

The determination and persistence of aggrieved seafarers to defend their rights finally paid off.

On 17 April 2007, Hong Kong's Wage Insolvency Unit of the Labour Department awarded 9 seafarers a total of \$119,850.41 as ex-gratia payment under the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Ordinance.

On 25 January 2005, the said seafarers, nine Filipinos and two Indonesians, filed cases against their employer, Kam Bao Shipping, for non-payment of wages and benefits. On 5 February, at the Labour Conciliation Meeting, representative of Kam Bao Shipping failed to pay the overdue wages of the eleven seafarers.

To be able to get the jobs, the Filipinos paid between 30,000 up to 100,000 pesos to an agent in the Philippines. They arrived in Hong Kong on a tourist visa – as is the usual case with seafarers. Each of them had their own Seaman's Book that would qualify them to work as seafarers. But still, they were charged by the agents an additional HK\$5,000 each, to be deducted from their salaries once they boarded the ship.

After two years of battle

Seafarers get justice for rights violations

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They only were able to receive their first month's salary and nothing else afterwards. They were stranded in the vessel doing myriads of tasks the following months. For several months they sailed between HK and Macau borders until they finally decided to disembark on 8 January 2005. Each one of them was paid with cheques that bounced.

On 9 January, they approached

the Philippine Consulate General (PCG) for assistance but were denied because the PCG said that they did not have an employment contract and that they were on a tourist visa. They were advised to return to the Philippines instead.

The Labor Department of Hong Kong, however, accepted their application for monetary claims with the bounced cheques as evidence to support their claims.

They approached the MFMW to seek assistance and the MFMW in turn, sought the help of the PCG for food and upkeep while they attended to their cases. Disappointingly, the Philippine

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When justice prevails. They are the seafarers who fought limb for limb for what they think is just, right and due them. They won in the end.



UBUNTU MISSION Training

It was the Spring Meeting of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. The UBUNTU Mission Journey Training was a prelude to it.

More than 20 women were gathered for a three-day activity. Their common denominator: their commitment to justice and opportunities for everyone and to the church mission. This commitment is made possible by their strong sisterhood and determination to reach out, visit and experience what their sisters in certain countries undergo. These experiences hope to find more meaning to efforts they would exert to gather more support for their marginalized counterparts.


Representatives from Kenya, Mozambique, Cambodia and Hong Kong were present as "UBUNTU Hosts" to the potential participants. UBUNTU Mission leaders from the US Methodist Women and GBGM STAFF, all prepared to learn and to share, also attended the meeting.



This is the second year of the Ubuntu Project and Hong Kong, China was chosen to be included as another site for the mission. Representatives from Kenya (Lucy), Cambodia (Esther), Hong Kong, China (Cynthia) and two others both from Mozambique presented their work and projects on women and for women's welfare.

Esther distributed scarves, a product of Cambodian women

after showing photos of the women and the Ubuntu visits. Kenya and Mozambique reps presented their programs orally. Cynthia presented a powerpoint/video presentation of the Bethune House. Esther, Lucy and Cynthia were also given a space to briefly introduce their projects at the opening of the Women's division's Spring Meeting.

The Ubuntu journey to Hong Kong SAR, China will happen next year, in 2008. 

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Consulate again turned them down.

Fr. Peter Ellis, of the Hong Kong Mariner's Club provided them several weeks' accommodation while pressure is being put up for the Consulate to assist them.

The MFMW, together with different migrant institutions and organizations including the stranded seamen protested the Philippine Consulate's lack of concern to the distressed workers. It was only after the protest action and several dialogues that the PCG finally acted on the seafarer's demand for free provision of food and accommodation.


Their plight was further exposed when local Filipino community media and the South China Morning Post (a Hong Kong major English daily) took interest on their case.

The Hong Kong Legal Aid and Immigration Departments took exemption of their cases. Legal Aid was offered to each of them and their visitor's visas were extended until they completed all the documentary requirements. With Legal Aid, their cases were pursued against Kam Bao Shipping in their absence.

The seafarers left for the Philippines in April 2005 with discounted tickets

from the Philippine Airlines. The MFMW acted on their behalf until the decision was reached, awarding them their respective claims.

They are very happy with the results when they learned of the good news. Their long wait is over and they extend their thanks to everyone who supported them while they were in Hong Kong pursuing their case.

The case of the aggrieved seafarers clearly shows that through determination and unity, migrant workers can effectively protect their rights and achieve justice. 

Mission Holds Consultations with Local Supporters in Macau

The demand for migrant workers in Macau is increasing. But as their number increases so do cases of abuse and exploitation.

The sharing-meeting facilitated by Mr. Apo Leung, the Executive Director of Asia Monitor Resource Center on 26th April 2007 with members of the academe, a union leader, civil servant official and member of the legislative council in Macau gave us an overview of how migrant workers are perceived by the local community in Macau.


“Foreign domestic helpers in Macau are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because employers can dictate their salaries, their day-offs and statutory holidays. It is important for migrant workers to continue organizing themselves.”

The Mission for Migrant Workers, together with the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in HK and Macau as well as Amy Sim of Engender were surprised to learn that the Macau government, though in need of migrant workers, do not cover migrant workers in their Labor law. According to an academe from the Polytechnic University in Macau, there is no special law for foreign domestic workers. It is not surprising why the locals are not concerned with migrant workers because for them they earn money from employers. They do not have an ID so they are not entitled to any social services and benefits.

Foreign domestic helpers in Macau are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because employers can dictate their salaries, their day-offs and statutory holidays. There is no standard contract that could be used against work-related violations.

According to an officer of the civil servant group, it is very difficult to fight in support of the migrant workers because of the absence of a law supposedly to protect them.

Legislator Au Kam San sees the need for a dialogue between the different migrant organizations and local groups supportive of migrant workers and the Immigration and Labor Departments to fully understand their policies that governs foreign domestic workers. It is also important for him to have a round table discussion attended by the local groups and migrant organizations to deepen their understanding on the situation of migrant workers so they could come up with concrete actions on how to deal with the increasing number of abuses.


The Mission welcomes the support provided by some local groups and hope that they could work together for the benefit of the migrant workers in Macau. It is also important for the migrant workers to continue organizing themselves as this will strengthen their resolve to demand for specific laws that would protect their working conditions in Macau. 



HK migrants support campaign vs. Rapu-Rapu island mining project

The United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-Migrante HK) organized a protest action at the Cheung Kung Centre on April 22 as part of an internationally coordinated move to pressure the ABNAMRO to withdraw its financial backing for Lafayette Philippines large scale mining project in Rapu-Rapu Island, Albay.

Residents of the island, along with church leaders, environmental and people's organizations and other concerned citizens claimed that Lafayette Inc. has no “social license to operate” as it has caused environmental tragedies, economic dislocation and social miseries to the local people of Rapurapu and nearby municipalities.

According to Eman Villanueva, UNIFIL secretary general, the withdrawal of financial support of ABN-AMRO from the project was its moral, social and legal obligation. A petition signed by migrants groups and local NGOs for the withdrawal of financial backers of the mining firm was submitted to the bank officials. 

Landslide Victory for Gabriela Women's Party in Hong Kong

The success of Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) is the success of the overseas Filipino workers and their families!

This was declared by GWP-HK chairperson Cynthia Abdon-Tellez following the announcement of the final tally count in the second overseas absentee voting in Hong Kong and Macau where Gabriela garnered 7,552 votes or 49% of the total partylist votes.

The determination of the "go-out-and-vote" campaign teams of the members of the GWP-HK paid off. Despite the political harassments and threats that the group experienced throughout the whole OAV process, the teams stood their ground and continued to conduct voters' education for the future of the OFWs and their families.

as they shared the feast of international delicacies especially the Pinoy lechon.

The heavy downpour, lightning and thunder however prevented them from continuing with the celebration filled with fun and games. Still, many OFWs stayed and played under the rain which they considered as a blessing for the occasion.


Abdon-Tellez reiterated the call for the Gabriela members to remain vigilant to defend their votes. "Victory is ours but the battle is not over," she said.

She cited the systematic move of the Arroyo administration to prevent the victory of progressive partylists in Congress by creating pro-administration candidates.

Although Gabriela garnered a huge number of votes, this does not guarantee that it can meet the maximum 6% of the total partylist votes to gain 3 seats in Congress, according to her.

This is aggravated by the prevailing system of electoral fraud, vote shaving and padding, military intimidation and harassments, and disenfranchisement of voters, she added.

But she assured the OFWs that with Gabriela in Congress, their issues will be addressed. These include the OWWA Omnibus Policy, POEA guidelines, collection of excessive government fees, corruption and transfer of OWWA funds, overcharging of placement charges, lack of protection and services, and other migrants' concerns.

Gabriela, according to her, will continue to serve the migrants even beyond the elections. Reinforcement of commitment, courage and cooperation is needed to ensure victory and continued protection of the OFWs. 



"The success of Gabriela Women's Party is the success of the overseas Filipino workers and their families!"

"The OFWs who voted for Gabriela clearly oppose the anti-migrant policies of the Arroyo administration," Abdon-Tellez said. "Their votes affirm their full trust and confidence in the progressive partylist that will promote and defend their rights and welfare in Congress."

On May 27 this year, more than three hundred Gabriela members and supporters gathered at the Repulse Bay beach in Hong Kong to celebrate their victory. The inclement weather did not dampen their triumphant mood

Mission holds OAV info desk together with other community groups

An Overseas Absentee Voting Information and Assistance Desk (OAV info desk) was set-up every Sunday from April 29 up to May 13 in Chater Road, Central, to provide information and assistance to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) regarding the one-month Overseas Absentee Voting exercise.

Aimed at increasing the number of voters by extending community efforts to reach out and convince the registered absentee voters to exercise their right to suffrage, to choose candidates from Senatorial to Partylist and the importance of the electoral process, the OAV info desk was manned by representatives from The Sun publication and organization, Mission Volunteers, Pinay Justice, Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, Filipino Migrant Workers Union Chater Road chapter, and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants.



The OAV Organizers and Volunteers. Cynthia from the Mission (middle, seated) is joined by Daisy Mandap of The Sun Publication and Organization and various leaders and members from various migrant organizations who volunteered for the OAV information desk.

Among the services offered were: inquiries regarding the voting process, voter's ID card, lists of candidates, polling schedules and how to get to the polling centre, free bus rides timetable, importance of the OAV and the party list system, up to recording their complaints.


The desk also provided a free blood pressure monitoring performed by a Filipina midwife who is in HK working as a foreign domestic worker.

Among the issues gathered were: OFWs do not know when the registration period happened, names were not in the certified list of overseas absentee voters (CLOAV), un-issued voter's ID cards and unknown schedule of polls.

Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) had their first taste of the

overseas absentee voting in 2004 presidential election. They are allowed to vote for the presidential, senatorial post and party list that will truly represent them and their families in the House of Congress.

For 2007 election, they voted for Senators and party lists representatives. The lack of enthusiasm and participation of the OFWs in this year's electoral exercise manifests not only the disenfranchisement of the migrant sector but also the dismay and apathy in their minds due to the fraud-ridden 2004 presidential election and the corruption and human rights violations taking place under the governance of the Arroyo administration.

Out of around 96,000 registered overseas absentee voters, only 19,185 cast their votes. 

More than 300 Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) rallied in front of Indonesian Consulate in Causeway Bay calling the Indonesian Government to stop overcharging of agency fee and illegal salary deductions. The march started from Victoria Park organized by the newly-formed United Indonesian Migrant Workers against Overcharging (PILAR), alliance of 19 Indonesian migrant workers' organizations established on 1 April 2007.

According to Eni Lestari, PILAR spokesperson in her opening speech, each IMW recruited and deployed to Hong Kong to work as Foreign Domestic Helper (FDH) is overcharged up to HK\$21,000 or more. The widespread of overcharging is caused by the fact that the Indonesian government does not have any law that standardizes the maximum fee that agencies in Indonesia can collect from IMWs. At the same time, government made it mandatory for all IMWs wanting to work abroad to apply to private recruitment agencies or known as one door exit. Thus agencies freely mark up fees and it is legal in Indonesia.

The agencies know that IMWs will never be able to pay the high fees in Indonesia before their departure, the payment is arranged while they are working in Hong Kong through salary deductions of up to HK\$3,000 per month for the first seven months. The collection is done through the agencies and finance companies in Hong Kong.

Eni pointed out that what is commonly known as underpayment is actually illegal salary deductions

through the collusion of the Indonesian recruitment agencies, the Indonesian government and Hong Kong employers. With the existing regulation of the Hong Kong government that stipulates a maximum agency commission of only 10% of the first month's salary, surely HK\$21,000 is unlawful. To ensure the IMWs will pay the amount without

Indonesian migrants form group, demand gov't to legislate agency fee equal to a month's salary



exposing the involvement of Hong Kong agencies, IMWs are made to sign loan agreements on the second day of their arrival even though they did not receive a single penny.

Although cases of overcharging have been taken to the courts, they viewed the issue as within the jurisdiction of the

of the cause and the contribution of workers to the Hong Kong society's progress were not verbalized.

The situation of workers in Hong Kong is worsening. The HK government, through its policy of free market, makes this happen. Employers from the big companies take advantage of this as security, benefits and welfare of workers are cut. Workers are exploited.

According to the HKCTU, "the government promotes contract and part time work by putting 10% of its employees under non-civil service contract staff terms."

Indonesian government and thus, the Hong Kong government could not do anything about these.

The following speaker Bibit Sunarti, one of GAMMI spokespersons, read the joined petition of PILAR with the following demands:

1. Legislate that the maximum placement fees of
Indonesians, go to p. 7

Migrant workers suffer the same fate as massive termination happens so frequently. The New Conditions of Stay, overcharging, underpayment and long hours of work continue. The wage is always under threat of cuts. Worst, migrant workers receive less attention when it comes to service provision from the Hong Kong government.

AMCB is an alliance of migrant organizations from Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Philippines. AMCB is the largest alliance of migrant organization in Hong Kong.

Asian Migrants join call for legislated minimum wage for all workers

The Asian Migrants Coordinating Body joined the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Union (HKCTU) and other groups on May Day to demand the HK government to legislate minimum wage for all workers in Hong Kong.

The call for May Day is about "Dignity and Hope" for all working class of Hong Kong. Workers must work hand in hand to defend their rights and interest against exploitation.

It has been a year since the call to legislate a minimum wage for all workers and it is quite disappointing that the Hong Kong government is not acting on it. Even recognition

A Single Mother's Battle Against Cancer



Rosel worked with Ms. Or Ki Yiu for two years from March 6, 2005 to May 2007. During this time, she worked from 7 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock in the evening everyday.

Her duties included taking care of a two-year old baby, cleaning, washing clothes, ironing, house cleaning and cooking.

She did not have a room of her own so she slept in the living room during the duration of her employment. Everyday, her employer would buy a lunch box for her from outside as she was not required to cook lunch for the family. The doctor told Rosel that the cancer that she have now may have been caused by the kind of food that she ate.

In October 2006, she had to see a Doctor because of stomach pain. The doctor from Pamela Youde Nethersole Hospital said that she is suffering from epigastric pain.

In November, Pamela Youde Nethersole Hospital scheduled Rosel to undergo an endoscopy on December 23.

Rosel was not able to wait for the scheduled endoscopy. She was admitted for stomach pains on December 4, 2006. After the tests that day, Rosel was diagnosed as suffering from cancer of the stomach.

She was scheduled at once to undergo an operation on December 11, 2006. Prior to her operation, her employer, upon learning that she has cancer, requested the doctor for a certificate that

Rosel is not fit to work anymore. Her employer wanted her to go back to the Philippines, saying that she continue her medication there. But Rosel decided to continue her medication in Hong Kong. The doctor advised her employer that the decision will depend on the patient. The employer was not able to do anything about it.

She underwent an operation to take away the adeno carcinoma of the stomach on December 11, 2006.

After the operation, it was the employer's friend who visited and talked to her. She continued to convince Rosel

“Rosel wanted to live longer to see her daughter and (hopefully) her grandchildren.”

to return to the Philippines. Her employer visited her only twice.

Because of her condition, Rosel requested her daughter to come to Hong Kong to look after her as her employer refused to let her stay in their house upon her discharge from the hospital.

She was then discharged from the hospital on December 19, 2006. When her daughter left on January 14, 2007,

she requested to be admitted in Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge as there was no one to take care of her.

Rosel was given a sick leave from December 6, 2006 to March 6, 2007. She had to undergo chemotherapy and radio therapy from then on.

She later claimed for unpaid wages, annual leave pay, air ticket, transportation expenses and medical fees from her employer. Her labor case was finally settled on May 16, 2007.

Rosel is 48 years old. Her eldest daughter died of rheumatic heart on September 11, 2001 when she was 20 years old. The youngest daughter is 24 years old and has just graduated from nursing school and is now searching for a job. She is Rosel's only companion now as she has been separated from her husband since 1995.

Rosel was allowed by the Immigration Department to continue her chemotherapy until June 2007. She still wanted to live longer hence she chose to undergo her medical follow-up in HK. She wanted her strength recovered so when she goes back home, she could be with her daughter who is planning to get married soon and eventually see her grandchildren grow up.

Meanwhile, we are raising additional funds for Rosel's chemotherapy and other medical needs. She cannot work so she needs continues financial support to cover her medical needs once she is back in the Philippines.

Indonesians, from p. 6

agencies in Indonesia be limited to one month salary.
2. Scrap all unnecessary fees by recruitment agencies and the Indonesian government.
3. Allow IMWs in Hong Kong to change their employers through direct hiring.
4. Scrap Law No. 30/2004.
5. Shut down Terminal 3 in Jakarta.

The program was concluded as the PILAR petition was submitted to a representative of Indonesian Consulate.

The people dispersed and returned to Victoria Park to continue their public forum in the Central Lawn of the Park from 1:00 to 7:00 pm.


The forum was to promote PILAR and gather supports and signatures for their call. The forum was well attended

by more than 2,000 people where speeches from PILAR and progressive cultural performances including drama, song and poetry were presented.

The first speaker, Sri Utami explained about PILAR, its campaign on overcharging. The second speaker, Retno Ningsih, presented the issue of overcharging from the Islamic point of view. She said that it is a form of

violation against Islam values and IMWs, therefore, reserve the right to fight against it.

More than 3,000 signatures were collected that day.

Currently, PILAR is able to gather more than 10,000 signatures. The forum closed with community dances of IMWs before their curfew to their respective employers. 

Forum on POEA Guidelines takes off in Tuen Mun and Tin Shui Wai

As part of a plan of groups of different church and Acharismatic groups together with the Mission for Migrant Workers, a Forum on the new POEA Guidelines for Deployment of Household Service Workers and the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) was held last April 15 in both St. Matthew's Church in Tuen Mun and the St. Jerome Church in Tin Shui Wai under the auspices of Fr. Tom Danaher, a Maryknoll Father.

The aim of the forum is to reach out to the members of their congregation in order to educate them on the new POEA guidelines which are in line with the "Supermaids" scheme of the Arroyo government. This scheme purportedly aims to "improve" the skills of Filipino DHs and caregivers to make them more competitive in order to fetch higher wages.

In St. Matthew's Chapel, more than 70 members attended the Forum. After lunch time, Fr. Tom Danaher together with the Mission and members of the church hurried to reach St. Jerome Church as they are also waiting to attend the said discussion.

Among the reactions of those who attended were "it is election time so the government would use the

"The (POEA) scheme is designed to squeeze money of the OFWs up to the last centavo."

money to finance the election", and that "the scheme is designed to squeeze the money of the OFWs up to the last centavo", and "is a rich breeding ground for corruption". It was very easy for the OFWs to put together the reasons behind the said scheme.

The Mission cited several cases of OFWs who were affected by the said guidelines. It is very evident during the discussion that the exception pronouncement of the government was misunderstood by many as "they do not have to pay or undergo the assessment anymore because they are re-hired or just taking a vacation".

The MFMW also took the opportunity to discuss the Overseas Absentee Voting especially the party list system and why it is important to go out and vote.

Two power point presentations were shown after which a question and answer followed. The Mission also collected some donations for the POEA paid ad that the different church groups were able to publish in a major Philippine daily before the election in the Philippines. 🇵🇭

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