



On its 3rd summit, Filipino migrants in Hong Kong challenge GFMD

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has emerged as another challenge to migrant workers whose number has grown to about 205 million migrants around the world. Apparently, the GFMD proponents perceive the migrants' remittances amounting to an estimated US\$ 2.26 trillion as a significant tool in the development of poor countries.

Rising to the challenge, more than three hundred Filipino leaders from around ninety organizations, church groups, alliances, federations, institutions, and migrants' rights advocates gathered at the Hong Kong University on August 31 this year to declare their opposition to the GFMD at the Third Filipino Migrant Workers Summit (TFMWS).

Speaking on Women, Migration and Globalization, Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, executive director of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and chairperson of Gabriela Women's Party Hong Kong, stated that the GFMD is another face of the neoliberal policies of privatization, deregulation and liberalization where issues of women migrants are largely unaddressed as with most concerns of women. In Hong Kong where majority of migrant workers are women, policies such as the Two-Week Rule often subject them to discrimination, abuse and exploitation, according to her.



Migration as a "tool for development" signifies greater commodification of migrants and management of migration to augment state revenues and help cover deficits in foreign loan payments, she stressed. Migrants as the living proofs of globalization policies should therefore strengthen their solidarity with other migrants' movement around the world to expose and oppose the GFMD.

The International Migrants Alliance (IMA), which was established in June this year, exemplifies the biggest and broadest international formation of grassroots migrants and advocates united for the rights and wellbeing of migrants against imperialist globalization designs.

IMA spokesperson Eni Lestari graced the TFMWS and delivered a presentation on the impacts of the GFMD to migrants. Remarkably, she earned wild cheers and intermittent applause from the audience as she explained in grassroots language the GFMD's historical development. She expressed admiration to the Filipino migrants' movement in Hong Kong for its role in raising the political awareness and for working for all foreign domestic workers from all cultures.

"At the end of the GFMD, it will be our wages, services, protection and rights that will be at stake. It is thus necessary for us to stand up against the GFMD," she said.

Norman Uy Carnay, country information officer of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) for Hong Kong, presented a realistic picture of the Labor Export Policy (LEP) of the Philippine government, thus making it a GFMD model for the world. This is why, according to him, the event will be held in the Philippines on October 28-30 this year.

He challenged the migrant workers to continue to resist the oppressive policies of the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo government such as VAT, remittance charges and the controversial documentary stamp tax. More importantly, he invited the leaders or their members to join the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR), the alternative event to challenge the GFMD in October.



At the same time, he enjoined the migrants to contribute to the web-based campaign called the Migrants' Counter to document cases of rights violations by various governments participating in the GFMD. These cases are in <http://counter.internationalmigrants.org>.

Immediately after the three speakers have delivered their presentations, the participants proceeded to tackle the summit declaration through workshops divided into five groups.

Finally, Dolores Balladares, chairperson of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE HK) reported that among the unities of the summit was to launch a big protest action on October 26, the Sunday before the GFMD starts. As well, they declared that they will encourage their family members in the Philippines to join in the actions led by the International Migrants Alliance (IMA), MIGRANTE International and BAYAN leading to and during the GFMD dubbed as the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR).



The following demands were presented by the five workshop groups to and approved during the plenary as the summit declaration:

A. To the Hong Kong SAR government

1. A substantial wage increase; a legislated minimum wage; and the abolishment of the levy.
2. An 8 hour-working day and expanding labor protection, this includes legalizing the right to live out; an increase in food allowance; and enjoying the right to long service payment irrespective of who initiates the termination of service.
3. Abolishment of the New Conditions of Stay better known as the two-week rule and to oppose all forms of racism and discrimination.

4. To adopt legal assistance policy for workers with cases. Allow them to work while their cases are being resolved and a waiver for visa fees for those pursuing legal remedies on their cases.
5. Impose policies to prevent unreasonable terminations.
6. Investigate and take the necessary action to stop the “buy one take one” scheme of unscrupulous recruitment agencies.
7. Investigate cases of mysterious deaths.

B. To the Philippine government

1. Scrap the fees for authentication of employment contracts; issue Overseas Employment Certificate free of charge; lower the passport fees by setting it at Philippine price levels.
2. Abolish the Documentary Stamp Tax (DST) on remittances.
3. Improve consular services by getting rid of its practice on double public holidays; require consulate personnel to wear proper ID; rate the performance of consulate officials through an independent watchdog.
4. Stop the privatization of schools and hospitals. Provide proper and affordable education and health services to the Filipino people including OFWs’ and their families.
5. Abolish the OWWA Omnibus policy and draft a pro-migrant charter with the participation of migrant organizations. Create an independent watchdog that would monitor OWWA funds.
6. Junk the proposed psychiatric test for OFWs; scrap MC04; scrap POEA guidelines on trainings for domestic workers; abolish the cable charge for remitting SSS contribution.
7. Stop the recruitment agencies’ overcharging of placement fees; draft implementing rules that would stop this dastardly practice.
8. Allocate funds for the pension funds of OFWs.
9. Abolish the EVAT as this ensures that 12% of what we remit goes to this tax.
10. Lengthen the validity of passports to 10 years.
11. Provide agricultural subsidies to farmers to ensure food sovereignty and sustainability.

C. To international governmental/non-governmental bodies and institutions

1. Stop commodification of labor. Stop GFMD.
2. Provide legal and health assistance and services to all migrants including refugees and undocumented migrants and their families.
3. Stop criminalization of undocumented migrants
4. Stop the “war on terror”.
5. Recognize domestic work as work; ensure one paid day off per week for domestic workers.
6. Stop extending loans to the Philippine government.
7. Stop sex trafficking of women and children.
8. Set up a mechanism in the UN for direct consultation of migrants concerning their issues

