

# As MFMW reaches 30th Year We Reaffirm Commitment to Serve and Empower Migrant Workers

Ever since 1993, the Mission's main advocacy has been Crisis Intervention and Prevention through Migrant Empowerment (CIPME). In its coming 30<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, it seeks to reaffirm its commitment adhering to this principle to serve and empower.

Part of the MFMW's mandate is to address the immediate needs and concerns of migrant workers in distress most of whom are foreign domestic workers (FDWs). This is done through counseling and sometimes through referrals. This includes explaining to the FDWs all the options and the rights that they are entitled to while at the same time telling them that many of their problems can be attributed to the policies of the Hong Kong and their countries of origin governments.

The General Issues and Needs of migrant workers can be summed up by the following:

1. The need to go home for good
2. The need for relief from numerous agency and government fees and personal debts
3. The need to protect their wages and remittances
4. The need to curb loneliness and family crisis due to separation
5. The need for cultural understanding with the local people
6. The need for protection against abuse and exploitation
7. The need for occupational safety and health services
8. The need for government support and protection

9. The need for betterment of self, raising dignity and broadening horizons
10. The need for socialization and support system from peers

In addressing these issues and needs the Mission has linked up with other service providers and with migrant organizations of different nationalities. Aside from this, the Mission was even able to create other institutions and even migrant organizations to serve the FDWs immediate and long term needs.

One such organization is the MOVERS or Mission Volunteers. This organization assists the Mission especially on Sundays in providing direct service to FDWs in distress while at the same time advocating for policy changes for uplifting their rights and welfare.

At the same time, the Mission can even expand to other migrant organizations of different nationalities with support from the MOVERS by assisting its welfare programs through building and raising its capacities to do so while promoting progressive values and principles.

Through its Labor Education and Assistance Program (LEAP), the Mission can equip the migrant's welfare committees with basic information and skills in promoting labor rights, protecting job security and wages of their members, and assisting even in financial problems.

On the other hand, the Mission's Pastoral Care and Social Welfare Program (PCSW) can attend to the psycho-social, spiritual

and cultural needs of the migrants and ensuring that progressive and pro-migrant values and principles guide them in conflict resolution and personal development.

The Mission can only effectively adhere to its mandate to serve and empower the migrant workers by forming welfare programs within migrant workers organizations. Because ultimately it is the migrant workers themselves who should take the lead in advancing their interests and immediate needs while NGO's like the Mission are there to provide them the necessary skills and guidance to achieve these. 📧

## A Great Visit from The Very Revd Rowan Q. Smith

It was an honor for the Mission For Migrant Workers to be visited by The Very Revd Rowan Smith, former Chaplain at the University of Cape Town, Chaplain to Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Provincial Executive officer for the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.

Coming all the way to Hong Kong to spend part of his sabbatical, St. John's Cathedral arranged in his itinerary a visit to the MFMW and its other outreach programmes. At the Mission, discussions with him centered on the conditions of marginalized women like the foreign domestic workers and also about what we do to assist them. 📧

# Forum on the Sex Discrimination Ordinance held



A three-hour forum on Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO) was held on 09 January 2011 with the participation of 187 migrant workers and advocates. Most of the former were members of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB).

The participants were welcomed by Ms Cynthia CA Tellez of the Mission for Migrant Workers who introduced the objective of the forum and gave a brief talk on women migrant workers and sexual discrimination and how sexual violence against women could be addressed.

Ms. Tellez stressed that understanding sexual discrimination and harassment against migrant workers must be in the context of the reality of forced migration whereby women migrant workers are dominantly offered positions in the service sector that are prone to sexual discrimination, violence and harassments such as care-giving and domestic work, "entertainment" and mail-to-order-brides. She described that these perennial incidents are due to the economically and politically low standing of migrant workers in the society, aggravated further by the society's general low regard to women. In conclusion, Ms. Tellez highlighted the importance of gathering the organized strength of women migrants in preventing such acts as well as in shaping policies that they would genuinely benefit from. She clarified that this can be done by belonging to an organization, immediate provision of welfare assistance, maximizing venues for redress, knowing and understanding laws and its limitations in order to arrive at ways on how it can be availed to serve and protect migrant workers.

Ms. Cynthia Lam, Senior Training Officer of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Corporate Communication & Training Unit shared that in 1995, the SDO was passed as an anti-discrimination law that also made possible the establishment of the EOC which is tasked to promote equal opportunities and work for the elimination of discrimination. Ms. Lam described "discrimination" and the occurrence of a direct and indirect discrimination. Ms. Lam presented a

power point where the important features and provisions of the SDO can be applied to protect females and males from sexual discrimination and harassments under specific conditions and requirements in seven areas such as: employment, education, provisions of goods, facilities or services, disposal or management of premises, eligibility to vote for, be elected or appointed to advisory bodies, participation in clubs, and activities of Government. She pointed out that it is helpful to immediately write a detailed record of incidents as soon as it happened for future reference if ever a complaint is pursued. Ms. Lam also clarified that an individual, groups of individuals or anybody can lodge complaints in writing to the EOC for investigation or conciliation.

A lively open forum followed based from the experiences of the participants and

on the framework presented by the resource persons from the MFMW and the EOC. The forum closed with a briefing for the March 20<sup>th</sup> Cultural Festival. Participants also witnessed a contemporary dance by the Likha Cultural Group.

*The forum was part of the Voices of Gender Equality (VOGE): Educational and Cultural Festival on Sex Discrimination Ordinance. Next to watch is a cultural festival on 20 March 2011 that will be held at the Chater Road precinct in Central. The VOG project is sponsored by the Mission For Migrant Workers in partnership with the Equal Opportunities Commission, aimed at providing public education and awareness amongst the migrants' community regarding the SDO and improving gender equality in Hong Kong as a contribution to the continuing movement for gender equality.*



## Bethune House holds XMas Party 2010

The staff, volunteers, friends and organizations of local and migrant workers in Hong Kong came together for a Christmas celebration with the residents of Bethune House on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2010.

As a treat for the residents, gift-giving and games were conducted to make the night a fun one. The camaraderie was evident as everyone celebrated the holidays even though they were far away from their loved ones and many face an uncertain future.

LegCo member Leung Kwok-Hung and League of Social Democrats chairman Andrew To also graced the event to give support to the migrant workers.



## The Story of Agnes Tenorio

# *My will to fight made me strong and better*

**My will to fight has strengthened me and made me a better person.**

I am Agnes R. Tenorio who came to work in HK on September 23, 2010. I stayed in the agency boarding house until September 26. Maybe many of you knew or heard about my case during my two hours of work after I was terminated by my employer on September 27.

I experienced being cheated and threatened by my agency. The worst thing was my experience on the way I was treated by the Labor Attaché of the Philippine Consulate whom I sought for help and guidance.

Before I came to HK, I helped my husband earn a living by working in a Canteen as a cook. Aside from this, I also helped in the farm by planting tomatoes. I was not able to graduate secondary school because of poverty so there was no opportunity for me to look for a much better paying job.

I have two children. My eldest daughter is deaf and mute but our income is not enough to send her to a special school.

I talked to my parents-in law to mortgage their farmland so I can apply for work in HK. I spent P85,000 for my placement fee in addition to the expenses I incurred for my passport, medical fees, training fees, transportation and food.

I was full of hope for my family when I boarded the plane to HK. They are my inspiration and my strength. My life revolves around them. I am too dependent on my husband, my parents and my other siblings. I am never away from the farm and I am not exposed to other people

***My experience shows that we can do something to change our situation if we act decisively.***

except our neighbors. This was my first time to be away from my family or from the Philippines.

Little did I know that my life will change because of the challenges and trials that came my way while in HK. My dreams were almost shattered when my employment contract was terminated. My hope of assistance and guidance from the Labor Attaché of the Philippine Consulate was very traumatic. I was shouted at and I felt degraded. I had to record our last meeting so I can prove that I was not treated well and my case was not an isolated one.

In the beginning, I did not know what to do or whom to approach. I was pressured by my family to return home but eventually they understood why I needed to fight for my rights. The truth was on my side; my fellow migrant workers, migrant organizations, service providers



for migrants and OFWs all over the world supported my decision to fight. My exposure to different forums, protest actions and dialogues gave me the strength and the confidence to face all the challenges.

My experience shows that we can do something to change our situation if we act decisively. We must not lose hope; we must speak out to tell the truth otherwise we will not be able to expose the rottenness of our government.

I have found a very nice couple who is willing to employ me. I hope and pray that the Immigration Department will allow me to process my new contract in HK so I could start earning a living.

I thank all those who were behind me all through out my struggles, who inspired me along the way and gave me the encouragement to continue.



## Foreign domestics don't have access to sexual/reproductive services in HK, ACHIEVE study reveals

photo courtesy of St. John's HIV Education Centre



The St. John's HIV Education Centre held a press conference on Saturday, January 22, highlighting the findings of the research conducted by ACHIEVE, entitled **Qualitative Study on Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and Information of Women**.

The Mission for Migrant Workers, through a paper entitled **Voices of migrant domestic workers and their SRH needs**, presented its stand on the matter of migrant women's right to health care. It presented cases where medical practitioners and hospital staff are supportive and give documents to support the patients' process and period of medication even if they have already lost their jobs. But while the Immigration Department extends the women's visa, Immigration would tell the Hospital Authority through a letter that the patient is already jobless ("no longer on a working visa") but on a visitor's visa.

It is a subtle hint to not treat the patient as a HK resident but as a visitor. That makes the payment for hospital services jump to several hundreds of percentage higher. This prevents the migrant from accessing hospital services.

Ms. Amara Quesada and Dr. Carolina Sobrechea of ACHIEVE presented the process and findings of the research while Philippine Vice Consul Joy Banagodios made her reaction on the study's results and shared the government's side to the matter.

One recommendation that came out was to integrate sexual and reproductive health rights in information and education programs for women domestic workers. This is made important to balance with the cultural background of




the migrants and the existing policies of the receiving country on the same subject.

Women domestic workers would hesitate to take action when certain SRH-related symptoms occur. Unfriendly policies such as termination of contracts when illness strikes that even when an employer follows the no-termination policy while on sick leave, nothing can stop them from terminating the contract right after the sick leave. This would not encourage the women to come forward.

There are several simple basic questions that migrants have in their minds. Their efforts to hold on to their peers in organized manner boost their morale and encourage them to come forward and assert their right to health care. Access may be difficult but information dissemination and intensive promotion of their right to health care can encourage them to address the issues squarely.


## MACAU CORNER

### Migrante Macau Holds Christmas Party

Around 45 members and guests of Migrante Macau held their Christmas party on January 9 in Tap Seac Park. Games and a simple feast highlighted the celebration. The activity was a great help in bringing together members of the group and was also used as an opportunity to inform the members of the upcoming programs of Migrante Macau. 

### Catholic Church Celebrates World Day of Migrants

Over 1300 people joined the World Day of Migrants, One Human Family of the Catholic Church in Macau on January 16. The event sought to provide understanding and camaraderie between peoples of different nationalities including that with locals. There were different cultural performances from the various groups that participated in the activity. Traditional cuisines from different countries were also featured in the event.

Among those who participated were members of the Macau Migrants Rights Network (MMRN). 

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