

# The Second Filipino Women Migrant Workers' Summit

*Building on gains and working for more victories in the struggle for the rights of Filipino migrant workers and families*

The governments of the Philippines and Hong Kong are in for a bigger movement of Filipino women migrant workers determined to advance their rights and wellbeing as well as those of their families.

Surpassing the success of the gathering last year, the Second Filipino Women Migrant Workers' Summit became a venue for an even broader range of organizations of Filipino women migrant workers to come together, discuss the major issues concerning the sector, and draft a common platform of actions.

More than 450 delegates from 110 organizations jam-packed the Rayson Huang Theatre of the Hong Kong University on August 26 to bring to a higher level the unities achieved in the Migrant's Summit 2006.



Organized by the Abra Tingguian Ilocano Society (ATIS), Cordillera Alliance (CORALL), Filipino Migrant Workers' Union (FMWU), United Pangasinan in Hong Kong (UPHK) and the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE-HK) and supported by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), the Migrant's Summit 2007 drew together a wide range of organizations of Filipinos including regional groups, provincial or town associations, church-based fellowships and interest-based formations.

Institutions that have consistently upheld and supported efforts for the empowerment of women and migrant workers such as the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge (BHMWR) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) also took part in the activity.

Delegates of the summit listened to insightful inputs on major frameworks that guided the delegates in the workshop.



Ms. Connie Bragas-Regalado, chairperson MIGRANTE International and Concern No. 16 of the International League of Peoples' Struggle, gave a highly-informative and analytical keynote address that shed light on the national situation facing families of migrant workers in the Philippines as well as the trend that the labor-export program of the Philippine government is taking.

She described the current situation in the country as that of the "dark ages" wherein the promises of Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo have been turning out emptier than before. In particular, she scored the government's plan of one million jobs a year to mean jobs overseas; social safety nets that are in contrast with the rising cost of health, education and housing; and peace in Mindanao that is not the objective of the government's military offensives in the said region.

Regalado also underscored the gross human rights violations happening in the country under the government's Oplan Bantay Laya (Operation Plan Freedom Watch) that included countless cases of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances as well as repressive measures most notable of which was the Human Security Act.

She said that programs of the government meant an increase and further systematization of the export of Filipino labour even while, in the global context, the rights of migrant workers are abused right and left due to the global economic crisis and the hysteria of anti-terrorism.



Ms. Elizabeth Tang of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions gave a well-received explanation of the current campaign in Hong Kong for a legislated minimum wage for all workers. She expounded on the situation of workers in Hong Kong including foreign domestic workers and asserted the necessity for workers to have a certain level of economic protection through a minimum wage law.



Ms. Jackie Hung's presentation on human rights in the Philippines and the solidarity of the people in Hong Kong on the campaign was both emotive and brought out the indignation of the participants against the spate of rights abuses in the country. Ms. Hung is from the Hong Kong Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (HKCAHRPP) and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese.



Ms. Hung presented on the various advocacy activities on human rights that the HKCAHRPP has conducted including the results of the first fact-finding mission that the group organized last year.

The summit delegates highly-appreciated Ms. Hung’s explanation of her involvement in the movement against human rights violations in the Philippines out of her Christian conviction. She expressed her hope for the various churches and faiths in the Philippines to take a firm stance and a more active role in the campaign.



Five workshops were simultaneously held that saw the enthusiastic participation of the migrant workers. They actively contributed their opinions on the matters that were discussed and offered suggestions on actions that could be taken for each particular concern.

The workshop groups were: 1. On the POEA Guidelines, Overcharging, Illegal Charges and State Exaction; 2. On Services and Protection of the Philippines and Hong Kong Governments; 3. On the Human Security Act and the Human Rights Situation in the Philippines; 4. On the Campaign for a Legislated Minimum Wage; and, 5. On the Redevelopment of Central, Privatization in Hong Kong, and the Displacement of Migrant Workers.



Additional inputs were given in some of the workshops including a theoretical explanation on wage by Ms. Analea Escresa of the Ecumenical Institute for Labour Education and Research (EILER), on the current human rights situation in the Philippines and in the Southern Tagalog Region by Mr. Marlon Torres of the National Coalition for the Protection of Workers’ Rights (NCPWR), on the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) by Ms. Marissa Dumanjug-Palo of the NDFP Section of the Joint Secretariat monitoring the CARHRIHL, and on the plan to redevelop Central by YC Chen.



Following the resolutions of the first summit, delegates of the second summit reviewed the positions taken by the first assembly and upheld them. Additional demands were included for new issues including the POEA guidelines, legislated minimum wage, working hours for foreign domestic workers, and the displacement of migrant workers from public venues.

Most importantly, the summit came up with plans of actions to address the matters that were discussed. Some of the actions that were decided on included a mass mobilization dubbed as “Walk for Justice” on September 23 to seek justice for victims of human rights abuses, educational forums on the minimum wage and the redevelopment plan of Central, picking up the ante again for the campaign against POEA guidelines and exposition of its lies and inutility, and campaigning for reforms in the judicial system and police procedures pertaining to cases of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong.



For families of victims of human rights violations, the summit, aside from continuing the campaign to seek justice, approved a proposal to have a fund raising project for the benefit of children of the victims sometime around Christmas.

The summit also unanimously approved a resolution to support and join in the founding of the International Migrants’ Alliance (IMA) that is set to have its first assembly on May 2008. The IMA is envisioned to become the first grassroots-based international formation of migrant workers that will carry the fight for the rights and wellbeing of migrants all over the world.

With a vow take the unity of Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong to an even greater heights, the delegates of the Summit ended the activity with hopes and determination to realize the resolutions of the event.

Indeed, a broader and stronger movement of Filipino women migrant workers in Hong Kong are set to confront the challenges faced by migrant workers and our families.

*Long live women migrant workers!  
Long live the Filipino people!*

