino - managed to scam over a period of several months at least \$230,000 from 230 Filipinos in Western Australia who were S457 visa holders, some who'd got the \$1000 to pay him by borrowing from their Australian resident girlfriends.

A number of the workers did get back \$10,000 or even more. The catch was that, upon a few trips to the ATO, I then found out that the claims Sam had put in on behalf of the workers for these large amounts were for very dubious and false or non-existent expenses eg for parents being in WA when in fact they were over in the Philippines or false claims for the use of the personal car for work purposes.

What happens next continues the nightmare. And it's just about the ones whose fate I happened to hear about or know of. One S457 visa worker who'd received over \$10,000 through these false tax claims he'd trustingly allowed Sam to put in for him was about to be deported because of these false tax claims. Fortunately, his union helped him out and he was allowed to pay back the money with a hefty fine.

A number of other workers also got these hefty fines, while shortly after, the ATO was about to send out penalty letters to many more of the other 230.

Others who could not believe that they'd been so easily scammed went in search of Sam, finding out that he'd gone and come back and while in the Philippines had stayed in

some 5-star resort, then back in Western Australia, had then bought himself a \$45,000 jeep and rumours were rife that he'd also bought himself a new house via his local girlfriend's name.

These workers wanted him imprisoned, then thrown out of the country and some said he'd done the same thing in Darwin before moving into Western Australia.

The horrible thing was that hardly any of these 230 scammed workers had seen - or got a copy - of what claims Sam and his cohorts had put into the tax office for them BUT Sam and company had each and everyone of their original signatures, tax file numbers, bank account and personal details!

With their personal details included, the workers had signed almost empty tax forms - and handed these forms willingly with \$1000 cash included to Sam and company!!!

So as the ATO logically pointed out, Sam and company could not only undertake bank transactions on any of these 230 x S457 workers' bank accounts - but lodge another set of claims AGAIN if they wanted to with the tax office for the same 230 scammed workers for the following tax year.

So the workers were advised to change their bank account numbers and eventually their tax file numbers!

But why did they trust Sam? Did he look like the Messiah? Or was it the smell of tens of thousands of dollars, like gamblers sense when they think they're on a winning streak?

(Sam convinced not just his own work colleagues but all these other S457 visa holders from so many other different companies to believe in him...)

A number of them told me that they trusted Sam not only because he was a worker like them but because: "he's like us, he's Filipino".

I wonder was this also the same reason why Emilio Aguinaldo's men were able to come close to Andres Bonifacio to kill him - because they thought they were all on the same side, all Filipinos fighting against the same coloniser?

People of the Diaspora: Trust & Corruption (continued...)

Did none of Bonifacio's men or Bonifacio himself think that the leadership of the so-called Philippine Republic would become a struggle between on one side, the ilustrado class and Aguinaldo who were sympathetic to the colonizing Americans and on the other side, the workers who believed in, and identified with Bonifacio and his dream of a truly independent Philippines?

I wonder was this also the same reason why Gloria Arroyo got elected to the presidency of the Philippines in 2001? Because Filipinos trusted her, another Filipino, to change their impoverished lives for them? Yet seven years hence, her government has pocketed hundreds of millions of dollars from an unbelievable trail of corruption: \$US130million from the inflated NBN-ZTE scheme and a host of other questionable transactions.

Is it because the molecules in the air in the Philippines must be so full of this corruption that cheating, lying, embezzlement has become the norm?

Yet such abuse of another human being as with Sam and company to their S457 colleagues or Arroyo's government to the impoverished workers at large- still seems incredibly evil.

When you know that the average worker in the Philippines is not even getting over US\$2 a day and can barely eat enough to survive - and you and your friends have pocketed billions of pesos - which could build schools, hospitals and save the lives of millions - and they are Filipinos and humans as you are, how does one sleep at nights?

Similarly, when you know that of the S457 workers you are recruiting to work in Australia, there will be those unfortunate enough to be employed under slave-like conditions, paying exorbitant rent, exposed to hazards in unsafe worksites, that they could be seriously injured if not die in such unsafe work conditions while threatened by their employers to keep silent about their conditions or be deported, that if they died in the worksite their families would hardly be able to even survive - and you yourself another Filipino who's doing the recruiting, also threaten them with deportation (and you might even be the pastor of a church you've put up - which is a real story by the way) or you've deliberately scammed them of \$1000 which could have gone to feed their children and families: how do you sleep at nights?



STOP THE KILLINGS IN THE PHILIPPINES

From 2001 when Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed the Philippine presidency, Karapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights) has documented more than 900 political killings and 200 disappeared.

Join Us in Demanding

Justice for the victims and the end of killings, abduction and harassment of human rights and community activists in the Philippines

Reflections on World Youth Day

By: Stephanie Rabusa



July 13 2008 marked the start of the World Youth in Sydney, Australia. It was estimated that over 110,000 international pilgrims and 113,000 local pilgrims have registered during the week-long celebrations of World Youth Day. Hundreds of thousands of people have come to the Randwick Racecourse and Centennial Park to hear the Pope's final mass.

World Youth Day (WYD) is a Roman Catholic youth-oriented event. However, the Roman Catholic church claims that while the event is headed by the Catholic faith, all denominations are welcome to attend.

Pope John Paul II, in 1986, has initiated WYD. It is celebrated every two to three years and was launched to revitalise the perceived flagging interest of youth all over the world in Catholic values and religion. This event aims to attract young pilgrims from every nation to come to a particular country and re-affirm their faith together. The church claims that having events like these will open up global issues and encourage the young to participate in Catholic Youth work based, of course, on the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.

With 400,000 people, WYD was reported to be the largest gathering of people in Australia ever. No wonder, our most prominent politicians were at the event hailing the Catholic Faith. Prime Minister Rudd, in his speech quoted ' *Some say there is no place for faith in the 21st Century. I say they are wrong. Some say that faith is the enemy of reason, I say, also they are wrong, because faith and reason are great partners in our human history and in our human future. Rich in humanity, rich in scientific progress.* '

In today's world, the church still has a powerful influence on people's attitudes and values. Their policies have been followed by countless Catholics all-over the world – conservative policies that have existed since medieval times.

These 'moral policies' have been detrimental to the growth of societies all over the world. Some of these policies are against condom use, family planning, abortion and homophobia – many of which have been more deleterious to the lives of women and the poor who are the most disadvantaged members of society. Looking at this analogy, the Catholic Church's stance on these issues create conflicts

between economic and social life. These policies are not in touch with ordinary people's sentiments. Worldwide problems like AIDS and population growth are not discussed and are deemed to be left in the hands of God.

During the WYD week-long event, the activities include Opening Mass, Stations of the Cross, Evening Vigil and Final Mass. All of these activities did not include spaces where the youth can express their concerns about the world they live in. There were no avenues for them to explore. There were no issues to be discussed. They were there to listen but not to be heard.

The NSW state and Federal government also, in all, have spent an estimated \$210 million dollars in taxpayers' money for the event. The economic benefits to the community are still to be determined. Will this be enough to engage young people in organised religious activities or could the money have been better spent?

From the telecasts, the youth seemed to be trapped in a symbolic ritual that does not seem to be of any purpose. In the eyes of the church, young people were a flock of sheep that are to be led to the right path. In the streets of every major city in Australia, young people with their countries flags, were seen roaming around and soaking the atmosphere. The whole experience seemed to be exhilarating to the young but when they go back to their own countries, I wonder what message they will spread?

The next WYD in 2011, will be held in Madrid, Spain. This will be an interesting event as the decision is seen as a strategic one for the Catholic church. Spain has one of the largest Catholic populations in the world. It is no surprise as Catholicism has been spread widely by the Spanish *conquistadores*. Spain is also currently being run by the Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. It is well known that Zapatero's government is moving towards a more secular society to promote progress and migrant growth. Zapatero's policies, including same-sex marriage and easier divorce, are in conflict with the Catholic church's conservative policies.

Sources:

http://www.wyd2008.org/index.php/en/wyd08_events
<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,23345326-5016946,00.html>
<http://www.alp.org.au/media/0708/mspm150.php>

Events Calendar - Mark your Diary

06 August - Hiroshima Day

Remembering the day the U. S. military dropped the very first atomic bomb ever to be dropped on areas full of civilians at 8.15 am on the 6th of August 1945.

30 August, Saturday - Migrante Melbourne's Winter Tipanan

Dinner Disco

6.30 p.m., Laverton Civic Centre, 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.

For further information and tickets contact Steph at 0422171969, Reyvi at 0421119776 or Migrante Melbourne at 1300366674

06 September, Saturday - ILPS Australia Report Back forum

5.00 pm CEPU Meeting Room, 139-155 Queensberry St., Carlton South

Report from Delegates to the IMA (International Migrants Alliance) Founding Assembly and to the ILPS TIA (International League of People Struggle Third International Assembly) in Hong Kong in June 2008.

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).

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.

10 December - International Human Rights Day

18 December - International Migrants Day



Affix Stamp

To: _____

