

## Legislative Council Excludes Foreign Domestic Workers in Statutory Minimum Wage



are much higher than most locals because they supposedly received a higher disposable income than the latter. Such as free board and lodging among others.

Other than this, it is the government which appointed the members of the Minimum Wage Commission. This body will be the one to determine the amount of the SMW to the government by August and the Leg Co has no power to amend it.

And finally, when the SMW had just been approved the Secretary Mathew Cheung was quoted as saying that essentially if the rate is the same as that proposed by unions, this might lead employers to cut wages, fire low paid workers or force people to become self-employed. In effect, he is batting for an SMW rate favored by business interests.

The Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) meanwhile branded the exclusion of FDWs in the SMW as tantamount to legalizing slavery in the territory. It also lambasted proposals to lower the SMW below HK\$33 per hour as making workers marginalized.

In last year's United Nations Development Program's 2009 Human Development Report, Hong Kong ranked number 1 among the world's most developed economies for income inequality. In the UNDP report the poorest 10% of the population only received 2% of the total income while the richest 10% received 34.9%.

AMCB also vowed to challenge the decision, including the possible filing of a judicial review against the exclusion. Other than this it will also send protest letters and petition to the international community including the International Labor Organization and the United Nations to expose the discrimination and slave-like treatment of FDWs by the Hong Kong government.

The Legislative Council (Leg Co) excluded Foreign Domestic Workers in the Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW) in a vote on July 16. At the same time, the demands of local workers for a HK\$33 per hour rate might not push through as the one who would determine this is a government-appointed task group.

Twenty three legislators voted for exclusion while only nine voted for the FDWs inclusion into the SMW. What is appalling though is that among those who voted for the former are a number of pro-democracy legislators and even one group belonging to the Labor sector.

As a whole though, the enactment of the SMW is a victory for the working

people in HK who struggled for so many years, so that their work can be compensated in a more dignified manner. At present, 440,000 people or 17% of the working people receive less than HK\$33 an hour which is what unions are demanding. Of these, 130,000 earn less than the HK\$24 which employers are batting for.

The Hong Kong government on the other hand showed even at the last minute its bias for the interests of employers. Secretary for Labour and Welfare Matthew Cheung Kin-chung gave the same reasons why FDWs were excluded from the SMW even before it was submitted to the Legco.

Namely that working hours are hard to calculate because of their live in status and that their wages



# BH Corner

## CURVES Discovery Bay donates to BHMWR

CURVES Fitness Centre in Discovery Bay has initiated a Food Drive from June 1-9 in support of the Bethune House, a temporary refuge for displaced women migrants. According to Connie Kroecker, the owner of the Centre, it is part of Curves International global charity initiative. They chose Bethune House as their beneficiary for this year.

For the period of Food Drive, Curves Discovery Bay has waived the joining fee for new members if they join on a 12-month direct debit programme. Their aim is to reach 2010 kilos of donated food for Bethune House with the theme "Help yourself to fitness and Help local charities too."

On June 22, boxes of rice, cooking oil, canned goods, coffee, tea, milk and other basic items are delivered to Bethune House. Bethune House is grateful to Curves Discovery Bay and to everyone who responded to make the International Global Charity Initiative a success. Thank you very much.



*It was truly a wonderful experience having members of CURVES Fitness Centre and other volunteers mingle with BHMWR residents as they conducted a successful food drive.*

## A Visit to Bethune House


Two new Priests of St. John's Cathedral visited the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge just about after a few weeks of being assigned in Hong Kong.

Bethune House is a temporary shelter for Foreign Domestic workers who have been terminated from their employment and pursuing their claims against their

former employers.

Father Mark and Father Nigel's visit has been an inspiration to the residents, volunteers and staff of Bethune House, knowing that they are not alone in the struggle for the interests of the less fortunate in this City.


Father Mark is the new Priest of Discovery Bay Church, which is located in

Lantau Island, while Father Nigel is the new Priest of the Emmanuel Church in Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong. These two churches are daughters of St. John's Cathedral which has been supporting both the Mission for Migrant Workers and the Bethune House as part of their outreach program of their ministry. 

## Hands On Hong Kong Volunteers at Bethune House

The mission of Hands On Hong Kong (HOHK) is to contribute to the well-being of the Hong Kong community and facilitate community cohesion through volunteerism. It has 23 partner organizations. It regularly provides volunteers in Bethune House every Tuesdays to help with its handicraft making.

The primary objectives of HOHK include:

- Promoting volunteerism and community service as an essential aspect of life in Hong Kong;
- Supporting charity and corporate partners with volunteer project design and implementation;
- Offering diverse volunteer opportunities by partnering with charities that address a wide variety of issues, including poverty, children, education, elderly, disabled, immigrants, environment, and animal welfare;
- Providing volunteer opportunities to both Hong Kong natives and foreign residents in either Chinese or English;
- Creating innovative, high-impact ways of making valuable contributions to people's lives;
- Making volunteering as accessible and rewarding as possible and providing a wide range of options to suit diverse interests, experiences, and schedules; and
- Providing a high-quality experience for each volunteer and charity working with HOHK. 

OUR FAITH,  
OUR  
STRUGGLE



# June 12 and the continuing search for a symbol of freedom and independence

**'THEN THE LORD SAID,** "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Exodus 3:7-8)

Thus begins the biblical history of redemption: with a God who sees the affliction of his people, who hears their cry, who knows their suffering and who liberates them. The Exodus event then is the watershed of Israelite history. It shapes their understanding of the character and nature of God. It also shapes their identity and their responsibility to God and their neighbors.

Yet the exodus event has a universal ring. It gives hope to all oppressed peoples. Thus the Exodus event is not only an event in the past but also provides the foundation of hope for a better future.

Many Filipinos will consider the events of August 1896 culminating in June 1898 as our own exodus from bondage to freedom; from being a colony to an independent country and people. The lavish cultural presentations – especially the street dancing staged by the Filipino community in Hong Kong on June 13 – testifies to the importance of June 12, 1898 to the collective identity and memory of the Filipinos.

However -- and I may be accused of dampening the enthusiasm of my compatriots -- we must confront things with regards to the significance, or the lack of it, of June 12. We must confront its inadequacies and search for a more meaningful symbol.

It is true that on that date, a proclamation of independence was indeed made: "...and having as witness to the rectitude of our intentions the Supreme Judge of the Universe, and under the protection of the Great and Humane North American nation, we do hereby proclaim and solemnly declare, in the name and authority of the people of these Philippine Islands, that they are and have the right to be free and independent, that they have ceased to have allegiance to the Crown of Spain, that all political ties between them are and should be completely annulled and severed..."

There lies the inadequacy of the June 12. It was a declaration of the Philippines as free and independent but it also was a proclamation of it as a protectorate of America. This was the result of the Hong Kong Agreement forged on April 25, 1898 between Aguinaldo and the Americans who were then recruiting the Filipinos to America's side in its war against Spain. That loyalty to the Hong Kong Agreement was officially repudiated by the Americans

when they signed the Treaty of Paris buying the Philippines from Spain for USD20 million on December 10, 1898, six months after.

Secondly, no representative was elected in the assembly then. The form of government that Aguinaldo proclaimed was a dictatorial government. The Malolos congress opened only on January 21, 1899.

Thirdly, the observance of June 12 as Independence Day was made by President Diosdado Macapagal on May 9, 1962, transferring it from July 4, the date when America granted the Philippines its independence after WWII -- after Manila was considered the most devastated city second only to Warsaw [due to American bombardment in

the retaking of Manila from the Japanese] -- and subject to onerous conditionalities, such as the Parity Rights.

Macapagal's reason was a double celebration with USA that dwarfs the Philippines' own celebration. But the more cogent reason was the rejection by the American House of Representatives of the \$73-million additional war damage bill to the Philippines. Macapagal also postponed his planned state visit to Washington. Hence, the change was more of a small grudge and a political tit for tat rather than historical exactitude.

So where does this lead us? All these dates are inadequate. Is it because we are never really free and independent?


## Indonesians form alliance in Macau

An Indonesian Migrants Alliance was formed in Macau last May 23.

It was initiated by the Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Macau (ATKI-Macau) which is also a member of the Macau Migrants Rights Network (MMRN) of which the MFMW is a part of.

The name of the new alliance is PEMACU or Persatuan BMI Macau (Alliance of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Macau).

Its member organizations are: ATKI-Macau, MATIM, NOOS, Halimah, and Green Dancers.

The formation of PEMACU heralds the strengthening of the Indonesian migrants' movement in the territory which would help the issues and concerns that would be addressed to both the Indonesian and Macau governments. As of April this year, there are 3,911 Indonesian non-resident workers in Macau. 




## Migrante Ma On Shan holds Leadership Training

MIGRANTE Ma On Shan Chapter (UNIFIL-HK) launched the first series of its Leadership Training Seminar for its officers and members last July 4, 2010. Ms. Emelita G. Hilario, chairperson of Migrante Ma On Shan led the event.

The workshop was a date to remember as the participants were reminded of their commitment to the young organization that they intend to expand, their commitment to attend to matters of concern with regards their members and even to go beyond nationalities as different nationalities of migrant workers find a neutral "space" in the park ground quite accommodating.


The random bites of tiny insects that many times cannot be seen by the naked eye (until red tiny patches appear on the skin) did not discourage the Migrante women of Ma On Shan. The last portion of the training enabled them to review their targets and carry on with their plans.

It is just the beginning of a budding group. More challenges ahead as they impressed themselves that as they see their meaningful activities progress, no matter how small, they see big things start from there.


More of such activities will be held, blended with their understanding of and taking actions in addressing the issues migrants have at hand. 

### *Friends visit MFMW*

Two former supporters and advocates of Foreign Domestic Workers here in Hong Kong made a surprise visit at the office of the Mission For Migrant Workers Ltd. on June 17, 2010.

The Very Revd. Christopher Butt and his wife Tricia included the Mission visit in their short trip to Hong Kong. It was indeed very good to see them. 



On June 16, Mission Volunteers members and residents of BHMWR went to Stanley Beach to watch the Dragon Boatrace. The activity was held to provide an opportunity for the residents to relax and be a part of the festival. 



## MIGRANT FOCUS

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